

Annual Rollout Plans 2005/6



Increasing transparency in network development

Introduction

Under their 'Ten Commitments to best siting practice', the mobile operators have undertaken to provide local planning authorities on an annual basis with plans showing their existing sites and network proposals for the following 12 months. Since 2001 this has provided planning authorities with a "look ahead" at the forthcoming mobile development in their area and the opportunity to discuss the proposals with the operators well ahead of the formal planning application process.

The operators' annual rollout plans have been issued each year during September and October to all local planning authorities and National Park Authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In October 2005, for the first time, the information was provided electronically from one source. MONO Planning Consultants Ltd were commissioned by the MOA to manage the issue of the rollout plans.

In addition to providing this important information in a combined electronic format from one source, the operators continued to offer to meet with local authority planners and councillors to discuss their plans, thus giving local authorities a forward look at proposed mobile base station development in their own area. This is intended to increase transparency in network development.

The operators hoped to increase the take-up of the offer of face-to-face meetings by local authorities by providing the information in a combined electronic format. This initiative provides an improved opportunity for local authorities to have direct input into the network development process.

With over 62.5 million mobile phones in use in the UK there is a continuing demand by the public for increased mobile services including data transfer using 3rd generation technology. All mobile services require a network of base stations to transmit and receive radio signals. Working closely with local authorities will help the operators to achieve the right balance between the need for base stations and environmental responsibility.

Rollout Format

The rollout information was presented to local planning authorities in an excel spreadsheet format with a tab for each operator. The spreadsheet was accompanied by an explanatory covering letter from the MOA.

The letter offered a joint or individual operator meeting with the authorities to discuss rollout plans. Local planning authorities wishing to hold a joint operator meeting were recommended to contact the MOA to coordinate arranging a meeting. Contact details were provided for each operator for those local planning authorities that preferred to meet or speak with operators individually.

Meetings with local planning authorities

To date a total of 24 planning authorities, out of a total of 431 sent rollout plans, took up the opportunity to request a joint operator meeting. ¹ 20 meetings have been held to date and the other

4 are in the process of being arranged. To date this equates to 4.6 % of authorities having taken up the offer of a joint operator meeting.

A small number of authorities noted that they could not meet due to staff shortages or stated that as there was little planned in their area a joint meeting was not considered necessary. A number may have held or requested meetings with individual operators.

Feedback

As this was the first year the rollout plans had been issued jointly via email it is important to obtain an understanding as to whether the needs of local planning authorities were being met. With this in mind, in December 2005, a questionnaire was emailed to gauge the response of the authorities to the method and content of the rollout plan submissions. The questionnaire received an 18% response rate, with 76 responses received.

Based on these responses rollout plans have been well received with 82% of responders stating that the information either met or exceeded their expectations, with six authorities (8%) considering that the information was "*well above expectations*".

The majority of authorities were happy with the information they received (82%).

An overwhelming majority (99%) were pleased with the fact that it was provided electronically and jointly from all operators as it made it easier to share the information both within their authorities and with the public. It also allowed the creation and updating of mast registers and could be added into GIS systems to produce an integrated map of existing and proposed sites within a local planning authority's area.

Comments from planning officers

Comments received from planning officers include:

"Many thanks for sending through the annual roll-out plans to this Council. Obtaining this information from a single source is certainly an improvement."

"Many thanks for co-ordinating this years' roll out exercise. The combined spreadsheet looks really good."

"Thank you for providing the annual rollout plans together in one standard format, this is extremely useful."

"This is a most welcome development and I would be grateful if you would pass on the Council's thanks to the individual operators."

Conclusion

The positive feedback from the local planning authorities is that the circulation of operators' rollout plans jointly and by email should continue in the future. With the considerable effort being made by the operators to provide the data, the hope is that the number of operator/local planning authority meetings will increase significantly when the operators issue the next set of rollout plans in September/ October 2006.

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