

Questions from Caroline Brown

To Councillor Toby Sturgis – Cabinet member for Strategic Planning, Development Management, Strategic Housing, Operational Property and Waste

Question

The first question relates to The Democratic Process – This question is in regard to planning permission for mobile microwave masts. Why is it that something that is so important to residents cannot be called in to Planning Committee? Request for mast installations are submitted in an 'Application for prior notification of proposed development by telecommunications code system operators.' Why is this handled by permitted development rather than a full planning application?

My next question is about the role of Wiltshire Council as the Planning authority. It seems that Wiltshire Council has little discretion to decide when it comes to mobile microwave masts. If Central Government appear to require a decision in favour of allowing, can these applications actually be refused and on what grounds?

Answer

The Government is committed to supporting the digital economy and the increasing demand for mobile services. It is working to create an environment where the consumer can expect mobile connectivity wherever they are in the UK that is reliable, resilient, secure, affordable and fast. To meet forecast demand from consumers, the government recognises that ongoing investment from mobile network operators to continually improve and grow the digital network is required. To facilitate this, it has granted a national planning permission, called a permitted development right, which operates outside of areas of outstanding natural beauty, conservation areas and world heritage sites. Where this national planning permission exists, network operators only require prior approval from the local planning authority for the siting and appearance of the development and the authority has only a limited time in which to respond that cannot be extended. The limited time that the authority has to respond and the fact that the Government has already granted permission in principle are the reasons why prior approval applications cannot be called to committee. Siting and external appearance are the only matters that the Council can take into account in determination of a prior approval application for telecommunications development.