



Plans and Research Team
Scottish Borders Council
Council Headquarters
Newtown St Boswells
Scottish Borders
TD6 0SA

27 February 2014

Dear Sir or Madam,

SCOTTISH BORDERS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN – PROPOSED PLAN CONSULTATION

The Mobile Operators Association (MOA) represents the four UK mobile network operators – 3, Telefonica (O2), Everything, Everywhere (formerly Orange & T-Mobile) and Vodafone – on radio frequency, health and safety and associated town planning issues.

The MOA has commissioned Mono Consultants Ltd to monitor all emerging development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance relating to telecommunications development on its behalf.

Please find attached a response to the current consultation documents prepared by Mono Consultants Ltd on behalf of the MOA.

Yours faithfully,



John Cooke
Executive Director

10 St Bride Street
London
EC4A 3DF
United Kingdom





Our Ref: GH/MOA

MONO CONSULTANTS LIMITED
48 ST VINCENT STREET
GLASGOW G2 5TS

Plans and Research Team
Scottish Borders Council
Council Headquarters
Newtown St Boswells
Scottish Borders
TD6 0SA

27 February 2014

Dear Sir or Madam

SCOTTISH BORDERS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN – PROPOSED PLAN CONSULTATION

Thank you for your recent consultation on the above. We have considered the proposal relevant to the Mobile Operators Association and would offer the following comments on their behalf.

It is recognised that telecommunications play a vital role in both the economic and social fabric of communities. National policy guidance acknowledges this through paragraphs 248 - 254 of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) which provides clear guidance as to the main issues surrounding telecommunications development, including siting and design.

Paragraph 248 of SPP states that:

"Planning authorities should support the expansion of the electronic communications network, including telecommunications, broadband and digital infrastructure, through the development plan and development management decisions, taking into account the economic and social implications of not having full coverage or capacity in an area."

We would take this opportunity to comment that we consider it important that there is a telecommunications policy within the emerging Local Development Plan. While we support the inclusion of Policies ED6: Digital Connectivity and IS15: Radio Telecommunications within the Proposed Local Development Plan, we have some concerns about the proposed wording as follows:

Policy ED6: Digital Connectivity

While it is confirmed within SPP that the mobile operators should take great care to minimise detrimental impact on the natural and built environment, the provision of advanced, high quality electronic communications infrastructure may, in some instances, result in some minor impacts. In these instances it is important that the visual impact of an installation is balanced against the Government's objective to;

"ensure that everyone can enjoy the same degree of access to high quality electronic communication opportunities." (paragraph 248 of SPP)

As stated in paragraph 250 of SPP;

"Equipment should be designed and positioned as sensitively as possible, though technical requirements and constraints may limit the possibilities."

In order to allow for the possibility of specific technical requirements and constraints, we would suggest that the wording of Policy ED6: Digital Connectivity is amended as follows:

*"The Council will support proposals which lead to the expansion and improvement of the electronic communications network in the Borders, provided it can be achieved without **any unacceptable detrimental impact** on the natural and built environment. This includes delivery of core infrastructure for telecommunications, broadband and other future digital infrastructure."*

Policy IS15: Radio Telecommunications

Criterion (a) of Policy IS15

Criterion (a) of Policy IS15 states:

"Within the Development Boundaries of Settlements, the siting of telecommunications equipment, particularly larger ground based masts, will be preferred in industrial or commercial areas or suitable areas of vacant or derelict land in preference to predominantly residential areas or in close proximity to schools. Siting in Conservation Areas or in the vicinity of Listed Buildings or their settings will not normally be permitted."

The above criterion is not considered to be wholly supportive of telecommunications development and is thereby in conflict with the support for telecommunications within SPP. The 3G and 4G networks, which are currently being rolled out by the mobile operators in the UK, have different technical characteristics to the established 2G networks and provide much smaller coverage areas. In order to provide high quality 3G and 4G mobile coverage, telecommunications base stations need to be located within the areas where the coverage is required. This includes residential areas; Conservation Areas and areas in proximity to schools and Listed Buildings. The restriction of telecommunications equipment in the areas detailed in criterion (a) of Policy IS15 could severely inhibit the Government's objective to ensure that everyone can enjoy the same degree of access to high quality electronic communication opportunities. There is no national policy or guidance which supports the restriction of telecommunications equipment within certain areas and it is therefore suggested the Criterion (a) is deleted from Policy IS15.

Criterion (b) of Policy IS15

Criterion (b) of Policy IS15 is also fairly restrictive on the future rollout of telecommunications development in areas which are considered to be sensitive landscapes and it does not take account of the technical and operational restrictions of the equipment used. As detailed in paragraph 250 of SPP;

"Equipment should be designed and positioned as sensitively as possible, though technical requirements and constraints may limit the possibilities."

In order to provide greater flexibility to telecommunications rollout within the countryside, we would suggest that the wording of Criterion (b) is amended as follows:

*"Within countryside, **and where operationally and technically possible, the** siting of telecommunications equipment should aim to avoid sensitive landscapes particularly within National Scenic Areas, sensitive wildlife habitats and visually prominent locations on hilltops or coastline."*

Summary

In summary, while we support the inclusion of Policies ED6 and IS15 within the emerging Local Development Plan, we consider that the sections detailed above are overly restrictive to telecommunications developments and contrary to the provisions of SPP. We therefore recommend that the wording is amended as suggested above. Alternatively we would suggest the inclusion of a concise and flexible telecommunications policy which reads:

"Proposals for telecommunications development will be permitted provided that the following criteria are met: -

- (i) the siting and appearance of the proposed apparatus and associated structures should seek to minimise impact on the visual amenity, character or appearance of the surrounding area;**

- (ii) *if on a building, apparatus and associated structures should be sited and designed in order to seek to minimise impact to the external appearance of the host building;*
- (iii) *if proposing a new mast, it should be demonstrated that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting apparatus on existing buildings, masts or other structures. Such evidence should accompany any application made to the (local) planning authority.*
- (iv) *If proposing development in a sensitive area, the development should not have an unacceptable effect on areas of ecological interest, areas of landscape importance, archaeological sites, conservation areas or buildings of architectural or historic interest.*

When considering applications for telecommunications development, the (local) planning authority will have regard to the operational requirements of telecommunications networks and the technical limitations of the technology."

We trust you find the above comments of assistance. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries relating to the above matters.

Yours faithfully



Ginny Hall MRTPI
SENIOR PLANNER

