

TO: ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC POLICY COMMITTEE –
7TH DECEMBER 2005

SUBJECT: TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENT

FROM: PLANNING AND ENGINEERING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on telecommunications development, planning policy guidance and recent research reports.
- 1.2 To inform members of the Council's own policy on the siting of telecommunications equipment on its land and property.

2. BACKGROUND

Policy on siting of telecoms equipment on Council Land and Property.

- 2.1 Housing Committee of 16th October 1996 considered a notice of motion and resolved as follows:-

"Because of doubts about the health effects and the considerable opposition by residents to recent applications, the Committee as a matter of policy reject any proposals from mobile phone companies to put antennas, microwave dishes and other telecommunications equipment on any dwellings owned by Warwick District Council Housing Department, until the Committee have received a further report from Officers." (Minute 635.)

- 2.2 Since that time, officers with property responsibility have operated a consistent policy in respect of all Council land and buildings and have refused requests from operators for the siting of telecommunications equipment on Council land and property.
- 2.3 A recent case related to Warwick Racecourse where a request from O2 for siting 'flagpole' type masts on a racecourse building was rejected due to the Council's restrictive policy on its own land/buildings. This then resulted in the operator making an application for prior approval for a "lamppost" type mast on Hampton Road which was duly considered by Planning Committee. The operator argued that in view of the council's stance as landowner in refusing to agree to siting flagpole antenna on the racecourse building, the site on the footway in Hampton Road represented the best possible alternative in the locality in order to meet a demonstrated need for additional capacity in the network. Planning Committee agreed that there were not sufficient grounds to withhold an approval to the particular site.
- 2.4 This case is mentioned in the context of this report, since it raises the issue as to whether the Council's restrictive policy in respect of its own land has led to what may have been an environmentally preferable solution to the need to provide increased telecoms coverage in this part of Warwick not being able to be secured.

Planning Policy and Health Risks

- 2.5 At the time of the Council's "moratorium" on the siting of telecommunications equipment on its own property, there were approximately 7 million mobile phone subscribers; information from the Mobile Operators Association (MOA) indicates that there are around 60 million subscribers in 2005.
- 2.6 The explosion in mobile phone use requires a growing number of transmitters. There are currently some 45,000 base station sites in the UK, $\frac{2}{3}$ of which are on existing buildings or structures. Additional base stations will be required to support the third generation of mobile phones (3G); the MOA estimate that the number of base stations/masts will increase to 50,000 by 2007.
- 2.7 The increase in the use of mobile phone technology has been accompanied by concerns about potential health risks from living, working or attending school in close proximity to a mast.
- 2.8 Because of these concerns, the government appointed an Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phone Technology early in 1999. Their report, usually known as the "Stewart Report" was published in May 2000.
- 2.9 Its broad conclusions were that the balance of evidence to date indicates no general risk to the health of people living near base stations, but that gaps in knowledge warrant further scientific research. A "precautionary" approach was recommended.
- 2.10 A further report by the Advisory Group on Non-ionising radiation reported in January 2004 (the AGNIR report) and represented the review which had been requested by Stewart. This concluded that:-
- "The weight of evidence now available does not suggest that there are adverse health effects from exposures to RF (Radiofrequency) fields below guideline levels..."
- "Exposure levels from living near to mobile phone base stations are extremely low and the overall evidence indicates that they are unlikely to pose a risk to health".
- 2.11 After the Stewart report, the government published revised planning guidance for "Telecommunications" (PPG8) in August 2001. In relation to health risks, the guidance stated:-
- "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 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."*

- 2.12 There have been no changes to planning policy guidance following the further scientific research into health risks that has taken place since Stewart. It remains the case, therefore, that planning decisions on mobile phone masts cannot be taken on grounds of risk to health. In the follow up (AGNIR) report of 2004, the principal recommendations were concerning the use of handsets by children. It recommended:

If there are currently unrecognized adverse health effects from the use of mobile phones, children may be more vulnerable because of their developing nervous system, the greater absorption of energy in the tissues of the head (paragraph 4.37), and a longer lifetime of exposure. In line with our precautionary approach, at this time, we believe that the widespread use of mobile phones by children for non-essential calls should be discouraged. We also recommend that the mobile phone industry should refrain from promoting the use of mobile phones by children (paragraphs 6.89 and 6.90).

3. **POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

This report is for information purposes only .Any review of the Council's policy in respect of whether telecoms equipment may be sited on its own land and buildings would need to be considered by the Executive.

4. **OUTCOME REQUIRED**

That the contents of the report be noted

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 "Telecommunications" Aug 2001

Areas in District Affected: Whole District

Executive Portfolio Area and Holder: Environment ; Cllr Begg

For further information about this report please contact:

Contact Officer: John Edwards

Tel: (01926) 456541 (Direct Line)

E-Mail John.Edwards@warwickdc.gov.uk