PE1416/D

Petitioner Letter of 13 May 2012

Dear Stuart,

Thank you for your email of 8th May and earlier emails from your Department.

Please accept my apologies for being slow in dealing with this as I was heavily involved in the recent Council elections and indeed have now been elected as a Councillor for the Rutherglen South Ward of South Lanarkshire Council.

You have sent me:

- two submissions from the Mobile Operators Association, and
- submission from the Scottish Government.

Broadly the issues were dealt with in the original Petition but I would make the following points:

1. Much of the submission from the Mobile Operators Association dwells on the benefits to emergency services etc of having mobile phone technology available. This is no doubt true but is, frankly, irrelevant. No one has suggested that mobile phone technology is not useful or that it should be discontinued, but simply that a more precautionary approach should be taken as to where phone masts are sited.

2. The Petition has ***not*** called for phone masts to be banned near residential properties or schools, etc but that the position be reviewed in the light of developments. The response from the Mobile Operators Association is again largely off the point. It would have been helpful for example if they had accepted that there was really no necessity to site masts near schools, if they had offered some explanation of how far apart masts typically required to be in built up areas to provide service, and the extent to which the companies had or had not collaborated on sharing masts. In short they have offered no convincing reason why a more precautionary approach could not in practice be taken with little or no detriment to coverage.

3. **Database** – I note with interest the information about the Sitefinder database. This is clearly less than satisfactory because of the current non participation of 3 major companies, but, for what it is worth, the impression given in relation to one of the local applications was that there was no such database. At the very least, this ought to be hosted on Council websites and be readily available to the public. I am not aware of the legal case referred to by the Scottish Government

but I find it difficult to understand why it should prevent information on an obvious public interest issue not involving personal data being made available to the public.

4. **The key issue is the health issue**. The HPA advice (quoted on page 1 of the Scottish Government's response) could hardly be said to be a categorical assurance that mobile phone mast technologies provide no health risks. Indeed it expressly states that "uncertainties remain and a continued precautionary approach to their use is recommended…" This is in line with the WHO position quoted in the Petition. I note that publication of a further review of studies is expected this year.

5. **In summary, the official advice at all levels is a continued precautionary approach**. It may well be that the scientific base will not be absolutely clear for some years to come. One thinks, in a different context, of the fact that asbestos-related diseases can take 40 years to materialise.

The question for the Committee may boil down to whether the current planning guidance/regulations adequately reflect the precautionary approach, particularly relating to siting of masts near schools, and bearing in mind the restriction on this in a number of other countries.

I hope this is helpful and once again apologise for slow response on this.

Best wishes,

Robert Brown