

Department for Communities and Local Government
Director, Planning
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Director General, Culture, Creativity and Economy
Department of Trade and Industry
Director, Business Relations

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Generic letter to all Chief Planning Officers in England

Department for
**Communities and
Local Government**



Dear Chief Planning Officer

31 July 2006

DIGITAL SWITCHOVER – INFORMATION FOR PLANNING SERVICES

The purpose of this letter is to draw your attention to the switchover from analogue to digital television, which will be taking place from 2008 to 2012, and to explain how it will affect your work.

The attached briefing note provides detailed information, and focuses particularly on considering any planning applications for changes to transmitter masts required to enable switchover. We hope this information is of help to you.

A copy of this letter is being sent to the Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government, and the Northern Ireland Office.

Yours faithfully

Colin Byrne
Director, DCLG

Andrew Ramsay
Director General, DCMS

David Hendon
Director, DTI

DIGITAL SWITCHOVER – INFORMATION FOR PLANNING SERVICES

Digital switchover is a major transformation project that will see the UK switchover to fully digital TV region by region between 2008 and 2012. The policy framework for switchover, including the overall timetable, has been set by the Government; implementation is being led by Digital UK, the independent not-for profit organisation set up specifically to coordinate switchover. As part of switchover, over the next few years the two transmission companies (Arqiva and National Grid Wireless) will need to carry out work on TV transmitters.

This briefing note explains more about digital switchover and its potential implications for the planning services. Planning officers should continue to take into account existing guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance 8 – Telecommunications (available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143964>), when considering related planning applications.

What is Digital Switchover?

The current analogue TV broadcasting network has developed since the 1950s and now extends to 1,154 different sites across the UK. Since 1998, a partial digital network has been developed that broadcasts alongside the national analogue network at 80 of the 1,154 sites. The Government wants everyone who currently receives analogue television services to be able to get digital services. But owing to limited spectrum this is not possible until the analogue transmissions are switched off. In September 2005, the Government confirmed that the analogue transmissions would stop switchover to digital on a region by region basis between 2008 and 2012. The full programme is set out below, with regions affecting England highlighted.

Starting in 2008	Border
Starting in 2009	West Country, Wales, Granada
Starting in 2010	West, Grampian, Scottish
Starting in 2011	Central, Yorkshire, Anglia
Starting in 2012	Meridian, London, Tyne Tees, Ulster

What are the Public Benefits?

Switchover makes it fairer. Today over 72% of UK homes have digital TV. However, one in four cannot get it via their aerial, and many still cannot receive Five. Only by switching off the existing analogue broadcasting system is it possible to boost the digital TV signal and provide people with a greater choice of affordable digital options. By adapting the existing transmitter sites the vast majority of householders should not have to reorientate their aerials towards new sites.

Digital TV is also more efficient. It frees up radio spectrum that could be used for innovative services such as mobile TV or high definition TV.

A world leader in broadcasting. Moving to the best available technology will ensure the UK continues as a world leader in broadcasting.

How the network is managed

The former BBC and Independent Broadcasting Authority transmission networks were originally established in the 1950s and are now owned respectively by National Grid Wireless (NGW) and Arqiva. Both companies are electronic communications code operators and provide network transmission services to the public service broadcasters, who produce the content, under the communications regulatory framework that requires access and co-operation in this regard.

What works need to be completed

The existing broadcast network is diverse, ranging from main transmitter masts up to 385 metres in height to relay installations using small poles similar in size and appearance to telegraph poles, with many lattice masts typically 45 metres in height in between. Familiar examples include the 200 metre high transmission mast at Crystal Palace and the 385 metre high mast at Belmont, Lincolnshire.

The physical works associated with switchover will also be diverse – from major alterations and even replacement of a small proportion of the large broadcast masts, to some works which may be considered *de minimis* or be permitted development under Part 24 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, as amended (the GPDO).

The works are being funded by the public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, S4C, Teletext) and carried out on their behalf by NGW and Arqiva.

What this can involve

The replacement or extension of any large mast will be a complex engineering project that could take around two years to complete. It is essential for the network operators to maintain continuous coverage to allow viewing for the duration of any works carried out at a site. In these cases a temporary mast close to the existing mast will be required. Such accommodation works may in many cases fall under Part 4 of the GPDO but, wherever possible, existing infrastructure and equipment buildings will be utilised.

In most cases, including the existing medium and small scale installations, switchover will be achieved through the installation of additional or replacement antennas and new radio equipment typically housed in the existing site accommodation.

In a few areas, some new installations will be required to provide limited coverage to complete localised gaps in the network. These will be location specific and have to fit within the wider existing network in terms of siting and channel usage.

The Planning Process

NGW and Arqiva will be responsible for transforming their network installations and will follow the normal planning processes that apply. They are encouraged to make early contact with local planning authorities to forewarn them of the broad implications for their areas and where practicable to do so on a joint basis. Thereafter local planning authorities can expect to be approached on a site by site basis, commensurate with the extent of works involved.

PPG8 applies to all forms of electronic communications, including broadcasting, but when drafted did not contemplate the switchover project. However, much of the guidance is relevant and applicable, in particular:

- The main policy to facilitate the growth of new systems whilst keeping the environmental impact to a minimum applies (para 1). In view of the national significance of this project and the tight timescales, local planning authorities are encouraged to treat any applications as a matter of priority and to use delegated powers where possible.
- Material considerations include the significance of the development as part of a national network to provide a continuation of terrestrial television services (para 5)
- Local planning authorities may reasonably expect evidence that the use of existing masts, buildings or other structures has been explored, where any new masts are proposed (para 21). It would not normally be appropriate to seek such evidence when an existing site is being modified.
- With the closure of the analogue network the reuse of existing sites is very desirable and is encouraged to minimise the need for new sites (para 23 as applicable). This has the added and important effect of minimising cost and disruption to the viewing public who might otherwise have to reorientate their aerials to point to a new transmitter.
- The analogue television broadcast network is already compliant with ICNIRP (International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection) guidelines. Digital transmissions will generally be at a lower level and very few sites will experience an increase in radio frequency emissions as a result of digital switchover, but those that do should still be well within the ICNIRP guidelines. However, applications should still be accompanied by a certificate of ICNIRP compliance (para 30 as applicable)
- When considering whether works are *de minimis*, the test is whether or not they may have a material effect on the external appearance of the structure or building as a whole (para 43 of Supporting Guidance).

As the broadcasters are implementing a Government requirement, no weight should be attached to any objections on the basis that analogue transmissions should be maintained.

Likewise, as government policy, in line with European regulatory requirements, is to encourage competition between services, little weight should be attached to any objections on the basis that television services are available through other mediums such as cable, satellite or broadband services.

Planning authorities are further reminded of the national importance of broadcasting, which is underlined by this transformation project of major public interest. They are further reminded that the construction of new buildings or other structures, such as wind turbines, can interfere with broadcast services, and the possibility of such interference can be a material planning consideration (para 33 and Annex 2 of PPG 8). Local planning authorities are therefore encouraged to make sure that developers of high buildings or other structures consult with NGW and Arqiva, prior to submitting their applications to prevent the loss of vital broadcast services.

Useful Links

Further information on digital switchover can be found at:

www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk

www.digitaluk.co.uk