

ITEM:		RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL
REF NO:	3PL/2021/0091/F	CASE OFFICER Tom Donnelly
LOCATION:	OLD BUCKENHAM Part of Anglian Water Drilling Unit site Abbey Road Old Buckenham	APPNTYPE: Full POLICY: Out Settlemnt Bndry CONS AREA: N LB GRADE: N TPO: N
APPLICANT:	Hickman & Smith Architects Studio B2.01 31 Rutland Street	
AGENT:	Hickman & Smith Architects Studio B2.1 LCB Depot	
PROPOSAL:	Erection of a 24.46m high radar tower and associated comms cabin (portakabin).	

REASON FOR COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

The application is presented before the committee due to the significant level of public interest.

KEY ISSUES

Impact on character and appearance
Impact on amenities
Biodiversity Impact
Impact on historic environment
Impact on parking provision and highway safety

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

The proposal seeks the erection of a 24.46m high radar tower and associated comms portakabin. The radar tower is to be used by the MET Office in association with flood warnings.

SITE AND LOCATION

The application site is at an existing Anglian Water Drilling Unit site on Abbey Road in Old Buckenham. There are a small number of residential units located on Abbey Road with the Old Buckenham Airfield located to the west of the site.

EIA REQUIRED

No

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

3PL/2019/1555/F

Withdrawn

17-03-20

Erection of a 28.5m high radar tower and associated comms cabin (portakabin).

No relevant site history

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The following policies of the Breckland Local Plan, including the Proposals Maps, have been taken into consideration in the determination of this application. The provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Policy Guidance have also been taken into account, where appropriate

COM01	Design
COM03	Protection of Amenity
ENV02	Biodiversity protection and enhancement
ENV05	Protection and Enhancement of the Landscape
ENV07	Designated Heritage Assets
GEN02	Promoting High Quality Design
INF01	Telecommunications
LBC	Planning(Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act 1990
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPPG	National Planning Practice Guidance
TR02	Transport Requirements

OBLIGATIONS/CIL

Not Applicable

CONSULTATIONS

OLD BUCKENHAM P C

OBPC object to this application on several grounds. Firstly, the ecological impact of the application has not been fully stated or even researched. There are several rare bat species in the area and there is research that the microwaves emitted by the Radar, could negatively impact them. The PC feel that the Met Office should have investigated the local wildlife present more fully and also find out the effect the Radar could have on them. Secondly, the application states that they have completed a full and detailed consultation process with the nearest neighbours, but this does not appear to be the case. Several residents who's land is very close to the proposed location were not consulted at all and some were became aware recently, when notified by other neighbours. If a full consultation process has not taken place, they will not have discovered the opinions of those that will have to live near it on a daily basis. Additionally, the location is on the boundary of Old Buckenham and so the parishes of New Buckenham and Carleton Rode should also have been consultees. We requested this previously and this has still not happened. There has also not been a full visual impact study for the residents that live next to the site, only from further afield. There has been no clarification on what screening option they could use. The PC feel that they will be unable to actually screen

the Tower, due to its height and the Met Office's lack of answer to this point further heightens this feeling. In summary, OBPC feel that this application should not be approved due to its impact on rare wildlife, the detrimental effect on a nearby property and also due to the lack of full consultation that they claim to have undertaken.

NORFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL HIGHWAYS

No objection

ECOLOGICAL AND BIODIVERSITY CONSULTANT

No objection subject to conditions

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICERS

No objection subject to conditions

HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANT

No objection

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

No objection

HISTORIC ENGLAND

No objection

CARLETON RODE PARISH COUNCIL

Carleton Rode Parish Council would like to recommend refusal of the above application taking into account the following considerations. Loss of visual amenity. Due to the open aspect of the site the radar tower will be highly visible from a great distance in area without any similar tall structures. Light pollution. There is very little light pollution in this area and we are concerned that this will increase with the building of this structure. Inadequate consultation by the Applicant. Our Parish Council, other neighbouring Parish Councils and local residents have not been formally consulted on this matter. Impact on wildlife. More research is required into the effects of the Radar on local bats and other wildlife. Proximity to the neighbouring property. This matter was discussed at the meeting held on the 9th February 2021.

NATURAL ENGLAND

No objections

OLD BUCKENHAM AIRFIELD

No Comments Received

SOUTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

No Comments Received

CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

No Comments Received

BUCKENHAM AVIATION CENTRE LTD

No Comments Received

REPRESENTATIONS

The neighbour consultation period expired on 16-02-21.
Additionally, a site notice was posted which expired on 22-02-21.

53 letters of representation were received with the key points raised as follows:

- Significant visual impact
- Proximity to residential properties

- Alternative locations that are more suitable
- Noise impact on adjoining properties
- Effects of electromagnetic radiation on health of nearby residents
- Impact on barbastelle bats
- Structure not contextually appropriate in rural location
- Inadequate surrounding road network
- Impact on nearby airfield
- Impact of development on tourism.

A letter of representation was also received by the Local MP which reads as follows:

Having studied the proposals on this occasion, it does appear that many of those concerns have been looked at in more detail by the Met Office and that this new application is more respectful of the Airfields proximity. For example, the height of the tower has been reduced by just over 4 metres and now misses the Airfields Inner Horizontal Surface protected area.

It is my understanding that, following surveys carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology in the area, it has been discovered that several rare bat species live in the area including the Western Barbastelle Bat, the Serotine Bat and the Nathusius Pipistrelle Bat. All are threatened with extinction in this country and, I believe, red-listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Having read through the documents for this application, it is clear that the issue of bats is rarely mentioned and I fear that it may have been missed or, worse, ignored for the convenience of getting approval for this application. I know from my conversations with Old Buckenham Parish Council that there is a strong desire to pause the application until at least such time that proper, comprehensive ecological surveys have been carried out to determine the full extent of the bat colonies in the area. A detailed study over a sufficient period is probably required to fully assess the situation).

I should, of course, highlight the enormous visual, and physical, impact that the proposed weather radar will have on residents living in the vicinity of the Anglian Water site too particularly Mr and Mrs Riches of Waterworks House, but several others too. I have also been struck by the number of residents living in the area that, until recently, were not aware of the Met Office proposals for this weather radar tower and who have not been directly consulted.

There can be no doubt that this weather radar tower is not reflective of the very rural nature of this area. Given the geography of the area, it will clearly dominate the surrounding landscape and be visible for some distance. Many are concerned by the impact of what will undoubtedly be an eyesore namely in relation to their quality of life, but also upon the prices of their homes. (There can be no question that this will impact upon local house prices what compensation will be offered? I understand that Historic England have even requested they be consulted due to the definite visual impact of the radar tower upon historic landmarks in the nearby area). Furthermore, there are worries about the potential health effects that could be encountered by those who may live in close proximity to the tower for a prolonged period of time and, while I know there is some scientific debate about the evidence of such health impacts from these radar towers, I would like to know more about the work that has been done to determine that this tower would be safe at the site in question)

With this in mind, I am surprised that the Met Office continues to insist this is the best location in Norfolk for this structure and that they haven't consulted with the locals in far greater depth to at least try and find a solution that is more acceptable to the community. Perhaps had the Met Office worked with local residents more, they might find they were not up against the level of opposition that they now are.

As before, I am absolutely not against the construction of such a radar tower, along with its associated infrastructure, in Mid Norfolk and, as before, I would be very willingly to work with the Met Office in order to try and find a more suitable location elsewhere in my constituency, should no others be situated beyond my patch. (Please take this as me formally offering my assistance to the Met Office again).

ASSESSMENT NOTES

1.0 Impact on character and appearance

1.1 The proposal seeks the erection of a 24.46m high radar tower and associated comms portakabin. The radar tower is to be used by the MET Office in association with flood warnings. The key policies in this instance in assessing the visual and landscape impact of the development are policies COM01, GEN02 and ENV05 of the Breckland Local Plan (adopted 2019).

1.2 The application is supported by the submission of a landscape and visual impact assessment. This assessment considers the likely visual impact of the development on the surrounding area and also has particular regard to the impact on heritage assets in the surrounding area with a 25km radius. The assessment takes into account existing natural landscape features. The visual and landscape impact is of particular interest due to the large number of heritage assets in the surrounding area.

1.3 Due to the height of the structure at 24.5m, it is to be expected that there will be a degree of visual impact on the surrounding area. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that although there will be a visual impact from the development, the level and severity of this impact would not be automatically unacceptable.

1.4 The visual impact assessment identifies the area that the structure will be seen when taking into account various factors of the land. Initially, when considering the flat topography of the surrounding area, it is noted that there would be an extremely high level of visibility of the structure.

1.5 The next stage of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility is to take into account areas of significant woodland and settlements that would impact on the level of visibility. After considering these factors, it is noted that the level of visibility of the structure is significantly reduced in this location. It is important to remember that the findings of this are only theoretical and therefore the 'actual' visibility of the tower may be increased or decreased.

1.6 The methodology adopted within the assessment follows the best practice guidance as found in The Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2002. The assessment concludes that the location of development is appropriate and is of a scale that can be accommodated in this location which assists in minimising any potentially significant landscape impacts.

1.7 The assessment, when considering the visual impact of the development on significant or sensitive receptors, identified that visibility was likely to occur as an inherent impact of a structure this size. However, it was not considered that the impact on these receptors would be significant when considering proximity, screening, direction of travel and existing factors that reduce the quality of the baseline view.

1.8 Whilst the structure will be visible in the surrounding area, when considering the visual impact of other tall structures in the District, such as the Dereham Water Tower which stands at approximately 46m, it is not considered that the visual impact of the structure on the landscape will be unacceptable having regard to Policy COM01, GEN02 and ENV05 of the Breckland Local Plan (Adopted 2019).

2.0 Impact on amenities

2.1 The impact on amenities was considered with regard to Policy COM03 of the Breckland Local Plan (adopted 2019). There having been significant objections received from local representatives, the Parish Council and the local MP raising concerns about the impact of the structure on the nearest residential

properties among other things.

2.2 There is a residential property immediately adjacent to the site to the east and the nearest property to the west of the site is approximately 200m away. Concerns have been raised about noise impacts from the radar tower on these residential properties. Whilst these comments are noted, the Environmental health officer has raised no objection to the development subject to conditions ensuring that the noise levels emitted from the tower do not exceed levels that would result in significant detrimental impacts on the amenities of the adjacent properties.

2.3 It is not considered on the basis of the siting of the structure that its height would result in any detrimental amenity impacts in terms of over-dominance that would warrant refusal of the application.

2.4 The proposal is overall considered to satisfy the requirements of Policy COM03 of the Breckland Local Plan (Adopted 2019) in terms of the preservation of amenities.

3.0 Biodiversity Impact

3.1 The application is supported by the submission of an ecological assessment report. The submission detail has been assessed by the County Ecologist and Natural England, neither of which have raised any objections to the proposal. Conditions have been requested by the County Ecologist to ensure the provision of biodiversity enhancements as part of the development.

3.2 Comments received from local representatives raised concerns about the impact of the development on barbastelle bats in this location. Additional information has been submitted by the agent in this regard to address the concerns raised. This information is currently subject to re-consultation and a further update will be provided once comments are received in this regard.

3.3 On the basis of the application as currently submitted and on the basis of the comments as currently received from statutory consultees, the proposal is considered to have appropriate regard to Policy ENV02 of the Breckland Local Plan (Adopted 2019) and the NPPF (2019) in terms of the preservation of biodiversity.

4.0 Impact on historic environment

4.1 As highlighted previously in the report, there are a number of heritage assets and sites of historic importance in the surrounding area and as such, the potential impact on these heritage assets is a key issue of consideration.

4.2 The visual and landscape impact assessment submitted with the application investigated the impact of the development on a number of heritage assets. The findings of the assessment was that none of the heritage assets would experience a significant impact as a result of the development.

4.3 Historic England considered the proposal and have raised no objections to the development in terms of the impact on the character and setting of these heritage assets.

4.4 Given the separation distances from the site to these heritage assets and the limited visual impact that will occur as a result of the development, it is overall not considered that the proposal will have a detrimental impact on these heritage assets. It can therefore be considered that the proposal would serve to preserve the character and importance of these features as required by Policy ENV07 of the Breckland Local Plan (Adopted 2019) and Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Area) Act 1990.

5.0 Impact on parking provision and highway safety

5.1 The highways authority have considered the proposal and have raised no objection to the development. It is not considered that the proposed development would give rise to any detrimental highway safety impacts. It is therefore considered that the proposal complies with Policy TR02 of the Breckland Local Plan (Adopted 2019) and paragraphs 108 & 109 of the NPPF (2019) in this regard.

6.0 Planning Balance

6.1 Whilst the comments and representations received from the Parish Council, MP and neighbours are noted regarding the visual, amenity and biodiversity impact of the development, there are no objections from statutory consultees that suggest that the proposal is unacceptable in planning policy terms.

6.2 In terms of the overall planning balance of the scheme, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in planning terms and is accordingly recommended for approval, subject to conditions.

RECOMMENDATION

The proposal is considered to be acceptable in planning terms and is recommended for approval on this basis, subject to conditions.

CONDITIONS

- 1 Full permission 3 year time limit**
The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of THREE YEARS from the date of this permission.
Reason for condition:-
To comply with section 91 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).
- 2 In accordance with submitted plans NEW 2017**
The development must be carried out in strict accordance with the application form, and approved documents and drawings as set out in the table at the end of this notice.
Reason for condition:-
To ensure the satisfactory development of the site, in accordance with Policy COM01 of the Breckland Local Plan (adopted 2019).
- 3 External materials as approved**
The development hereby permitted shall be constructed using the materials specified on the planning application form and / or submitted drawings.
Reason for condition:-
To enable the Local Planning Authority to ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development, as required by Policies COM3, GEN2 and COM1 of the Breckland Local Plan (adopted 2019).
- 4 Non-standard condition**
An ecological management plan (EMP) shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the LPA prior to commencement of development or at reserved matters stage. The content of the EMP shall include the following.
 - a) Description and evaluation of features to be managed,
 - b) Ecological constraints on site that might influence management

- c) Aims and objectives of management
- d) Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives including mitigation detailed in the ES submitted with the application namely that for protection and enhancement of bat feeding and commuting corridors, protection and enhancement of hedgerows creation of a wildlife pond and enhancement of the existing pond on the site, creation of wildflower areas, mitigation measures outlined in principle in the Ecological Assessment (Wild Frontier Ecology; January 2021).
- e) Prescriptions for management actions
- f) Preparation of a work schedule (including an annual work plan capable of being rolled forward over a five-year period)
- g) Details of the body or organisation responsible for implementation of the plan
- h) On-going monitoring and remedial measures

A site visit, desk study and updated targeted protected species survey carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist may be required in-line with CIEEM s Advice Note on the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys (CIEEM; April 2019) and any additional mitigation measures that need incorporating into the site s design agreed with the local planning authority.

The EMP shall also include details of the legal and funding mechanisms by which the long-term implementation of the plan will be secured by the developer. The plan shall also set out (where the results of monitoring show that conservation aims and objectives of the EMP are not being met) how remedial action will be identified, agreed and implemented so the development still delivers the fully function biodiversity objectives of the originally approved scheme.

Reason for condition:-

Details are required prior to commencement in the interests of biodiversity protection and enhancement having regard to Policy ENV02 of the Breckland Local Plan (Adopted 2019).