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## ROCHFORD DISTRICT REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN - TELECOMMUNICATION MASTS

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This reports seeks Members views on possible amendments to the current policy PU1 which deal with the provision of telecommunication masts.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The current policy for considering proposals for telecommunications masts is attached as an appendix to this report. The policy was specifically designed to encourage co-operation between operators, reduce the impact of aerials on sensitive landscape and to encourage masts to be placed on buildings wherever possible.
- 2.2 At the time of preparing the existing policy, the development of mobile communications was at a relatively early stage. Since then mobile communications have become a part of everyday life and the advent of the next generation 3G licences means that further very significant development will be required. This report assesses those changes and seeks Members views on possible revisions to the current policy.

### 3 DISCUSSION

- 3.1 Recently, there has been growing concern about the health implications associated with the provision of mobile phone masts. The Stewart Report was published in April 2000 and stated as follows:

*“... the balance of evidence does not suggest mobile phone technologies put the health of the general population of the UK at risk. There is some preliminary evidence that outputs from mobile phone technologies may cause, in some cases, subtle biological effects, although, importantly, these do not necessarily mean that health is affected. There is also evidence that in some cases people’s well-being may be adversely affected by the insensitive siting of base stations. New mechanisms need to be set in place to prevent that happening.*

*Overall, the report proposes that a precautionary approach be adopted until more robust scientific information becomes available and that the subject be reviewed again in three years time, or before if circumstances demand it. “*

- 3.2 Following the Stewart Report, in December 2000, the Department of Health published two leaflets explaining the risks associated with the use of mobile phones and the impact of base stations on health. The leaflet on base stations did little more than reaffirm the precautionary

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approach recommended by Stewart, though it did point out that there was some public concern about the location of transmitters next to schools.

- 3.3 In the last few months, primarily in response to public pressure, the Government has announced some minor changes to the arrangements for dealing with proposals for telecommunication masts, though the 'prior determination' procedure for masts less than 15 metres in height has been retained.
- 3.4 The development of new telecommunication technologies is highly dynamic process and the latest 3G licences will require the operators to erect a very substantial additional number of masts.
- 3.5 Given the likelihood of a new wave of applications and prior approval requests, it seems to make sense to consider the implications for the district and the need for appropriate revisions to Local plan policy. Whilst the evidence provided to date does not seem to indicate any proven health risk, there is no doubt that many residents do perceive a risk; this is reflected in the advice from Stewart regarding a precautionary approach.
- 3.6 Accordingly, it is suggested that a revised policy be prepared that also adopts a precautionary approach to the provision of new masts in close proximity to schools and residential areas. The definition of 'close proximity' would be the key to such a policy and clearly a reasonable stance would need to be followed, and a distance of 50 metres would seem to be an appropriate starting point. If Members accept this suggestion, then it is envisaged that this would be one of the criteria against which Planning applications would be assessed in a revised policy. The final clause in the existing policy relating to siting of masts on buildings would need to be amended to take account of this change since buildings on which masts might be located could be within a residential area.

#### **4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 At the present moment, the jury is out on the impact of telecommunication masts on health and safety. It is considered that safety first policy stance should be adopted to mast provision in the replacement Local Plan.

#### **5 RECOMMENDATION**

It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That, subject to comments from Members, a revised policy on telecommunications masts be prepared for inclusion in the replacement

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Local Plan that seeks to control the provision of masts within close proximity to residential areas or school premises. (HOPS)

Shaun Scrutton

Head of Planning Services

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**Background Papers:**

Stewart Report – April 2000

Mobile Phones Base Stations and Health – Department of Health, December 2000

For further information please contact Shaun Scrutton on:-

Tel:- 01702 318100

E-Mail:- [shaun.scrutton@rochford.gov.uk](mailto:shaun.scrutton@rochford.gov.uk)

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APPENDIX 1

10.4.0 Telecommunications

10.4.1 As far as British Telecom is concerned, the proposed phasing and intended uses of the sites identified for development do not pose any significant problems in respect of the provision of their services. The Company will however require as much notice as possible to provide services, particularly for those sites which are situated in remoter areas.

10.4.2 British Telecom will not require any additional land during the Plan period apart from the usual requirements for underground service ducts, public call boxes and similar needs.

10.4.3 Where environmental improvements are to be encouraged, especially in the Conservation Areas and town and village centres, the Local Planning Authority will seek the co-operation of telecommunication providers in providing wherever possible for the undergrounding of telephone cables, and the sensitive design and siting of call boxes, particularly in Conservation Areas. Elsewhere telecommunication providers will be encouraged to dismantle all disused overhead telephone and telex lines.

10.4.4 Other providers of telecommunications services were also consulted in the preparation of the Local Plan, namely, Mercury, Cellnet and Vodafone, but no response was received from any of these companies. The same consultations will apply to the siting and design of their equipment where the Council is able to exercise control as set out in paragraphs 10.4.5 to 10.4.7 and Policy PU1.

*Telecommunication Masts*

10.4.5 The siting of these substantial masts, which are essential to the operations of the various mobile phone companies, must be carried out with great care to ensure that sensitive areas, particularly residential estates, do not suffer a loss of residential or visual amenity. Regard must be had however, to the limitations imposed by the nature of the telecommunications network and the new technology which usually constrain operators' choice of sites. Furthermore, Parts 24 and 25 of the General Development Order 1988 (as amended) give significant permitted development rights for the erection of communication equipment, although the operator must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required to the details of the siting and appearance of the apparatus.

10.4.6 Where the erection of a mast requires the grant of a planning consent, the Local Planning Authority considers that it is important to indicate those areas where the siting of masts should normally be avoided if at all possible, always bearing in mind the technical siting limitations referred to in paragraph 10.4.5 above. These "*environmentally sensitive areas*" would include SSSI's, the Roach Valley Conservation Zone, Coastal Protection Belt, conservation areas and Special Landscape Areas. Furthermore, there is a clear need to ensure that there is communication between the different companies to avoid the need for the erection of more than one mast in any particular location.

10.4.7 Careful consideration needs to be given to the potential for the placing of masts on existing buildings where their overall impact can be less than for a free standing structure.

**POLICY PU1**

**THE COUNCIL WILL ENCOURAGE CO-OPERATION WITH AND BETWEEN TELECOMMUNICATIONS OPERATORS RESPECTING THEIR PROPOSALS TO ERECT APPARATUS. IN CONSIDERING APPLICATIONS THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY WILL SEEK:**

**(i) BY AMENDMENTS TO THEIR DESIGN OR ADJUSTMENTS IN THEIR SITING, AND BY REQUIRING SITE LANDSCAPE WORKS, OR BOTH, TO MINIMISE THEIR UNSIGHTLINESS OR INTRUSION, ESPECIALLY AS SEEN FROM WITHIN AREAS DESIGNATED FOR THEIR LANDSCAPE OR CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE. IN AREAS SO DESIGNATED THE PRIOR APPROVAL REQUIREMENTS OF PART 24 OF THE SECOND SCHEDULE TO THE GENERAL DEVELOPMENT ORDER WILL BE APPLIED WHERE IN THE COUNCIL'S VIEW A SERIOUS RISK TO AMENITY IS ENTAILED.**

**(ii) TO AVOID THE UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION OF MASTS; AND**

**(iii) TO SECURE THEIR SITING ON EXISTING BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES WHERE APPROPRIATE.**