

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Friday 3 December 2021

Present: A Cooper, W Dracup, G Gribble, P Harper, G Hill, S Morgan, D Moyse,
J Nutley, N Oakley, M Renders, P Sanders, P Smerdon, P Vogel,
P Woods

Officers: C Hart, Head of Development Management
P Twamley, Planning Officer

Apologies: J McInnes, C Pannell, L Samuel, D Thomas

The Chairman welcomed Mrs C Shewan, Independent Person and newly appointed Claire Eden, Business Support Officer.

1465 Declarations of Interests and Contact

Members agreed to declare those interests set out in the matrix attached to the Agenda (Membership of other Councils).

Mr Harper declared a pecuniary interest in Item 1 (0572/21) Land at Lakehead Hill, Bellever, due to his renting land to EE; he advised that he would leave the meeting room and take no part in discussions regarding this item.

1466 Minutes of Meeting held on 5 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2021 were AGREED as a true record.

1467 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

None.

Mr Harper left the meeting room.

1468 Applications to be Determined by the Committee

Members received the report of the Head of Development Management (NPA/DM/21/010).

Item 1 – 0572/21 – Installation of 30m lattice tower on concrete base upon which will be attached a 3 no. antennas and 2 no. 0.6m transmission dishes along with associated ancillary ‘MHA’ units and cabling – Land at Lakehead Hill, Bellever

Speaker: Mr J Bird, Galloway Estates, agent for the applicant.

The Case Officer advised Members that the proposed location of the mast would provide coverage to the B3212 and an additional 47.4Km of minor roads; these currently have poor or unusable coverage. The site would also offer radio coverage to a large part of the moorland which would assist the Dartmoor Rescue Group; the Group consists of four mountain rescue teams who assist the Devon & Cornwall Police and other emergency services.

The site is located to the east of the Postbridge to Bellever road. The proposed access track crosses a county wildlife site currently leased by Devon Wildlife Trust from the Forestry Commission. The site of the mast and compound is located on the edge of the woodland to the east, managed by the Forestry Commission. At ground level and within a compound measuring 10m x 10m, there would be a Foul Weather Enclosure (FWE) accommodating Home Office equipment cabinets with electronic apparatus, electrical meter cabinet, generator and a 1200mm satellite dish on a 2.6m high support pole, enclosed within a 1.8m high mesh fence around the 10 x 10sqm compound with barbed wire top. Access from the road would be via 290m long, 3m wide, compact stone track direct from the existing splay to the site.

The Forestry Commission has confirmed its management plan to fell an area of the woodland in the 2039 season. The mast would, therefore, be entirely exposed within its lifetime due to windthrow over the next decade and the proposed felling in 2039. The Authority's Trees and Landscapes Officer has advised that, in his opinion, the plantation would take 40 years to reach a height where it provided the same level of screening as the present tree crop. In addition, the track would be highly visible from the open moorland and the minor road that runs to the west of the site and, therefore, visually intrusive in the landscape.

The Authority's Archaeologist has advised that the access track appears problematic as it cuts through a relic boundary of the prehistoric field system. In addition, the area contains cairns, barrows and hut circles of prehistoric, probably Bronze Age date as well as the remains of a field system which most likely originates in a similar period. In planning terms, these features are to be considered undesignated heritage assets and there is an elevated potential for the presence of unknown, buried, heritage assets which have no current surface expression. The proposal fails to conserve or enhance Dartmoor's cultural heritage, with an adverse impact on upstanding archaeology.

The proposed track could result in the permanent loss of UK priority wet heath / mire habitat and could, indirectly, adversely impact a larger area of priority habitat as a result of changes to hydrology and drainage. This would be contrary to local and national planning policy. The Authority's Ecologist has objected to the proposals stating that there is not enough information to demonstrate that the County Wildlife Site and priority habitat would be protected and that impacts can be avoided, mitigated or compensated. The applicant has indicated that they would be willing to consider a revised access track.

Dartmoor Forest PC objects to the proposals, having the view that the proposals would be an inappropriate development for Dartmoor National Park.

Dartmoor Wildlife Trust shares the concerns of the Authority's Ecologist, highlighting that there is insufficient detail provided on the track specification. Five letters of objection have been received; concerns include that the feature would be intrusive

in the landscape, the proposed track would tarnish the open moorland and that there would be a detrimental impact on the wildlife.

The Case Officer advised that the site for the mast had been selected to serve an area that receives a high number of call outs in the Bellever area. The coverage zone is a well-used and highly visited part of the National Park. Enhanced operation of the emergency services will benefit the local community and visitors to the area alike. It is considered that the public benefits of the proposal are significant.

Mr Bird advised Members that the proposed development is needed to provide a key part of the new Emergency Services Network coverage on Dartmoor, a requirement which has been ongoing since 2017.

The height of the proposed mast is 30m which is the minimum height required given the location of the site within an area of mature trees. The antennas should be above the tree clutter, to provide the required coverage. The effects on the signal degradation of the trees should not be underestimated. Signal absorption and shadowing effects vary according to vegetation and density. This can cause dropped calls, calls failing to set up correctly or the voice being incoherent when making a call.

He stated that a detailed consultation was undertaken; no other locations within the search area were brought to the agents' attention as being more suitable or that any of the discounted options should be considered.

It is his belief that the wider public benefits for residents, workers and visitors have clearly been demonstrated and outweigh the minimal harm the proposal would cause.

Mr Bird advised that the applicant recognises the importance of the policies mentioned by officers; however, he added that it should be borne in mind that this is a communications mast site; whatever design and location is chosen within the technically identified search area no location or design will, as such, conserve or enhance the character of the area and provide the technical solution required. It is the applicant's considered opinion that such comments would equally apply to all other locations in the search area.

He stated that the applicant has proposed a new, single track access be constructed which would remove many of the existing rutted areas which are clearly visible on site. The applicant is willing to work with DNPA to agree a specification to ensure the track appears as similar to the field as is possible.

He added that, whatever the outcome, there is was clear and demonstrable requirement for a site in the area to provide the essential emergency services coverage in the area for the wider public benefit of visitors, workers and residents alike in the area.

In response to Member queries, the Case Officer advised the following:

- No alternative site locations have been provided by the applicants; they have requested that the Authority puts forward suggested alternatives but this is not possible due to the technical requirements of the system.

- No detailed information has been forthcoming with regard to the number of actual incidents recorded in the area.
- The mast may allow other uses, potentially offering 4G to EE customers; nothing has been excluded at the moment, but nothing has been confirmed; there are no guarantees.

The Head of Development Management confirmed to Members that the agents have engaged with officers through pre-application discussions regarding technical aspects, the position of the proposed mast, height, equipment etc. The application is also dependent upon the availability of a willing landowner. There has been a search of the area and the Home Office has decided that the application site is the best one.

Mr Sanders proposed that the application be deferred for a site inspection to be undertaken, which was seconded by Mr Nutley.

RESOLVED: The application was DEFERRED in order that a Site Inspection may be undertaken.

Mr Harper returned to the meeting.

1469 Appointment of Site Inspection Panel and Arrangements for Site Visit

Item 1 - 0572/21 – Installation of 30m lattice tower on concrete base upon which will be attached a 3 no. antennas and 2 no. 0.6m transmission dishes along with associated ancillary 'MHA' units and cabling – Land at Lakehead Hill, Bellever

The Site Inspection to be undertaken on Friday 17 December 2021; the following Members were appointed to the Site Inspection Panel: Ms Woods, Mrs Hill, Mr Vogel, Mr Smerdon, Mr Renders, Miss Moyse, Mrs Morgan, Mrs Oakley, Mr Dracup and Mr Sanders.