



Policy Summary

RADIO TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENTS

The radio telecommunications industry encompasses mobile, Fixed Radio Access, microwave link, television and radio broadcasting, paging, police, taxi and private telecommunications systems. A modern and efficient telecommunications network has become vital to society, and the Government aims to extend the social and economic benefits of modern telecommunications technology throughout the country.

SNH's objective is for telecommunications developments in Scotland to be sited and designed to minimise adverse impacts on Scotland's natural heritage, and in particular avoid harm to landscapes and habitats of national or international importance.

Background

The legislative framework for telecommunications is provided by the Telecommunications Act 1984. Legislation for and regulation of telecommunications are matters for the UK Parliament, and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) control licences to operators. However, Town and Country Planning is reserved to Scotland and planning control of telecommunications developments is provided by The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, (the GPDO), as amended.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the proliferation of masts gave rise to concerns about their impacts on the environment and fears about implications for human health. This concern led to the establishment of an Inquiry, conducted by the Scottish Parliament's Transport and Environment Committee, into the need for greater controls over telecommunications developments. The Committee reported in April 2000, and the Scottish Executive later accepted their recommendations to amend the GPDO to bring considerably more telecommunications developments within the scope of full planning control. This amendment was accompanied by the publication of NPPG 19 and PAN 62 on Radio Telecommunications. SNH contributed to the production of both these documents.

For the foreseeable future there are likely to be many more proposals for new base stations, expanding both existing 2 and 2.5G networks, and developing networks for 3G. However, it is difficult to anticipate with any degree of accuracy either the extent of new or expanded networks or the scale of potential impacts.

SNH's position

SNH recognises the benefits arising from the telecommunications industry advice and supports guidance contained in NPPG 19 and PAN 62 on Radio Telecommunications that seeks to ensure that impacts upon the natural heritage are minimised. SNH's approach to telecommunications developments builds on these statements and develops them with respect to natural heritage issues.

SNH identifies the nature of impacts upon the natural heritage arising from telecommunications developments as:

- landscape and visual impacts in all types of landscape;
- impacts on people's enjoyment of the natural heritage setting (including visual amenity); and
- ecological impacts, particularly local habitat loss and disturbance caused by construction and maintenance at sensitive sites.

Cumulative landscape and visual impacts can arise from telecommunications developments and SNH will produce guidance on how such effects should be assessed.

Consistent with the overall approach to our involvement in the planning system set out in PGS 02/05, *SNH and the Town and Country Planning System*, we will direct most effort to advising local authorities on policies concerning radio telecommunications developments within development plans and on any associated supplementary planning guidance.

SNH will afford a high priority to casework arising within designated areas listed by NPPG 19 where it has a statutory role.

Outwith designated areas, SNH may be consulted by local authorities or may ask to be consulted. SNH will only engage selectively regarding casework in the wider countryside and will place greatest priority on that which affects settings of regional or local natural heritage importance, areas identified in SPPs or NPPGs, and areas identified by SNH as locally important settings.

In responding to consultations on proposals for base stations arising anywhere in the countryside, SNH will seek to ensure that guidance on best practice contained in NPPG 19 and PAN 62 is applied. Within designated areas, SNH will particularly encourage the use of innovative design solutions for masts and cabins, unusual technology, undergrounding of power lines, use of the BT Trunk network, and low impact approaches to construction and maintenance. SNH will also encourage practices such as:

- the establishment of local forums comprising operators, the local authorities and other interests;
- the preparation of detailed siting and design guidelines for sensitive areas such as NSAs and National Parks with respect to the particular landscape types found in these areas;

- the use of 'Roaming¹' agreements over larger areas, particularly NSAs and National Parks; and
- liaison between adjoining local authorities to ensure that a fully strategic view can be taken of proposals that will affect these areas.

Over and above our involvement in casework, there is an important role for SNH to play in influencing how the current guidance and advice is implemented, and how the policy framework is developed. SNH will therefore seek to:

- develop advice on cumulative impacts, commissioning research as appropriate;
- promote Roaming;
- promote better use of existing infrastructure for the siting of telecommunications equipment;
- promote best practice by contributing to the work of the Scottish Executive on telecommunications;
- share experience with the countryside agencies in England and Wales; and
- set an example with reference to guidance in its own policy when considering proposals for the siting of base stations on SNH owned land and buildings.

References:

Scottish Executive. Development Department (2001). Radio telecommunications. (Planning Advice Note (PAN); 62). Edinburgh : Scottish Executive.

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Rawcliffe, P. Ferguson, R. (1999). SNH's Involvement in the Town and Country Planning System. (Policy Guidance Note (PGN); 99/04). Perth : Scottish Natural Heritage.

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¹ Roaming describes the utilisation of one operator's network by one or several other operators.