

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT – TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This draft SPD provides advice to all those with an interest in the siting of telecommunication masts and associated equipment. It supplements the Policy BLT24 of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Unitary Development Plan First Review (adopted March 2005).

2. Policy context

Government and Regional Policy

- 2.1 Government policy is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (PPG8) Telecommunications (2001) which states the aim of the policy is 'to ensure that people have a choice as to who provides their telecommunications service, a wider range of services from which to choose and equitable access to the latest technologies as they become available. The Government places great emphasis on its well established national policies for the protection of the countryside and urban areas - in particular the National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the Green Belts, the Heritage Coast and areas and buildings of architectural or historic importance'
- 2.2 There are no specific policies in the London Plan.

Council policy

- 2.3 Council policy within the UDP First Review is as follows;

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- 6.106 **The Council will seek to ensure that the siting of satellite dishes and other telecommunication apparatus does not harm the character or visual appearance of an area, the visual amenities of adjoining occupiers or the character, appearance or setting of a listed building. The Council will encourage the sharing of telecommunication sites by operators where this is technically possible, and visually appropriate.**
- 6.107 The Council recognises that the rapidly expanding telecommunications industry offers benefits both in terms of the economy and increased services for consumers. Although the Council must take into account technical and operational matters, satellite dishes and other such equipment can look alien in the existing urban environment. Where possible the Council will exercise its powers to ensure that it protects the visual and environmental amenities of the Borough. The Council will have regard to PPG 8 and the Government's code of best practice as updated by Circular 4/99. Applicants will be required to have regard to the Council's guidelines, which will be a material consideration in determining planning applications. In many cases the installation of equipment is permitted development, for which an application for planning permission is not required; the guidance offers advice on siting in these cases. For any installation, there is a need for considerable care in the siting of equipment to avoid visual and environmental problems, damage to

trees and paving materials. There is local concern over potential links between electromagnetic fields (EMFs) and ill health, and although there is no proven link the Council will continue to monitor research findings and will amend policy if appropriate.

Planning permissions

- 2.4 The Town and Country (General Permitted development)(Amendment) (England) Order (GDO) 2001, sets out permitted development rights for telecommunications code operators, including masts and other apparatus. These include the erection, alteration or replacement of a mast up to 15m. high (except in conservation areas) subject to a condition that requires the operator to satisfy 'prior approval procedure'. Under this procedure, the local planning authority has the opportunity to say within 56 days whether they wish to approve details of the siting and appearance of the proposed mast. The authority is able to refuse approval where they consider the development is unacceptable in terms of siting and appearance.
- 2.5 The Council has the option to intervene in the details of certain permitted development if it considers that equipment has not been sited so as to minimise its effect on the appearance of the building on which it is installed, and does not therefore comply with the condition of the GPDO. Development that does not come within the scope of the GPDO will normally require a full planning application.
- 2.6 Some equipment may not fall within the legal definition of development. Such equipment may include small antennae systems which are defined as de minimis, or equipment which does not have a material effect on the external appearance of the building on which it is to be installed. Such development will not require express permission.

Health issues

- 2.7 There is concern that electromagnetic waves may have adverse effects on health. An expert group established in 1999 under the Chairmanship of Sir William Stewart concluded 'the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to people living near 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' The report also said that the possibility of harm cannot be ruled out with confidence and that gaps in knowledge are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach.
- 2.8 Health issues are the subjects of separate legislation and local authorities are not permitted to replicate or replace this through the planning system. Enforcement is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive not planning authorities.
- 2.9 However, health issues and public concern can in principle be material consideration in applications for planning permission and prior approval. It is for the local planning authority, having regard to the Stewart Group's report and Government guidance, to determine what weight to attach to such considerations in a particular case. It is the Government's view that if a proposed development meets the ICNIRP Guidelines (International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation) for public exposure to electro-

magnetic fields, it should not be necessary for an authority in processing an application, to consider health aspects and concerns further.

3 The Council's approach

3.1.1 While the Council accepts the need for and the social and economic benefits of the development of communication networks, it has two principal concerns relating to the installation of new masts and associated equipment. These are their potential effects on visual amenity and public concern over their impact on health.

3.2 In respect of public concern about health, the Government has made its view clear in planning guidance (PPG8), that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. The Council does not seek to do this, but, as accepted in the same Government guidance, health considerations and public concern can be material considerations in determining applications. In this context, the Council considers it has a legitimate responsibility to give due weight to public concern over this type of development and use its planning powers to avoid or minimise such concern where alternatives make this possible.

3.3 The following approach is intended to ensure that the above two main concerns referred to in 3.1 are adequately addressed during the planning process.

Locational criteria

3.4.1 The high quality of most of the Borough's built and open environment means that masts will often be intrusive. The majority of the Borough is covered by protective designations including Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Buildings of Townscape Merit, Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land, Other Open Land of Townscape Importance, Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, Historic Parks and Gardens and Thames Policy Area.

3.5 Lattice towers and monopole masts and other kinds of equipment eg; control box cabinets are generally not acceptable unless it can be demonstrated they:

- will not be prominent in the street scene or from dwellings;
- will not be detrimental to the character or appearance of important buildings including listed buildings or buildings of townscape merit;
- will not adversely affect the character of a conservation area;
- will not adversely affect the character of the Riverside;
- will not affect an important viewpoint or be prominent on the skyline;
- will not be sited so close to other telecommunications equipment or other street furniture, where it would create a cluttered visual appearance.

Where possible and appropriate, masts should be screened by buildings or vegetation.

- 3.6 The Council is aware that there are areas of the Borough which are less likely to give rise to the concerns referred to above, such as industrial and business areas and parts of some open spaces. It would, therefore wish operators to take a sequential approach to identification of sites seeking less sensitive sites first. In particular, where the Council, local residents or schools (including pupils and parents), have indicated they have significant concerns over sites being proposed close to residential properties and/or schools due to visual and/or health impact, they should first pursue application sites that are away from such locations in less sensitive areas. The Council is not seeking to preclude the possibility of masts and related equipment being on sites close to residential properties or schools, but where the above concerns have been expressed, would expect operators to seek alternative sites where this concern can be minimalised or avoided. If alternatives cannot be found and sites are proposed near to residential areas and schools where concerns have been expressed, the Council would require evidence that alternative sites have been fully evaluated by the operator and are unavailable or unsuitable. Such evidence should include details of contacts and responses from the owners of potential sites stated to be unavailable, and full reasons to support any statements that potential alternative sites are not suitable.

Design issues

- 3.7 In general supporting structures should be as slim and unobtrusive as possible and as far as practicable relate in scale and form to lighting columns. Equipment should be painted the same colour and relate to that of its surroundings particularly lighting columns (see also Public Space Design Guide 2006). The details of design, siting and treatment of ancillary development will all have an impact on appearance. 'Jumbo' bases are unlikely to be acceptable unless hidden by shrubbery or walls. Where possible, equipment should be placed underground.
- 3.8.1 Operators are expected to ensure designs minimise visual impact. Where practicable priority should be given to incorporating equipment unobtrusively inside buildings or structures, or incorporated as part of their structure and these options should be explored before external free standing or projecting structures are considered.
- 3.9 Where masts are proposed on tall buildings or structures they should;
- be appointed to relate to that of its surroundings;
 - be scaled in proportion to the building or structure;
 - have minimal impact on the roof line;
 - not adversely affect the impact on views or the skyline;
 - avoid creating additional 'clutter'
 - use clean lines and maintain symmetry.

Mast sharing

- 3.10 Mast sharing has the potential in some circumstances to reduce or eliminate the need for additional masts and it is expected this will be fully investigated

before proposing a new structure. However, this needs to take full account of the impact of additional elements on existing masts (it should not result in an over-large installation) and any resultant clutter or visual impact.

Planting and landscaping

- 3.11 Applicants will be expected to provide details of landscaping and planting to minimise visual impact where this would be appropriate, as well as any subsequent arrangements for the irrigation and maintenance of such landscaping.

Health impact

- 3.12 All applications must be accompanied by a statement that the apparatus, when operational, will be compliant with ICNIRP guidelines (taking into account any cumulative impact) and other information as appropriate, in relation to the precautionary approach.

4.0 Sustainability Appraisal

Legal requirements

- 4.1 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, sustainability appraisal (SA) is mandatory for Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). The SA will incorporate the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive through the carrying out of a single appraisal process.
- 4.2 In order to test that the objectives of this draft Planning Brief are in accordance with sustainability principles, they have been tested for compatibility with the Council's Draft SA objectives (See Table 1). A draft framework for assessing possible sustainability implications is set out in the Draft Sustainability Scoping Report. For more information please use the following link:
http://www.richmond.gov.uk/home/environment/planning/local_development_framework/sustainability_appraisal_ldf.htm
- 4.3 The strategy for Telecommunications Masts takes account of these SA objectives (see below).

Table 1: Appraisal of SPD against Draft SA objectives

(Objectives taken from the Draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report)

		impact of SPD
E N V I R O N M E N T A L	1) To promote sustainable waste management, including reducing waste and waste disposal, promoting recovery, reuse and recycling.	=
	2) To make the most efficient use of land and to reduce contamination and safeguard soil quantity and quality.	=
	3) Reduce air and noise pollution, including greenhouse gases, and ensure air quality improves.	=
	4) Minimise congestion and pollution by reducing the need to travel, encourage alternatives to the car and making best use of existing transport infrastructure.	=
	5) To maintain or where possible improve water quality, conserve water and reduce the risk of and from flooding.	=
	6) To promote sustainable energy use through reduced energy use, improved energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy.	=
	7) Conserve and enhance biodiversity avoiding irreversible losses, through responsible management of key wildlife sites, connecting and other areas.	+
	8) Promote high quality places, spaces and buildings & conserve and enhance the landscape and townscape character of the borough including historical features for the benefit of both residents and visitors	+
	9) to make best use of previously developed land and existing buildings, encouraging sustainable construction practices	=
S O C I A L	10) to provide new housing opportunities and sufficient affordable housing that meets local needs.	=
	11) to create and maintain safer, more secure and more cohesive communities.	=
	12) To facilitate the improved health and well being of the population, including enabling people to stay independent and ensuring access to those health, education, sport, leisure and recreation facilities and services that are required.	+
E C O N O M I C	13) To increase the vitality and viability of existing town centres, local centres and parades.	=
	14) To promote and encourage a buoyant and diverse economy that will provide sustainable economic growth.	=
	15) provide appropriate commercial development opportunities to meet the needs of the local and sub-regional economy.	=

key to potential impacts:

+ positive = neutral or no impact + / - both positive & negative impacts

Environmental Considerations

Health and well-being

- 4.4 The guidance will have a positive impact by requiring all applications be accompanied by a statement that the apparatus is compliant with ICNIP guidelines; in so far as the guidance reduces public concern this will have a beneficial impact in terms of reducing stress.

Conservation and enhancement of biodiversity

- 4.5 The guidance seeks appropriate landscaping and therefore will have a positive impact.

Preservation and enhancement of landscape

- 4.6 The guidance identifies the sensitivity of landscape designation (Para 3.2). It states a number of circumstances (which will include landscape) in which masts will generally be unacceptable and it requires appropriate screening of masts.

Sustainable energy use and waste management

- 4.7 There are no specific implications.

Traffic congestion and pollution

- 4.8 There are no specific implications.

Creation of safer communities.

- 4.9 There are no specific implications.

Other matters

- 4.10 It is not considered that the Guidance will have significant implications in relation to matter such as vitality and viability of town centres, promotion of a buoyant and diverse economy or provision of commercial development opportunities.