

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

ADVICE NOTE

What is Telecommunication equipment?

Radio base stations transmit and receive radio signals to and from mobile phones. Each base station comprises radio equipment that is housed in a cabinet and antennae (which can be mounted either on freestanding structures or on existing buildings and structures). The structures used to support the antennae vary in size and design, depending on such factors as the amount of equipment they need to support, the height required to provide a network coverage, and the setting of the site.

Telecommunication installations masts can vary from antennae being mounted directly onto the roof of a building through to a lattice tower mast. However, some small and less visually intrusive masts have been designed to resemble lamp-posts, telegraph poles and trees and may be a more acceptable form of development in certain locations.



Need and Demand – An Overview.

The rapid growth in mobile communications has resulted in at least 43 million users of mobile phones in the UK. Customer demand has necessitated upgrading the technology, with operators having to continually expand their networks to accommodate services and improve quality.

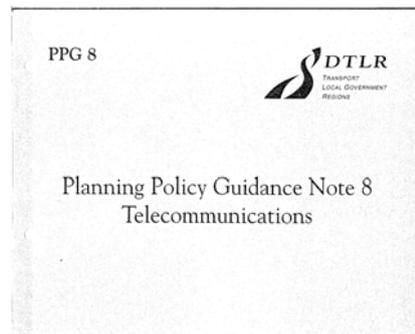


Five UK operators also now have licences to provide a 'Third Generation' (3G) service that will allow enhanced services for mobile phone users, such as higher quality internet access. This means more sites are needed within the District, as 3G networks require masts to be sited closer to one another.

The area of coverage of the base stations varies, depending on a number of factors, one being the amount of mobile phone usage. More base stations are therefore needed where there is a high density of mobile phone users, such as in urban areas and transport corridors.

Policy Framework.

The Government's policy framework for telecommunications development is contained within Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (PPG8). PPG8 sets out the Government's policy "to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems, whilst minimising the environmental impact of any installation".



Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are, therefore, required to respond positively to proposals for telecommunications development, and not question the need for the equipment, in principle, or obstruct the competitiveness of operators. The benefits of an efficient telecommunications service are recognised within the Adopted Wycombe District Local Plan to 2011. These support new development, provided the visual impact of the structures is minimised, and the amenities of the surrounding area.

Environmental Considerations.

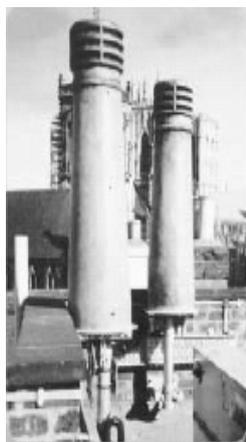
Mast and site sharing

Mast and site sharing is strongly encouraged both nationally and locally where this will result in the least visual intrusion. However, the sharing of an existing mast usually requires it to be increased in height or structural capacity, which could increase its visibility. Therefore, the provision of two or more masts on the same site (co-location), utilising existing screening, may, in some circumstances, be less visually intrusive.

As far as possible, existing buildings and structures (such as electricity pylons) should be used for siting new antennae.



Siting and Appearance



The impact of any installation on the environment can be minimised through sympathetic design, camouflage and appropriate screening. Alternative designs, materials, colouring and siting will be explored, to ensure that development has the least visual impact.

The Government gives high priority to the protection of rural and urban areas covered by environmental or historical designations, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Conservation Areas. The impact of telecommunications installations on these protected areas should, therefore, take into account advice provided in other planning policy guidance notes, to preserve their quality and character.

Health Considerations.

The Stewart Report

Following research by an independent group of experts into the possible health effects posed by mobile phones, and base stations, the Stewart Report concluded that:

“The balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations, on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of the guidelines. However, there can be indirect adverse effects on their well-being in some cases”.

Gaps in scientific knowledge led the Stewart Report to recommend a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phone technologies. The elements of the precautionary principle found in the Stewart Report have been taken into account in PPG8, and Local Planning Authorities are advised not to adopt any further ‘precautions’.

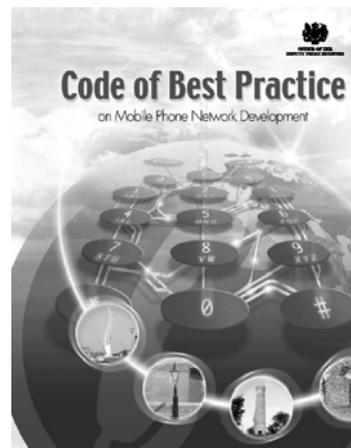
Government Guidance

PPG8 sets out very clearly the Government’s view on public health concerns about telecommunications masts, and the approach that LPAs should take in this respect:

“Health considerations and public concern can, in principle, be material considerations in determining applications for planning permission and prior approval. Whether such matters are material in a particular case is ultimately a matter for the courts. It is for the decision-maker (usually the LPA) to determine what weight to attach to such considerations in any particular case” (para 29).

“However, it is the Government’s firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It remains central Government’s responsibility to decide what measures are necessary to protect public health. In the Government’s view, if a proposed mobile phone base station meets the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines for public exposure it should not be necessary for a LPA, in processing an application for planning permission or prior approval, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them” (para 98).

“All new mobile phone base stations are expected to meet the ICNIRP guidelines. However, all applicants should include with their applications, a statement that self-certifies to the effect that the mobile phone base station, when operational, will meet the guidelines...Where a mobile phone base station is added to an existing mast or site, the operator should confirm that the cumulative exposure will not exceed the ICNIRP guidelines”(para 99).



Types of Proposals.

There are two types of applications determined by the Council:

1. Prior Approval Proposals – suffix of: /TCIF

Certain telecommunications development does not require formal planning permission, being permitted under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). This is however conditional upon the operator making a Prior Approval application to the Local Planning Authority. Such a proposal must be determined within 56 days of receipt, otherwise the applicant can carry on with no further intervention from the Council. Siting and appearance of the proposed development are the only issues that can be considered on these types of proposals. As such it is not possible to question the principle of the development or to seek to resist it as a matter of principle.

2. Full Planning Permission – suffix of: /FUL

Where a development requires a formal application for planning permission, it will be considered in the same manner as any other planning application i.e. a determination needs to be made against the local development plan policies and any other material considerations. An application for full planning permission for telecommunications apparatus can be called to Development Control Committee at the request of any Councillor.

An application for planning permission for a mast will generally be considered against policies G8 (Detailed Design Guidance and Local Amenity) and G28 (Telecommunications). In certain instances, there may be a requirement to assess the proposal against other policies. For example, if the site is in the Green Belt or the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, other local plan policies would be relevant and will need to be taken into account when determining the application.

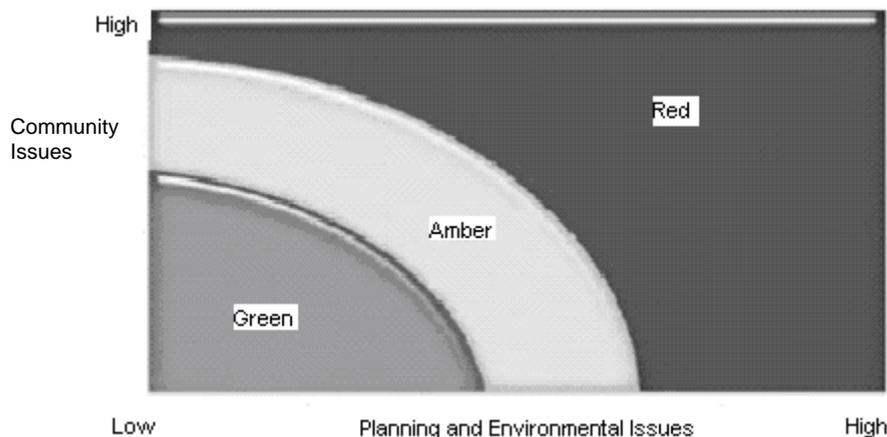
Consultation Arrangements.

Pre-application consultation

PPG8 advises that the operators should carry out pre-application discussions with the local authority, and other organisations with an interest in the proposed development. The submission to the Council of each operator's annual rollout plans for future developments, leads to the production of the overview plan. This means that any technical and environmental constraints, and alternative approaches, can be discussed at the earliest opportunity and prior to the formal submission of a proposal.

The onus is on the telecommunications operators to consult residents and amenity groups, prior to the submission of a planning application. The telecommunications operators have developed ten commitments to address community concerns, including improved consultation with local residents about new developments. The amount and type of consultation will vary with each site, based on an evaluation system for assessing the sensitivity of any installation. This includes the proximity to residential properties and schools, and the impact on the environment. This is known as the 'traffic light ratings model'.

A green rating suggests there are few concerns, whereas a red rating highlights that there are several. Further information on this framework can be obtained by contacting the Mobile Operators Association or any of the operators (contact details below).



On receipt of an application

The Council is obliged to deal with any application that is submitted. We are keen to give local residents, and amenity groups, the opportunity to express their views on any proposal. When the Council receives an application for prior approval or full planning consent:

- the application will be listed in the weekly list of applications;
- all adjoining properties to the application site will be notified in writing;
- we will consult the head of governors and head teachers of any schools within 200m of the application site;
- a site notice will be displayed;
- we will advertise in the local press, in certain circumstances, (for example, for sites in Conservation Areas or affecting a public right of way).

These consultation arrangements exceed the statutory requirements.

Telecoms Roll Out Map.

A telecom operators Roll Out Plans for the coming year can be viewed on the Council's website.

How does the Council determine the application?

The consideration of any application will be in the context of government policy and advice (outlined above) and as expressed in the adopted Local Plan, and will take into account environmental and other considerations. Relevant material considerations may include the impact of any installation on highway safety, and the protection of trees. The impact of such development on property values is not a matter for the planning system.

Further Contact Points:

In writing to: Planning and Sustainability,
Wycombe District Council,
Queen Victoria Road,
High Wycombe,
HP11 1BB.

By e-mail: planning@wycombe.gov.uk

By phone: 01494 421511

Other Reference Points:

Department of Health leaflet on mobile phones and base stations: <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

Office of Communications (OFCOM) (which has taken over the role of the Radio Communications Agency): www.ofcom.gov.uk

Mobile Operators Association (MOA) (formerly Federation of the Electronics Industry), Russell Square House, 10-12 Russell Square, London, WC1B 5EE, www.mobilemastinfo.com (includes details of the Traffic Light Ratings Model), tel: 020 7331 2015 or 2047.

The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), the Government's statutory advisors on radiological protection matters: <http://www.hpa.org.uk>

The Operators:

'3' (Hutchinson 3G) tel: 0845 604 3000	www.three.co.uk
O2 tel: 01753 564 306	www.O2.co.uk
Orange tel: 07980 261 071	www.orange.co.uk
T-mobile tel: 0870 321 6047	www.t-mobile.co.uk
Vodafone tel: 0845 4450 450	www.vodafone.co.uk