

Cairngorms National Park Authority

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OFCOM CONSULTATION: REVIEW OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE OBLIGATION

With regard to the current Ofcom consultation: **Universal Service Obligation**, as it relates to Public Call Boxes, (PCBs), the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) endorses the proposals that that 'adequate coverage is best determined at a local level through consultation with local bodies' and that the 'local veto' should remain.

The CNPA welcomes both the implementation of measures to make the process more transparent, accountable and consistent and the issue of proposed guidance on requests for PCB removal, to improve the consultation process.

These views have been informed by the CNPA's involvement in the recent BT consultation undertaken in 2004 regarding the proposed removal of 29 phone boxes within the Cairngorms National Park, which provoked widespread local reaction.

Specific and general objections were raised by individuals, local communities, local authorities and the Cairngorms National Park Authority to the majority of BT's proposed removals within the Park area, particularly in the smaller settlements and remote rural areas.

The objections included:

- concerns regarding safety and security of residents and visitors
- access to emergency services
- absence of or inadequate access to alternative mobile coverage
- the impact on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups particularly young people and older people
- the limited distribution of PCBs within the Park
- heritage and landmark features

Specific criticism was also raised regarding BT's poor and inadequate notification and consultation process which included the lack of direct consultation with local community councils; inadequate time frame to respond to proposals and a lack of clarity in the process and follow up.

It is the view of the CNPA that Community Councils represent the most appropriate level of local government to have the local veto. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, which originally set up Community Councils states that their general purpose as:

"To ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents..... and to take such action in the interests of the community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable."

The CNPA also considers that national park authorities along with local authorities, as key local bodies, are integral to the overall consultation process and can provide a strategic overview on the impact any proposals for PCBs might have on their constituencies.

With regard to the definition of 'site' the CNPA is concerned that any definition of site agreed ensures that due regard is taken of the location and setting (e.g. remote rural, rural, village), customer needs and any other relevant circumstances (e.g. mobile coverage, safety and security issues). For example the CNPA could not endorse the removal of PCB's simply on the basis that individual boxes were only a 15 minutes walk apart. The CNPA would want to ensure that all factors had been considered and that adequate and appropriate consultation had occurred.

With regards to the introduction of emergency and free phone call boxes this along with proposed removals or other changes should be determined through a consultative process involving key local and strategic stakeholders.

Finally, the CNPA considers that the current 42 day consultation period to be inadequate and that this should be raised in line with the suggestion to 90 days

Should you require any further information please contact Don McKee, Head of Planning donmckee@cairngorms.co.uk or telephone 01339753608

Yours sincerely



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