



Blair backs phone masts

By Jonathan Walker, Birmingham Post Mar 9 2005

The Prime Minister yesterday dismissed public concerns about mobile phone masts by insisting they were safe and the Government had no plans to stop them going up.

Tony Blair told **The Birmingham Post** "there isn't the evidence" to justify a ban.

He said the Government kept scientific evidence about possible health dangers under constant review.

But he insisted it would be wrong to alarm the public by appearing to confirm their fears and preventing new masts being erected.

Mr Blair made the comments during a wide-ranging interview as the unofficial election campaign continued. He refused to give any hints about the date of the poll, widely expected to be May 5.

His views on mobile phone masts follow a series of campaigns by residents across the Midlands opposed to the structures being installed in their communities.

High-profile examples include the case of St Augustine's Church in Edgbaston, Birmingham, where the vicar has angered residents by agreeing a plan to install a mobile phone mast in his church spire.

Campaigner Eileen O'Connor, from Wishaw, Sutton Coldfield, became a national celebrity when she took second place in ITV1's Vote For Me show, where the public chose a contestant to stand as an independent MP.

Mr Blair's comments are likely to prove highly controversial.

Concern that the masts are a risk to health was a major issue in last year's by-election in Hodge Hill, Birmingham, which Labour narrowly won.

He said: "We keep this under constant review. We get scientific advice.

"But what I'm not going to do in respect of mobile phones is say, if there is a whole series of front pages saying mobile phones cause this and this and this, to then go and agree with it if the scientific evidence doesn't show it to be true.

"Because otherwise you alarm people wholly unnecessarily, and you do a great deal of damage to business and industry.

"It is not that we don't constantly reassess this, we do.

"But it is also important that we proceed according to scientific evidence.

"And I have been through a number of these campaigns now, sufficient to know that it is important right at the outset to say to people, wait for the proper scientific analysis from the experts and don't necessarily take everything that you read as the absolute truth."

He added: "The reason we have not gone and banned mobile phones, or banned the masts is that there isn't the evidence to justify it at the present time.