



An  
Bord  
Pleanála

## Inspector's Report

### ABP-312965-22

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<b>Development</b>	Construction of a 30-metre-high multi-user lattice tower telecommunications structure.
<b>Location</b>	Bracknagh GAA Club, Clonsast Upper, Rathangan, Co. Offaly.
<b>Planning Authority</b>	Offaly County Council
<b>Planning Authority Reg. Ref.</b>	21767
<b>Applicant(s)</b>	Signal Infrastructure.
<b>Type of Application</b>	Permission
<b>Planning Authority Decision</b>	Grant with Conditions
<b>Type of Appeal</b>	Third Party
<b>Appellant(s)</b>	Towercom Ltd.
<b>Observer(s)</b>	None
<b>Date of Site Inspection</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> of May 2022
<b>Inspector</b>	Caryn Coogan

## 1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site is located within and to the rear of Bracknagh GAA Club grounds Co. Offlay. The grounds are located 3km to the west of Bracknagh village.
- 1.2. The topography is level. The immediate vicinity of the GAA grounds includes a high density of linear developments along the local road network.
- 1.3. The Bracknagh GAA grounds includes two pitches, a club house, maintenance shed, parking, goal posts, floodlighting and netting.
- 1.4. Access is off a minor county road.

## 2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposed development is a 30metre high multiuser lattice tower telecommunications structure with headframe, carrying antenna and dishes enclosed within a 2.4metres high palisade fence compound with associated ground equipment and access track.

## 3.0 Planning Authority Decision

### 3.1. Decision

The planning authority granted the proposed development subject to standard planning conditions relating to telecommunications masts.

### 3.2. Planning Authority Reports

#### 3.2.1. *Planning Reports*

The proposal complies with development plan and national policy relating to telecommunications structures. It will enhance mobile and broadband services in the area.

#### 3.2.2. *Other Technical Reports*

Area Office: Surface water to remain within the site and the vehicular access is restricted to one access.

Water Services and environment: No objection.

### 3.3. **Prescribed Bodies**

None apart from the Irish Aviation Authority who had no objections to the proposed development.

### 3.4. **Third Party Observations**

An objection from another telecommunications company.

## 4.0 **Planning History**

Nothing relevant to the mast, only the GAA grounds.

## 5.0 **Policy Context**

### 5.1. **Development Plan**

### 5.2. ***Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027***

#### 5.2.1 **Information and Communication Technologies**

Offaly County Council recognises that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) play a crucial role in enabling social and economic activity and is therefore committed to enhancing the ICT infrastructure throughout the county. It is acknowledged, however, that this must be managed to ensure a balance between the provision of such infrastructure in the interests of social and economic progress, and sustaining residential amenity and environmental quality.

#### **5.8.2 Telecommunications**

The Council recognises that there is a balance between facilitating the provision of mobile telecommunications infrastructure and the need to protect residential, visual amenity and the natural and built environment. When considering proposals for telecommunications infrastructure, the Council will have regard to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's "Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures, Guidelines for Planning Authorities" 1996 and Circular

Letter PL07/12 'Telecommunication Antennae and Support Structures' and any amendments thereof.

*ENTP-40* It is Council policy to promote and facilitate the sustainable development of a high quality Information and Communications Technology (ICT) network in the county in order to achieve balanced social and economic development whilst protecting the amenities of urban and rural areas.

ENTP-41 It is Council policy to support and facilitate the delivery of the National Broadband Plan and the Offaly Digital Strategy as a means of developing further opportunities for enterprise, employment, education, innovation and skills development.

ENTP-43 It is Council policy to achieve a balance between facilitating the provision of telecommunications services in the interests of social and economic progress and protecting residential amenity and environmental quality. The Council will have regard to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Governments Guidelines on Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures (and any future editions) and Circular Letter PL07/12 (Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures) in assessing development proposals.

ENTP-44 It is Council policy to avoid the unnecessary proliferation of masts in the county through colocation of antennae on existing support structures and masts. Masts and antennae shall be restricted in the following areas.

### 5.2.2 Chapter 13 - Development Management Standards

**DMS-111 Telecommunications** outlines the necessary requirements for a planning application.

### 5.3. Natural Heritage Designations

The closest Natura 2000 site to the proposed development is 6.5km,

Site Code 002162

SITE\_NAME River Barrow And River Nore SAC

## 6.0 The Appeal

### 6.1. Grounds of Appeal

Towercon Ltd manage an existing mast network in Ireland and facilitate co-location of multi-operator infrastructure to a wide range of clients including national mobile operators, national and local broadband providers, broadcasters and local emergency services. Towercom manage a telecommunications structure at Eir Exchange at Bracknagh, located 3km southeast of subject application, close to Bracknagh village and the junction of R442 and R419 Regional Roads. It is an established utilities site for many years.

**Section 5.8.2 Telecommunications** of the Offlay County Development Plan is cited.

The applicant has not met the requirements and standards relating to sharing facilities and co-location of antennae contained in the Telecommunications Antennae and Support structures Guidelines for Planning Authorities 1996. The applicant has not demonstrated the required coverage could not be achieved by co-location. Permission should be refused on the basis of proliferation. The structure at Eir Exchange Bracknagh was not investigated fully and if it could achieve the required coverage. The technical justification states the proposal is to improve the services in the area including Bracknagh and the R419 regional road. It is accepted the existing structure at the Eir Exchange may be too low at 15metres however the structure and the location have the potential to accommodate an extended or redeveloped structure to accommodate additional equipment subject to planning permission. There has been a telecommunications support structure on the exchange property for many years providing a long history of telecommunications and utilities use. The exchange site is the most suitable site for a telecommunications infrastructure in the area, it is located on the outskirts of the village close to the R419 Regional Road which is the target area for the coverage.

### 6.2 Applicant Response

The technical justification was undertaken by Reef Consulting for the telecommunications installation. The nearest existing site is Bracknagh which is located 3.4km from the site with a 15metre mast, and it will not be able to provide adequate coverage to the target areas. A report commissioned by the applicant

demonstrated that co-location on the existing structure at Bracknagh will fall short of the coverage required and it was ruled out. For that reason. The Eir Exchange site covers the town and surrounding area, an increase in height of the existing mast at Bracknagh would still be significantly lower than the proposed site at the GAA grounds. The applicant would not deploy unnecessary duplicate infrastructure in locations where there is already sufficient infrastructure to co-locate equipment onto. The planning authority has determined the proposal complies with the development plan policies under 6.11.3 and 11.18.1.

### **6.3 Planning Authority Response**

The planning authority requests the Board to support its decision to grant permission for the development.

### **7.0 Assessment**

7.1 I have read the contents of the file, and had particular regard to the planning authority's decision, the grounds of appeal, and the submissions made to the Board by the applicant. I have visited the site, and I consider the salient issues in the assessment of the appeal are as follows:

- Impact on Visual and Residential Amenities
- Compliance with Planning policy
- Consideration of Alternatives
- Appropriate Assessment

### **7.2 Impact on Visual and Residential Amenities**

The receiving environment is a rural area in Co.Offaly , which consists of a flat topography, agricultural landholdings and a multitude of one off houses along the local road network. The site is positioned in the corner of an existing GAA club which includes two pitches, floodlighting, netting and a clubhouse, and shed. I note from the planning file, there were no objections from the local residents to the proposed development.

The proposed structure is a 30metre robust triangular lattice structure set against a mature hedgerow. The drawings describe it as a multiuser lattice tower, and I consider it to be a significant communications tower with a multitude of antennas at

the top of the structure in a triangular formation. There are floodlights in close proximity to the proposed location and these are 16 metres in height, in addition there are tall netting poles behind the goal posts along the site boundaries.

The proposed structure will be visible from the surrounding properties along the perimeter of the GAA grounds and will be highly visible from within the GAA grounds itself. I consider the proposed structure will blend in with the existing tall structures on site in terms of the floodlighting and goal posts and netting posts. Although, the existing tall structures are integral and synonymous with the amenity use of the GAA grounds, I do not consider the inclusion of the mast will result in an adverse impact to the visual and residential amenities of the area.

### 7.3 **Compliance with Planning Policy**

The current policy document is the ***National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040***. The proposed development, a 30 metre telecommunications structure, is to provide all operators to deploy 3G and high speed 4G broadband services including future technology upgrades. The subject site was chosen because it would greatly benefit the local area and service the needs of the area for many years to come. The proposed development will cater for the transmission of high-capacity wireless data and broadband services for Mobile Network Operators, Radio Stations, Wireless Broadband companies.

***Objective 24*** – ‘Support and facilitate delivery of the National Broadband Plan as a means of developing further opportunities for enterprise, employment, education, innovation and skills development for those who live and work in rural areas.’

The proposal complies with Ministerial Guidelines which were published in 1996 and expanded under Ministerial Circular PL07/12. The options for co-location identified are positioned too far away from the coverage deficit and there is no facility to share on an adjoining mast in the immediate area of the site. The proposal is to enhance the existing service in the area. Therefore, a new standalone lattice structure in the area is the only option available to the providers. The site is designed to support mobile and broadband communications with antennas, transmission dishes and equipment for mobile network and wireless broadband providers extending the

reach of communications into areas. This will support remote working in the surrounding villages and surrounding rural area too in line with National Policy.

### **7.3 Compliance with Development Plan policy**

The relevant plan is the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. The current development plan policy has been quoted at considerable length under Section 5 of this report. It is stated in the Offaly County Development Plan, the Council will have regard to the visual impact of the proposed equipment on the natural and built environment. The applicant commissioned Reef Consulting to prepare a report on the site selection background which was submitted as part of the response to the appeal.

Section 5.8.2 Telecommunications (development Plan) states it is the policy of the planning authority under policy ENTP-40 to promote and facilitate the sustainable development of a high-quality Information and Communications network in the county in order to achieve balanced social and economic development whilst protecting the amenities of urban and rural area.

In addition, the proposed development complies with Policy ENTP-41 to support and facilitate the delivery of the National Broadband Plan and the Offaly Digital Strategy as a means of developing further opportunities for enterprise, employment, education, innovation and skills development.

### **7.4 Consideration of Alternatives**

The proposed structure will enable mobile and operators to bring improvements to mobile and broadband users in the general area. Coverage improvements are predicted in Bracknagh, Cushina Lower, Corbetstown, Tully East, Littletown, Greenfield and the R419 and surrounding area. It will facilitate multiple operators to deploy 2G voice, 3G and high speed 4G broadband Services. The local customers will benefit from more choice of network operators for high-speed broadband.

The third-party appeal states the applicants did not consider co-location at an existing mast at the Eir Exchange, Bracknagh town. The existing location is considered to be central with the receiving population, however it has limited range. The existing 15m mast at the Eir Exchange in the village, is 3.4km from the subject site which is considered to be too far for optimum coverage. The existing lattice



structure is 15metres in height as opposed to the 30metre height of the proposed structure. The subject site is also 10m+ above ground level when compared to the existing Eir exchange site. The existing 15metre mast cannot accommodate the additional antennae and equipment required to service the area. A new planning application would be required for a taller mast at the existing location and it still would not provide the required coverage.

The target areas are indicated in the Reef Consultancy report under Figure 1. The introduction of the proposed development will lead to a better service for homes and businesses of the area.

The *Planning Guidelines for Telecommunications Guidelines and Support Structures (1996)* state any applicant of a telecommunications mast must investigate alternative site locations. Vilicom prepared a technical report on 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 for the mast at Bracknagh. A full list of the existing sites within 9km of the subject site was listed, and it included 9No. existing masts, and none of these were deemed suitable to service the blackspots identified in the area.

## 7.6 **Appropriate Assessment**

Having regard to the nature and scale of development proposed and to the nature of the receiving environment, 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.

## 8.0 **Recommendation**

- 8.1. I recommend the planning authority's decision to grant planning permission be upheld.

## 9.0 **Reasons and Considerations**

Having regard to:

- (a) National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040,
- (b) The Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures -Guidelines for Planning Authorities, issued by the Department of Environment and Local Government in 1996,

- (c) The Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures -Guidelines for Planning Authorities, issued by the Department of Environment and Local Government Circular Letter PL07/12,
- (d) The objectives of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027,
- (e) The nature, scale and location of the proposed telecommunications structure, the proposed development, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, would achieve the objectives set out in National Policy and the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. It is considered that the proposed development would not seriously injure the visual or residential amenities of the area and would otherwise 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 proposed mast and all associated antennas, equipment and fencing shall be demolished and removed from the site when its no longer required. The site shall be reinstated to its pre-development conditions at the expense of the developer.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interests of orderly development.</p>
3.	<p>The antennae type and mounting configuration shall be in accordance with the details submitted with this application, and notwithstanding the provisions of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, and any</p>

	<p>statutory provision amending or replacing them, shall not be altered without prior grant of planning permission.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> To clarify the nature and extent of the permitted development to which this permission relates and to facilitate a full assessment of any future alterations.</p>
4.	<p>A low intensity fixed red obstacle light shall be fitted as close to the top of the mast as practicable and shall be visible angles in azimuth. Details of this light, its location and period of operation shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to the commencement of the development.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interests of public safety</p>
5.	<p>Details of the proposed colour scheme for the telecommunications structure and ancillary structures shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority prior to commencement of the development.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interests of visual amenity.</p>
6.	<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 prior grant of planning permission.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> In the interest of visual amenities of the area.</p>

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Caryn Coogan  
Planning Inspector

10/06/2022