

CABINET – 4 AUGUST 2004 PORTFOLIO : FINANCE & SUPPORT







EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – TETRA COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Summary of Purpose and Recommendations:

To consider a policy in respect of future proposals so site TETRA communication systems on Council owned land.

Cost to Council: Rental income could be lost.

Contribution to Corporate Plan (Minor/Moderate/Major/Neutral):

	+		-		+		-
	✓			Priorities			
		✓		Clean Streets and Public Space		✓	
		✓		Crime and Disorder			✓
	✓			Housing		✓	
		✓		Managing our Finances			✓

Comments on Impacts on Corporate Objectives and Priorities:

No significant impacts



Organisation of excellence



Working with public and partners



Economic well being



Social well being



Environmental well being

TETRA COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At the Council meeting on 26 April 2004, Cllr Mrs Robinson moved the following motion :

'In view of the strong concerns expressed by residents about the risk to human health of the TETRA communications systems, along with the controversy surrounding the scientific evidence on the safety of this system, this Council resolves to refuse requests for permission for the erection of Tetra masts and associated equipment on any land or buildings owned or controlled by the New Forest District Council'.

- 1.2 Cllr Mrs Robinson said that TETRA – stood for 'Terrestrial Trunked Radio'. It was the new system which the Government wanted to introduce as a communication system for the emergency services – an essential service, but no consultation had been undertaken before the contract was awarded to get the system up and running.
- 1.3 TETRA was apparently different to the ordinary mobile phone system as it operated on a different frequency. This gave rise to a great deal of public concern about risk to human health. Scientific studies had been carried out but many members of the public were not satisfied because they did not explain some of the phenomena reported.
- 1.4 Public opposition along the south coast had been particularly strong in West Sussex, East Hampshire and in the New Forest, particularly in Hythe. Mostly the arguments had been channelled through the planning system but Cllr Mrs Robinson said that there needed to be a wider debate and which addressed people's anxieties.
- 1.5 In the meantime Cllr Mrs Robinson urged the Council to adopt a precautionary approach as stewards of public land and to refuse any requests received from the contractor looking for places to site TETRA equipment, at least until the Council was satisfied public confidence was established.
- 1.6 In accordance with Standing Order 41.2 the Chairman considered that this matter was not urgent. It was a matter that required detailed investigation and therefore would be referred for consideration to the Corporate and Finance Review Panel who would then make a recommendation to the Cabinet.
- 1.7 An Officer's report was submitted to the Corporate and Finance Review Panel on 24th June 2004. Following consideration of this report, including detailed consideration of scientific evidence produced for Hampshire County Council, the Panel agreed a recommendation to Cabinet. This report summarises the relevant considerations and asks the Cabinet to agree the Panel's recommendations.

2. THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

- 2.1 There is a considerable body of material which has been published on the potential health effects of telecommunication developments and more specifically TETRA masts. Particularly useful is a report produced in May 2004 for consideration by the Environment Policy Review Committee of Hampshire County Council. The Committee received evidence from the Police, contractors, scientists and special interest groups. This report was circulated to the Corporate and Finance Review Panel and can be viewed on Hampshire County Council's website (www.hants.gov.uk).
- 2.2 The main conclusions are :-
- (a) The only established risk to health resulting from exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields arises from heating. Maximum levels of exposure are given in terms of the power absorbed in the body, or Specific Absorption Rate (SAR). So long as these levels are not exceeded there is no heating risk.
 - (b) Research to investigate cancer, tumour and brain pattern effects has identified no other risks to health.
 - (c) Current Government advice is that health issues should not be considered as part of the planning process so long as masts satisfy ICNIRP standards.
 - (d) Hampshire Police Authority's Airwave implementation plan is due for completion this year.
 - (e) Friends of the Earth do not work specifically on this issue but recommend a precautionary approach. A pressure group opposing the insensitive development of telecommunication masts is 'Mast Action UK'. They have a website at <http://mastaction.co.uk>.
 - (f) An independent expert indicated that the research findings so far do not indicate that TETRA poses a serious health hazard.
 - (g) An industry representative indicated that around 120 masts were needed in Hampshire to service a TETRA system and that most of these were already in place.

3. THE PLANNING ISSUES

- 3.1 The situation under the Town and Country Planning legislation is also with in the Hampshire County Council report. The main point is that Government advice (in PPG8) is that local planning authorities should not seek to impose their own judgements on safety and health matters or introduce their own precautionary policies by way of, for example, a ban or moratorium on the granting of planning permissions.
- 3.2 Ignoring this advice is likely to receive little support from planning Inspectors determining planning appeals. The awarding of costs for unreasonable behaviour is not uncommon in telecommunication cases where health issues are introduced by local authorities.

4. THE COUNCIL AS LANDOWNER

- 4.1 At present there are no TETRA masts on Council land, however the authority does share a Forestry Commission site at Fritham with Hampshire Police Authority where a TETRA system was installed last year.
- 4.2 Future technological advances may also provide the opportunity for this authority to utilise this type of apparatus for improving the authority's own communications systems, both voice and data.
- 4.3 At present there are no requests for new installations outstanding.
- 4.4 With the balance of evidence available at present it would be difficult to justify any policy that treated TETRA differently from other forms of communication equipment.
- 4.5 The greater proportion of the Council's land holdings are in areas close to residential or commercial premises. Any policy that sought to control development in these areas would in effect rule out much of the Council's property.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The location of Tetra masts will always be a sensitive issue, and can be highly controversial. Restricting future developments on Council owned land is likely to have widespread public support, even if the decision is not based on scientific evidence.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Although there are no direct crime and disorder implications to this report, the location of aerials and masts can be a contentious issue. Adopting a precautionary policy may restrict future criticism of this authority. On the other hand the new TETRA system is intended at present to serve the police and other emergency services. If the network is not complete this could have negative crime and disorder implications.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 If a more precautionary approach is to be adopted there may be some financial loss from rental derived from new installations.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Although not based on the balance of scientific opinion, public concern is growing over the health risks arising from the location of telecommunications apparatus, especially Tetra apparatus.
- 8.2 In the light of the fairly extensive consideration of the scientific evidence by Hampshire County Council recently, officers feel that little would be achieved by New Forest District Council carrying out a similar exercise.

- 8.3 This Council has relatively few sites where new telecommunication facilities are likely to be proposed. As opposed to imposing a moratorium on any new facilities on these sites it is recommended that any new proposals be considered on a case-by-case basis. This could start from a 'precautionary basis' whereby the presumption is against any Tetra telecommunication development on Council land where the public are likely to perceive a threat to their health or well being.

9. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 9.1 Although current advice is that Tetra masts do no harm to individuals, many remain unconvinced. Given this is the case, when called upon to give permission for a mast to be installed, every effort should be made to seek sites where they do not cause concern to local residents.

10. RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET FROM CORPORATE AND FINANCE REVIEW PANEL

- 10.1 That in all cases where Tetra development is proposed on Council owned land they be appraised on a precautionary basis with the presumption being that they are not approved if the public are likely to perceive a threat to their health or well-being.

For Further Information Please Contact :

Andy Groom, Valuer,
Tel. (023) 80285634
E-mail andy.groom@nfdc.gov.uk
or Chris Elliott, Head of Development Control
Tel. (023) 8028 5310
E-mail chris.elliott@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers

Published papers only