

Commercial Telecommunications Developments

Planning Guidance Note

Introduction

This Guidance Note explains how Policies DQ4 and GB 2K of the East Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2 will be applied. It supersedes Guidance Note 11 – Telecommunications Development published in association with the East Dunbartonshire Local Plan.

Format of Guidance

All planning guidance notes are material considerations in the assessment of planning applications and shall be afforded significant weight in the decision making process. Failure to comply with Guidance Notes may be a reason for refusal of planning consent.

Planning Framework

Planning Advice Note (PAN) 62 includes extensive guidance and advice on good practice in location and design. The Council's principles of guidance adapt and build upon this guidance and advice. Although they are not repeated here, these principles are expected to be incorporated in operators rollout plans, site selection enquiries, notifications and applications and will be applied in the Council's assessments. Developers will be required to take particular care in designing proposals which have an impact on historic or natural environment designations identified in the Local Plan.

Policy Guidance

Scale

It is considered that large telecommunication base stations and massed antennas generally have the potential for far greater environmental impact than a greater number of smaller, normally lower wattage, installations spread over a wider area. This is particularly the case in urban areas. Base stations which have the outward appearance of the surrounding street lighting columns (in scale, location, colour and local design) will generally have a more acceptable visual impact than larger structures. It is, however, accepted that a system based on smaller lower wattage base stations may have a more restricted choice of locations.

Where substantial base station structures have been demonstrated to be required, the Council will wish to see evidence that opportunities both to share existing sites and masts have been fully exploited and that the potential for future

sharing arrangements is maximised in the design of the proposed new installation.

Built Form

Free standing installations (towers and poles) generally have a greater environmental impact than those mounted on existing buildings and other structures such as existing masts. In general, therefore, new installations on buildings are preferable to the erection of free standing masts. Where a number of existing antennas or related equipment are already present on a building, the Council may take the view that further proliferation would have a significant adverse visual impact and resist additional proposals.

Location

Where new telecommunication installations offer the only option, their environmental impact can be considerably reduced by selecting an appropriate location. Many types of installation are difficult to fit into urban and particularly residential environments and could be more appropriate to industrial or business areas, commercial or other non-residential buildings (especially in town centres) in an urban environment or larger urban open spaces such as golf courses (which allow room for landscape screening). Although many of the more attractive rural areas, especially the Regional Scenic Areas of Campsie Fells and Kilpatrick Hills, are as unsuited as residential areas to accommodating unsympathetically designed installations, some areas of countryside offer more scope to absorb these developments than urban areas. The visual impact of large free standing installations can, for example, be minimised by locating them in quarries or woodlands (subject to amenity considerations) or associating them with industrial or institutional establishments or substantial farm buildings. Even more than in urban areas, however, care will need to be taken to avoid prominent skyline locations, especially when seen from established view points. Operators should avoid adverse impact on locally important environmental resources defined on the Council's databases including listed buildings, ancient monuments, Local Nature Conservation Sites (including important wildlife corridors), Regional Scenic Areas and on the landscape quality of the greenbelt as described in the Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Landscape Character Assessment.

In summary, therefore, where new telecommunication installations have been demonstrated to be necessary, the Council will encourage these to be located:

1. in urban areas :

- in industrial and business areas;
- on industrial and business land supply (where this does not constrain future development opportunities);
- on large, free standing commercial or non-residential buildings;
- in open spaces (where appropriate screening can be accommodated);

2. in lowland countryside:
 - in quarries;
 - associated with industrial or institutional establishments;
 - associated with substantial farm buildings;
 - in woodlands (subject to amenity considerations);
3. in uplands countryside (e.g. Regional Scenic Areas of Campsie Fells and Kilpatrick Hills):
 - within woodlands, especially avoiding open countryside and skyline locations (subject to amenity considerations);
 - associated with substantial farm buildings.

Layout

Much of the adverse visual impact of telecommunications infrastructure arises as a result of the 'clutter' associated with such development. Associated equipment should also be minimised or contained within existing structures. Where telecommunications development requires additional cabling, information should be supplied at the pre-application stage and shown on the plans for planning applications. Fencing or other security arrangements are often necessary in the interests of community safety or to protect equipment. This will, however, require to be agreed to the Council's satisfaction before development can commence. In appropriate circumstances, the provision for landscaping to the Council's satisfaction should be incorporated in proposals in order to address the impact of fencing and other clutter around the base of the mast. The landscaping arrangements should include a densely planted minimum 2 metre wide strip surrounding the compound.

Detailed Design

The environmental impact of telecommunications developments can be addressed by appropriate orientation, colour and finish (including camouflage). This may be particularly important in cases which could affect Conservation Areas (and other local designations), listed buildings or designed landscapes. Where planting is proposed to conceal elements of the installation, maintenance arrangements require to be agreed to the Council's satisfaction.

In order to reduce visual impact, where possible all cabling should be underground, the equipment should not be illuminated and no logos or advertising lettering should appear on any of the equipment or associated fencing.

The Council will require operators to adhere to best available design practice as set out in PAN 62 and any emerging opportunities to reduce adverse impact.

Community Wellbeing

Emissions of radiofrequency radiation are controlled and regulated under other legislation and it is therefore not necessary for planning authorities to treat

radiofrequency radiation as a material consideration. To demonstrate to planning authorities that the known health effects have been properly addressed, applications for planning permission involving antennas to be employed in an electronic communications network should be accompanied by a declaration that the equipment and installation is designed to be in full compliance with the appropriate ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure to radiofrequency radiation.

Recent experiences have indicated that telecommunication installations which are on residential buildings or property or have significant impact on the visual amenity of residential properties can be a source of community concern. Applicants with proposals in such locations will be encouraged to provide documentation to indicate how community concerns have been identified and addressed. Applicants will be encouraged to engage with either residents or parents groups as appropriate in order to address their expressed concerns in relation to developments which are:

- a on residential property
- b located and designed in such a way that they have a significant visual impact on the amenity of residential properties
- c within 250 metres of schools, nurseries or equipped play areas.

Applicants for planning permission are required to formally notify adjoining property owners and occupiers under Article 9 of the General Development Procedure (Scotland) Order 1992. However, with telecommunication developments this may only involve a very limited number of members of the community. Given the current level of community interest in such development it is important that proposals are widely publicised in order to ensure that the wider community has ample opportunity to express views. Major telecommunication proposals which are perceived to have an adverse effect on the character of an area of established amenity (for example new masts near residential properties or that introduces significant change into homogenous areas are classed as “bad neighbour” developments and will require to be advertised in the local press under Schedule 7 of the General Development Procedure (Scotland) Order 1992. The majority of telecommunications proposals do not fall into this category, but in recognition of the widespread community interest the Council will (in addition to placing a notice in the “weekly list”), for the time being, advertise all telecommunications applications in the press.

Community Gain, Environmental Improvement and Site Restoration

In the interests of local amenity, it is important that provision is made for site restoration should the installation become redundant (in whole or part, including any access track or other aspects required for the construction process).

The Council will place conditions on planning consents for telecommunications developments requiring the removal of equipment (and any associated cabling,

fixing or ancillary items) and the reinstatement of the site (including all evidence of the development, ranging from, for example, fixing holes on buildings to access tracks to base stations in rural locations) within three months of it becoming redundant or obsolete.

Opportunities may arise to merge or replace older base stations with smaller, better designed and located installations. The Council will take into account when assessing the impact of new proposals, the extent to which applicants are prepared to review existing (particularly any less well-designed or located) infrastructure installed under previous arrangements.

Procedures

Planning applications for communications equipment should be accompanied by the following supporting material:

- a description of how the proposed equipment fits into the wider network;
- a description of the siting and design options which satisfy the operational requirements, alternatives that were considered, and the reasons for the chosen solution;
- details of the design, including height, materials and all components of the proposal;
- details of any proposed landscaping and screen planting;
- a description of how the cumulative effects of the proposed and existing equipment in the area were considered;
- a declaration that the equipment and installation is designed to be in full compliance with the appropriate ICNIRP guidelines; and,
- information on visual impact, if relevant.

Operators will be expected to take every available opportunity to engage with the Council and the community (as recommended in PAN62) when preparing their 'roll out plans' and assessing site options prior to submitting a planning application. Unless this has taken place, it may be more difficult to efficiently process applications. The Council will expect to be consulted and will expect its concerns to be accommodated at the 'draft roll out plan' stage and when siting options are being considered.