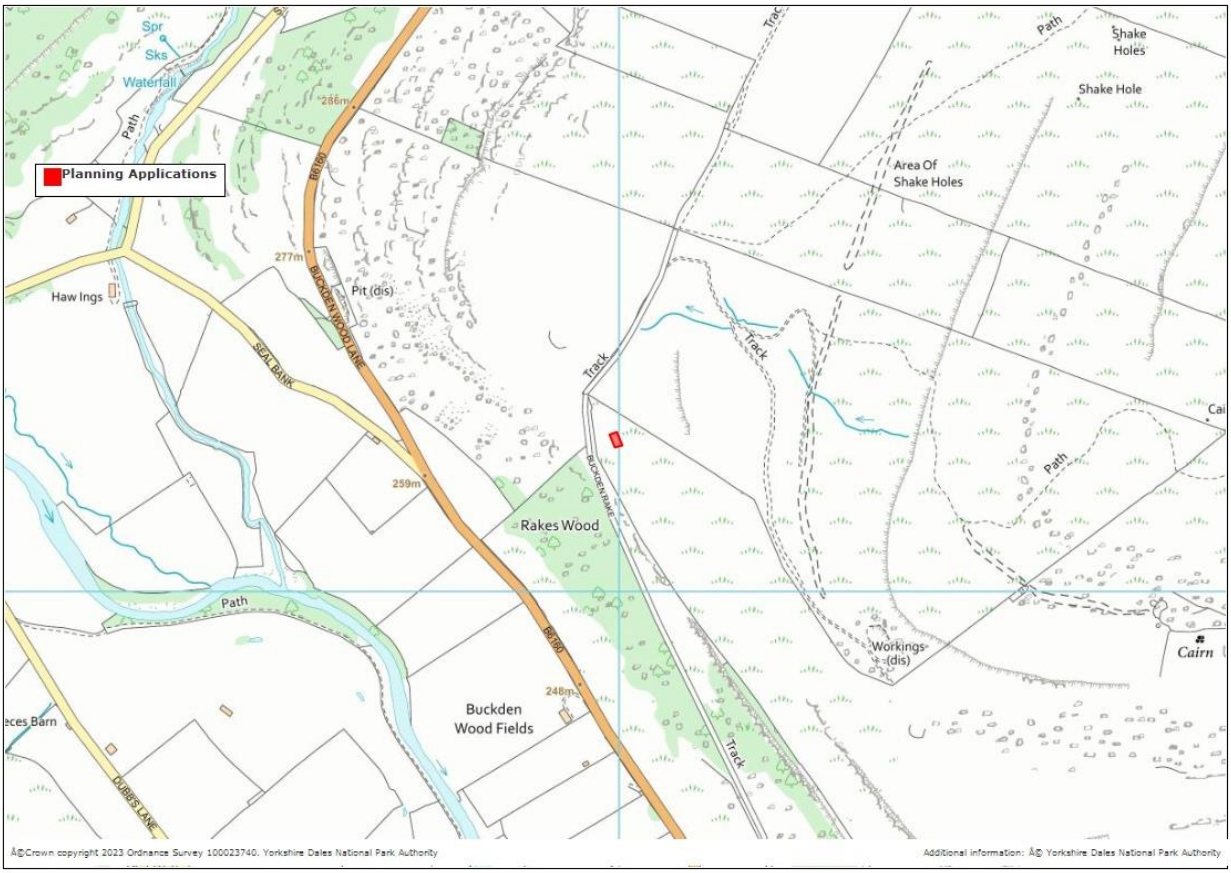
YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Committee:	Planning	**Parish:**	Buckden
Date:	30 May 2023	**Officer:**	Andrew Tait
Applicant:	Cornerstone	**Application No:**	C/13/204
Site Address:	Land near Rakes Wood, Buckden, Skipton, BD23 5JA		
Proposal:	Full planning permission for the installation of a 25 metre high lattice tower supporting 6 no. antennas, 4 no. transmission dishes, 2 no. equipment cabinets, 1 no. meter cabinet and ancillary development thereto including a generator and associated fuel tank and a fenced compound, for the Shared Rural Network project on behalf of Cornerstone		



REASON FOR COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

1. This application is reported to Committee for the following reason: in the opinion of the Head of Development Management it is in the best interests of the National Park Authority that the application is considered by the Committee.

APPLICATION SITE

2. The site is located on a shelf above Rakes Wood to the north of Buckden. Access to the site is just off the track that leads north then eastwards and provides a route up to Buckden Pike from the National Park Car Park at Buckden. The area subject to the application is currently used for grazing. There is an existing small temporary Vodafone mast adjacent to the site that currently provides 3G coverage for the local community. However, this is going to be switched off at some point this year as 4G coverage replaces 3G.

PROPOSAL

3. Full planning permission is sought for the installation of a 25 metre high lattice tower supporting 6 no. antennas, 4 no. transmission dishes, 2 no. equipment cabinets, 1 no. meter cabinet and ancillary development thereto including a generator and associated fuel tank and a fenced compound. The installation was to be enclosed by a fence but amended plans have confirmed that this will now be a dry stone wall and the applicant has oferred some planting immediately around the installation. A map showing the degree of visibility of the site (Zone of Theoretical Visibility) was requested and has been provided. The applicants have also agreed that the installation will be constructed using a helicopter build method to avoid damage or the need to upgrade the track. This also removed the need for a short sectin of track to the installation itself.

4. This is a Shared Rural Network proposal that would provide wider and more reliable 4G coverage for the Bucken and Hubberholme area. The applicant has looked at a number of potential alternative sites, several of them on lower ground, requiring a taller mast and not providing the same levels of coverage. The current proposal provides the best option and while it is much smaller the site hosts existing infrastructure in the form of a small mast providing the above mentioned service that is to be switched off this year.

5. The application has been submitted with a range of information including a heritage, ecology report and photomontages showing the existing view and the proposed views with the mast in position.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

6. No relevant planning history.

CONSULTATIONS

7. The comments of statutory and non-statutory consultees are summarized below:

Buckden Parish Council-We would request that in considering the application the Authority should takesthe following points into account:

Loss of current 3G Service: Buckden village and Hubberholme currently have a limited pico-cell based 3G mobile service provided under Vodafone's ROSS programme. This is due to be decommissioned during 2023. The Buckden community is therefore very keen that this application should be approved as quickly as possible to avoid the risk that the village is left

without any mobile service for a period of time. Assurances have been given to the PC via the applicant that Vodafone have confirmed that the new service can be delivered before the existing service is decommissioned as long as there is no significant delay in the planning approvals process.

Access to site: Some concerns about how the site will be accessed with some inconsistency in the documents.

Power Supply: The application is silent on the question of mains power supply. We have discussed this with the applicants who had assumed that there was mains power available adjacent to the site. The means of supply should be subject to the agreement of the Local Planning Authority.

Visual impact: While the undoubted benefits of the proposal are acknowledged, there is no doubt that the mast will have a significant detrimental visual impact that is underplayed in the document and there are a number of statements which are incorrect, in particular those relating to the visibility of the mast from designated assets, and the assertions that the mast will be "well screened by Rakes Wood and other areas of woodland". The PC recognise that line-of sight is necessary to achieve the necessary signal coverage and accept that therefore the mast will inevitably be visible, but are keen that everything feasible should be done to minimise the visual impact.

The PC emphasise that this decision has consequences for the community, and will have a very material, 15 to 20 year (at least) impact on the quality of life and the sustainability of the social and economic community in the parish. A small number of households have voiced strong opposition to the proposal, although the majority have been supportive. The opinions of current residents are clearly important, but they are not the only stakeholders in this decision, and future residents and the many visitors will also benefit from the proposal.

The PC consider that the the lack of effective mobile coverage in the parish is impacting people's lives; examples include:

• Safety: The area is a very popular walking destination. Every year there are a number of instances of walkers becoming injured or lost, and where a viable mobile phone signal could significantly reduce the time for them to call for help and be found. For motorists, the roads in the parish are unlit, narrow and occasionally flooded or snowbound. Other than in the village itself, almost none of the roads have a mobile signal. In the case of breakdown, accident or other problems, a mobile phone is a valuable safety aid.

• Increasingly access to health services relies on phone contact with triage, remote consultations and 111 services taking place by phone call-back. Without a mobile signal people have to wait in for the call back which can often be many hours later. Furthermore, given our remoteness from the nearest hospital (~one hour away), the community relies on local first responders in the event of emergency. The responders, in turn, rely on the mobile network both for call-out and guidance.

• As services become digital, areas such as ours without effective mobile coverage can be penalised financially. A current example of this is smart meters; these rely on the mobile network and therefore do not currently work in Buckden; this means that not only are residents unable to benefit from using a smart meter to help reduce their electricity consumption, but they are also excluded from the government's Demand Flexibility Scheme; similarly people installing solar panels now cannot benefit from feed-in tariffs without a smart meter. All of these contribute to higher bills.

• Other examples include the National Parks electric vehicle charging station in the Wood Lane car park which is only usable by 20% of users – and by none when the Vodafone 3G is switched off later this year. Likewise, contactless payment on the bus (which is a feature of the governments "Bus Back Better" strategy) is not feasible, without mobile coverage, and the

real-time upload of information from the bus to the server does not work. Delivery drivers find their handheld deviceswon't connect back to theirdepots, causing them issues.
• With the move to digital and the increase in cyber-crime, more and more sites are moving to text or app based dual-factor authentication. With no signal, it can be impossible to log onto a site or complete a transaction.
• Buckden is a tourist area – and while some residents can use broadband-based mobile calling, this is not available to the many thousands of visitors a year who come to Buckden to walk, and indeed to residents when they are outdoors in large parts of the parish.

Use of mobile online is disproportionately higher amongst younger people – as the first generation of "digitalnatives" grow up they are less likely to want to visit, live in and bring up families in areas where they are notable to use mobile – potentially further increasing the average age of an already aging demographic. All these factors persuade the PC that there is a compelling case why the application should be approved.

Highways - There are no local highway authority objections to the proposed development

Craven District Council- All work is to be carried out, to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations 2010.

Craven District Council (Contamination)- There are no known contaminated land implications regarding the proposed development.

Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority- no objection/observation to the proposed development.

North Yorkshire County Council- having reviewed the comments made by various consultees on the application the Council suppport the application. The Council believe that the applicant has provided the required supporting information. While some residents of Buckden have concerns, the majority support the proposal as they realise the benefits that will be brought to the area. The area only has limited 3G coverage and this is due to be de-commissioned during 2023 leaving the area with no mobile phone coverage. This 4G proposal has been made possible by the Shared Rural Network between the government and operators. This initiative is not something that will be repeated by Government in the near future. The Government intervention is required because a number of installations such as this one are not commercially viable in rural areas. The initiative has until June 2024 to have the sites constucted and operational. The application is in line with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Strategy for the area and the Local Plan.

The National Trust- As landowner object to the application based upon landscape and visual impact and consider that has not been minimised in accordance with requirements, question whether the site is inside or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, concerns about rhe heritage statement and that there could be a chance, if slight of archaeological remans in the area, there should be an archaelogical watching brief. If approved the site should be restored to its former condiiton if the site is no longer required.

Trees & Woodlands YDNPA -No objections or comments to make.

Area Ranger YDNPA (Wharfedale & Littondale) -Proposed development does not affect the PROW

Natural England- Have no comments and refer the Planning Authority to general guidance.

PUBLIC RESPONSES

8. The application was advertised in the local press and by site notice dated (26/10/2022) Five letters of objection have been received that raise the following issues:
   - Unacceptable landscape and visual impact
   - The landscape and visual impact not minimised
   - Infrastructure is obtrusive
   - Other options not explored thoroughly enough
   - It is possible to work from home in the area and have good communications.
   - Better design should be considered more in keeping with a National Park
   - The application is for the benefit of rents to commercial operators
   - Agricultural tenant objects concern about access to land
   - Concern about potential upgrades to the tack
   - Concerns about the effects upon a very popular walking routes Buckden Pike, Dales Way, Pennine Journey, Lady Anne's Way
   - Less obtrusive sites not fully considered
   - Alternative designs would be better
   - Olive wrong colour for the mast.
   - Can existing ongoing infrastructure be used such as telegraph poles.
   - Some providers are not involved
   - Power cables would be obtrusive.
   - Other elements could be added to the base station if it does go ahead.
   - Thorough assessment of the proposal must be made of the benefits against the landscape impact.
   - Too little consideration given to alternatives.
   - Any lighting should be kept to a minimum.

Two letters in support of the application from Digital Mobile Spectrum Ltd and the head of Building Digital UK both express support for the application pointing out that it is an important element of delivering the Shared Rural Network to decrease the digital divide that can affect residents, visitors and hinder business development in rural areas.

ASSESSMENT

Key Issues:

- Planning policy
- Landscape and Visual Impact
- Heritage Impact
- Ecology
- Parish Council comments
- Equality Act

PLANNING POLICY

9. Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires the Authority to afford great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks. The NPPF guidance also acknowledges the importance of communications infrastructure for economic growth and social well-being and advises that decisions should support the expansion of communications networks.

10. Policy C11 of the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan (2015-2030) is also directly relevant as it concerns proposals for new or improved infrastructure providing essential services and facilities. Such development will be permitted where their siting and appearance minimises the impact on visual amenity and landscape character and will not result in unacceptable

impacts on ecology, archaeology, architectural or historic interest. Proposals should demonstrate that they are the least environmentally harmful deployment option available.

11. The case for the proposal is well set out in terms of need. However, as noted below, the development would also have some significant landscape and visual impacts. Paragraph 4.79 of the Local Plan notes that development proposals considered under policy C11 should be cross-referenced against policy SP4 'Development Quality' to safeguard against unacceptable impacts on, amongst other things, visual amenity. In this instance, the erection of a 25m lattice mast would have an impact on the visual quality and character of the locality and the wider landscape. The key question is the degree and extent of this impact and whether that is acceptable when weighed against the positive aspects of the proposal.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

12. The application site sits on a small shelf above the track that leads onto open moorland and forms the route up Buckden Pike from the YDNPA Car Park at Buckden. The track up to the site goes through Rakes Wood then turns where the shelf is apparent. There is an existing telecoms facility on the site. The coverage plots, in effect show line of sight visibility of the mast in the valley and surrounding hills. There is visibility of the site at relatively close quarters on the route up to Buckden Pike (a popular used path part of the Pennine Journey route), but these views would be at limited points as the site sits on a shelf above steep ground it also has steep ground immediately behind with rising moorland beyond that. This combination of topography obscures the site from much of the upper and middle ground of Buckden Moor.

13. Policy C11 requires that applicants should demonstrate that any proposal represents the least environmentally harmful development option available, having regard to operational and technical restrictions. The applicant points out that they do not have a free hand in terms of negotiating differing degrees of coverage based upon other sites in that the 'hole' that must be filled by this proposal is pre-determined and agreed by the Government to justify the public funding that goes into supporting the proposal. Seven alternative sites have been considered including the car park at Buckden and a site at Hubberholme. Several sites considered are lower but would require a higher structure that would be more obtrusive than the current site as they would be closer to visual receptors such at the Buckden Conservation Area and the roads and paths on lower ground.

14. There would be some visibility of the site at closer range when walking up the track from Rakes Wood, but this would be quite limited and mitigated to an extent by the woodland cover. The mast would be seen from the village and village green, but this view would be at something in the order of 8-900 metres away from the structure. The width of the lower section of the lower section of the mast is 2 by 2 metres and the upper section (being the section visible form the village) is 1 metre by 1 metre (though recognising that the antennas would make this appear bulkier in some sections). In addition the design is a lattice mast meaning that it is to some extent see-through. While prominent in terms of height the extent of the view taken up at a kilometre distance would be limited. While the mast would be visible this extent of view would not undermine the overall character of the pasture and woodland when viewed from Buckden.

15. The submitted visibility map and coverage plots show there would be extensive views of the site from the opposite side of the valley (eg from the Dales Way which runs through

Upper Wharfedale) and in some instances the views would break the skyline. At the closest point this would be at approximately 1 kilometre in distance. As noted above at this distance the massing of the structure is limited and while it would have a detrimental impact this is at a distance, taking up a small proportion of the wider views available. The Yorkshire Dales Landscape Character assessment notes that shelves in the landscape are sensitive sites. In this case the shelf on which the mast is sited is narrow and it has rising ground behind it. The site is not ideal in terms of the views available from the opposite side of the valley, but the mast is limited in terms of its massing and the lattice design ensures that the land or the sky is read behind it rather than obscured. Concerns have been raised that a more sympathetic design could be used but a monopole at the height required would have a bulkier appearance (and potentially house less equipment) and most imitation structures are poor replicators of natural objects, such as trees, and can appear to false despite the best design intentions. In many instances, the whole height of the mast and compound would be visible. To break up the ground-based elements a dry-stone wall will enclose the compound with some limited landscaping in front of this. This will help to reduce the apparent width of the infrastructure on the ground. The applicants have agreed to a helicopter build so no new track to the site would be formed.

16. There is no mains power at the site and a key concern is how power would be supplied. To provide mains power an overhead line would have to be constructed either from Buckden through Rakes Wood or from the Bishopdale Road somewhere in the vicinity of the Buckden to Cray stretch of road. Both options could have a significant negative impact on the landscape and potentially ecological interests. This matter has been raised with the applicants and they have pointed out that some form of off-grid proposal could be adopted such as solar panels in combination with a biofuel generator. The geology of the area would also make an underground solution difficult if not unfeasible in terms of cost and potential damage to the land. Whilst the precise details of power supply are not confirmed at the present it is clear that power can be provided without the need for overhead lines and as such a condition can be applied that makes permission subject to approval of power supply details that do not involve overhead lines.

HERITAGE

17. Policy L1 ‘Heritage assets’ is relevant as there are three Scheduled Monuments and thirteen Listed Buildings within 2km of the proposed development site. Buckden Conservation Area is located within 1km of the site. The applicant’s Heritage statement considers that these assets are at some considerable distance from the site and although tall, the proposed tower is limited in scale and massing, and will be well screened by Rakes Wood and other areas of woodland and topography. There are archaeological remains in the wider area but not on the site itself. The track that leads through the site as noted by residents is historic and there would be serious concerns if any kind of upgrade of the track was made, but the applicant’s have confirmed that the mast would be a helicopter build and as such there would be no need to make any changes to the track. As such, it is not considered that there will be any adverse impact upon the setting and significance of any designated assets in the locality.

ECOLOGY

18. In terms of ecology Natural England have raised no objection referring the Authority to their general guidance. The YDNPA Trees and Woodlands Team have no objection. The site itself is heavily grazed grassland with some evidence of poaching. The proposal does

not come with any specific biodiversity enhancements, but the applicant had offered to provide some limited planting immediately around the installation.

PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS

19. The Parish Council has carefully considered the proposal and while clearly recognising that there would be some significant visual impacts has decided to support the proposal based upon their consultations and the need within the local community and visitors.

EQUALITY ACT

20. The Authority has a duty under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share it. The relevant characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.

21. It is considered that the proposal would help to advance equality of opportunity for some people with protected characteristics such as persons with a disability who may need to rely upon effective electronic communications to access a range of essential services. This is a material consideration that weighs in favour of the proposal.

CONCLUSION

22. The recommendation is finely balanced, and that balance is clearly expressed in Policy C11 in that proposals should minimise impact upon visual amenity and the wider landscape character and demonstrate that proposals represent the least environmentally harmful deployment based upon the technical limitations and operational requirements that are applicable. This test in policy C11 gives effect to the guidance in paragraph 176 of the NPPF that great weight should to be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty.

23. Given that most of the visual impacts are at a distance from the site and would take up a limited extent of the view from any single point it would be difficult to argue that (while some impacts are significant) the proposal does not represent a level of significance that fundamentally undermines the landscape character or visual amenity of the area. Balanced against this is the clear need for an effective electronic communication network in this area as eloquently expressed by the Parish Council. This represents a particularly compelling argument as the removal of a 3G service would leave the area without any coverage and the proposal would benefit residents, businesses, community services, visitors, persons with protected characteristics etc and the needs of future generations. Although great weight is given to the need to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty the public benefits of the proposal are significant and must also be given considerable weight. Based upon this need the proposal is recommended for approval subject to the conditions set out below.

24. It should be noted that a recommendation for approval does not imply tacit approval of some form of overhead power supply to the site and a condition is recommended that requires approval of power supply details before construction of the mast. The final condition is also of key relevance in that different options may become available in future this condition requires the removal of the infrastructure that while in one sense is permanent in another is not, in that if it does become redundant it will be removed.

RECOMMENDATION

25. It is recommended that permission is GRANTED subject to conditions to include the following:

I. Time limit.
II. Plans condition.
III. No works until power supply approved.
IV. Dry stone wall to enclose compound.
V. Any lighting to be approved.
VI. Mast to be finished in grey colour to be approved.
VII. Landscaping plan to be approved and implemented.
VIII. Removal of existing mast at the site within 3 months of the development being operational.
IX. The development shall be constructed by helicopter lifts and no track shall be formed to the site from the existing Rakes Wood track.
X. Removal of the facility and restoration of land if no longer required.