



Planning and Telecommunications

Woking Borough Council's approach

Woking Borough Council is the local planning authority responsible for making planning decisions on telecommunications (telecoms) equipment in the Borough.



The Council is keen to encourage a joint working approach to telecoms development with everyone concerned. Government guidance recommends the parties concerned enter into a process that ultimately raises the level of agreement about the type, and the location, of telecoms equipment. This might be done by operators undertaking their own pre-application consultation with local people. The results of these would be available to the public on request.

The operators have made a commitment to provide local planning authorities with annual rollout plans for each new area. These indicate

where new installations are required. This will assist the local planning authority in understanding potential areas of search from the five main operators in Woking.

What is telecoms 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 antennas (which can be mounted on either freestanding structures or on existing buildings and structures). The structures used to support the antennas vary in size and design, depending on such factors as the amount of equipment they need to support, their required height and setting. The antennas often need to be at a minimum height, hence their location on rooftops or masts (for example, lattice tower masts). Some smaller masts have been designed to be less intrusive (for example, resembling lamp-posts, telegraph poles and trees).



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 for mobile phone users to receive better quality internet access. This means more sites are needed in the Borough. Under the terms of their licences, the operators must provide a network covering 80% of the population by 2007.

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.

Government policy

Policy framework

The government’s policy framework for telecommunications development is set out within Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (PPG8). PPG8 outlines the importance of good communications, both economically and socially. It sets out the government’s policy to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunication systems, whilst minimising the environmental impact of any installation.



Local planning authorities are, therefore, required to respond positively to proposals for telecommunications development, and not question the need for equipment, in principle, or obstruct the competitiveness of the operators. The benefits of an efficient telecommunications service are recognised in the Surrey Structure Plan and our Local Plan. These support new development, provided the visual impact of the structures is minimised, and the character of the countryside preserved.

Works on Council land

Whilst the Council is aware of some public concern over the health risks associated with telecommunications masts for mobile telephones, it has to balance this against government advice, particularly that contained in respect of planning policy. The Council will therefore not allow the erection and operation of telecommunications masts on land and buildings in its ownership unless:

- it is satisfied that there is not a more suitable alternative site that would maximise the distance from residences and schools
- the Council has granted planning consent
- terms and conditions for the transaction have been agreed and approved under delegated authority
- the grant of a consent does not adversely affect the asset value of other Council property, or the opportunity for future development.

Environmental considerations

Mast and site sharing

Mast and site sharing is strongly encouraged where this will result in the least visual intrusion. 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 be less visually intrusive.

As far as possible, existing buildings and structures (such as electricity pylons) will be used for siting new antennas. Mast sharing, where appropriate, is also encouraged to minimise the need to find new sites.

Siting and appearance

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

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 the 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. Any elements of the precautionary principle found in the Stewart Report have been taken into account in PPG8, and the local planning authority is not supposed 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 local planning authorities 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 local planning authority) to determine what weight to attach to such considerations in any particular case.” *(paragraph 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 local planning authority, in processing an application for planning permission or prior approval, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them.” *(paragraph 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 guideline.” *(paragraph 99)*

Types of applications

There are two types of applications determined by Woking Borough Council.

1. Prior approval applications

Certain telecommunications development does not require planning permission being permitted under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). For example, this includes masts less than



15 metres in height that are on the ground. However, this is conditional upon the operator making a prior approval application to the local planning authority. Such an application will allow the local planning authority to consider (strictly within 56 days) the siting and appearance only of the proposed development.

2. Full planning permission

Larger installations require an application for planning permission, and these will be determined in accordance with the local development plan, unless material considerations (see page nine) indicate otherwise. This includes masts within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or a Conservation Area.

The usual time frame for planning applications apply (eight week target). Planning authorities should consider any technical constraints on the location and proposed development that may affect the operation or effectiveness of the equipment.

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.



Operators do, from time to time, consult with the local planning authority on various potential sites, to obtain an initial view whether these sites are acceptable in principle.

The onus is on telecommunications operators to consult residential and amenity groups, prior to the submission of a planning application. The telecommunications operators have developed ten commitments to address 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 can be obtained by contacting the Mobile Operators’ Association or any of the operators (see page 11).



On receipt of an application

The Council is obliged to deal with any application that is submitted. It is 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
- occupiers of surrounding properties will be notified and where appropriate, heads or governors of local schools close to the site will be advised
- a site notice will be displayed
- the Council will advertise in the local press in certain circumstances, (for example, for sites over a certain size or affecting a public right of way).

These consultations exceed the statutory requirements.

How does the Council determine an application?

The decision on any application will be in accordance with government policy and advice (outlined on page six), taking 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.



Other information

The Human Rights Act (2000) is taken into account in all decisions made by the local planning authority, in particular Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (Right to Respect For Private and Family Rights) and Article 1 of the 1st Protocol (Protection of Property).

Whilst these rights are recognised, they are not absolute and do have limitations. One limitation is that the articles are subject (as far as is necessary in a democratic society) to the interest of (for example) the economic well-being of the country, and the public interest. The planning authority must, therefore, balance respect for the individual's family home and property with the economic well-being of the country and the public interest.

Further contacts

Planning and Regulation Woking Borough Council

Queries related to permitted development/planning applications:

Phone: 01483 743417

Email:

developmentcontrol@woking.gov.uk

Policy queries:

Phone: 01483 743871

Email: planning.policy@woking.gov.uk

Department of Health

Leaflet on mobile phones and base stations.

Web: www.dh.gov.uk

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

Planning policy and information on mobile phone base stations.

Web: www.communities.gov.uk

Office of Communications (OFCOM)

Has taken over the role of the Radiocommunications Agency.

Web: www.ofcom.org.uk



Mobile Operators' Association (MOA)

(Formerly Federation of the Electronics Industry)
Russell Square House
10-12 Russell Square
London WC1 5EE
Web: www.mobilemastinfo.com
(includes details of the Traffic Lights Ratings Model.)
Phone: 020 7331 2018 or 2047
Email: info@ukmoa.org

The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB)

The government's statutory advisors on radiological protection matters.
Phone: 01235 831600
Web: www.nrp.org.uk

Mast Action UK

PO Box 312
Hertfordshire
EN7 5ZE
Web: www.mastaction.co.uk

Campaign for Planning Sanity

Web: www.planningsanity.co.uk
Email: info@planningsanity.co.uk
Helpline: 0161 278 3355

Mast Sanity

Web: www.mastsanity.org
Email: webmaster@mastsanity.org
Helpline: 08704 322377

Powerwatch

Web: www.powerwatch.org.uk

Telecommunications operators

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Regional Planning and Environmental Controller
Phone: 0845 604 3000

O2

Phone: 01753 564306
Email: network.consultation@o2.com

Orange

Phone: 0800 7835021

T-mobile

Phone: 0870 321 6047
Email: networkinfo@t-mobile.co.uk

Vodafone

Phone: 01635 676457
Email: emf.advisoryunit@vodafone.com

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