

**Powerwatch applauds these Conservative words, but asks for clarifications:
The comments and questions in red, below, have been added by Powerwatch**

Press Release

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Conservatives

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Conservatives will give local people powers to tackle unwanted phone masts

The Conservatives would give local people the final say over the location of mobile phone masts, under plans to tackle cheap and poorly designed masts blighting communities across the country.

Local people should have a 'real influence' over the location. The 'final say' may have to be the result of a compromise following discussion with the operator to find what will work, given the needs of the locality

Representing the biggest changes in planning regulations since the 1984 Telecommunications Act, the Conservatives would ensure all masts require full planning permission, that health concerns are taken into account, and visual intrusion is reduced.

How exactly are the health concerns to be taken into account? What weight will be given? How will concerns be evaluated in terms of 'accepted research'? Who will advise on the latter?

Today's policies come amid warnings that under 3G technology, there could be an estimated 100,000 more masts being sited across the country, in addition to new 'Tetra' and Network Rail masts.

Launching a new Conservative campaign, *You decide where they go*, Caroline Spelman MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Local & Devolved Government Affairs, said:

"The erection of poorly-located masts is causing considerable disquiet in many parts of the country. There is a presumption in favour of development inherent in the current planning system, which overrides local, environmental and safety concerns."

Under the new five point plan:

1. All mobile phone mast developments would require full planning permission, so that local councillors are clearly accountable and answerable for where masts are located. In what way will the councillors be accountable and answerable to whom? If an Application is rejected and goes to Appeal and is overturned (as frequently happens now) then the local councillors are not clearly accountable and answerable. What new rules will the Conservatives put in place to improve the Appeals process?
2. There would be a single process for deciding all masts, including those on Network Rail or church property, Tetra masts, as well as small antennas being covertly installed in street furniture or signs.
3. Councils would be allowed to take health concerns into account such as near homes, hospitals and schools. Current national planning guidance prohibits this. What weight should be given by the councils to the perceived and expressed public health concerns? What new powers of decision-making would taking this into account give them? What about the weight given in any Appeals process?

4. Mast operators would be required to demonstrate that any development does not result in unacceptable damage to visual amenity or harm environmentally sensitive features.
5. Councils would be asked to draw up their own supplementary planning guidance to ensure consistency and clarity for operators and residents, and ensure a plan-led approach to future development. **Councils do not usually have specialists in RF (microwave) design & technology. How will they get the necessary independent advice to ensure both operators' (who also represent local phone network users) & residents' needs are met in the plan? What extra resources would a Conservative Government make available to Local Planning Authorities?**

No mention is made about the pressure the council could exert with respect to enforcing the Operators to roll out the network using the minimum of power necessary for it to operate effectively. They could monitor the radiation levels locally, both in private and public places, possibly using local secondary schools or colleges science departments. This would show national variations & departures from the UK & other international precautionary guidelines, enabling this knowledge to inform future planning.

Mrs Spelman added:

“Conservatives will champion the interests of local residents and address the feelings of powerlessness and frustration experienced living under the threat of badly sited masts. Local councillors, answerable to local residents via the ballot box, should have the final say on where they go.

“During the Birmingham Hodge Hill election, Labour pledged in their leaflets that they would ‘do everything we can to ensure that there are no more phone masts near schools and hospitals’. Yet the Labour Government have failed to support Private Members Bills in Parliament or change planning laws to back up those pledges. Ahead of the general election, we will ensure that Labour will pay for their dishonesty - at the ballot box.”

Phone masts are often installed near secondary schools to cope with the amount of ‘call-traffic’ generated by school pupils, which exceeds the capacity of other base stations nearby. If the masts are erected further away, people living nearby (as schools are usually in residential areas) will be highly irradiated in order for the signal to reach the school where the phones are being used.

How would a Conservative government enforce the precautionary advice given by the Stewart report in 2000 and the Department of Health recommendation that children (up to the age of 16) only use mobile phones in an emergency?

ENDS

Notes to Editors

(1) ‘3G’ masts are those required to support new ‘3rd generation’ mobile phone technology such as video-calling. ‘Tetra’ masts are part of a new police secure communications system, but have attracted particular controversy because of concerns about the impact of their electro-magnetic radiation on human health.

(2) The policy document launched today is available at:
<http://www.conservatives.com/pdf/masts-policydocument.pdf>

(3) A high resolution (300 dpi) poster is available at:
<http://www.conservatives.com/pdf/mastposter-jpeg.jpg> (JPEG)
<http://www.conservatives.com/pdf/mastposter-pdf.pdf> (PDF)