

Technical change request from Norgate Limited

Sunshine 855 is seeking Ofcom's permission to switch off the AM service of their licence AL000138.

Sunshine 855 holds a combined AM and FM commercial licence serving Ludlow and surrounding areas. The AM licence was awarded in October 1992. When it became apparent that businesses didn't wish to advertise on an AM only station and with continual requests from listeners to be able to listen on FM, an application to request an extension to broadcast on FM was granted ten years ago by Ofcom. There are now two FM frequencies on two sites serving the area.

The 855AM frequency can only be accessed during daylight hours, due to heavy interference from European and in particular, Spanish stations. This reduces uninterrupted listening hours from October to March to eight and a half hours daily.

During 2022/2023, Sunshine Radio conducted two surveys on their web site. One question asked how listeners currently tune in to the station. It showed only a very small fraction of people ticked the AM box. Ninety percent of that figure were well out of the transmission area and the remainder were contacted to ask if they were listening on AM because they didn't have access to FM or could they not receive the signal other than by AM. The majority responded saying that they were in fact listening on FM. On one MF outage due to storm Afwen, the loss of programme feed to the MF transmitter lasted twelve hours and no complaints were received directly to the station or noted on social media.

Sunshine 855 maintains switching off the AM transmitter will result in only a very small reduction in the proportion of listeners who will no longer be able to access the service on AM. The coverage in most of the area will continue to be provided on the two FM frequencies and the upcoming SSDAB as well as online. To the west and east there are now new areas of coverage. These are served 24 hours per day as opposed to the AM service which is served only in daylight hours.

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Noting the DCMS recommendations and the other recent applications to switch off their AM services for similar reasons as ours such as a decline in AM listenership and increasing costs, we request that Ofcom considers our request. The BBC switched off their local AM transmitters two years ago for the very same reason. We believe that most of our audience, if not all have already migrated to our FM frequencies and we would alert any listeners that might be affected by an AM switch off, to migrate to FM, online and DAB. We consider there would be no affordability issues for those people as AM only radios are non-existent and those who purchased radios many years ago, had a choice between medium wave and FM any way.

Norgate Limited, September 2023