



Mobile Phone Mast Action Letter No 1

EDITORIAL by TRUDY DEAN

This leaflet is not meant to stop mobile phone masts being put up. We recognise the increasing use of these phones, particularly in emergency situations. We just want to be sure that masts are put up in safe places.

There is a long list of health scares where scientists have warned of dangers long before governments have taken action: lead in petrol, traffic pollution, asbestos, smoking, thalidomide, and, most recently, the chaos caused by failure to act quickly on BSE infected cattle. In these cases it has often taken years to prove exactly how these health problems have been caused.

The European Government has recognised this and Title XVI, Environment, Article 130r (2) of the Maastricht Treaty binds member countries - including the UK - to take the so called "precautionary approach". In a nutshell, it says: "If there is any risk - don't do it." In addition the European Environmental Regulations impose a special duty on Councils to reveal information on proposals affecting the environment - and that includes the air.

Unfortunately, many local planning authorities are still ignoring this advice, withholding information and taking the view that assessing health risks is not a matter for them. They need to be made aware that Councils in the UK can and are refusing applications for mobile phone masts on health grounds and on grounds of public concern - Shepway Council in Kent did so on 5 October 1999.

We hope this leaflet will help you persuade your Council to think carefully before permitting new masts. We also need your help to join with other campaigners, including the Local Government Association and British Medical Association, for changes in the national law to give us all better protection.

Trudy Dean - Leader, Liberal Democrat Group, Kent County Council



Phone Mast Stories from across Kent



Mrs Debbie Collins from Bexley has been fighting to have a phone mast removed from school grounds since July 1999. She first became aware of the mast, which has been in place for four years, when her daughter started at the school. The phone mast was first refused because it was unsightly, however it was then sited between trees and given permission.



The health and safety of the children attending the school was not mentioned. Mrs Collins and other parents have since withdrawn their children from the school. She distributed a health check questionnaire to parents of which more than 30 were returned. A number of children are reported as suffering violent nose bleeds and headaches, which clear up in holiday time. Adults in the neighbouring area complain of headaches and dizziness.

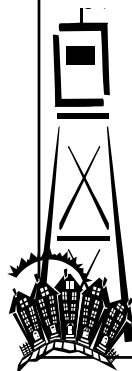
Mrs Slater saw a site notice tied to a school road sign about the installation of a mast in Bidborough. Two further notices tied to lampposts in nearby roads in Southborough led to the formation of the Bidborough/Southborough Residents' Awareness Action Group. Each sign gave only three days notice for residents to object.

The Group raised awareness by involving the Courier Newspaper who gave the story of these new style 'street furniture' lampposts front page cover. In addition, 600 households were leafleted, Radio, Meridian TV and Archie Norman MP, expressed interest. A public meeting was arranged for the MP, Kent County Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council planners and Powerwatch to attend.



To date Tunbridge Wells Borough Council have refused all three transmitters. One on conservation grounds and two on highway safety and appearance. The reaction by the Group was regarded as 'mass hysteria'.

Mr Willingham, also from Tunbridge Wells, recently had a pacemaker fitted and was told by his specialist to avoid phone masts which may make his pacemaker 'race' - or stop! However, he has to walk past a phone mast in his cul-de-sac to get out of his estate. He has joined the Action Group.



Mr Swan & Miss Paul from St Margarets-at-Cliffe have photographs of a phone mast sited on a fire station tower 20 metres high, 5 metres from a bungalow in a residential area. Over 200 residents attended a public meeting and voted to charge their elected representatives to work for the removal of the telecommunication attachment, and the lowering of the tower. The residents have received support from their local MP. Orange did not attend the meeting. Dover District Council approved the phone mast application and have advised residents that fighting the phone mast is a 'lost cause' because it is in place. Although the Fire service is working in business partnership with Orange, Fire service personnel are awaiting Health & Safety advice concerning working on the tower.



Mr and Mrs Jenness from Ashford have had a mast in their area since 1993 on a farm adjacent to an old manor house used as a training centre. In the manor house grounds are two new large homes housing severely disturbed children. The Charity running this operation objected to the installation of the 'phone mast because of the unpredictability of the children's behaviour. Despite its objections, the Charity now wants to extend the site and build a residential school. Ashford Borough Council has granted outline planning permission for the development.



Planning Details - a simplified guide.

? Any mast which is over 15 metres high or in a specially protected area, such as a Conservation Area, National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, requires a full planning application to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority - normally the District or Borough Council. All of these applications must be advertised, and most BUT NOT ALL councils will consult local Parish Councils and advise neighbouring residents. Where a full planning application is required, the Planning Authority can refuse permission for any reason which would normally be allowed under planning law, and this includes potential public health risk, and the level of public concern. **Most Planning Authorities do not know this vital point, which has changed the thinking of a number of Councils about 'unknown health risks' (*)**. However, as with any planning application, the Council must consider each proposal and the appropriateness of any grounds of refusal, on a case-by-case basis.

If the mast is under 15 metres high, and NOT in a specially protected area, mobile phone operators have been given what are called Permitted Development Rights (PDR) by the Government. This means that no full planning application is needed. If the mast is to be on a building or other existing structure, there is a complex formula setting out the height of masts allowed under PDR, depending on the height of the building (see DETR Circular 04/99). Under Permitted Development Rights, companies only have to tell the Council where they propose to site the mast and provide a written description of what it looks like. The Council then has EITHER 28 days to 'intervene' if the mast is on an existing building, OR 42 days if it is sited on the ground. If the Council does choose to intervene, the company has to go through a Prior Approval procedure, giving the Council the opportunity to consider the detail of the proposal and, if appropriate, refuse it. Any refusal must be issued within

the 28 or 42 day period. Despite Government guidance encouraging councils to consult local people, there is no legal requirement to do this and many Councils say they haven't time to do a meaningful public consultation exercise in 28 days...so they don't tell anybody. All the company has to do is to post a Site Notice (but only if it is a ground based mast) which can be one page of small print attached to the nearest lamppost...**so keep a careful watch for them!**

About 6 in every 10 phone masts are erected under Permitted Development Rights, which can mean virtually no one knowing about them. The other big drawback is that masts dealt with under PDR can ONLY be refused on grounds of siting, which does include nearness to houses, and appearance.

If the Council is sufficiently concerned about any Prior Approval notification, they can serve an Article 4 Direction. This means that the full planning application is needed and the broader grounds for refusal potentially apply. Many Councils are reluctant to intervene, or use their Article 4 Powers, or refuse applications on anything other than appearance grounds, because the Government advises Councils (in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8) that they must "facilitate" phone masts in the interests of the economy. Councils are instructed that they must not question the need for these masts, and advised that on questions of potential health risk they should be guided by the advice of the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). The NRPB limits for exposure set for this country are up to 1,000 times higher than other countries. In an attempt to reduce the intensity of the signal, some countries have recommended an exclusion zone of up to 500 metres, as has been done in Australia. In England we understand the exclusion zone is 4 metres! If a Council grants planning permission, there is no appeal against its decision, but if permission is refused, the applicant can appeal, and the decision then rests with an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State who will sometimes order a public inquiry.

(*) This refers to the 1998 Court of Appeal Newport Decision, which stated 'genuine public fear and concern, even if that fear is irrational and not based upon evidence, is a material planning consideration'. **Newport Borough Council v Secretary of State** (1998) JPL 377.

~~WE ONLY HAVE ROOM HERE FOR A VERY SIMPLIFIED GUIDE. SEE REFERENCE ON BACK PAGE FOR LIST OF DOCUMENTS~~

Why are landowners agreeing to have mobile phone masts sited in residential areas?

In a word - money. The Government is requiring phone companies to achieve full network coverage by the end of 1999. They are offering up to £10k per year to landowners to site masts on their property. A great number of mobile phone masts are sited on school grounds, church grounds and local authority land - all of whom are strapped for cash. Often landowners and developers are unaware of the health implications, or are willing to ignore them. Parents in many cases have not even been told about the plans for masts on schools! 10 Kent schools and more recently the Fire Service, have accepted thousands of pounds from mobile phone companies to site masts on their land and towers. Some Fire Authorities employ agents to actively market their sites with mobile phone companies! We believe that, in the absence of scientific evidence and advice to satisfy the health concerns surrounding phone masts, the financial gains are simply not worth the possible risks involved.

Possible Health Risks - A brief overview

The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) standards have been set to limit the intensity of microwave radiation and the recognised heating of human cells which it can cause. Nevertheless many scientists are concerned that NRPB limits for exposure are up to 1,000 times higher than in some other countries. Concern has also been expressed that increases in the growth of incipient cancers, and cataract problems experienced by mast riggers exposed to high intensity radiation, may also become apparent in people exposed to extremely low intensity radiation for very prolonged periods e.g. by living very close to a phone mast for months or years, for many scientists now believe that there are also **non thermal** effects of microwave radiation, particularly when pulsed at low frequencies, close to those used by the brain itself (brainwaves). It is believed that children may be particularly at risk because of the larger absorption of microwaves by their heads, and the fact that the electrical activity of their brains is still developing. Because every human being is unique, however, each person may respond to radiation in a different way, but the following are commonly reported examples of human reaction to this form of radiation:

- Some people living near masts report headaches, impairment of short term memory, sleeping disruption (and with it chronic fatigue syndrome).
- Mast riggers report health problems including short term memory loss.
- A study has shown an impairment of learning skills in exposed children.
- Certain prescribed drugs are known to make some people especially sensitive to microwave radiation.
- Some parents across the country have reported that their children are apparently suffering epileptic type seizures at schools which are close to mobile phone masts. When the children are at home the fits do not occur and none of these children had a previous history of epilepsy.
- One girl, already known to be epileptic, who, prior to the erection of a mast near her home, was having an average of 2 fits per month, is now having 8 per day with the mast in place. When, unbeknown to her or her family, the mast is turned off, her condition improves dramatically.
- A health check questionnaire at a London school resulted in 30 reports from parents whose children were suffering headaches and violent nosebleeds during term time, which cleared up in school holidays. Adults living near the mast, sited at the school, reported headaches and dizziness.
- People who have pacemakers have been advised that mobile phone masts may cause the pacemaker to race - or stop. We know of one mast which carries a notice warning people with pacemakers not to approach it.




Success Stories from Across the UK

- 14 Councils in Scotland have already adopted, or are in the process of developing, precautionary policies effectively banning phone masts from being sited on schools, and in some cases, on other Council properties and in densely populated areas.
- Speke in Liverpool - parents instigated mass walkout of all the children in one school, which resulted in the mast, although in place, not being activated.
- Gordon in Scotland – following parental pressure a phone mast was relocated.
- Bedfordshire & Luton Combined Fire Authority postponed the sighting of a mast at a fire station 'until further investigative work into the possible health effects of masts on school sites is completed by the DfEE'.
- Wyre Borough Council in Lancashire refused a phone mast application on health grounds.
- Restormel Borough Council refused a mast on health and safety grounds. The mast would have been sited near a primary school.
- Belfast City Council, Hampshire and Oxfordshire County Councils have decided not to allow masts being sited on their land, pending further research into their safety.
- The British Medical Association have confirmed to the House of Commons Select Committee that 'while scientific evidence remains inconclusive we should take precautionary measures to minimise exposure, and encourage further research.'
- The National Union of Teachers have written to their members advising that: 'Consultation should take place with parents and staff on any such proposals before masts are installed in schools. Where widespread opposition is voiced, the NUT believes that such proposals should be withdrawn regardless of the actual potential risks to health. Local Education Authorities and governors should not conclude agreements in the face of opposition from parents and staff.'

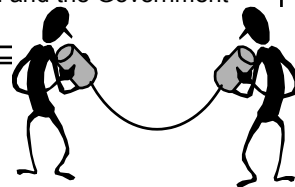


ACTION

What improvements are we pressing for?

- We believe the planning process should be reviewed and the Government should remove all Permitted Development Rights so all masts need full planning applications. This gives time for residents to be informed and **respond**.
- No more masts installed on or near schools, homes for the elderly or hospitals; all are especially vulnerable. New Zealand have banned masts from all State schools.
- Masts in sensitive areas should be moved or switched off. 
- Local Authorities in England and Wales should be able to adopt the precautionary principle as Scottish Councils have done. This would mean that they could ban masts from, for example, schools, hospitals and elderly people's homes where children and adults are specially vulnerable. A further step would be to declare 'exclusion zones', which commonly state that buildings occupied for long periods of time should be further than, usually 500 metres, away from a phone mast.
- We support the call from scientists, the British Medical Association, the Local Government Association and the Government itself for truly independent further research on the possible health effects of phone masts.

Q: What can you do? A: Spread the word!



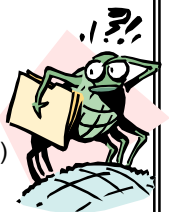
Q: How can I raise awareness in my area about phone masts? A: Tell people about it!

If you are concerned about the siting of a mast, distribute a copy of the phone mast planning notice to local residents. Ask each resident to write to the local council raising their objections to the phone mast. If the Council advise they are not able to refuse an application on health grounds tell them about the Newport case and object on the grounds of site and appearance, as well as potential health risks.



Q: Who should I contact? A: The people who will make the decision

~ your Parish Councillor ~ your Local Borough or District Councillor ~ your County Councillor
~ your MP ~ your MEP ~ the local Council's Chief Planning Officer
Also, contact other action groups for additional support and advice (contact KCC Lib Dem Office for a list)



Q: The Local Council is not providing me with any information - what can I do?

A: Try and speak to the local Council's Chief Planning Officer in the first instance. If a local Council refuses to give you any information, tell them about the European Environmental Regulations and complain if the information is not forthcoming. Contact the Council's Monitoring Officer and complain to him/her about the Council withholding information. Some Councils may claim commercial confidentiality as an excuse not to let you have any information. Confirm that you are happy for any information related to prices etc. to be kept hidden from you, but you are entitled to the rest.

Q: How can I gather information on health effects potentially caused by an existing phone mast?

A: Use the information in this newsletter (it is all documented). Distribute a health check questionnaire to local residents/parents of school children. Try and get your GP to help with comparative figures (before and after mast siting) for headaches, nosebleeds, epilepsy etc. The British Medical Association have concerns about phone masts and have stated 'While scientific evidence remains inconclusive we should take precautionary measures to minimise exposure, and encourage further research'.

PARENT POWER!

School Parents make a stand

A school in Kent was recently offered £4k (+ £2k per year rental) to site a supplementary mast 2/300 yards from school buildings in the corner of the playing field.

The parents of a primary school, also on the site, joined with parents from the secondary school to lobby school Governors not to have the phone mast.

The mast was due to be sited during the summer holidays. However, a meeting was held with parents, the mobile phone company and the school to discuss the mast. Following further discussions it was agreed that the mast should not be allowed.

Shepway protesters forge the way in Kent

Mrs Adams and Mrs Pugh from Shepway are celebrating their success in fighting a proposal for a mobile 'phone mast in Stowting. Activists succeeded in getting both Hythe Town Council and Shepway District Council to change their minds from a position where officers of both said health risks were negligible. On 5th October 1999 Shepway Council became the first Kent Council to refuse a mast application on grounds of health risk and public concern. Their decision, which was proposed by Labour Councillors and supported by a Conservative Councillor, reads '**Current scientific research gives rise to doubts about the safety of base stations because of the possible effects of low intensity microwave radiation on human health and given the public concern about the issue in the local area the proposal is considered unacceptable.**'

Publications,
Reports and
Websites which you may
find of use:

SUCCESS!

- Environmental Protection - the Environmental Information Regulations 1992
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) Circular 04/99 Planning for Telecommunications
- Treaty on European Union including the Protocols & Final Act with Declarations - Maastricht, 7 February 1992 (the Treaty entered into force on 1 November 1993)
- Friends of the Earth - Scotland, Briefing - Blot on the Horizon or Health Threat? www.foe-scotland.org.uk
- Paper presented at the IBC - UK Conference: 'Mobile Phones - Is There a Health Risk?' September 16-17 1997, Brussels, Belgium. Neurological Effects of Radiofrequency Relating to Wireless Communication Technology - Henry Lai, Bioelectromagnetics Research Laboratory, University Washington, USA
- Powerwatch - exists to help the growing number of people wishing to know more about electromagnetic fields and their reported health effects: www.powerwatch.org.uk
- Waveguide - provides information on EMF/RFR: www.wave-guide.org
- The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) is a public body partly funded by the Department of Health and partly funded by commerce, including mobile phone companies. Their prime role is to provide advice on matters relating to radiation protection: Tel 01235 831600 www.nrpb.org.uk
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) continuously reviews all current published research related to mobile phones: www.who.int/peh-emf
- For a free copy of the Federation of Electronics Industry (FEI) leaflet 'Mobile Phones and Health: Your Questions Answered' contact the FEI on 0171 331 2000.
- Potential and Actual Adverse Effects of Radiofrequency and Microwave Radiation by Dr Neil Cherry, Lincoln University, New Zealand - 10 July 1997
- Consultation Draft (December 1998) DETR Land Use Planning and Electro Magnetic Fields (EMFs)
- Minutes of Evidence taken before the House of Commons Science & Technology Committee 9 & 16 June 1999
- House of Commons Science & Technology Committee - Third Report, 2 September 1999
- Publications & Reports by Dr G J Hyland, Department of Physics, University of Warwick:
 - Mobile Phones & Health Inquiry Memo
 - Report on the Fundamental Inadequacy of Existing Safety Guidelines (House of Commons 15 June 1999)
 - Some Observations on the report of the Science & Technology Committee on Mobile Phones & Health and the Role of the NRPB



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