

Planning and Development advice



January 2006

This document sets out **Supplementary Planning Guidance for telecommunications development** in Wigan Borough. In determining proposals for telecommunications development the council will have regard to this guidance, which expands upon Policy EN7J of the Wigan Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and to any other material considerations.

This guidance is arranged as follows:

- Section 1** The importance of telecommunications development.
- Section 2** Taking account of health effects and the public perception of danger.
- Section 3** The geographical rationale for the adopted approach.
- Section 4** Assessment of the visual impact of telecommunication masts.
- Section 5** Design issues - mast design, mast sharing, fencing, equipment cabins, planting and landscaping.

1 The importance of telecommunications development

- 1.1 We are aware that modern telecommunications are an essential and beneficial element in the life of the borough and in the regional and national economy. High quality communications can contribute to the achievement of a competitive economy, increased employment opportunities and reductions in the need to travel.
- 1.2 Our approach is to help towards the growth of telecommunications systems whilst keeping their environment impact to a minimum. This Supplementary Planning Guidance takes account of the need for us to respond positively to telecommunications development proposals and of government guidance on the protection of urban and rural areas from inappropriate development. We will also have regard to any technical constraints on the location of proposed development and the wider benefits which might be gained. We strongly wish to encourage telecommunications operators to enter into pre-submission discussions in order to achieve optimum solutions to development requirements.
- 1.3 This guidance takes fully into account the growth and characteristics of modern telecommunications, including the need for masts and antennas

to be placed in particular locations in order to work effectively. The guidance develops the policies included within the Wigan UDP, and in particular Policy EN7J which is included at Annex 1, in order to take account of these factors.

2 Taking account of health effects and public perception of danger

- 2.1 It is the Government's view that if a proposed development meets the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation (ICNIRP) guidelines it should not be necessary for an authority, in processing an application, to consider health effects further. Consequently all new base stations are expected to meet the ICNIRP guidelines.
- All applications should include a statement to the effect that the apparatus when operational will meet the guidelines.**

3 The geographical rationale for the adopted approach

- 3.1 The approach adopted by this Supplementary Planning Guidance seeks to guide telecommunications development towards suitable locations and away from unsuitable ones **based upon the visual impact of the development**. Fundamental to this approach is the understanding that the visual impact of telecommunications development is determined by the following factors:

- The characteristics and predominant land uses of the area.
- The type and design of installation.
- The design and materials of ancillary buildings and fencing.
- The extent of existing and proposed screening by buildings and landscaping.

- 3.2 This approach is appropriate for Wigan Borough because of its characteristic geography which consists of numerous settlements of various sizes separated by large tracts of open land. In addition, there are only minor topographical variations across the borough providing limited opportunities for elevated telecommunications sites.

As a result of these geographical factors:

- It is particularly important for telecommunications development to be appropriately sited to minimise its visual impact.
- Some parts of the borough are more visually sensitive to telecommunications development than others.
- In other parts of the borough telecommunications development may be more readily incorporated without causing visual harm.

- 3.3 This guidance has been drafted to assist telecommunications operators to give priority to appropriate types of location when seeking new or expanding sites for facilities.

4 Assessment of the visual impact of telecommunications masts

- 4.1 Policy EN7J of the Wigan Unitary Development Plan lists a range of factors which should be taken into account in determining proposals for telecommunications development. The policy is shown in Annex 1. These factors seek to strike a balance between the need to protect and enhance the environment and make reasonable provision for telecommunications development.

Our approach

- 4.2 We will seek to strike this balance by carefully considering the siting of telecommunications masts and related equipment as well as having regard to the operational needs of the network operators in each case.
- 4.3 This approach aims to ensure that telecommunications development does not have a detrimental effect on the living conditions of residents of the borough by reason of visual intrusion.
- 4.4 Where installations are likely to have an impact on visual amenity, a full justification will be required with the application as to why alternative sites were considered unsuitable.
- 4.5 The approach involves defining a hierarchy of locations for masts on the basis of their suitability. These locations are:
- i** residential areas with high population densities;
 - ii** mixed commercial and residential areas;
 - iii** industrial areas;
 - iv** rural areas, including green belt and protected open land;
 - v** town centres; and
 - vi** major transport corridors, such as road and rail.

i Residential areas

Within and adjacent to residential areas lattice tower and monopole telecommunications masts are generally not suitable because of their height and inappropriate appearance. Consequently the following assessment criteria will apply within residential areas:

Lattice tower and monopole masts will generally not be acceptable within residential areas unless:

- The operator is able to show convincing evidence that the need for the mast within the particular residential area outweighs the harm which will be caused to visual amenity.
- The mast will not be prominent from dwellings or in the street scene.

Lamp column type masts and antenna on buildings may be acceptable within residential areas provided they are not prominent from the main windows of any dwelling.

ii Areas of mixed commercial and residential use

Lattice towers, monopole masts and antenna on buildings may be acceptable in mixed use areas provided they are carefully sited and designed in relation to dwellings and the street scene.

The following assessment criteria for lattice towers and monopole masts and related equipment will apply:

Masts shall:

- not be visually prominent in the street scene or from dwellings due to height and/or design of structures; and
- where possible, be screened from public areas by buildings, structures or vegetation.

Lamp column type masts may be acceptable in mixed commercial and residential areas provided they are not prominent from the main windows of dwellings.

iii Industrial areas

Telecommunications masts of all types, both freestanding and located on buildings may generally be acceptable in industrial areas. However, the visual amenity of both the industrial area and the wider area must be reasonably safeguarded from inappropriate structures of excessive height or prominence.

The following assessment criteria will apply:

Masts and telecommunications equipment will:

- not be visually prominent in the street scene or from dwellings due to height or design of the structure; and
- where possible be screened from public areas by buildings, structures or vegetation.

Lamp column type masts will generally be acceptable in industrial areas.

iv Rural areas including green belt and protected open land

Although masts are generally acceptable in these areas it is important to protect the visual amenity of the landscape from unsuitable and excessive amounts of telecommunications development.

The following assessment criteria for lattice towers and monopole masts will apply:

Mast may be acceptable in green belt and open land provided they:

- fit reasonably well into the landscape or screened by vegetation from important viewpoints;
- are not visually prominent from public open space or dwellings;
- are not prominent on the skyline; and

- are not sited so close to other masts and structures so that they create a cluttered visual appearance within a small area.

v Town centres

Within town centres it is recognised that there may be scope for attaching telecommunications equipment to buildings in locations which may not be readily visible from street level. But lattice towers and monopole masts are likely to be excessively prominent.

The following assessment criteria apply:

Generally, lattice towers and monopole masts are not acceptable within town centres unless it can be demonstrated that they:

- will not be prominent in the street scene or from dwellings;
- will not be detrimental to the character and appearance of important buildings including Listed buildings or buildings in a Conservation area;
- will not affect the character of a Conservation area;
- will not affect an important viewpoint; and
- will not be sited so close to other telecommunications equipment so as to create a cluttered visual appearance.

Other forms of telecommunications development, including antennas and lamp column masts may be acceptable in town centres provided they meet the above criteria.

vi Major transport corridors such as roads and railways

Telecommunications masts are commonly located along major roads, motorways and railway lines in order to serve the needs of travellers.

Locating masts within or adjacent to such corridors will generally be acceptable provided they do not create a cluttered appearance. However, you will always need to have regard to the type of area as defined in the hierarchy of other location types, so that the appropriate requirements of such an area are met. It will not generally be acceptable to locate masts adjacent to or prominent from rivers or canals because these features are protected against visual intrusion by policies in the Wigan UDP.

The following assessment criteria will apply within major transport corridors:

Lattice towers and monopole masts may be acceptable within and adjacent to major road and rail transport corridors provided they will:

- fit reasonably well into the landscape;
- not be sited so close to other masts and structures so that they create a cluttered visual appearance within a small area; and
- not conflict with the assessment criteria applicable to the particular type of area in which they lie.

5 Design issues

- 5.1 The details of the design, siting, treatment of ancillary development and landscaping all have a bearing on the overall visual impact of telecommunications development. These guidelines should assist operators in improving the appearance of their installations.

Mast design

- 5.2 Operators should consider the use of sympathetic mast design in relation to the particular site in order to minimise the visual impact. Generally, slimline monopole masts are less intrusive than lattice towers. However, monopoles may not be suitable for mast sharing.
- 5.3 Other designs include masts designed to resemble trees or street furniture such as lamp column types. Sometimes there is an opportunity to incorporate equipment unobtrusively inside buildings, for example, church towers or cupolas of mill buildings and these should be explored before external structures are considered. Operators are encouraged to pursue innovative designs which will minimise visual impact.

Mast sharing

- 5.4 Mast sharing has the potential to reduce or eliminate the need for additional masts within an area. Operators should therefore explore alternatives for mast sharing or siting of antennas on buildings when formulating their proposals, as advised in government guidance.
- 5.5 However, mast sharing may require an existing mast to be increased in height to accommodate more equipment. This may result in a more visually prominent mast. In some cases two masts may be a more effective way of minimising visual impact than mast sharing. Operators should be guided by the advice on visual assessment set out in the previous section of this guidance when considering sharing of masts or sites. In particular, the assessment criteria for rural areas, town centres and major transport corridors require that masts are not sited so close together that they create a cluttered visual appearance within a small area.
- 5.6 Where equipment is to be installed within existing features of a building, opportunities for other operators to share the space should be explored at the outset.

Fencing

- 5.7 The design of fencing for equipment compounds should be visually appropriate to the particular surroundings. Security fencing will normally be required to a height of at least 2 metres and this can have a significant visual impact unless care is taken with design and colour. The most visually acceptable types of fences for all locations are likely to be:
- Roundex and diamex type railings
 - Weldmesh type mesh fences

- 5.8 Steel palisade fencing will not be acceptable unless the site is entirely within an industrial environment. Chain link fencing is unlikely to be secure enough and is easily vandalised so it may only be suitable for very remote locations.
- 5.9 All fencing should be colour treated during manufacture by powder coating in black, dark green, dark blue or similar colours.

Materials and colours of equipment cabins

- 5.10 Equipment cabins are located close to the base of masts, usually on the ground but sometimes at roof level to serve antenna or stub masts mounted on buildings. The materials and colours selected for equipment cabins, cable boxes and other necessary items should blend in as far as possible with the surroundings. Operators should explain in their submissions how the selected materials and colours achieve this objective. Where possible equipment cabins and other equipment to serve rooftop installations should be placed inside buildings or be concealed by existing structures.

Planting and landscaping

- 5.11 Site selection should normally take into account the advantages which existing vegetation may provide, particularly from critical viewpoints. Operators should always consider opportunities for additional planting and landscaping when preparing proposals for ground-based installations. Whilst new planting cannot screen masts it can help to provide screening for equipment cabins, fencing and the lower parts of the masts into the surrounding area. As part of their submissions operators should indicate the extent of planting they propose to carry out and identify who will be responsible for its maintenance.

Annex 1 Extract from Wigan UDP – adopted January 1996

EN7J Telecommunications Development

In considering proposals for telecommunications development the council will have regard to the following:

- (a) the operating requirements of telecommunications technology;**
- (b) the availability of alternative sites for telecommunications development;**
- (c) the feasibility of sharing existing facilities;**
- (d) in the case of radio masts that they cannot reasonably be placed on an existing building or structure;**
- (e) that equipment and structures are sited and designed so as to minimise their visual impact;**
- (f) that in large new developments telecommunications systems should be provided underground;**
- (g) that wall mounted dishes and apparatus should be placed in the least obtrusive position possible when viewed from the street;**

- (h) that dishes and antennae should, wherever possible, be placed below the highest part of the roof of a building;
- (i) Telecommunications equipment will not normally be permitted where it would be likely to demonstrably harm the character and appearance of:
 - a a listed building or its setting;
 - b a building of local interest or its setting;
 - c a designated conservation area or a building within it.

The council recognises the importance of modern communications in the social and economic life of the borough. A balance must be struck between the need to protect and enhance the environment and making reasonable provision for telecommunications development. The General Development Order provides opportunities to erect many facilities without reference to the council although in some cases intervention is allowed where there is a significant amenity issue. Where in respect of larger installations planning consent is required, the council will need to be sure that all possible alternative sites have been investigated and that all attempts have been made to minimise the impact of the equipment by consideration of sharing facilities, erection of radio masts on existing structures and careful siting and design. In large developments visual impact can be avoided by placing facilities underground.

In the case of dish and other domestic installations, they should be sited so as to minimise their impact on the local urban environment.

In areas where there is special concern for visual amenity or heritage protection the council will apply more stringent control over the siting and design of telecommunications installations. Further guidance is set out in Policies EN8A, EN8B and EN8C.

For more information or if you wish to discuss specific proposals, please contact the appropriate Development Control Manager for the area:

West

Standish, Shevington, Western Wigan including Wigan Town Centre, Orrell, Ashton-in-Makerfield, and Ince-in-Makerfield.

Telephone: 01942 404271

East

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