

From the Lookout Post - April 2007

Telecoms Masts – Raise your objections

The proliferation of telecoms masts in Caversham causes concern in several ways. The structures themselves are unsightly, the street furniture encroaches on the limited pavements and is a canvas for graffiti: also many people hold the view that the facilities pose a danger to human health. However, 65 million mobile 'phones in this country provide a lucrative market for the communication providers, and the cards are stacked in their favour.

Masts up to 15m in height are governed by the general development order regulations, not subject to the full planning process, only a cursory consultation. Hence both the local authority and objectors have very limited influence in the siting of telecoms facilities. However, the biggest grievance is that mobile phone operators, and indeed the utility and communication industry in general, are entitled by virtue of rights originally given to nationalised companies, such as the Post Office, to use community land to deliver profits for their shareholders. By comparison, an annual rental of a telecoms mast site from a private landowner would raise a charge of between £2,000 and £10,000. Why shouldn't councils be entitled to similar payments?

Technology has progressed to permit more than one mobile 'phone provider to use a mast. Central government has recognised this development and is urging telecom companies to co-operate in this regard. However, the ease and cost to the telecoms companies building their own sites, is cheaper than them engaging in plans with their competitors in the location of facilities and in sharing them.

Another criticism of utility companies is their failure to make good the excavations they have made. There are many examples of this in Caversham; one of the most noticeable is the several inch deep trench across St Peter's Hill, caused by the TAFisher development. Local authorities should have more powers to force utility company contractors to compact the trenches, and leave an even and finished surface.

Action open to readers is to object to planning applications for new masts, as over 100 have done in relation to the proposed one at the corner of Ilkley Rd and Woodcote Rd. MPs can also be made aware of residents dissatisfaction with utility companies free use of prime community land.

Planning Enforcement

If you are unfortunate enough to find that construction is not following the plans permitted or contractors are working at weekends outside the hours permitted, you may have need of the Planning Enforcement Team. The majority of their work starts with a complaint from a member of the public and so in a sense we all form part of that team.

A new Draft Planning Enforcement Policy has been issued and comments are invited. You will find it on the Council website under 'Consultations'. It sets out the information which it is useful to record and also the levels of priority which members of the team will follow. It is reassuring to know that the highest priority is given to threatened loss of protected trees, to listed buildings and those in a conservation area. It is interesting to know the range of powers available to the Enforcement Service which are too many and too complex to cover in this column. Should you need to contact the Enforcement Team, contact details are as follows: Monday to Friday, 8.00 am to 600 pm, phone the call centre 0800 626 540 and ask for the Planning Enforcement Officer. In an out of hours emergency, call the security lodge on 0118 9390900.

The policy sets out the service standards for response by the Enforcement Officer but also accepts that some breaches of a temporary or irregular nature may require immediate action. If you are faced with unauthorised Sunday working and this response is not forthcoming, you may need to seek support from your Ward Councillor.

Neighbourhood Policing

As noted in the February Lookout Post column, Neighbourhood Policing is being rolled out in Caversham this spring. The scheme commences with Lower Caversham starting in March and the rest of Caversham in April. We welcome the four Police Community Support Officers who will be dedicated to Caversham and Kings Meadow. However, we wish to pay tribute to the contribution of two police officers who have been moved from Caversham, WPC Sally Jenkins and PC John Finnerty.

PC Finnerty, in his longer posting to Caversham, played a valuable role in community matters, bringing the appropriate response to the varied situations he had to deal with.

Neighbourhood Policing is based on greater involvement of residents and business representatives, via committees that will identify objectives and guide police focus. The CADRA AGM on the 17 April 2007 at 7.30 pm will be followed by a comprehensive introduction by several police and neighbourhood watch representatives into these plans. Do come to hear first hand about the Neighbourhood Policing plans.

Memorial to Molly Casey

You may have read in previous editions that Reading Civic Society and the Caversham and District Residents' Association are working to identify an enduring and visible way of recognising the contribution Molly made to Caversham and Reading. The proposal is to replace the 17thC wind vane on top of the gazebo in Caversham Court in conjunction with the Caversham Court Gazebo Trust, without whom the gazebo may by now have slid into the Thames.

Our aim is to have the replica completed by early June to enable a celebration and a dedication of the vane in Caversham Court Gardens at 6.30pm, Thursday 21 June 2007. The vane will then be held safely until the restoration of the gardens and the gazebo is complete. The cost is estimated to be about £1,000 as we will have to meet English Heritage standards for its manufacture. However RBC will meet the cost of design and erection as part of the overall Caversham Court project.

We would be delighted if you would like to contribute to this scheme. A flyer giving details of how to contribute is available in Wordplay in Prospect Street, who have also kindly agreed to accept cheques for us. You can also request a copy from the CADRA secretary at 159 Kidmore Road, RG4 7NJ or print one from the CADRA website, www.cadra.org.uk. You will receive a formal acknowledgement and in due course a formal invitation to the dedication. Donations are to the Caversham Court Gazebo Trust (Charity Ref 263959) which enables gift aid to be claimed.

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