

**Mereworth**                      **566550 153951**                      **05.05.2006**                      **TM/06/00878/TEPN56**  
**(Mereworth)**  
Hadlow, Mereworth And  
West Peckham

Proposal:                      Telecommunications installation comprising 1 no. 15m overall height brown monopole mast incorporating 3 no. antennas, 1 no. microwave dish, radio equipment housing and ancillary development  
Location:                      Land North Of Childeric House Tonbridge Road Mereworth Maidstone Kent  
Applicant:                      T-Mobile UK

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**1. Description:**

- 1.1 This is a 'prior notification' for the erection of a 15m overall height monopole mast incorporating 3 no. antennas, 1 no. microwave dish, radio equipment housing and ancillary development.
- 1.2 The mast is galvanised steel which is to be painted brown. The cabinets will be green.
- 1.3 The lattice design initially proposed has been altered to a monopole design in order to better blend in with the trees in the vicinity.
- 1.4 The platform is to be non-ground invasive steel grill in order to reduce root damage to trees in the immediate vicinity.
- 1.5 The applicant has submitted signal coverage maps showing the existing coverage, the proposed coverage of this individual cell and the proposed composite coverage for the wider locality. The applicant has issued a declaration of compliance with the ICNIRP guidelines. The applicant has also submitted a detailed supporting statement, which is available for Members' inspection.

**2. The Site:**

- 2.1 The site is MGB. It does not have a specific landscape designation other than being in the rural area (ie it is not AONB or SLA). The mast will be 215m from the edge of Mereworth Castle Conservation Area and the SLA.
- 2.2 The nearest PROW is 500m to the NW.
- 2.3 It is to be sited near a clump of trees next to derelict sheds. It will be 215m north of Tonbridge Road (A26) and 330m east of Malling Road (A228).

**3. Planning History (relevant):**

3.1 TM/04/03294/TEPA Approved 01.11.2004

Details of siting and appearance of a 15m-lattice installation with 6no. Vodafone panel antennae, 1no. 300mm microwave dish and 1no. 600mm microwave dish with 3no. outdoor cabinets submitted under Part 24 of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

**4. Consultees:**

4.1 PC (Mereworth): No comment.

4.2 DHH: No objections.

4.3 Private Reps: (A8 Site Notice) 4 objections were received to the original design of a green lattice mast:

- Very few villagers know about this proposal: other residents feel the same but have been made aware of the situation too late.
- Putting a mast near houses, people and children is unacceptable: current health anxieties mean that masts should be sited only in areas remote from habitation.
- Impact on the Green Belt and possible impact on visual amenity and other amenity value of the area.
- No evidence of very special circumstances.
- Improvements in convenience for mobile phone operators or profitability of mobile phone networks is not exceptional justification.
- Although it appears to be similar in height to nearby trees, it will be visible from some angles and from elevated locations to the north.
- The mast in question is not disguised in any way.
- This development would erode the agricultural landscape of fruit and hop farmland which has already been damaged by the new roundabout and its signage.
- It is immediately next to an SLA and will be visible from immediately adjacent Conservation Areas and will spoil the view of Mereworth Castle.
- This needs a rigorous examination against policy P6/17 of the TMBLP.
- Council should obtain professional advice.

Renotification has taken place on the revised design/colour and any further representations received will be included in a supplementary report.

**5. Determining Issues:**

- 5.1 PPG8 sets out the Government's policy to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems whilst keeping the environmental impact to a minimum. It offers advice to LPAs dealing with such proposals and makes it clear that regard should be had to any technical constraints on the location of the proposed development. Authorities should not question the need for the telecommunications system, which the proposed development is to support.
- 5.2 In addition, policy P7/16 of the TMBLP applies to telecommunications facilities. This provides detailed criteria for assessing such developments, subject to the Borough Council also having full regard to the licence obligations and technical and operational constraints faced by telecommunications operators.
- 5.3 Application TM/04/03294/TEPA proposed a mast for Vodafone that was a 15m high lattice to be painted olive green with 2.3m of antennae. It was shown to be in a virtually identical siting. The new application includes written confirmation that Vodafone has withdrawn its interest in this site. This is therefore an alternative submission for T-Mobile.
- 5.4 In the light of the recent prior approval of the siting and appearance of the Vodafone mast (which was 2.3m taller overall) there are not considered to be any relevant changes in circumstances such that this mast from T-Mobile needs to be treated any differently.
- 5.5 The mast is permitted development and as such, the Borough Council's control is limited to matters of siting and design. In this case as there is limited non-MGB land in the vicinity, this is a factor justifying what would normally be inappropriate development.
- 5.6 There is evidence of T-Mobile's specific need for the mast in order to deal with a "gap" in coverage and a restriction to "in car" level only coverage along the A26 in Mereworth. They have carried out a site search nearby but are constrained by Conservation Area status, listed buildings and uncooperative landowners etc. There are stated to be no alternatives in terms of site sharing using other masts in the vicinity.
- 5.7 The mast is relatively well screened by trees in its immediate vicinity and is relatively well screened from more distant views from the public domain by mature hedgerows along the A26 and the A228. There are no public footpaths close to the site. The visual impact of the mast in the landscape will be acceptable in my opinion due to its siting within trees. I consider that it has a neutral impact on the Conservation Area to the south and no significant impact on the SLA to the south or to the NE.

- 5.8 In terms of colour, it is considered that green or brown are more appropriate colours than galvanised steel as the background to most views will be trees and agricultural fields rather than sky. As the tree clump is deciduous, I am of the view that a dark brown colour will be an acceptable colour to reduce visual impact.
- 5.9 I note the concerns raised by local residents regarding the potential health risks associated with telecommunications equipment. PPG8 clearly states that if a mobile phone base station meets the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure, it should not be necessary for a LPA to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them. In the accompanying evidence, the applicant has submitted a declaration of conformity with the ICNIRP public exposure guidelines.
- 5.10 In light of the above considerations, I am satisfied that adequate information has been submitted of the need for this monopole to be sited in this location and that the design of the proposed monopole will not significantly harm the visual amenity or landscape quality of the locality. The mast complies with PPG8 and Policy P7/16 of the TMBLP and it is recommended that prior approval be granted.

**6. Recommendation:**

- 6.1 **Prior Approval is required and such approval be granted** in respect of the siting and appearance of the proposed telecommunications development as detailed in letters and enclosures date stamped 16.03.2006, coverage plots date stamped 16.03.2006; letter dated 24.04.2006 and plan nos. 70046/010A; 70046/012C; 70046/013B.

Contact: Marion Geary