



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Inspector's Report

### ABP-310584-21

<b>Development</b>	Erect 24m high telecommunications structure, antennas and dishes and remove 15m high monopole.
<b>Location</b>	Templemichael Business Park, Ballinalee Road, Longford
<b>Planning Authority</b>	Longford County Council
<b>Planning Authority Reg. Ref.</b>	2194
<b>Applicants</b>	Eircom Ltd.
<b>Type of Application</b>	Permission
<b>Planning Authority Decision</b>	Grant Permission
<b>Type of Appeal</b>	First / Third Party
<b>Appellants</b>	Signal Infrastructure Ltd.
<b>Date of Site Inspection</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
<b>Inspector</b>	Dolores McCague

## **1.0 Site Location and Description**

- 1.1.1. The site is located at Eir Exchange, Templemichael Business Park, Ballinalee Road, Longford. The site is located in an industrial area not far from the N63, Ballinalee Road, south of its junction with the N4, Longford by-pass. The area is generally industrial. There are pockets of residential use in the area. Two schools are located to the south, the nearest being Saint Emer's National School c275m away. The site is currently occupied by small building and a monopole telecommunications structure. A two storey building occupies the front of the site and there is an existing internal, service road to the location of the proposed development.
- 1.1.2. The site is given as 0.034ha.

## **2.0 Proposed Development**

- 2.1. The proposed development is the erection of a 24m high lattice telecommunications structure (overall height of 25.5 metres), antennas and dishes and ancillary works, all enclosed in security fencing and the removal of the existing 15m high monopole.
- 2.1.1. The application is accompanied by a letter from Towercom, who made the application.
- 2.1.2. Eir's current 4G coverage east of Longford town centre requires significant improvement. It currently transmits from an existing shared telecommunications structure situated to the rear of Communications Design within the IDA Industrial Estate. Owing to insufficient height and consequently to insufficient coverage that structure no longer adequately fulfils Eir's technical requirements. The new structure will release Eir to significantly improve its next generation services for the benefit of Longford residents from within its own telecommunications Exchange compound. Eir may realise significant technological and work practice efficiencies by situating its mast infrastructure adjacent to its telecoms exchange building in this way converging over ground telecoms infrastructure including a mast, antennas, microwave dishes and exchange building together with its underground telecoms infrastructure to include Eir fibre and copper phone lines.

- 2.1.3. It lists structures it has discounted: at Tesco shopping centre – Vodafone and Eir transmit from the rooftop, the structure does not allow for intensification; the rear of CDL Design Limited – three and Eir transmit. The relocation will achieve operational synergies.

### **3.0 Planning Authority (PA) Decision**

#### **3.1. Decision**

The planning authority decided to grant permission subject to 7 conditions, including:

3) any change in the ownership of the site of the operator of the structure shall be immediately notified to the PA. The latter requirement shall include the use of the site by another additional service provider.

5) no material change of use of the mast shall be made without a prior grant of planning permission.

7) the operator shall insure that the Electromagnetic emissions from this station are currently and shall remain in accordance with the relevant International Standards and that non-ionising radiation levels are within the limits specified by the International Commission of Non-Ionising Radiation Protection Agency (ICNIRP) and by the Irish Telecommunications Regulatory Agency Comreg.

#### **3.2. Planning Authority Reports**

##### **3.2.1. Planning Reports**

The planning report, recommending permission, includes:

- The site is at the entrance of the IDA Business Park, approx. 400m south of the N4 Leo Casey Roundabout. The land is zoned industrial commercial in the Longford Town and Environs Area Plan in the Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021.
- Taking account of the location of the site, the justification of the need for the mast and the proposed development's importance in providing the best

possible communications infrastructure, which is one of the underpinning aims of the Longford County Development Plan, permission is recommended.

#### 3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

Roads – no impact on roads.

#### 3.3. Prescribed Bodies

Irish Aviation Authority – no requirement for obstacle lighting.

Geological Survey of Ireland – no comment.

#### 3.4. Third Party Observations

Operator of 4 Site – there is an existing 24m mast in close proximity which has been designed as a multiuser installation capable of meeting all operator requirements in the area.

### 4.0 Planning History

None given

### 5.0 Policy Context

#### 5.1. Development Plan

- 5.1.1. Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, is the operative plan. Relevant provisions include:

The provision of a high-quality competitive information and communications telecommunications (ICT) service is essential in order to promote industrial and commercial development, and to enhance social inclusion and mobility. There is a reliance on the provision of such services for industrial, commercial, tourism and social development and the expansion of ICT infrastructure is key to meeting the needs of the County's population and a digital economy.

The Planning Authority will work with the telecommunications providers to facilitate the development of infrastructure that respects the recognised values of the natural

and built heritage and will seek to encourage the co-location of masts and antennae on existing structures within the county.

Relevant objectives:

CPO 5.174 Promote orderly development of telecommunications infrastructure throughout the county in accordance with the requirements of the following: - 'Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (1996), except where they conflict with Circular Letter PL 07/12 which shall take precedence, and any subsequent guidelines. - 'Guidance on the potential location of overground telecommunications infrastructure on public roads', (Dept of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources, 2015).

CPO 5.175 Ensure that the location of telecommunications structures should minimise and /or mitigate any adverse impacts on communities, public rights of way and the built or natural environment.

CPO 5.176 Encourage co-location of antennae on existing support structures and to require documentary evidence as to the non-availability of this option in proposals for new structures. The shared use of existing structures will be required where the numbers of masts located in any single area is considered to have an excessive concentration.

The site is in an area zoned Industrial / Commercial / Warehousing, with the objective to primarily provide for industrial/workshop, warehouse and commercial or business development including compatible uses such as offices and distribution. 'Telecommunications' is permissible in this zone.

## **5.2. Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 1996**

5.2.1. These Guidelines set out the criteria for the assessment of telecommunications structures. Of relevance:

- In the vicinity of larger towns and in city suburbs operators should endeavour to locate in industrial estates or in industrially zoned land.
- Facilities and Clustering (Section 4.5) - sharing of installations (antennae support structures) will normally reduce the visual impact on the landscape.

The potential for concluding sharing agreements is greatest in the case of new structures when foreseeable technical requirements can be included at the design stage. All applicants will be encouraged to share and will have to satisfy the authority that they have made a reasonable effort to share. Where the sharing of masts or towers occurs each operator may want separate buildings/cabinets. The matter of sharing is probably best dealt with in pre-planning discussions.

### **5.3. Circular Letter PL07/12**

- 5.3.1. This Circular Letter revises elements of the 1996 Guidelines. In particular, Section 2.2 advises Planning Authorities to cease attaching time limiting conditions to telecommunications masts, except in exceptional circumstances. Section 2.4 advises that the lodgement of a bond or cash deposit is no longer appropriate and instead advises that a condition be included stating that when the structure is no longer required it should be demolished, removed and the site re-instated at the operators' expense.
- 5.3.2. It recommends (section 2.5) that planning authorities should set up a register/ database of approved telecommunications masts to maximise the potential for future mast sharing and co-location.

### **5.4. Natural Heritage Designations**

- 5.4.1. The nearest protected site areas: Carrickglass Demesne pNHA (site code 001822) located c1.8km straight line distance to the north east of the subject site and the Royal Canal pNHA (site code 002103) located a similar distance to the south-west. The nearest Natura sites are: Brown Bog SAC (site code 002346) located c5km straight line distance to the west and Mount Jessop Bog SAC (site code 002202) c5.5km to the south.

### **5.5. EIA Screening**

- 5.5.1. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and the absence of any significant environmental sensitivity in the vicinity there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed

development. The need for environmental impact assessment can, therefore, be excluded at preliminary examination and a screening determination is not required.

## **6.0 The Appeal**

### **6.1. Grounds of Appeal**

6.1.1. A first party appeal against the decision to grant permission has been submitted by 4Site, on behalf of Signal Infrastructure Limited.

6.1.2. The grounds of appeal includes:

- Signal Infrastructure Limited owns and operates an existing in situ 24m multi-user telecommunications support structure at Communications Design, IDA Industrial Estate, Ballinalee Road, Longford c170m southeast of the proposed development. Planning permission was granted on a 10 year temporary basis for this development in December 2007 under Ref No. 07/1049. An application for retention of this structure was submitted to Longford County Council in May 2021, Ref. No. 21/128, and is due for decision in June 2021. This structure is capable of meeting all operator requirements in the area and currently has capacity to accommodate additional telecommunications equipment as the need arises. It is apparent that the justification did not consider the existing structure less than 200m away from the site. In the absence of a review of all existing telecommunications sites in the general vicinity, serving the same target geographical area, the applicant has not met the requirements and standards relating to sharing facilities and co-location of antennae contained in the Guidelines and circular PI 07/12. Policy TEL 1 of Longford County Development Plan, is referred to.
- The proposed development is contrary to ministerial guidelines and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

### **6.2. Applicant Response**

6.2.1. Towercom have responded to the grounds of appeal, on behalf of Eircom Limited, t/a eir. The response includes:

- 6.2.2. The existing structure owned by Cignal was identified and discounted.
- 6.2.3. The existing coverage available from the 15m monopole is shown on a small scale aerial photo of the area; and the coverage for the 24m lattice tower is shown on an aerial photo of the area at a similar scale.
- 6.2.4. Given the level and height of tree clutter in the area, the increased height at 24m significantly improves the coverage potential. The existing tree and building clutter limits the usable space and heights on the 15m monopole and proposed tower to some extent, which would also be similar at the existing Cignal tower, particularly given the increasing size of antennas and ancillary equipment.
- 6.2.5. The proposed 24m lattice tower is the preferred method of support and height, structurally capable of supporting the loads of both equipment and environmental loads without movement.
- 6.2.6. It is considered the most suitable of multi-user telecommunications support structures and the most appropriate design at this industrial location, particularly with the size of the Exchange property, existing buildings on site, removal of existing 15m support structure and level of natural screening in the surrounds, set back from nearby roads. The proposed structure would future proof the site and provide sufficient height for other operators to co-locate.
- 6.2.7. Works access safety for the lifetime of the structure was also a consideration when selecting the proposed lattice tower, given it is the easiest and safest structure.
- 6.2.8. The submission cites the Report of the Mobile and Broadband Taskforce and Action Plan for Rural Development, published by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and other policy documents.
- 6.2.9. It is widely accepted that telecommunications infrastructure, particularly wireless technology, is undergoing significant changes in the last number of years. Advances in wireless technology and communication devices has put significant pressure on the wireless telecoms network throughout the country, network operators are constantly upgrading and modifying their networks to keep pace with the demand. There has been significant investment made at these telecommunications sites in Longford town and others in the wider area to provide comprehensive service, and now potentially by other licence operators who wish to co-located in order to provide



coverage to the local community. The subject proposal to replace an existing support structure at an established utilities site will ultimately avoid a proliferation of communications masts and antennae in this area and facilitate the potential for future mast sharing and co-location. The proposed structure would be of use to potentially multiple operators in improving mobile and data services in the area, as well as smaller broadband operators.

## **7.0 Assessment**

- 7.1.1. The issues which arise in relation to this appeal are: appropriate assessment, location and co-location, the following assessment is dealt with under these headings

### **7.2. Appropriate Assessment.**

- 7.2.1. Having regard to the nature and scale of the development proposed, the limited extent and duration of the associated construction works, and the distance to the nearest designated sites, no Appropriate Assessment issues arise and it is not considered that the proposed development would be likely to have a significant effect individually or in combination with other plans or projects on a European site.

### **7.3. Principle of Development and Location**

- 7.3.1. The Development Plan notes the importance of a high quality and competitive telecommunications service stating that it will support and encourage the provision of an improved communications network in the County, in order to facilitate the industrial, economic and social growth of Longford in a national context.
- 7.3.2. The site is in an area zoned Industrial / Commercial / Warehousing, which is a location identified in the guidelines as suitable for telecommunications masts.
- 7.3.3. The site is set back from the road and is screened by development. It is not unduly close to residential areas and is c275m from the nearby national school.
- 7.3.4. There is an established telecommunications network on this site; and being already developed for utilities is referenced in the guidelines as making it more suitable for development such as this.

7.3.5. The proposed development is therefore acceptable in principle.

#### **7.4. Co-location**

- 7.4.1. The grounds of appeal states that the justification did not consider the existing structure less than 200m away from the site. In the absence of a review of all existing telecommunications sites in the general vicinity, serving the same target geographical area, the applicant has not met the requirements and standards relating to sharing facilities and co-location of antennae contained in the Guidelines and circular PI 07/12. The structure referred to was then the subject of a planning application for retention permission, (decision to grant the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021). The grounds states that this structure is capable of meeting all operator requirements in the area and currently has capacity to accommodate additional telecommunications equipment as the need arises; and that the applicant has not met the requirements and standards relating to sharing facilities and co-location of antennae contained in the Guidelines and circular PI 07/12.
- 7.4.2. The first party response states that the proposed structure would future proof the site and provide sufficient height for other operators to co-locate. The subject proposal to replace an existing support structure at an established utilities site will ultimately avoid a proliferation of communications masts and antennae in this area and facilitate the potential for future mast sharing and co-location. The proposed structure would be potentially of use to multiple operators in improving mobile and data services in the area, as well as smaller broadband operators. The proposed 24m lattice tower is the preferred method of support and height, structurally capable of supporting the loads of both equipment and environmental loads without movement.
- 7.4.3. The development plan encourages co-location and states that shared use of existing structures will be required where the numbers of masts located in any single area is considered to have an excessive concentration.
- 7.4.4. The guidelines state that sharing of installations (antennae support structures) will normally reduce the visual impact on the landscape, applicants will be encouraged to share.

- 7.4.5. The suitability of the location has been referred to earlier in this report. The two masts will be visible in the same visual frame but will largely only be viewed from a distance. Co-location is already in operation on both masts. The applicant states that ongoing investment in telecommunications infrastructure, particularly wireless technology, and advances in wireless technology and communication devices, have put significant pressure on the wireless telecoms network throughout the country, such that network operators are constantly upgrading and modifying their networks to keep pace with demand. It appears to be the case that in the long run both masts will be required. There is a substantial telecommunications presence on the subject site.
- 7.4.6. Avoidance of a proliferation of masts is mainly directed at the visual impact of these structures. This is not a particular concern in this case due to the location, topography and surrounding development.
- 7.4.7. I consider the proposal acceptable and that the presence of another mast in the vicinity should not be a reason to refuse or modify the proposed development.

## **8.0 Recommendation**

- 8.1.1. In accordance with the foregoing I recommend that permission should be granted, for the following reasons and considerations and in accordance with the following conditions.

## **9.0 Reasons and Considerations**

Having regard to:

- (a) the provisions of the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, and in particular the location of the proposed development in an area zoned for Industrial / Commercial / Warehousing uses, and
- (b) the guidelines relating to telecommunications antennae and support structures which were issued by the Department of the Environment and Local Government to planning authorities in July, 1996,

it is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development, which is necessary for the provision of high quality

communications and information technology networks in the area, would not seriously injure the amenities of the area, and would be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

## 10.0 Conditions

1.	<p>The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interest of clarity.</p>
2.	<p>The developer shall allow, subject to reasonable terms, other licensed mobile telecommunications operators to co-locate their antennae onto the subject structure.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In order to avoid the proliferation of telecommunications structures in the interests of visual amenity.</p>
3.	<p>Equipment erected on the lattice tower shall not interfere with existing telecommunications equipment in the area, except with the agreement of other users.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interest of clarity.</p>
4.	<p>Any change in the ownership of the site or the operator of the structure, or the use of the site by another additional service provider, shall be immediately notified to the planning authority.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interest of clarity.</p>

5.	<p>No advertisement or advertisement structure shall be erected or displayed on the proposed structure or its appendages or within the curtilage of the site without a prior grant of planning permission.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interests of the visual amenities of the area.</p>
6.	<p>When the structure is no longer required, it shall be demolished, removed and the site re-instated at the operators' expense.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interest of clarity.</p>

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Planning Inspector

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Photographs

Appendix 2 Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, extracts.