

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

TO: PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE	Subject: POLICY ON APPARATUS INVOLVING ELECTRO-MAGNETIC FIELDS
From: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT	
Date: 23rd June 1999	Ref: S/PL/B/9/83/DRM/JM

Purpose of Report

1. To propose an interim policy in respect of the treatment of telecommunications equipment giving rise to Electro-Magnetic Fields (EMFs).

Sustainability Implications

2. In developing an interim policy it is important that the sustainability indicators in respect of social needs, in particular the possible health effects of exposure to EMFs are fully explored.

Background

3. In December 1998 the Scottish Office issued a draft consultation document on Land Use Planning and Electro Magnetic Fields. This draft document gave guidance to planning authorities in drawing up development plan policies, determining planning applications for development giving rise to EMFs and development proposed in the vicinity of EMFs. A response to this consultation document was considered and agreed by the Planning and Development Committee at its meeting of 24 February 1999. This response acknowledged that there was some conflict within the document's statement that "there is no convincing evidence of a causal link between EMFs and cancer" and that "any public perception of danger is a valid planning consideration". The response suggested that as further research still had to be undertaken on the alleged health links it may be prudent at present to adopt a more precautionary approach to the issue at this stage.
4. Since that consultation document the Council has been faced with a series of developments on this subject:
  - a) a number of planning applications have been submitted for telecommunications equipment throughout the Council area, usually on private property/land. It should be noted however that in many instances the erection of this equipment is permitted development and therefore outwith planning control.
  - b) the Council have a number of leases with mobile phone operators which were entered into prior to April 1996 and new leases are still being sought often in respect of high rise housing blocks or on Education properties. A report on some aspects of this issue by the Director of Housing and Property Services was recently continued by the Housing Committee.
  - c) the public perception and awareness of the issues surrounding EMFs and the perceived health risks has risen considerably due to press coverage and campaigning organisations such as Friends of the Earth. Within North Lanarkshire itself some local community groups have also launched campaigns to ensure that there are no health risks to their local communities and are seeking to have perceived fears taken into account as a relevant planning consideration.

- d) a number of Councils have adopted precautionary policies which include the prevention of new leases being granted on certain local authority buildings and/or requiring periodic emission tests by independent bodies to ensure safe levels are maintained.
  - e) a continuing uncertainty exists in respect of the alleged health risks and to date the Government has not yet finalised its formal guidance to Planning Authorities. In addition the World Health Organisation is still finalising its own guidance on this subject and a report by the National Radiological Protection Board acknowledges that the interpretation of various experimental findings is not easy.
5. In view of these developments and the fact that this issue potentially affects most services within the Council, whether as an owner of land or in a regulatory capacity, it is suggested that a small group of officials be given the remit to examine this issue in more detail and to present a further comprehensive report to the Council on all aspects of this topic, including whether and how the Council may seek further guidance. In the intervening period it is suggested that all planning applications covering this type of development be presented to the Planning and Environment Committee for a decision so that their individual circumstances can be debated by Members and that a temporary moratorium be placed on the issuing or renewing of leases in respect of the Council's own property pending the preparation of a more comprehensive report on all relevant issues.

#### Recommendations

6. It is recommended that:
- 1) All planning applications involving the erection/installation of telecommunications equipment be referred to the Planning and Environment Committee for determination;
  - 2) A temporary moratorium be placed on the granting or renewing of leases in respect of telecommunications equipment on Council owned buildings and land;
  - 3) A further report be prepared for the relevant Committees in respect of the health and technical implications associated with the development of apparatus involving electro magnetic fields; and
  - 4) Recommendations 2 and 3 above be referred to full Council for its consideration.

*I G Lawson*

**I G Lawson  
ACTING DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT**

**Date:- 16th June 1999**

For further information please contact Mr Millar on 01698 302115.

#### Background Information

1. Scottish Office Consultation Exercise: Land Use Planning and Electro Magnetic Fields.
2. Report to Planning and Development Committee of 24 February 1999 in respect of Scottish Office Consultation Exercise.
3. N.R.P.B. "Electromagnetic Fields and The Risk of Cancer".
4. Report to Housing and Property Services Committee of 8 June 1999 in respect of Telecommunication Equipment within Council Tower Blocks.