

PLANNING COMMITTEE – 30TH NOVEMBER 2005

ITEM 5/01

NEW NATIONAL STADIUM AND TV RECEPTION

Summary

This report relates to a petition presented to the Wembley Area Consultative Forum at their meeting on the 20th September concerning problems with television reception caused by the New National Stadium development. A condition had been attached to the stadium permission seeking a study, and in the event of a problem, a solution to the impact of the development on television reception. This condition has been discharged however the solution agreed is no longer feasible given the priority now being given to digital television and change in direction by OFCOM.

Recommendation

That Members note the petition and the practical problems now facing the Council and the Stadium in terms of overcoming interference to television reception.

That Members acknowledge that whilst the planning condition relating to television reception has been discharged, Officers of the Council and Wembley National Stadium Ltd are working closely to ensure that best advice is provided to local residents facing reception problems.

Detail

The petition containing 172 signatures states : 'As a local resident I call on Brent Council and Wembley stadium Developers to sort out the problems with TV reception NOW'. The petition is signed by residents living predominantly to the west of the stadium in the Wembley Hill area (e.g. Manor Drive, Park Chase, Wembley Park Drive, Dagmar Ave, Hillside). The petition was presented to the Wembley Area Forum by a representative of the Wembley Hill Residents Association during a discussion on TV reception and the stadium.

In considering the planning application for the new national stadium in June 200 and again on 20th march 2002, the Council, being mindful of the scale of the structure and the impact that tall buildings can have on television reception, agreed a condition (15) as part of the planning permission requiring the applicants to demonstrate either that the stadium will have no harmful effect on reception, or that remedial measures are introduced to prevent any adverse effects.

The applicants, WNSL, commissioned the BBC Spectrum Group to assess the current standard of reception in the area and conduct an analysis of the likely impact of the new stadium. The BBC recommended that a self help transmitter be incorporated into the stadium design to relay signals on to areas that would otherwise potentially be affected by a poor signal leading to ghosting. The Council agreed these measures and discharged the condition

and they were written into the construction contract between WNSL and their contractors Multiplex.

It has more recently transpired that the BBC are no longer able (due to the requirements of the telecoms regulator OFCOM) to make suitable analogue frequencies available given the demands of digital transmission which will eventually take over totally from analogue. Announcements recently from the government indicated that the switch over will start in 2008, although it will not be undertaken in London until the early part of 2012. This means that the signal booster solution agreed for the stadium will not work.

It is estimated by OFCOM that over 65% of UK households now have digital television. This figure has increased by 18.4% on the previous year. Given that the Wembley area already had relatively poor reception it is likely that the proportion of local households receiving digital reception is greater than the national average.

Towards a solution

Multiplex have been investigating the extent of the current problem and have arranged for test vans to test conditions at locations where complaints have been raised; there have been six complaints in the last six months. Their conclusion has been that digital reception is generally unaffected, and that the area enjoys relatively good digital reception. Most of the tall cranes are due to be removed by January and we should shortly see their numbers reducing. This will create a more stable environment leading to an improvement in the signal received. It is the responsibility of individual residents to receive their signal, not the television broadcasters, and undoubtedly some local aerials and related equipment need to be modified or redirected. Digital reception, as well as analogue, can also be affected by the use of old or misdirected aerials and old cabling.

The Director of Planning has discussed the problem with Multiplex and WNSL in an attempt to provide best advice to residents who are experiencing difficulties. WNSL have just set up a helpline to assist in this process (Tel 0800-0931675) and this helpline is being publicised by the Council. Cable and satellite reception is unaffected.