

LPA Ref: 20/01305/FUL

I am speaking on behalf of MBNL which is a joint venture between EE and Three. MBNL undertakes the deployment, management and integration for all of EE and Three's shared mobile network. The proposed development at Braintree College will ensure the existing EE and Three mobile network throughout northern Braintree is maintained and improved. This is because the permanent base station on the rooftop of Braintree College was removed due to redevelopment. Currently, a temporary installation is providing network coverage. However, this temporary installation can only be in place for 18 months as it was deployed using emergency powers. Without this temporary installation, the local area would be without any network coverage. Consequently, we have the requirement for a permanent replacement solution, and this must be completed as soon as possible within this 18-month period. It can be seen that the need for the development is therefore justified.

As Members may be aware, a previous application in July 2019 was submitted for a replacement base station within the College grounds, (Ref: 19/01317/FUL). However, the application was refused in November 2019. As a consequence of this refusal, further discussions were undertaken with the Planning Department and the scheme has now been re-designed. The proposal before the Council tonight is 5 metres shorter in height and accommodates considerably less apparatus than the previous refused design. Where previously 12 antennas and 7 transmission dishes were proposed, this application now proposes 6 antennas and 4 transmission dishes. The redesign and discussions with the Planning Department has thus resulted in a scheme that will provide the minimum level of network coverage whilst reducing the perceived visual impact of the proposal. Additionally, the application site has been moved approximately 40 metres away from the original location, adding further distance between the proposed development and nearby heritage assets. We consider that the scheme now brought forward is more acceptable and appropriate for the area.

It is important to state that since the submission of the original application in 2019, our lives have changed dramatically. Over the last 12 months we have had to manage unprecedented change and within the telecoms industry we have seen a huge increase in demand and need from the population, whether that is from working from home, coordinating deliveries, home schooling, connecting with loved ones we have seen a huge increase in data and mobile usage. In addition we also need to prepare the EE network in order to take over all the Emergency Services telecoms needs in the next 6 months, all of this has meant that connectivity is now an expectation and a direct need rather than a luxury. Our modern lives depend upon being able to communicate whenever and wherever.

We have also seen a direct shift in network demand, from city centres and places of work, to more suburban and residential areas and this trend is likely to stay requiring everyone to be connected or communities will be disadvantaged. Of equal importance has been the use of connectivity to directly combat the current situation with app notifications by the NHS, the monitoring of individuals, and supporting the Emergency Services. Mobile connectivity is a critically important piece of infrastructure that needs to be maintained for everyone in Braintree.

The reinstatement of a permanent site at Braintree College will not only ensure continued network coverage across the local area but will vastly improve connectivity and capacity on both networks, whilst at the same time bringing 5G to Braintree and future proofing connectivity. As such, the local area will be at the forefront of network improvements and advancement.

As part of the application, photomontages were produced. They demonstrate that, although the proposal would be visible from some certain public vantage points being able to see something does not immediately infer that it is inappropriate. We suggest that the proposal presents limited harm to the visual amenity of the surrounding area and has directly addressed the objections to the previous application. It is therefore considered that the social, economic and environmental benefits that will be brought forward as part of this application outweigh any perceived harm that the scheme may be caused. This is supported by Case Officer's recommendation for approval and we therefore urge Members to approve the application.