



We care for the Chilterns

Planning Guidance Statement on Telecommunications Masts

(Reviewed 2018)

The Society's remit is limited to considering the aesthetic impact of masts on the character of the Chilterns and its settlements. Comments on proposals will be most effective if they have regard to national planning guidance as set out in National Planning Policy Framework paras 112-116. This requires, amongst other things, that:

“Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks” but “the number of radio and electronic communications masts, and the sites for such installations, should be kept to a minimum consistent with the needs of consumers, the efficient operation of the network and providing reasonable capacity for future expansion.”

“Use of existing masts, buildings and other structures should be encouraged. Where new sites are required (such as for new 5G networks, or for connected transport and smart city applications), equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.”

“Applications.... (including for prior approval under the General Permitted Development Order) should be supported by evidence of consultations with organisations with an interest in the proposed development, a statement that self-certifies that” radiation “will not exceed International Commission guidelines, and evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure.”

“Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.”

Not all masts and antennas require planning permission, falling into 3 categories.

- The installation of small additional antennas on existing masts is permitted development, and only needs to be notified to local planning authorities.
- New masts, replacement masts, or extensions to existing masts, with resultant heights up to 25 metres (or up to 20m in AONBs, National Parks, and Conservation Areas, or on land on a highway) is also permitted development, but subject to a prior approval procedure. Under this procedure the planning authority is given the opportunity to say whether it wishes to approve details of the siting and appearance of the installation. No other factors can be considered by the Council for this type of application and there is a strict 56 day time limit for the Local Planning Authority to give its view. The developer is obliged as part of this process to give notice of the proposed development to any owner or tenant of the land in question prior to the submission of an application.
- Masts over 25 metres in height (or over 20m in AONBs, National Parks, and Conservation Areas, or on land on a highway), or “broadening” of masts beyond a certain threshold, for example by the addition of larger antennas, require full planning permission and are dealt with under normal planning procedures.

For the latter two categories of application, Planning Field Officers may wish to comment on matters of appearance and siting.

Factors to be considered relating to the appearance of masts and ancillary apparatus might include materials, colour and design. The use of appropriate materials and colour may allow a mast to blend more easily into its surroundings. Features of design which PFOs may wish to consider include dimensions; overall shape; and whether the construction is solid or forms an open framework.

Factors to consider relating to siting might include:

- the height of the site in relation to surrounding land;
- the existence of topographical features and natural vegetation;
- the effect on the skyline or horizon when observed from any side;
- the site in relation to areas designated for their scenic or conservation value;
- the site in relation to existing masts, structures or buildings, including buildings of a historical or traditional character;
- the site in relation to residential property.

In considering the siting and appearance of a mast together with its associated development, the scope for landscaping and screening to reduce the impact of the development on its surroundings will be an important consideration.

Society Planning Field Officers should consider whether in their opinion these factors have been adequately taken into account in each case and whether the applicant has provided evidence of having considered alternative sites including existing structures or a shared site. Operators' licences already require them to remove installations when no longer needed.

PFOs would do well to familiarise themselves with available designs of masts, details of which can reasonably be requested from operators making applications. It will be useful to find out the views of other interested parties (e.g. the Parish Council and CPRE), although their criteria may not be precisely the same as those of the Society.

Other opportunities to influence telecommunication plans may arise as follows:

- Pre-application discussions should be carried out by the operators with local planning authorities and 'other organisations with an interest in the proposed development' such as residential groups, parish councils or amenity bodies. Action should be taken to ensure that the Chiltern Society is included on the list of consultees.
- From time to time, mobile telephone operators provide local planning authorities (LPA) with information to show forthcoming plans for mobile network development. This information is made public by the LPA in order that communities can be involved with discussions regarding siting and design of equipment with operators prior to the submission of applications to the LPA. It should be noted that the information provided by the operators indicates areas of search for new sites, and not specific locations, and thus offer the opportunity for influencing the precise siting of equipment at an early stage in the site identification process.

In summary, Society policy is to oppose the siting of masts where they would spoil the view of residents of the Chilterns or users of the Chilterns countryside, particularly those using footpaths.