

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **MOBILE PHONE MASTS**

#### **SCOPE OF REVIEW**

##### **1. Background; Government Policy; Stewart report.**

The rapid growth in mobile phone use over the last 10 years has been accompanied by public debate about possible adverse effects on human health. This concern has related not just to the emissions of radio frequency radiation from the phones themselves but also the emissions from the base stations that receive and transmit mobile phone signals. Such base stations normally consist of one or more radio transmitters and receivers as well as radio antennas and these are often located on towers or the roof of a building.

As a result of this concern the Government established an independent expert group, under the Chairmanship of Sir William Stewart, to examine the possible effects of mobile phones, base stations and transmitters. The Stewart Report was published in May 2000 and it concluded that, for the general population, the levels of exposure arising from phones held near to the head were substantially greater than whole-body exposures arising from base stations. It stated that the balance of evidence indicated that there was no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures were small fractions of guidelines. However it was not possible to say that exposure to radio frequency radiation, even at levels below national guidelines was totally without potential adverse health effects and gaps in knowledge were sufficient to justify a precautionary approach.

In 2001 the Government published Planning Policy Guidance 8 which states that it is their policy to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems whilst keeping the environmental impact to a minimum. Local Authorities are, therefore, encouraged to make suitable property available for base stations. Whilst, the Government also accepts that it has a responsibility for public health it does not regard the planning process as the place for determining health safeguards. If a proposed base station meets the guidelines for public exposure it should not be necessary for a local planning authority to consider health aspects. Nor, in the Government's view, should local authorities implement their own precautionary policies by, for instance, imposing a ban on new telecommunications developments or insisting on minimum distances between base stations.

##### **2. Planning Controls**

The controls, which are partly set out in Govt Planning Policy Note PPG8 of Aug.2001, and the General Permitted Development Order Part 24, are complex, but broadly-speaking fall into one of two categories;-

**A. Masts which do need full planning permission.**

Those more than 15 m. high above ground level (but not necessarily those on buildings).

Those in Conservation Areas.

**B. Masts which don't need full permission; are those under 15m and outside Cons. Areas.**

These come under PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT; effectively they are Granted permission by Government Development Order, but have to go through PRIOR NOTIFICATION procedure wherein a Council may object to Design and Siting, (e.g. colour of pole, pole too thick, could be moved a few metres one way or another or be screened by planting); and has to do so within 56 days or the scheme will automatically benefit from permitted development. No scope here for objecting on health grounds.

**3. UDP policies**

The ADOPTED (i.e currently valid) Unitary Development Plan (1998) says that locations of telecom equipment should minimise any adverse effect on visual amenity of the locality or on individual buildings.

The REVISED DEPOSIT UDP is at public Inquiry stage and carries less weight until after Inspector's Report.

It requires evidence that locations outside of residential areas and not close to schools/hospitals have been considered; and that Government guidelines on emission levels are met with. It refers to the importance of mast or site sharing.

**4. Public Consultation.**

This is carried out (A) by the Phone Companies and their agents **before** they submit planning applications, and (B) by the Planning Service once a formal application is submitted.

At the stage when they are **contemplating** a new installation or siting, the Phone Companies have a procedure for contacting Local Councillors, Local amenity groups, Local schools, and, later on, the Planning Service, to gauge initial views for or against.

When the formal application is submitted to Planning Service, the Operators enclose copies of letters to all those they have consulted, together with any response and any analysis of that. We find they actually do this. They don't seem to get much response from those they consult.

Consultation by the Planning Service; once formal application submitted, Planning will notify residents in the vicinity, typically this will run to between 40 and 60 addresses; more where there are blocks of

flats involved, less where site is 'open' e.g. some recent applications on Hampstead Lane or Aylmer Road opposite open space or school playing fields.

This amount of consultation is in excess of what would be done for say the erection of one or two new houses, and reflects the likely 'visibility' of a mast in the street scene.

Site Notices are put up where proposal is in Conservation Area.

If local residents are well organised the response could be substantially greater than the number of consultees; objections might come from people who live 400 metres away or more, who dislike mobile phone masts anywhere.

In general we feel the amount of consultation is sufficient to gain a view of public opposition.

There could be a requirement to put up a Site Notice for **all** proposed installations, whether or not in Cons Area.

## **5. Current Practice on dealing with applications**

This is to refuse wherever possible on Design and Appearance grounds. There are some instances where it is very difficult to object to roof-top mountings, but we would refuse the majority of large free-standing mast proposals.

## **6. Other areas of Council involvement.**

### **Street scene; street lamp post installations etc.**

Is there a need for an 'in principle' decision as to whether the Council as Highway Authority should not agree to 'lamp-post swap' types of installation for antennae?

**Existing Installations** -- **On blocks of flats.**  
-- **On roofs of schools.**

It would be for Housing and Education to explore whether there were any escape clauses in existing agreements which would permit the removal of existing masts.

**Note;** the implication however is that Operators would seek out nearby privately-owned sites.

## **7. Practice of other Boroughs.**

The actions of neighbouring authorities with regard to discouraging mobile phone masts needs to be explored.

