



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Policy Position Statement

Telecommunications Development

CPRE is concerned that the countryside is suffering unacceptably and unnecessarily as a result of telecommunications development. We do not object in principle to the development of national telecommunications networks. We recognise the possible environmental benefits, such as a reduced need to travel, that they may bring. But the impact on the countryside of such networks needs to be minimised.

National planning guidance (PPG8) puts the growth of the telecommunications industry before environmental factors. Planning controls over telecommunications development are lax. In many cases, masts enjoy 'permitted development rights', meaning that a full planning application to the local council is not needed. This has resulted in a rash of inappropriately sited and unnecessary masts across many parts of the countryside.

What are the issues for the countryside?

From the 1980s the expansion of the telecommunications industry in England has been rapid. The most prominent sign of this is the proliferation of telecommunications masts in the countryside, principally to serve the demands of mobile telephone users. It is estimated that the growth of the Third Generation (3G) network over the next few years will lead to at least 50,000 masts by 2007, a growth of 8,000 (or 20%) on top of the 40,000 in the UK in 2004. In addition, telecommunications networks for various public services, such as the emergency

services and the railways, are being rolled out. This could add at least a further 5,000 masts to this total.

Masts and antennas often have to be put up in prominent positions to maintain clear lines of sight between them. But without sensitive siting and design, masts can form ugly and alien new landmarks. There is little sign of a co-ordinated or systematic approach to the provision of masts by the four mobile network operators. Separate masts, owned by different operators, can often be found within a short distance of each other.

CPRE's approach

CPRE believes that operators will only come together and make more efficient use of fewer masts if planning policies require them to do so. We are campaigning for national planning guidance for new masts to be revised as follows:

- > *The Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995*

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campaigns and copies
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statements visit our
website or contact:

CPRE Publications
128 Southwark Street
London SE1 0SW
Tel:
020 7981 2800
Fax:
020 7981 2899
Email:
info@cpre.org.uk
Website:
www.cpre.org.uk

(GPDO) should be amended to remove 'permitted development rights' for all but the smallest telecommunications developments, as in Scotland and Northern Ireland. All new masts should be subject to the same planning scrutiny and controls as other commercial development, including masts erected for the emergency services and railways.

- > Where permitted development rights are retained, any substantive objection to a proposal for telecommunications development should trigger the requirement for a full planning application.
- > National planning policy guidance, in particular PPG8, should be revised to remove the bias in favour of the telecommunications industry at the expense of environmental considerations and emphasise the need to minimise the environmental impact of telecommunications development. These should be achieved through:
 - > operators consulting local councils and communities on their annual plans for network rollout;
 - > requirements to investigate fully opportunities for mast- and site-sharing;
 - > the use of appropriate designs and sites to minimise environmental harm, informed by local Landscape Character Assessments; and
 - > the introduction of a sequential test for site selection beginning with the use of existing buildings and structures, where appropriate, and

requiring full consideration of options for mast- and site-sharing.

- > New masts should only be considered as a last resort where the operator can demonstrate that there is no other way of providing the required component in the network, and it should be recognised that even then environmental considerations may still override the technical case for such a mast.

What you can do

There are plenty of cases where considerations of 'amenity' – or beauty – have taken precedence over the commercial and technical claims of the mobile network operators. Local campaigning can play a vital role, using the approach outlined below, in raising concerns about proposed new masts or bringing new information to bear on planning decisions.

Local campaigners can, for example:

- > encourage local councils – or local planning authorities (LPAs) as they are known – to include policies on the environmental constraints affecting telecommunications in their development plans and introduce supplementary planning guidance on siting and design;
- > inquire whether mobile network operators have provided details of their district-wide network of masts to LPAs and discussed it with them;
- > request that the LPA informs them of all proposals which do not require a planning application in order for them to comment on their impact;

Further reading

Fieldwork, CPRE's quarterly newsletter available only to CPRE members. Carries regular updates on telecommunications and other policy issues affecting the countryside. For details of how to become a member, please go to www.cpre.org.uk/support-us.

Telecommunications Development: a CPRE briefing, CPRE, 2004. Provides more specific advice on what you can do to ensure telecommunications development in your area works for the good of the countryside.

The planning system has been radically reformed as a result of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Our new website, www.cpre.org.uk/planninghelp, explains how to use the system to respond to planning applications, influence change and protect and enhance the environment.

- > encourage LPAs to advertise any proposed telecommunications development and to maintain a register of masts;
- > persuade the LPA to withdraw permitted development rights for telecommunications development when they are faced with a poorly sited or designed telecommunications development proposal;
- > request that the LPA employ an expert to deal with contentious applications;
- > press for planning conditions to be attached to planning approvals which:
 - > reduce the impact of development, such as camouflaging the antenna (e.g. as a flagpole on a church) or require landscaping appropriate to the area; and
 - > require that, when a mast becomes redundant, the LPA is to be notified, the apparatus removed and the site returned to its original condition;
- > press LPAs to refuse applications when they have not been provided with all the information needed to make a considered decision;
- > press LPAs and mobile network operators to use sensitive mast design and encourage them to use Landscape Character Assessments to inform policies, designs and proposals; and
- > ask mobile network operators planning new masts to justify why they are not using existing structures or sharing existing masts in the locality.

Telecommunications operators have undertaken to improve their working with local communities in a document called the *Ten Commitments* (set out in the *ODPM Code of Best Practice*).

Campaigners' Guide to Local Development Frameworks, CPRE, 2004.

Campaigners' Guide: Public Inquiries and Planning Appeals, CPRE, 2004.

Getting Organised and Getting Results: The CPRE Campaigners' Guide, CPRE, 2002.

Campaigning for Countryside Character, CPRE, 2003. Gives specific advice on how to use landscape character assessment tools to safeguard the special character of your local countryside.

Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2002. Available at www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/content_servertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=2348&l=2

Planning Policy Guidance note 8: Telecommunications (PPG8), ODPM, HMSO 2000. Available from www.cpre.org.uk/planninghelp.

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