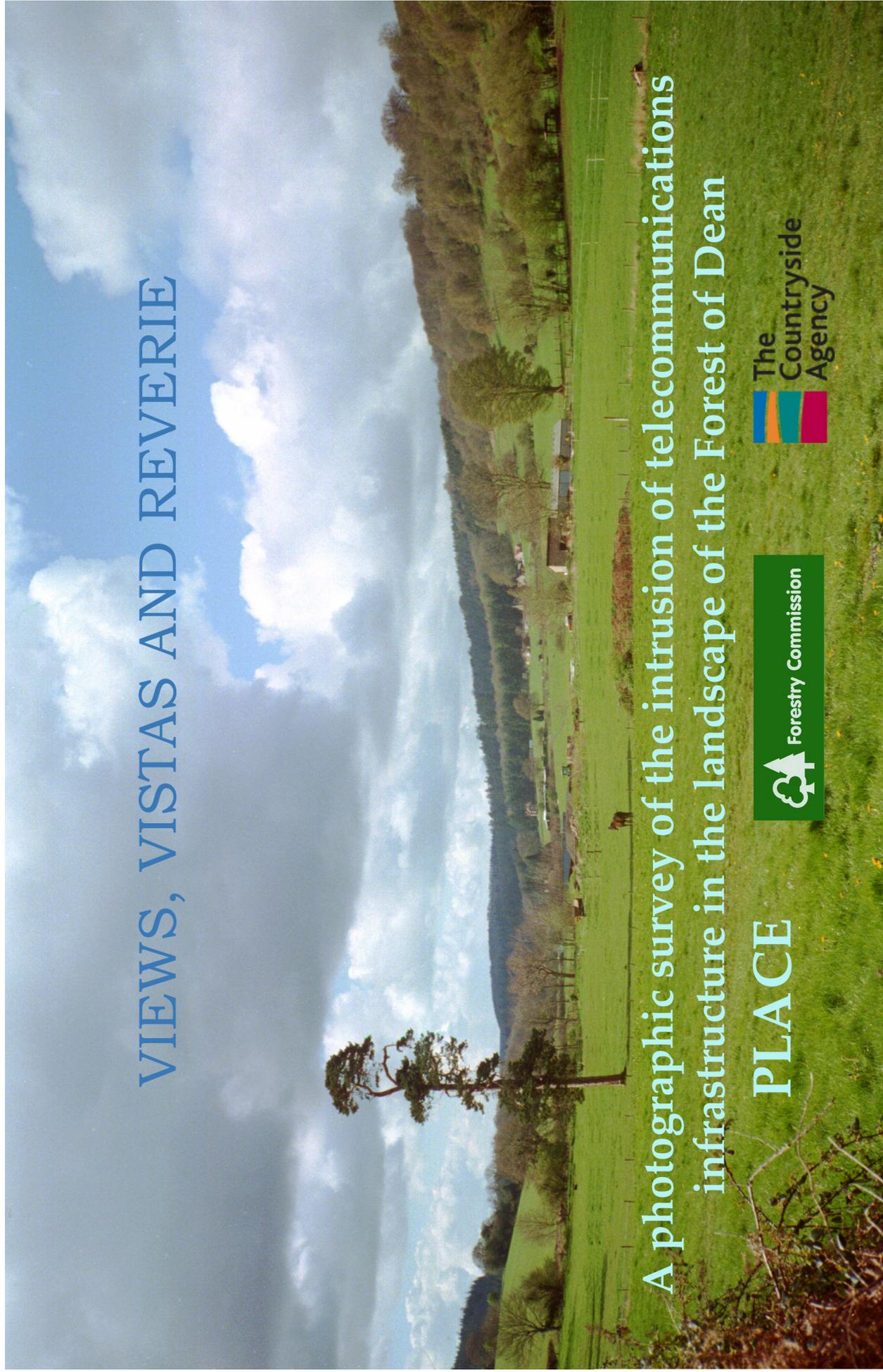


VIEWS, VISTAS AND REVERIE

A photographic survey of the intrusion of telecommunications
infrastructure in the landscape of the Forest of Dean

PLACE



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the Forest of Dean

Most people are familiar with the idea of 'endangered species.' There is less awareness of 'endangered experiences' – the loss of the possibility of certain sorts of experience. Spatial freedom in wild landscapes clear of human clutter is becoming ever more rare in the British Isles. Absolute aloneness interacting only with the otherness of the non-human world, is ever more difficult to find. The sense of the frailty and inconsequence of the human animal when immersed in the vastness of the elements and amongst other life forms gives a much needed, powerful and important change of perspective.

This survey is based upon the area of the Forest of Dean District Council which is approximately 200 square miles (52,600 hectares) and has a population of approximately 80,000. The survey took place from June 2004 to June 2005.

Note on the electronic manipulation of imagery:

About 15% of the images have had the definition of the mast enhanced. This is to try to match the image to my actual experience of the mast in landscape. Enhancement has been used exclusively for distant panoramic shots where the power of human vision is much superior to technology; it has *not* been used for dramatic effect.

Base Station is the term given to a mobile phone transmitter / receiver mast and its ancillary ground-based equipment cabins.

Abbreviations in the text: ant = antennae; galv.= galvanised; dish = dish antennae

Where no site number is visible or decipherable at the site, the text reads: site No-;

Andrew Darke undertook the survey which was funded by PLACE and The Countryside Agency, with support from the Forestry Commission.

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Base Station at Wydean School, Sedbury Grid Ref. 545 939

ntl site No. -; multi-operator site. 30m lattice tower. 3 colinear antennae, 16 sector antennae, 1 dish ant., other directional ants. Aggressive grey palisade fencing, grey and brick equipment cabins. No planting.

Comments: *Very ugly, tall intrusive mast with a confusion of antennae, sited in school grounds and very close to council housing - unlikely that such a siting would be allowed now. Very intrusive into surrounding rural views.*

Urgent Amelioration Needed: *Demolish and relocate away from school and community using low impact method to blend into the environment. (see the Crieff solution etc.)*



Looking south; view includes from left to right - north tower of the Severn Bridge carrying the M48, pylon carrying 400KV power line, ntl mast

Base Station at Wyedean School, Sedbury Grid Ref. 545 939



Looking from the school entrance



Looking SW



Looking North from nearby housing



In the school grounds

The purpose of this document is to draw attention to an insidious and damaging process which is eroding the quality and tranquility of rural landscapes in Britain and worldwide. High places and horizons are particularly under attack as both mobile telephone base stations and wind turbines are at their most efficient when placed on high sites. They add to the longer term intrusions of TV broadcast and military communications installations. High places are persistently undervalued in a market economy as they are, from a strictly economic point of view, underused; their value remains un-priced and apparently un-quantifiable. This value system is clearly inadequate for dealing with the aesthetic and existential qualities of landscape. Value is expressed in the *language* of aesthetic and scientific appreciation and consequent landscape designation eg. “areas of outstanding natural beauty,” “special landscapes,” “sites of special scientific interest” but a sterling value remains elusive. Even a relatively small change or intrusion in these areas can cause a dramatic diminution in their quality, for instance, of wildness or habitat.

As each new infrastructure is proposed and then perceived by government to be the next irresistible economic benefit another degree of intrusion in landscape by technical structures is sanctioned by a society which has become largely disconnected from the land. A new reduction of the possibility of experiences of otherness (wildness, non humanness, etc.) occurs. Yet more places Gerard Manley Hopkins might have described as “sweet especial scene, rural scene, a rural scene, sweet especial rural scene”^{**} are engulfed for economic gain as against the uncalculated and incalculable benefit of a reverie in rural tranquility..... or of simply “leaving well alone.”

In the case of wind generation, to have a planning policy which either by default (or intent!), results in the severe degradation of fine local landscapes in the name of global environmentalism seems, at best unimaginative or at worst, a blundering own goal. For instance wind farm proposals for the Isle of Lewis and for Whinash in Cumbria which would perform a desecration on these places seriously degrading some of our most prized landscapes and extending blighted areas a further 30 or so miles around, owing to the size of the structures proposed.

Surely coastal areas which are already heavily industrialized and are close to centres of power demand, thus reducing the need for transmission lines, should be sites for wind power generation?

The current pressures for renewable energy, mobile telephone and internet connection for all, new roads, new power lines, airport extensions etc. are going to increase rather than reduce. Our internationally famous landscapes are **now** in dire need of a new thoroughgoing system of protection. If anyone is in doubt as to the importance of landscape to national identity, one need only spend a little time looking at the amount of landscape imagery used in advertising, or the mass of references to the land in cultural output.

Recent governments have not kept pace with the rise in importance of environmental quality to large numbers of the population. General planning policy has been amended incrementally without addressing the totality of the real situation or the impact of new infrastructures, such as the mobile phone system. For instance the mobile operators have been allowed to continue adding to their infrastructure **without ever giving a reliable estimate of how many base stations might be needed and what their impact on landscape might be! Why has this industry been given such an unprecedented carte blanche? Does the £22.5 billion license fee have any bearing on it?**

A new vision for planning policy is required which is pro-active, strategic and retrospective (ie. a permission can expire and restoration be required).

In order to make good the poor governmental response to the rising concern for environmental quality, PLACE proposes that planning law be amended so that there is a **“presumption against,”** as currently in AONBs, the siting of **any** new infrastructures outside of urban, suburban areas or urbanized corridors (new definitions will be required eg. urbanized corridors - major road/rail corridors.)** The developer, or government, should be obliged to prove an incontrovertible need for intrusion into land beyond the latter three categories. Should that need be established in an Inquiry, then the developer should be required to offer his plans for mitigation to full scrutiny and debate and subsequent amendment. A new era of respect for landscape and environment quality would begin, which is of course, what renewable energy is all about.

* from “Binsey Poplars” by Gerard Manley Hopkins

** see page 10 for PLACE’s national street lighting/ mobile phone system

To return to horizons and the increasing impact of mobile phone infrastructure there, horizons tend to be the point at which a gaze comes to rest and as more and more masts and other structures are placed on or near horizons, the quality of views and vistas becomes diminished.

A gaze out over any extensive view will always include a horizon, that essential meeting point between sky and land or sky and water. Periods of gazing (a gaze: a long intent look – Longmans Modern English Dictionary) are usually accompanied by a cessation of the immediate day-to-day practical, logistical thought processes. In my own experience, these are replaced during gazing, by a more reflective, lateral and expansive type of thought. The eye travels over and through space alighting upon and inquiring about, say, a subtle change in colour of the tree canopy, or some secretive declivity where a stream has cut down into the flank of a mountain. The eye-mind begins to speculate on that change of colour – a cooler air perhaps flows up from the estuary there or, a slightly unwelcome increase in acidity in the soil... or perhaps a reminder of the colour of a head of hair... a gaze may turn into a reverie. The eye-mind begins to flicker between internal experience, memory, new ideas and then back again absorbing the external scene. The eye wanders up to the horizon... comes to rest there... dips in and through and along and takes off into beyond.

What is the mind doing? Exploring, finding, searching perhaps... or reflecting, re-living, renewing, refreshing perhaps... imagining... understanding, or perhaps lying fallow, ... or just gazing. This long *uninterrupted* moment is so important.

My gaze wanders along the horizon – ouch!

* "This example of man's handiwork out here, where no man was to be seen, this confusion suggestive of gallows, shipwrecks and coal, this crude contrast between unblended colours of black and white, of barren, violent nature lacking any organic life, with no trace of any lichen or moss anywhere on the rocky outcrop - this piece of carpentry, with no vegetation to bridge the gap between primitive nature and the work of men, seemed *startling, worrying and brutal.*"
(*my italics*)

* from "By the Open Sea" a novel by August Strindberg written 1889-90

This observation by Strindberg of a manmade structure in the environment and his acute dissection of his feelings about it mirror my own feelings when confronted with the now numerous (40,000 and still rising - no estimate is made what the final number [finality - an unknown concept in this industry?] might be) predominately ill-designed and ill-sited mobile phone base stations.

These feelings are further compounded by seeing the masts as Towers of Babel dominating precious horizons, an instantaneous reminder of the clamour and intrusion of mass communication, the tearing into the inward or outward gaze.



"White Mare II" 1892 August Strindberg

The development of the mobile telephone industry over the last 10-15 years has been accompanied by the requirement for technical infrastructure in the form of base stations consisting of masts, antennae and equipment cabins. The ever increasing numbers of base stations are now causing significant damage to views and vistas in rural areas, often compromising roofscapes and architectural form in urban areas and causing distress to many local people worried over landscape quality and potential health impacts.

This survey is a snapshot of the situation here in the Forest of Dean in 2004-5. Note that PLACE shares current health concerns regarding the new technology, but the subject of this document is the loss of certain sorts of experience in landscape as a result of the intrusion of technical infrastructure. The study of this rural area will be a reference point for comparisons with future development. *It can be extrapolated to cover most rural parts of the UK.* The principles and many of the methods of amelioration are certainly suitable for semi-rural areas and suburbia. The document points to practical ways forward for a reduction in the intrusiveness of the technology through a number of simple, effective measures.

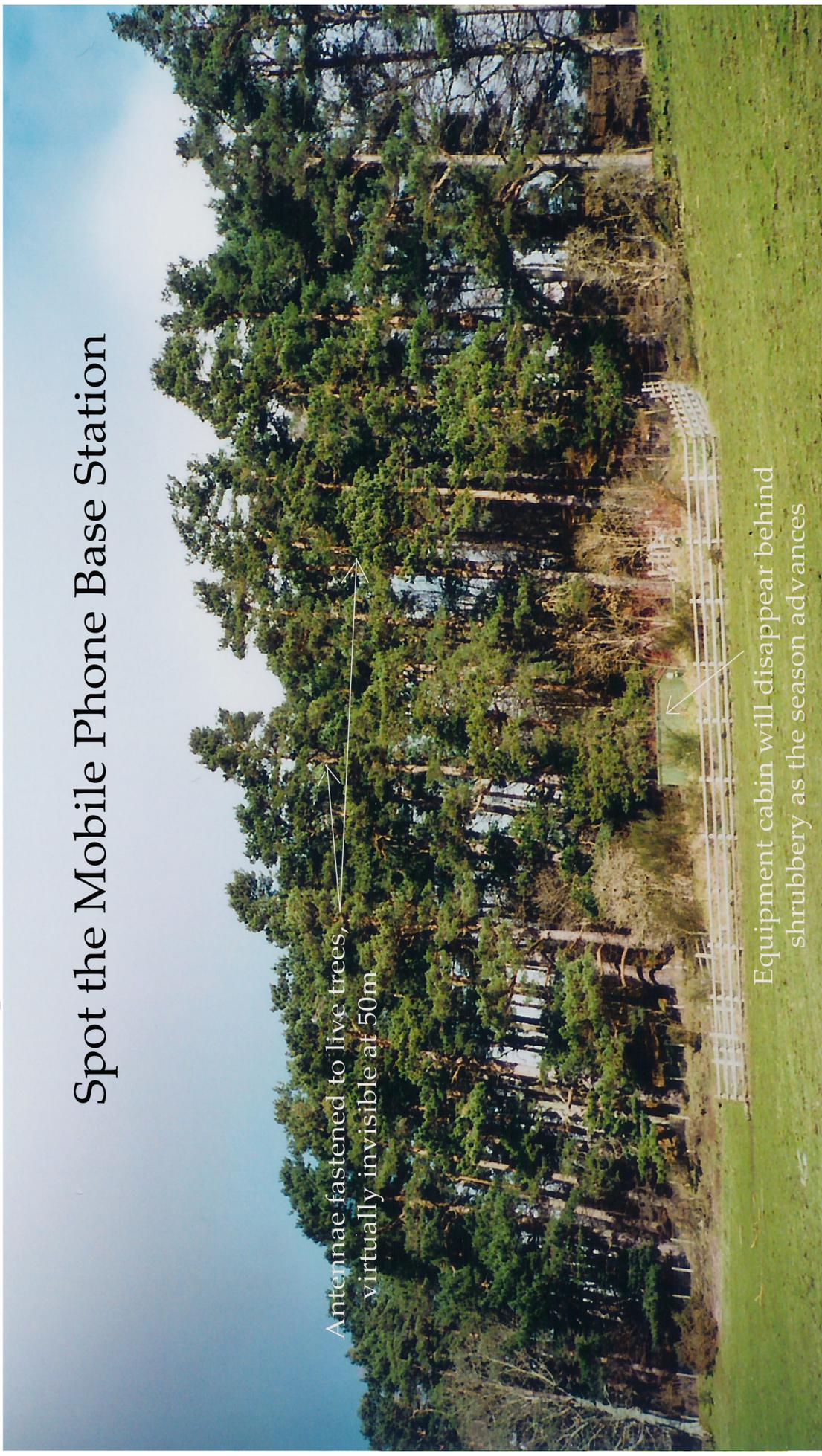
Another possibility is the re-conceiving of the entire mobile phone network so that all the infrastructure is sited alongside the road and rail networks. This proposal by PLACE arises out of a number of observations:

1. This is where most people are most of the time – properties of all types and uses are connected by roads.
2. All the mobile phone companies design some of their base stations in or on street lighting type poles which can be fitted, in visual terms, very successfully into the urban, suburban, semi-rural design culture (fabric) of roads.
3. Such base stations are lower powered than those on lattice towers - ie. more would be needed, but the increase in numbers would fit in well with the need to shrink cell size in order to accommodate more phone users.
4. Roads tend to be in valleys and therefore lower; thus high places and horizons would be freed from technical infrastructure.
5. Mountains, moorlands and remote wild places where there are few roads would be less intruded upon and their more dangerous and less humanly transformed quality better preserved.

See pages 38-9 (wood finish pole), 26-7, 54, 55, (street lighting type base station)

The Crieff, Scotland, Solution – 1 Grid Ref. NN864 224
This *is* part of a solution for rural and semi-rural areas.

Spot the Mobile Phone Base Station



Experience shows that landowners can have a strong influence on the type of mast built. They should *insist* that the best solution for the landscape is used. This site was built by Vodafone. (Site No. 4788)

Base Station at Redhill Farm, Lydney Grid Ref. 630 032

Crown Castle Int. site No.-; 22.5m square cross-section, galv. steel lattice mast; One2One Cell ID 92237, 6 sector ant.; 2 dish ant.; grey netting on galv. 2m posts; pale grey equipment cabins; no planting.

Comment: Tall mast on high ground, dominating the canopy of mature trees intruding into quality rural views from the A48 and local footpaths. Partial tree backdrop helps significantly.

Urgent Amelioration Needed: minimum – paint mast, cabins, fencing and posts matt BS 12B25. Paint antennae pale grey BS 18C35. Plant around compound

Ideal: Demolish mast and re-attach antennae to mature trees and / or use wood poles not higher than the tree canopy.



Looking SW



Looking NNW

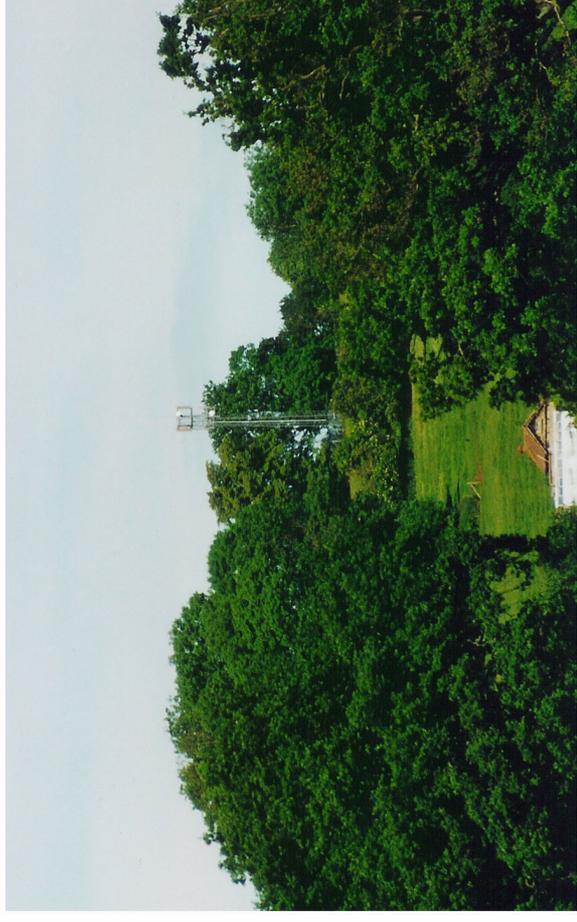
Base Station at Redhill Farm, Lydney Grid Ref. 630 032



Looking westnorthwest



Looking southwest



Looking northwest

Base Station at Ashwell Grange Farm, Stroath Grid Ref. 584 988

Crown Castle site No. - ; Operator: Mercury. 15m steel lattice mast; 6 sector antennae; 3 dish ant.; green netting on 3m galv. posts; pale grey equipment cabins; planting to the SW, NW sides of compound – why not NE, SE too?!

Comments: *Ugly mast sited in open countryside close to a few houses and work places. Intrudes into important wooded rural views and vistas from local footpaths and the A48.*

Urgent Amelioration Needed: *Paint mast, antennae and cabins olive green; plant around the NE, SE side of compound.*

Ideal: *Demolish existing site and mount antennae on existing trees 500m to north of present site; and / or use 2 – 4 No. wood or wood clad poles placed up against the fringe of the nearby wood.*



Looking NW

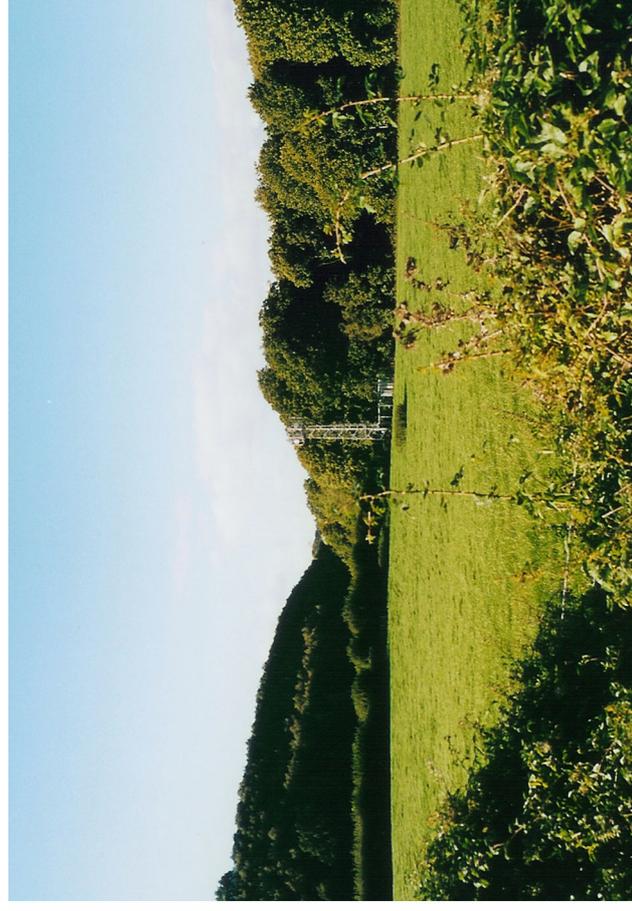
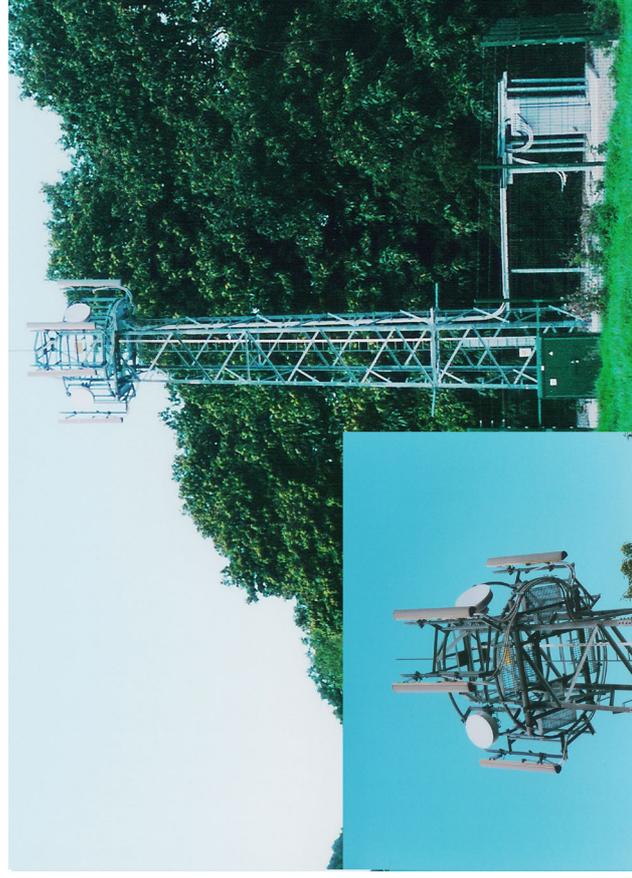
Base Station at Barnage Farm, Woolaston. Grid Ref. 584 020

Orange site No. -; 15m galv. tapering, square cross-section steel lattice mast, 4 sector ant.; 2 dish ant.; 2 grey equipment cabins; green mesh fencing on green steel posts.

Comments: *Ugly, intrusive mast in rural setting benefits from tree backdrop and high hedge beside the road. Relatively well hidden.*

Urgent amelioration needed: *minimum - paint mast and antennae matt olive green. Plant hedging around other three sides of compound.*

Ideal: *Demolish lattice mast and replace with wooden poles below the height of the trees.*



Note all sector antennae are directed away from the wooded backdrop, ie. a perfect site for using antennae on wooden poles within the tree canopy.

The Telecoms Mast Working Group

The idea of a mast working group to function within the Forest of Dean District Council using the knowledge and experience of local people was first mooted at the Telecoms Mast Issues Meeting of July 2003. PLACE supported this idea and from November '03 – March '04 it worked with Councillor Stephen McMillan to set up such a group. Potential members of the group including PLACE met in March '04, with the first formal meeting of the full group taking place on 8th June 2004. This meeting was attended by the following:

Cllrs. Stephen McMillan, John Clissold, Venk Shenoj, Andrew Gardiner
Chief Planner – Sean Hannaby
Ben Lennon – Forest Enterprise
Andrew Darke – PLACE
Helen Evans – Lydbrook Residents Group

The aspirations of the group were:

1. Council Website to be regularly updated with information on all proposed new developments and changes to existing sites.
2. Council Policies regarding Telecomms to be reviewed and updated.
3. To make sure all new developments are up to or above current standards of best practice.
4. An assessment of the current state of mast sites to be produced – the Photographic Survey as proposed to the Countryside Agency by PLACE. Document to be produced: “Views, Vistas and Reverie.”
5. To achieve over time a number of best practice examples of siting, design, colouring, and screening of base stations in the Forest of Dean in order that these can become a recognized standard best practice approach. These examples can then be published nationally.
6. Two public meetings – one in the Council Offices, one at Newent.
7. Discover if any other councils have projects concerned with telecomms issues and if so visit to learn of other approaches.
8. Educate Councillors and Officers, by inviting lectures from the companies, going to conferences etc.

Note that the work of the TMWG and the photographic survey ran concurrently.
See Appendix V for final report.

Base Stations to rear of Bowens Garage, Tutshill, Chepstow Grid Ref. 539 946

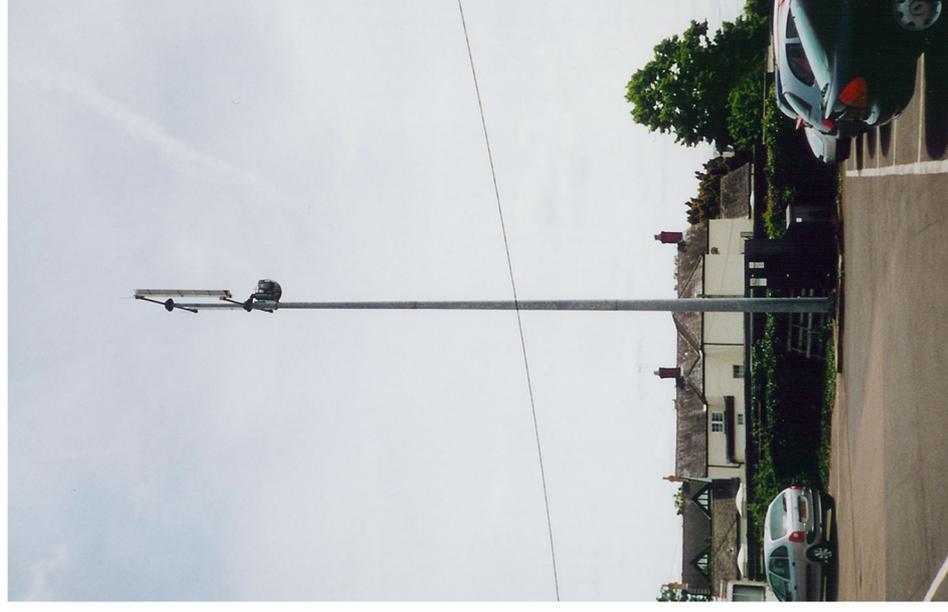
Orange site no. GWT 0021; 15m galv. steel lattice mast; 6 sector ant.; 1 dish ant.; 3 colinear ant. (lightning conductors?); grey cabins; green netting on galv. posts

Vodafone site no.4257; 15m (18m?) 3 section galv. multi-facet pole; green cabins; no compound.

Comments: *Both masts are quite well concealed behind the garage and by the urban fabric when seen from surrounding viewpoints, but are close to housing and businesses.*



Orange at Bowen's Garage



Vodafone at Bowen's Garage

Base Station at Caswell Wood, Tidenham Grid Ref. 538 002

ntl multi-operator site No. -; Operators: Vodafone site no. 6518; One 2 One Cell ID 92001; 28m galv. lattice mast, 7 sector ant.; 2 dish ant.; broadcast array, some green cabins, some grey; wooden post and wire fencing.

Comments: This mast should not have been allowed in its present form as it compromises a number of important views in the AONB. Any future developments should seek to REMOVE present impacts. This is a controversial siting in ancient woodland in top quality Wye Valley AONB landscape with Grade 1 listed architectural heritage building – Tintern Abbey in the near vicinity. Although the mast is invisible from the immediate environs of the Abbey, and only the tip of the mast is visible from the A466 in Tintern village, the upper 10 metres is increasingly visible proceeding up the valley past Tintern Parva. It is also very visible looking downstream from Brockweir Bridge and visible from higher points on the west side of the valley.

URGENT AMELIORATION NEEDED: Demolish mast and re-site antennae by attachment to trees –see Crieff solution. Views and vistas in and around AONBs should not be compromised by telecoms infrastructure.



Looking SE from the A466



Looking ENE from the A466

Base Station at Caswell Wood, Tidenham Grid Ref. 538 002



Looking south from Brockweir bridge

Base Station at Caswell Wood, Tidenham Grid Ref. 538 002



The Crieff Solution – 2

This *is* part of a solution for rural and semi-rural areas.



In 1997 when PLACE discussed the possibility of living tree base stations with industry representatives during the “Aspire to Clear Horizons” (see PLACE CV) project, it was told that the Norway system (cheaper and technically efficient developed by Telenor Mobil in collaboration with a well known environment campaigner in the mid 1990s, could not be used in the UK.

In 1999 the first living tree base station in the UK (to our knowledge) was sited in Scotland by Vodafone.

Base Station at Little Eddies Field Wood, Stock Farm, Clearwell Grid. Ref. 575 085

ntl multi-operator site No. -; Vodafone site 8399. 35m triangular section galvanised, tapering lattice mast. 4 green equipment cabins, 1 grey cabin; wooden post and wire fencing; 4 TV relay antennae; 3 sector ant.; 4 colinear ant.; 2 dishes

Comments: *Tall, intrusive, multi-operator lattice mast on high ground close to the boundary of, and visible from within, the Wye Valley AONB.*

Urgent Amelioration needed: *This mast should be demolished and replaced with 2 or 3 wood/wood finished poles placed within the tree canopy.*



Looking NW



Looking SSE over Coleford with SmithklineBeecham chimneys to the right

Base Station at Little Eddies Field Wood, Stock Farm, Clearwell Grid. Ref. 575 085



Looking NW



Looking SE



Looking E

