

## **Speech at the 2nd Reading of Transmission Masts Bill debate — House of Commons**

**Richard Spring MP, 21 May 2004**

I beg to move that the Bill now be read a second time.

The measures in this Bill are of significant importance to many people in my constituency, and other constituencies up and down the country.

At the outset, I would like to put on record my appreciation for the overwhelming cross-party support that I have received, and the enormous amount of encouragement from outside the House. Since the first reading of this Bill, my postbag has been filled with letters from the four corners of the country expressing support. In particular, I would like to thank the pressure groups 'Planning Sanity' and 'Mast Sanity' who have been a constant source of encouragement and assistance. I would also like to thank Mr Mike Bell, the Chairman of the Radiation Research Trust, and his team whose support has been invaluable. Finally, Mrs Sarah Webster of Bridgetown in Devon deserves to be thanked in this debate. She is a dedicated and passionate campaigner on the issue of transmission masts who has helped me understand in the clearest possible terms the impact this issue has had on the lives of many people. She has put me in contact with people across the UK who are suffering from serious cases of ill health that they attribute to transmission masts and base stations.

I have the fullest support of the two district councils in my constituency: Forest Heath District Council, and St Edmundsbury Borough Council. I have also consulted fully with the Local Government Association which is totally backing this Bill, having canvassed the views of the local authorities it represents.

I make no Party political point when I say that many people feel that the power to influence their lives in their local communities has slipped away from them over the years. It really is extraordinary that a matter like the construction of these masts — so visible and so intrusive — is something which in practice local people have no control over whatsoever.

There have been far too many emails and letters of support from members of this House to name them all individually. Nevertheless, I would like to mention my honourable friend the member for Broxbourne, who has campaigned for greater regulation in this area for a number of years. Indeed, she preceded many in her calls for the effects of transmission masts on health to be researched much more rigorously. Many others in this House have specifically talked to me about this, and their constituency concerns — not least my Right Honourable Friends the Members for Hampshire North East and Hampshire North West, and my Honourable Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton, for South West Devon, for Mid Sussex, for Gainsborough, for South West Bedfordshire, for Southend West

and East Surrey, and many others across the Party political divide, most notably my fellow Suffolk MPs.

There have been several adjournment debates on the impact of transmission masts on health and on the environment over the past few years – including one that I introduced myself, last March. I would be surprised if any honourable member of this House had not at some point received correspondence from a constituent about this issue. Action to defuse a national groundswell of anxiety from the public is long overdue. I would like to see action on three fronts:

Firstly, that the Government accept the need for more research to investigate the genuine cases of ill-health and the health concerns felt by sensible, rational people.

Secondly, that the precautionary principle, which was advocated by Sir William Stewart when he was the Government's senior adviser, to mean that, in most cases, masts should not be placed too close to people's homes, schools and hospitals. The Government may wish to draw up new guidelines to put this into practice.

Finally, for a change to paragraph 40 of PPG8 to enable the councillors who have to make planning decisions to take into account the views of those whom they represent, in a balanced and objective way.

I note that there has been research published by the National Radiological Protection Board earlier this year. I have also noted that they broadly confirm what Sir William Stewart had stated four years earlier:

'There is now scientific evidence however which suggests that there may be biological ... effects occurring at exposures below these guidelines ... We conclude that it is not possible at present to say that exposure to RF radiation, even at levels below national guidelines, is totally without potential adverse health effects and that the gaps in knowledge are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach'.

With this uncertainty still hanging over transmission masts there is clearly a need for more specific research.

Turning to the two other calls for action which have been made, I am pleased to say that it is precisely these concerns that my Bill will address. If this Bill is enacted every application for planning permission for a mast must be accompanied by a certificate that sets out the area of and maximum range of the Beam of Greatest Intensity. If this falls on part of any premises or land occupied by an educational or medical facility, or a residential property, planning permission will not be granted. Furthermore, every application must also be accompanied by a precautionary principle statement. If this statement indicates that there is a threat of serious damage to health or the environment, the fact that there is no full scientific certainty about the health impact of mast radiation shall not constitute a reason to ignore the precautionary statement, and grant planning permission. These measures are significant and will place the power to accept, or reject applications clearly in the

hands of local authorities. I shall return to these points later on in my speech for I now want to concentrate on why I feel these measures are necessary.

My interest in this matter was provoked by constituents of mine who wrote to me on numerous occasions relaying their fears that these mobile phone masts have a detrimental effect on their health. Nausea, dizziness and headaches are just some of the symptoms which a number of constituents tell me have affected them since a transmission mast was erected near to their homes. One notable and specific case is that of Mark Wheal, who first brought this to my attention, on behalf of himself and his anxious neighbours. Elsewhere, schoolchildren have suffered from nose bleeds, insomnia and behavioural changes, allegedly because of a mast having been erected near to their school.

When a cluster of transmission masts was placed on a water tower in Haverhill in my constituency, there were some curious consequences. Almost immediately, the squirrels and birds disappeared. Doris Barnes – who lived with her nephew John Insole – began to have a series of what appeared to be strokes, dementia began quickly to set in, and she needed twenty-four hour care. Her bedroom had been in the path of the beam of greatest intensity of the transmitters. Because the Insoles found it so difficult to cope, and on the advice of their GP, she was put in a care home in a village nearby. Almost immediately her health substantially recovered. There was no apparent explanation.

These constituents of mine are rational individuals. I find it difficult to reject out of hand their belief that radiation from masts is responsible for their ill-health. I find it difficult to believe that there has been some sort of outbreak of mass hysteria in many parts of the country.

I have led grassroots campaigns in Newmarket and Haverhill – two towns in my constituency – against mobile phone masts that were near to schools, residential property and centres of population. In one particular instance, the behaviour of the mobile telecommunication company involved, was underhand and unscrupulous. A TETRA mast was erected on a block of flats in Newmarket. After a strong campaign, agreement was reached that it should be moved. I thought I had brokered an arrangement for it to be located on a hill outside the town. Then one morning we all woke up to find that it had been erected in another part of the town – technically not in Suffolk but in neighbouring Cambridgeshire. Townspeople were outraged. The Suffolk Constabulary were deeply embarrassed too. The local district council sought to have it removed but lost on appeal. The company was simply not interested in discussing alternative sites or a compromise, despite assurances given to me.

This behaviour is totally and disgracefully at odds with the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development. This particular telecommunications company followed none of the guidance issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Indeed, let me read to the House an extract from the 'Foreward' of the Code of Best Practice:

‘Strategic planning, combined with proper discussion of and consultation on proposals for developing the telecommunications network, is central to this process. This requires operators, local authorities and local people working together in partnership to produce optimum solutions. In August 2001, we introduced improved planning arrangements for telecommunications development. These included greater requirements for consulting local people.’

The document goes on to say that one of the main aims of the code is to: ‘encourage better communication and consultation at all stages of network development between operators, local authorities and local people.’

These words will come as a cruel joke to the people of Newmarket whose deep concern and anxiety has simply been ignored. Operators have devised what they call ‘The traffic light model’ to enable them to rate a site according to likely sensitivities. It is intended as a guide to the degree of consultation necessary. One of the factors that is supposed to be considered before a mast is given a green, amber or red status is the involvement of the local MP. My concerns have been routinely ignored. Furthermore PPG8 already makes it clear that where there are plans to install, alter, or replace an installation close to a school or college that the institution be consulted before an application is submitted to the local authority. The mast in my constituency in Newmarket is close to three schools – none of which was ever consulted. Schools simply never are.

Since I indicated my intention to present this Bill, I have discovered that this is a pattern repeated across the country. Such is the frustration of local residents, groups of concerned protestors have torn down masts and forcibly tried to block new installations.

Let me quote to you some of the letters I have received from worried people across the country, so members of this House can be under no illusion about the severity of this problem. The following is an extract from a letter from Mrs Lin Ansell of Liss in Hampshire who tells me of the impact of a mast outside her home:

‘We experienced a phenomenon here in Liss regarding the Tetra mast sited between 120 & 300 metres from our houses. On Wednesday 29th October, 17of the residents, including 4 children experienced ill health, disturbance and disorientation. We were having a residents meeting at the time when we expressed our concern about how ill we and members of our family were feeling. We got better on the following Friday, and we found later (AFTER we had experienced these various symptoms) that the TETRA mast had been turned on during Wednesday and turned off on the Friday ... Since the mast was switched on for good, I have a permanent headache, metallic taste in my mouth and feel sick. We have moved into a back bedroom, and my friends who have come to stay complain of headaches and sleeplessness. I have been unable to offer the house to lodgers because of the illness felt by guests. This

has deprived me of my health and my income. Are you able to offer any help in our hour of need?’

More disturbingly, and tragically, I have received information that describes serious illnesses such as cancer that sufferers ascribe to masts near to their homes.

In Ballygawley, Northern Ireland, 5 homes amidst rural farmland make up the hamlet of Cranlome Hill. These houses are within 100m of a transmission mast. In these five homes there are six cases of serious life threatening cancer. The people who live in the houses lead healthy lives with plenty of exercise and a good diet. To say that this ill-health may not be connected in some way to the unwelcome mast many would find an unsustainable argument. Mr Walter Graham, Chairman of the campaign group, Northern Ireland Opposing Masts, explained to me in a letter the symptoms of local people living close to the mast:

‘Our most recent member is a small rural area between Ballygawley and Dunganon known as the Cranlome Hill mast. Local citizens concerned for their health cut down the mast after their group of five homes at the bottom of the hill from the mast six people with cancer. Four are now dead. The mast had thirty-five pieces of microwave equipment with another four due to go up. They even had cancer appear in a six-month-old cow kept in the field with the mast.’

Mr Graham goes on to speak about another mast in Saintfield:

‘I spoke at a public meeting in Saintfield, which has had two masts for a number of years. During question time a woman stated that she had a daughter with leukaemia within a half mile of the masts and that she had contacted the health board asking about other children with the disease. They found eleven children under eleven with leukaemia and seven adults with cancer, all within a half mile of the masts. It has since been reported that a farmer two miles out of Saintfield, who has a mast in his field near the house, has had his child come down with leukaemia.’

Any member of the House present during the debate introduced by my honourable friend the member for Sutton Coldfield on the 28th January could not have been left but deeply concerned after hearing of the cancer cluster in the hamlet of Wishaw. The Chairman of the local action group, Sutton Coldfield Residents Against Masts, Eileen O’Connor, an exceptionally brave lady herself who has battled against cancer, catalogues the ill-health in the tiny hamlet:

- ‘Five ladies developed breast cancer
- One case of prostate cancer
- One bladder cancer
- One lung cancer

- Three cases of pre-cancer cervical cells
- One motor neurone disease age 51, who also had massive tumour removed from the top of his spine.
- People have developed benign lumps
- Electro sensitivity
- Three cases of severe skin rashes
- Many villagers suffering with sleep problems, headaches, dizziness and low immune system problems.

'Out of the eighteen houses surrounding the mast at up to a range of 500 metres, 77% of the tiny hamlet has health related illness believed to be as a result of radiation from the mast, the out-break of illness occurred in 2001 after seven years of exposure to the radiation emitted by the T-Mobile mast. We are now in connection with many people who are suffering from this form of radiation.

'One other important fact is that since the Wishaw Mast was vandalised on 6th November 2003, many of the residents are reporting a feeling of well-being. The residents are reporting improvement in their sleep patterns and increased energy levels. The headaches and dizzy symptoms have disappeared ...'

The time is at hand to react to these tragic cases of ill-health, with a precautionary approach to the siting of masts. It is all we can do in the absence of long-term definitive knowledge about the impact of radiation. The present law now, is woefully inadequate with numerous loop-holes that mobile phone companies are able to exploit at will. Masts below 15 metres at present do not even require planning permission. This means that masts can be erected without a full check on the suitability of the site by local councillors. If this state of affairs was not bad enough, masts erected on land owned by Network Rail require no planning permission whatsoever. It is wrong that these structures can be erected with such ease when there are still so many question marks over their impact on health. If enacted, my Bill will require that all transmission masts go through the full planning permission procedure regardless of their height, or if they are on land owned by Network Rail.

The case is different elsewhere in the world where the large questions over the health impact of masts is recognised. Current UK Government policy concerning human exposure to the electromagnetic fields emitted by mobile telecommunication base-stations, is based on compliance with the safety levels published by the International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). These levels are much higher than in Italy, Switzerland and even China and Russia. In Italy the national public limit for people exposed for more than four hours a day is 90 times lower than the ICNIRP value. A mast in Haverhill, in my constituency, complies with UK emission levels but would not have been allowed in other

countries. Such disparities may be based on conflicting scientific information, so it is incumbent on us to access the best worldwide scientific research to try to plug the gaps in our knowledge.

I would now like to turn to how my Bill may help prevent many of the disturbing cases that I have relayed to the House.

I have already touched on how my Bill will amend existing legislation, bringing all applications to erect a mast within the full planning process. Furthermore, I have spoken about how my Bill would embrace the precautionary principle by requiring a statement to be published that shows how the mast adheres to this principle. Considering that an application should already be accompanied by:

- An explanation of an operators needs in a particular area;
- Details of the location and type of telecommunications apparatus or structure intended to be constructed;
- Details of any other mobile phone systems on the site;
- The area of search and details of possible alternative options, where appropriate, which may include other methods of providing the required coverage;
- Design options for particular sites;
- The Traffic Light Model rating for a proposed site and the proposed consultation strategy;

I do not think a precautionary principle statement would be too much of a burden. It seems sensible to me that this statement is made available to the public, and that on appeal the Secretary of State must take into account the contents of this statement. The fact that there is no full scientific certainty about the health impact of mast radiation should not constitute a reason to ignore the precautionary statement and grant planning permission.

Let me turn to other measures in my Bill. I want to reduce the amount of time telecommunications companies are allowed to install cumbersome temporary movable apparatus to replace unserviceable apparatus from 6 months to 3 months. New apparatus has to be of the same type and capacity as the unserviceable apparatus it is to replace. This measure is important as it will place the emphasis on telecommunication companies to repair their equipment quickly, with as little inconvenience to local residents as possible.

My Bill, if enacted, will also allow for schools and hospitals to cancel contracts they have entered into with telecommunication companies agreeing to the erection of installations on their land or premises. Once an application to cancel a contract has been served by a school or a hospital, the mast must stop being used within 28 days. Many schools and hospitals might have entered into these agreements before the possible health effects of masts were as known as they are now. It is only fair that

they have the opportunity to cancel these agreements in the light of new research. I know of parents and headteachers in my constituency who would strongly welcome this measure.

I don't try to pretend to be scientist and I cannot make scientific judgements. My interest in this subject has arisen from real life experiences and some, admittedly minority opinion, research. I would finally like to read to you a copy of a letter I have received from Mrs Jane Lee of Budleigh Salterton, in Devon a lady who earlier in the year lost a legal battle with Orange. I want to show the House in the clearest possible terms how the law is stacked in the favour of telecommunication companies, and to what lengths ordinary people have gone to in order to stop masts being placed outside of their homes.

'I am severely disabled and now in an extremely serious financial situation. The reasons for this are:

1. I have just lost an expensive legal battle to stop Orange putting up a mast that would focus the beam of greatest intensity directly onto my home.
2. Now that this mast has been allowed, my local estate agent tells me that I will probably lose a third of the value of my home.
3. In order to protect my own and my families health, I feel I am being forced to move. It will be hard to find another bungalow in this area that I can afford and adapt to my special needs. Worse in order to find another home that I can afford I may have to move away from my family and friends who are my support.

I have seen other people who have been made ill by low level radiation from masts beaming into their homes. I refuse to have this imposed on myself, my family or my neighbours, I have therefore fought 4 battles over 2 1/2 years The stress of this has meant that I have hardly slept in the last 12 months and been driven to near despair.

As my house is worth over £100,000 I cannot get legal aid. In losing my high court battle I have to pay costs, which I cannot afford. As few people will risk living so close to a mast I am about to lose a third of the only capital I will ever have (due to my disability I am unable to earn money to replace this).

'I have lived here for over 7 years and am heartbroken at the prospect of losing the home I love.'

I have been sent in excess of 500 letters from individuals and organisations offering me alternative Bills once I was drawn in the Private Members Ballot. However, this is an issue that is in need of urgent legislation and attention. I believe my Bill is sound and comprehensive. I hope that in my arguments in this House today, and through the impressive cross-party support I have received, I have shown that we can reach a sensible consensus should this Bill go to Committee. I think that I have shown without a shadow of a doubt that legislation is required.



This Bill gives the power to local authorities to decide where transmission masts should be erected. I do understand that mobile phones will not work without the supporting infra-structure – *ie* the masts – and I want people to benefit from greater choice and network coverage. Nevertheless, I think that this can be achieved whilst minimising the possible health risks to members of the public. I urge the House to support the Bill today, to carry it through Committee and to turn it into law.