CHAPTER 9
Telecommunications Strategy

9 TELECOMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

9.1 Background

Fast population growth and rising economic activity in the county will increase demand for mobile services and telecommunication infrastructure. Broadband technology and services will also increase demand for mobile services. It is envisaged that there will be a need to build some new infrastructure to provide increased capacity, raise quality of coverage and meet potential demand for broadband services.

9.2 Goal

To retain Kildare's position, as a leader in the field of information and communication technology and to support and facilitate the development of telecommunications infrastructure to accommodate the future needs of the county.

9.3 Objectives

(1) To support national policy for the provision of new and innovative telecommunications infrastructure and recognise that the development of such infrastructure is a key component of future industrial and employment creation.

(2) To ensure that the location of telecommunication structures should minimise and/or mitigate any adverse impacts on communities and the built or natural environment.

(3) To support the development of wide access to broadband telecommunications throughout the county.

9.4 General Principles:

9.4.1 Design and Siting of Telecommunications Infrastructure

The Council will seek to ensure that telecommunications infrastructure is sited, so as not to cause a negative impact on the special character and appearance of designated conservation areas, Protected Structures or sites of archaeological importance.

While each application will be assessed on its merits in terms of its visual impacts, only as a last resort will free-standing masts be permitted within or in the immediate surrounds of smaller towns or villages, or in a residential area or beside a school. If such a location should become necessary, sites already developed for utilities should be considered and masts and antennae should be designed and adapted for the specific locations. The support structure should be kept to the minimum height consistent with effective operation. In residential areas or beside schools, the support structure should be monopole or poles rather than a latticed tripod or square structure.

In the vicinity of larger towns, operators should be encouraged to locate in industrial estates or in industrial zoned land. The possibilities offered by some commercial or retail areas should be explored whether as rooftop locations or by way of locating "disguised" masts. The use of tall buildings or other existing structures is always preferable to the construction of an independent antennae support structure.

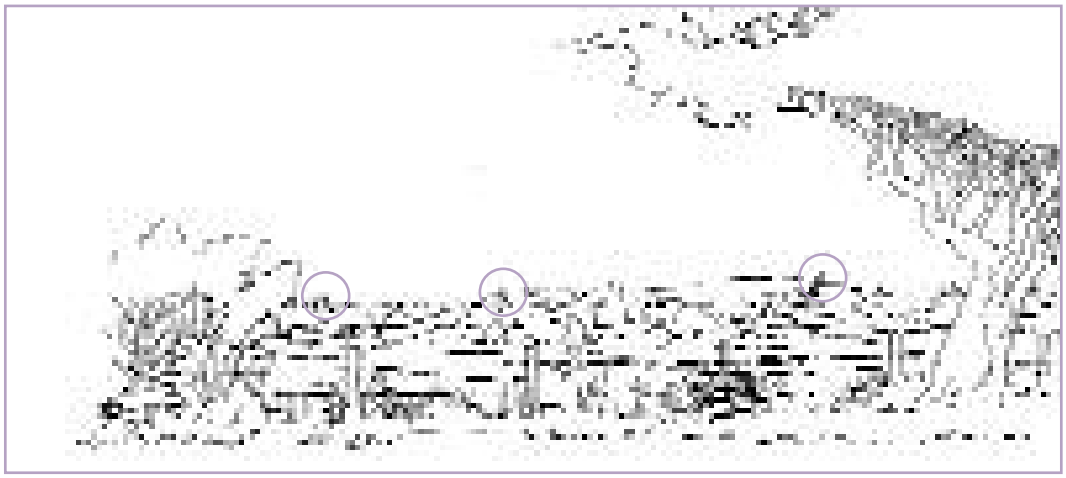
In rural areas the visual absorption opportunities provided by existing topography and vegetation should be taken account of. The possibility of placing towers and masts in forestry plantations should be considered, provided of course that the antennae are clear of obstructions. Where masts are located outside of forested areas, applicants will be required to indicate the technical reasons why forest areas are unsuitable. The design and visual appearance of masts, antennae and satellite dishes and their associated equipment, shall be as unobtrusive as possible.

Sensitive design, painting of masts and screening will be expected to minimise visual impact. Green or black is a preferred colour at ground level.

Fig. 9.1 Telecommunication masts on ridgelines

Due to the prominent location and visibility of skylines from lower elevations, masts and antennae located on ridgelines are likely to affect the visual integrity of wider areas of the County landscapes. The zone of visual influence in this case will be significantly larger than when located on hill slopes and in close proximity to well established forests.

Fig. 9.2 Telecommunication masts on secondary ridgelines and near forestry



When located on hill slopes or secondary ridgelines, masts/antennae will present a visual impact on the local landscape. The visibility will be partially screened by occurring topography and vegetation. Consequently, the zone of visual influence is reduced and the impacts on the overall landscape minimised.

Table 18.6 in Volume 2 illustrates the likely perceptions of landscape impacts of telecommunication structures in different landscape character areas.

9.4.2 Safety Aspects

A statement of compliance with the International Radiation Protection Association Guidelines or the equivalent European Pre-standard which has been conditioned by the licensing arrangements with the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications shall be supplied at application stage. Antennae compounds should be securely fenced and anti-climbing devices should be installed.

9.4.3 Ancillary Developments

Access roads shall be permitted only where essential. Where provided, they should not adversely impact on the landscape where they are located and should follow the natural contours of the site. In the case of obsolescence, access roads must be reinstated to their original condition or landscaped in order to minimise their visual intrusion.

Grid connections shall, where possible, be confined to underground.

9.4.4 Planning Permission

Telecommunications technology and design of radio equipment and antennae is rapidly changing and there are current indications of possible changes in the design of support structures. Within the life of a planning permission, opportunities to modify and improve existing structures shall be taken into consideration. In the event of obsolescence, the antennae and their support structure or be demolished, removed and the site re-instated at the operator's expense. A bond will be required to guarantee this.

Pre-application discussion by the developer with local groups and individuals is advised and evidence of consideration of alternative sites must accompany planning applications.

9.5 Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Council:

TE 1 To co-operate with telecommunication service providers in the development of this service, having regard to proper planning and sustainable development.

TE 2 To provide orderly development of telecommunications infrastructure throughout the county in accordance with the requirements of the "Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures – Guidelines for Planning Authorities" July 1996, whilst having regard to the policies for the Landscape Areas of County Kildare.

TE 3 To minimise the number of masts and their visual impact on the environment, by continuing to facilitate appropriate development in a clustered manner, where feasible respecting the scale, character and sensitivities of the local landscape, whilst recognising the need for economic activity within the county.

TE 4 To locate telecommunications infrastructural services underground, where possible, and that existing overhead cables and associated equipment should progressively be located underground.

TE 5 To encourage applicants to share installations and to satisfy the authority that they have made a reasonable effort to share installations. Where it is not possible to share a support structure, applicants should be encouraged to share a site or to locate adjacently so that masts and antennae may be clustered.

TE 6 To normally grant planning permissions for telecommunication antennae and support structures for five years, in accordance with the DoEHLG Guidelines.

TE 7 On cessation, of use to remove obsolete structures and reinstate the site at the operator's expense, within a period of time to be agreed with the Council.

TE 8 To co-operate and co-ordinate with relevant bodies regarding the laying of key infrastructural services within towns and villages in order to minimise potential impact and maximise resources.

TE 9 To assess each application on its own merits, according to the type of development proposed, the particular landscape characterisation and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.