

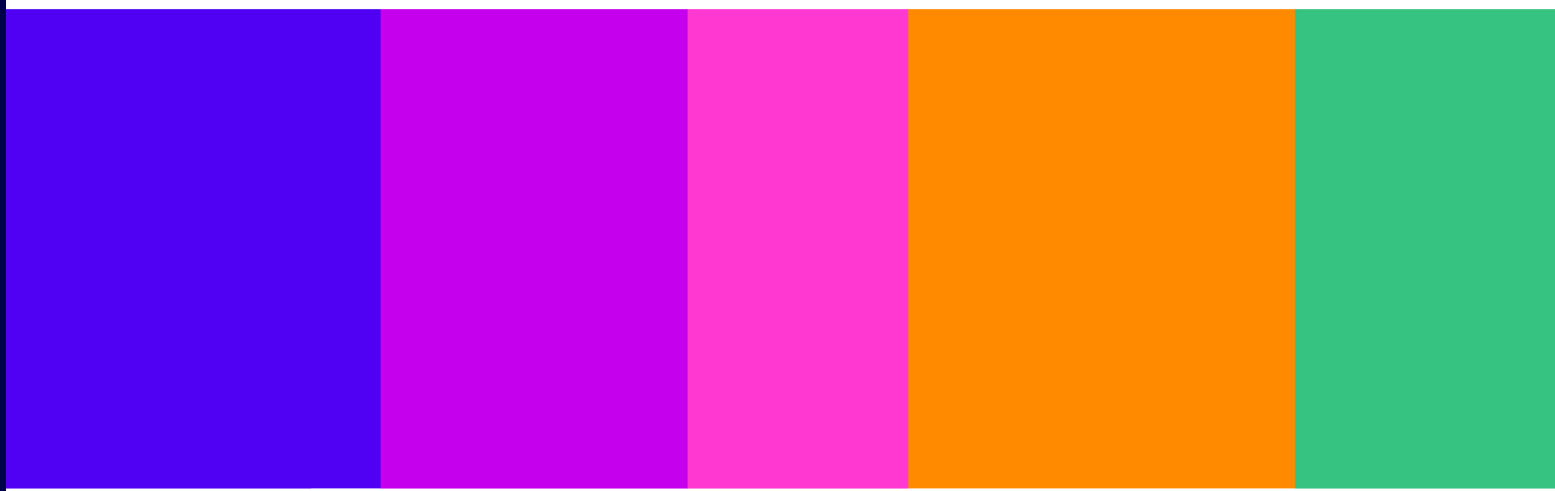
Small-scale DAB coverage change: Southampton

Decision on request to vary the licensed area of the Southampton small-scale radio multiplex

Statement

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1. Overview

- 1.1 A radio multiplex service is the means by which DAB digital radio stations are broadcast. This document sets out Ofcom's decision on a request to change the area to be served by the Southampton small-scale radio multiplex service.
- 1.2 Ofcom is required to consult before deciding whether to agree to such a request. We did so in a consultation that closed on 25 August 2026.

What we have decided – in brief

We have decided to exercise our discretion under section 54A(2) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as modified by the Small-scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019) to approve an application from Southampton DAB C.I.C to vary the small-scale radio multiplex licence for Southampton so as to change the area within which the service is required to be available.

2. Process for changing a radio multiplex licensing area

Statutory framework for variations

- 2.1 Under section 54A(2) of the Broadcasting Act, Ofcom is able to vary a small-scale radio multiplex licence by—
- a) varying the frequency on which the licensed service is required to be provided,
 - b) reducing the area or locality in which the licensed service is required to be available, or
 - c) extending that area or locality to include an adjoining area or locality.
- 2.2 Section 54A(3) and (4) further specify that Ofcom must have received an application for the variation from the licence holder, and that this application must include a technical plan relating to the service proposed to be provided under the licence indicating, in particular—
- a) the area or locality which would be within the coverage area of the service,
 - b) the timetable in accordance with which that coverage would be achieved, and
 - c) the technical means by which it would be achieved.
- 2.3 Under section 54A(5), before deciding whether to grant the application, OFCOM must publish a notice specifying—
- a) the proposed variation of the licence, and
 - b) a period in which representations may be made to OFCOM about the proposal.
- 2.4 Finally, section 54(7) states that Ofcom may vary a licence in accordance with an application, *“only if they are satisfied that doing so would not unacceptably reduce the number of community or local digital sound programme services available to persons living in the area or locality for which, before the proposed variation, the small-scale radio multiplex service is required to be available.”*

Policy framework for variations

- 2.5 Whilst the above sets out the statutory framework for variations, section 54A(2) provides Ofcom with a discretionary power. That is, we can give approval if the statutory conditions are met but we are not required to do so.
- 2.6 We first assess whether a requested change in transmission arrangements constitutes a frequency change, a reduction in the licensed area, or an extension of the licensed area to an adjoining area.
- 2.7 Where a request, if approved, would result in a change of frequency or a decrease in overall coverage of the multiplex service (as measured by adult population coverage), Ofcom will generally consider these to fall within the scope of section 54A and thus will need to be consulted upon before Ofcom can reach a decision.
- 2.8 Where a request, if approved, would result in an overall increase in coverage for the multiplex service (as measured by adult population coverage), Ofcom will determine whether it constitutes an extension of the area in which the licensed service is required to

be available to include an adjoining area. We interpret ‘adjoining area’ in this context to mean an area of new coverage outside the existing licensed area which, whether measured in terms of the specific location(s), geographical size(s) or population coverage(s), could reasonably be considered to be material – we recognise there is a difference between overspill coverage that is unavoidable and intentional extra coverage. We will also take account of whether that adjoining area is, or will potentially be, served by another small-scale radio multiplex service, and whether it was or wasn’t part of the original area advertised by Ofcom.

- 2.9 If we determine that the proposed change in transmission arrangements would result in an extension of the licensed area to an adjoining area, the request will need to be consulted upon before Ofcom can reach a decision.
- 2.10 In circumstances where a change would result in an overall increase in coverage for the multiplex service but not constitute an extension of the licensed area to an adjoining area, we will nevertheless also consider whether any coverage which is lost as a result of the changes is of sufficient magnitude and/or significance such that a consultation would still be appropriate. In reaching this view, we will have regard to the extent of any coverage losses both in terms of the absolute numbers of people who are predicted to lose coverage of the multiplex service, but also in terms of the geographical location(s) where coverage is predicted to be lost. We are likely to attach greater weight to coverage losses in the core population centre(s) of the licensed area than to losses at the periphery of the licensed area, or where losses are dispersed across sparsely populated areas.
- 2.11 For all requests to change transmission arrangements, Ofcom will not give its approval unless it is satisfied in relation to all the following technical requirements:
- a) Overlap with any relevant local multiplex(es) remains not greater than 40% (in line with the policy intention of section 50(2A)(c) of the BA1996 to limit such overlaps).
 - b) Any international constraints are adhered to.
 - c) There is no significant increase in the level of interference to multiplexes elsewhere.¹
- 2.12 Ofcom will also consider:
- a) Whether the reason(s) for making the change is adequately supported by evidence. In particular, we would not normally approve a reduction in coverage unless continuing with the current technical plan is demonstrably not feasible, and feasibility cannot reasonably be achieved through less impactful means.
 - b) Whether there is evidence the licensee has taken reasonable steps to minimise any adverse impacts from changes to its coverage, and that any changes in coverage involving coverage reduction or extension into the coverage area of neighbouring small-scale multiplexes are unavoidable. This should include an indication of all other sites that were investigated and any reasons for selecting a preferred site.
 - c) Whether any increase of overlap (or new overlaps) with the coverage of other small-scale radio multiplex services is excessive. Whilst some overlap between small-scale multiplexes is inevitable, and changes to transmission arrangements may alter this overlap, in general we would consider this should represent no more than a small proportion of the other multiplex’s coverage (if on-air) or polygon (if not yet launched, or yet to be advertised), and extending coverage to a material extent into a key

¹ For on-air multiplexes elsewhere, this means no significant impact to their actual coverage. For polygon areas that have not yet been advertised, or small-scale multiplexes where a licence has been awarded but not yet granted, this means protecting the entire population in the polygon area as at initial assessment.

population centre served by a launched or planned small scale multiplex service should be avoided.

- 2.13 In addition, for any variation requests which are subject to consultation, if we are satisfied in relation to the statutory criterion specified in paragraph 2.7 we will also have regard to the following additional criteria when determining whether to vary the licence:
- a) whether the change in transmission arrangements would be calculated to maintain or promote the development of digital sound broadcasting otherwise than by satellite;
 - b) whether the licensee's proposed coverage plan is satisfactory;
 - c) whether the licensee has the ability to maintain the licensed service;
 - d) whether there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect the rights and interests of stations carried on the multiplex and the rights and interests of other multiplex operators (and the stations they carry); and
 - e) any other factors that appear relevant to the particular case.
- 2.14 Small-scale radio multiplex licences are granted by Ofcom principally to enable the provision of community and local digital sound programme services on the DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting) platform. The statutory basis for licensing small-scale radio multiplexes is the Broadcasting Act 1996, as modified by the Small-scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019 (the "Broadcasting Act").
- 2.15 The holder of a small-scale radio multiplex licence is responsible for, among other things, delivering its service in accordance with a technical plan agreed by Ofcom prior to grant of the licence. The technical plan contains details of the transmitter site(s) from which the multiplex service is broadcast, and other technical details such as power levels and aerial patterns etc.
- 2.16 For small-scale radio multiplexes, the technical plan effectively defines the licensed area of the service. Ofcom publishes coverage maps showing the coverage and therefore extent of the licensed areas for such services. It should be noted these are indicative only, based on computer models rather than actual measurement, and on a defined predicted signal level deemed sufficient to qualify as "receivable". They are subject to some variation due to possible interference from other services and seek to estimate in-building coverage only. Nevertheless, such models provide a reasonable estimate of the coverage achieved by the technical plan appended to a licence.

3. The variation request

Proposed new technical plan

- 3.1 The licence to provide the Southampton small-scale radio multiplex service was awarded to Southampton Digital Radio Limited in February 2023. The multiplex launched in August 2024 using two transmitters to cover the area, located at Dumbleton Tower and Millbrook Tower. Between them, these transmitters covered approximately 375,000 adults. The licence was transferred from Southampton Digital Radio Limited to Southampton DAB C.I.C ('Southampton DAB') in March 2025.
- 3.2 Southampton DAB has applied to vary its licence on the basis that, for reasons beyond its control, it is no longer able to use the Millbrook Tower transmission site. This is because, due to the implementation by the local authority of new fire risk legislation, third party equipment is no longer able to be stored in the lift motor room at Millbrook Tower (where the transmitter equipment was installed). Consequently, the Millbrook Tower transmitter, which delivered the majority of the multiplex's coverage, has been off the air since May.
- 3.3 In order to replace the Millbrook Tower site, Southampton DAB has proposed a new transmitter site at Romsey Golf Club, approximately 2.7 km to the north of Millbrook Tower. However, due to the reduced elevation of the proposed new site, Ofcom's coverage predictions show that there would be a loss of coverage to the west of the area previously served, and over the South Downs to the north. To try to compensate for this, Southampton DAB has also requested that its remaining transmitter at Dumbleton Tower is granted a power increase from 125W to 160W.
- 3.4 Annex 1 sets out a comparison between the coverage of the multiplex when the Millbrook Tower transmitter was still operational, and the new technical plan being proposed, as described in paragraph 3.3 above. We predict the changes would reduce coverage from 374,930 to 366,150 adults - a net loss in coverage of 8,780 adults. This net loss is comprised of around 24,165 adults who will no longer be served by the multiplex, offset by around 15,385 adults who will gain coverage.
- 3.5 Under the proposed changes, there is no extension of the multiplex coverage into any adjoining area.
- 3.6 Section 7 of Ofcom's [Guidance Notes](#) for small-scale multiplex applicants and licensees sets out our approach to considering requests for changes to the coverage of existing small-scale radio multiplexes. Having regard to the criteria set out in the guidance note, we consider that it is appropriate to consult on the licence variation request for Southampton given that the request would involve a net overall reduction (in terms of population coverage) in the area or locality in which the licensed service is required to be available.

Our preliminary view

- 3.7 In our consultation published on 18 July 2026, Ofcom considered that the application met the requirements as set out in section 54A(3) and (4) of the Broadcasting Act.

- 3.8 In relation to the statutory requirements in section 54A(6), Ofcom noted that the proposed change results in a net decrease in coverage amounting to 8,870 adults, affecting a variety of locations to the north and west of the existing licence area. In the context of a multiplex covering around 375,000 adults, this represents a material loss, albeit a relatively small one.
- 3.9 However, the statutory provision requires consideration of whether this is “unacceptable”. The acceptability of a loss is not simply a matter of the number of households affected but the circumstances of the particular case. In this case, Ofcom recognised that the licensee was required by the local authority to vacate its current main transmission site at very short notice due to changes in fire safety regulation. The licensee has identified a replacement transmitter at Romsey Golf Club, although - due its reduced elevation - the coverage that would be achieved by this site would be somewhat less than that achieved by the Millbrook Tower site. We also noted that the licensee is proposing to increase the power at its other transmitter (Dumbleton Tower) with a view to minimising any coverage loss.
- 3.10 While the loss of coverage is disappointing for affected listeners, Ofcom’s provisional view was that the applicant had genuinely sought to minimise these losses and the reduction (approximately 2.3% of the existing population coverage) was acceptable.
- 3.11 In relation to policy considerations, Ofcom provisionally considered that all technical requirements referred to in paragraph 2.14 above had been met, as overlap with the relevant local radio multiplex (South Hampshire) remains below the 40% threshold and international constraints are still adhered to.
- 3.12 With regards to the considerations listed in paragraph 2.15, we were preliminarily satisfied. The licensee had provided evidence to demonstrate that continuing with the current technical plan was not possible due to the implementation of new fire regulations, and that the availability of other economically viable transmission sites which might have delivered greater coverage than the one being proposed had been investigated. Ofcom was also satisfied that the criteria listed in paragraph 2.16 have been met.

Consultation responses and Ofcom assessment

- 3.13 Ofcom did not receive any responses to this consultation and as such the consultation did not provide any grounds for departing from our preliminary view.

Ofcom’s decision

- 3.14 We have decided, for the reasons set out above, to exercise our discretion under section 54A(2) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as modified by the Small-scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019) to approve the application from Southampton DAB C.I.C. to vary the small-scale radio multiplex licence for Southampton so as to change the area within which the service is required to be available.

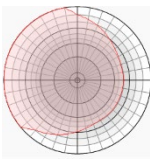
The overview section in Section 1 of this document is a simplified high-level summary only. The decision we have taken is set out in the full document.

A1. Proposed change

- A1.1 The licensee is proposing to change one of its two transmitter sites. The current site at Millbrook Tower would be replaced by a new site at Romsey Golf Club. It is also proposing a power increase at its Dumbleton Tower transmitter site.
- A1.2 A summary of the currently licensed and proposed coverages is given below, together with a comparison of the coverage provided by each technical plan, and population counts of the adults (aged 15+) within the areas.
- A1.3 The coverage maps indicate where the small-scale radio multiplex service should be receivable on a DAB digital radio within a typical domestic building.²
- A1.4 However, please note the following caveats:
- The maps are based on computer predictions rather than actual measurements, so is indicative only.
 - 'Receivable' is based on the defined signal level required by a receiver that meets the minimum receiver specification (available here: [Minimum specifications for DAB and DAB+ personal and domestic digital radio receivers: Digital radio action plan report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/344441/Minimum_specifications_for_DAB_and_DAB_plus_personal_and_domestic_digital_radio_receivers_Digital_radio_action_plan_report_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)), although that level may not be adequate for receivers built to a poorer sensitivity, or be sufficient in every location.
 - The maps do not take account of any interference from other DAB digital radio services. The likelihood of any such interference will increase as more DAB services are launched, but Ofcom will seek to reduce the impact as far as is reasonably practicable.
 - The maps do not show where reception outside homes (e.g. along roads) may be possible.

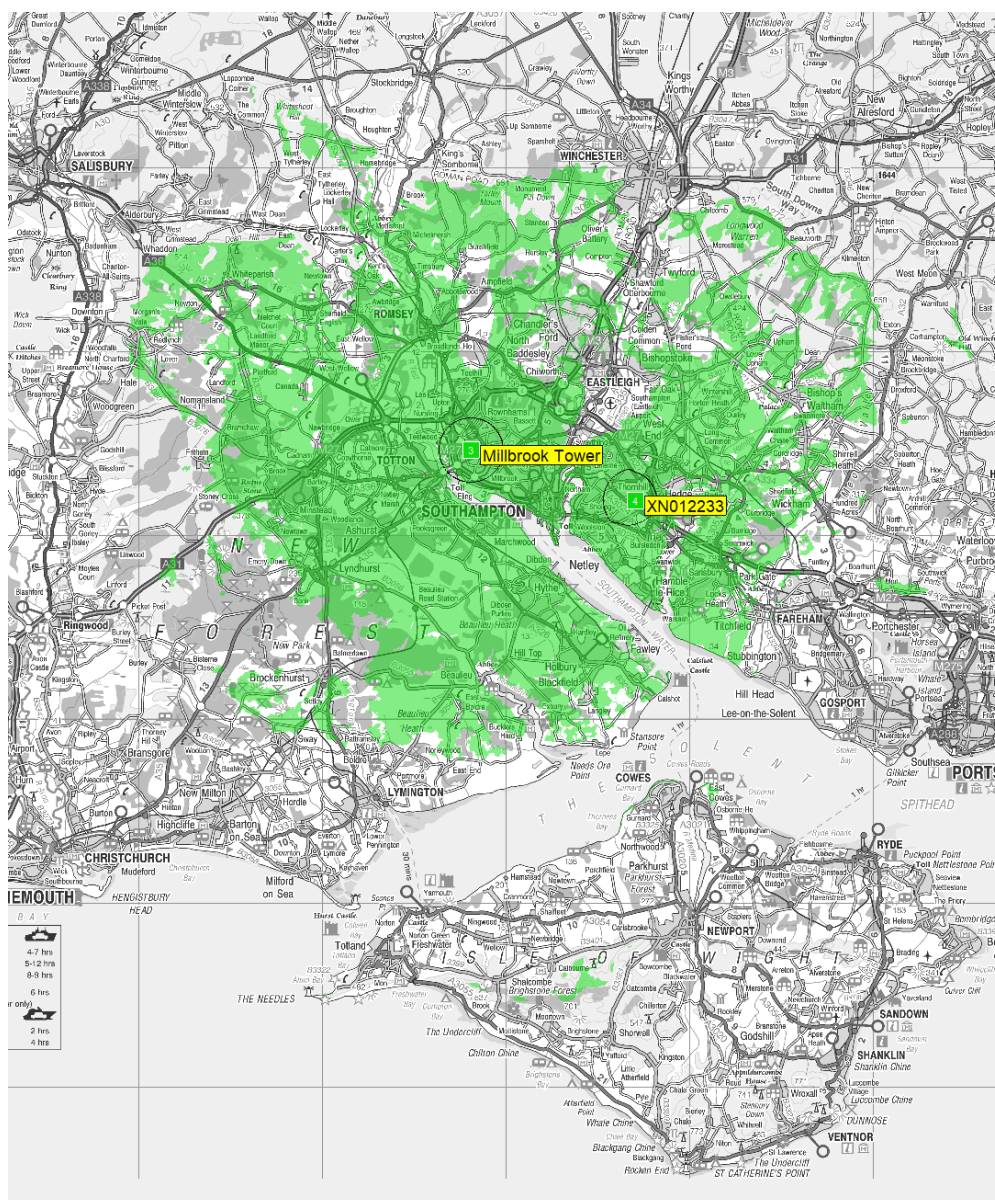
Coverage required by current licence

Currently licensed transmitter details

Site name	NGR	Site height	Power (W)	Aerial height	Aerial Pattern
Dumbleton Tower	SU 47085 11898	56m (57m HTZ)	125W	44m	
Millbrook Tower	SU 38094 14636	10m	200W	77m	ND

² The areas classed as served are where we predict a field strength of at least 63dBµV/m at 10m above ground level, which corresponds to providing a service at 80% location probability and 50% time availability, as set out in our [Technical policy guidance for DAB multiplex licensees \(ofcom.org.uk\)](http://www.ofcom.gov.uk/consult/condocs/dab/dab_multiplex_licensees/dab_multiplex_licensees.pdf)

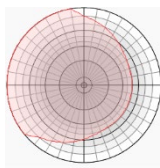
Map of currently licensed coverage



Coverage shown is for predicted indoor coverage (63dBμV/m at 10m above ground level)

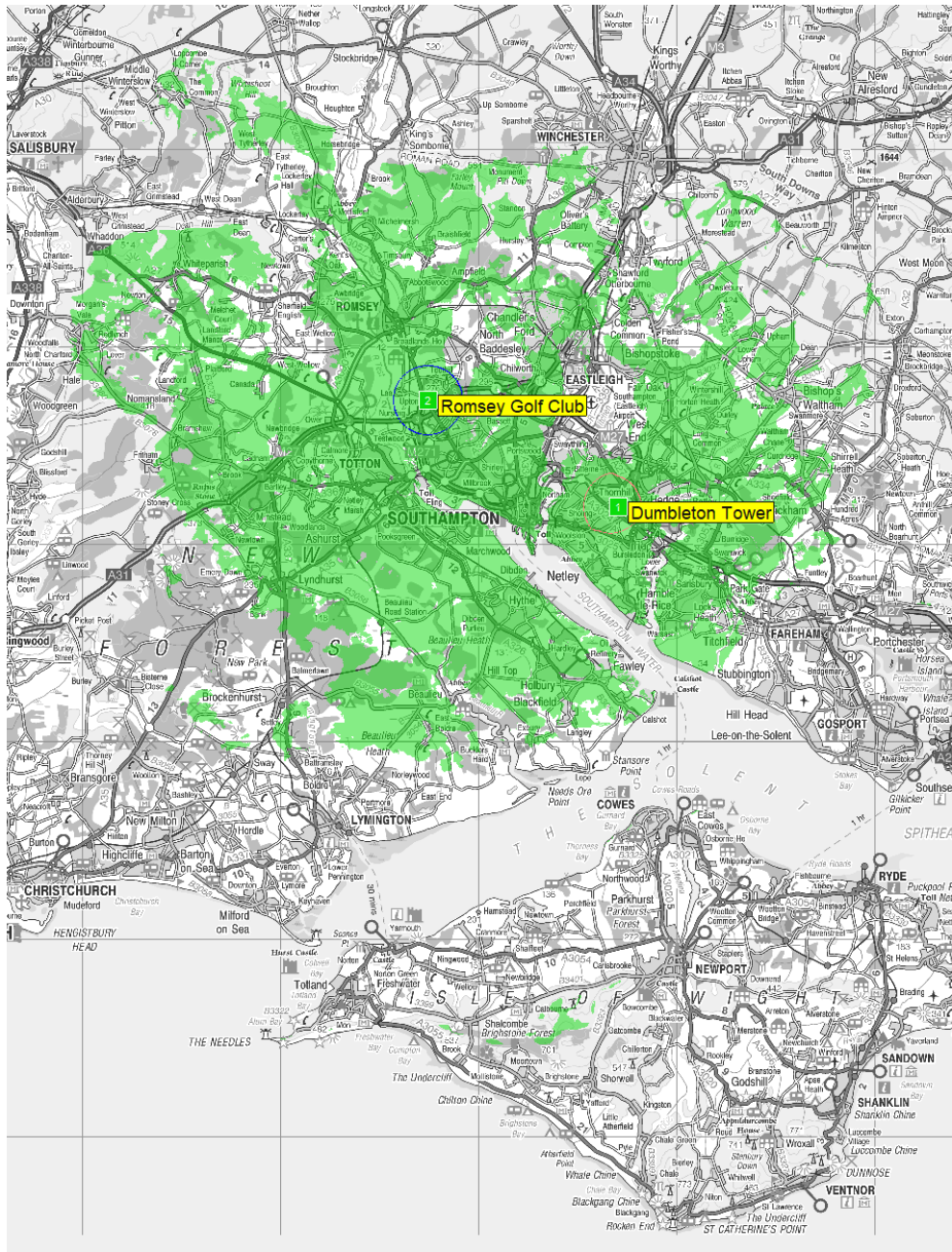
Coverage proposed by the licensee

Proposed transmitter details (new site in bold)

Site name	NGR	Site height	Power (W)	Aerial height	Aerial Pattern
Dumbleton Tower	SU 47085 11898	40m (57m HTZ)	160W	44m	
Romsey Golf Club	SU 37453 17279	65m (52m)	300W	15m	Omnidirectional

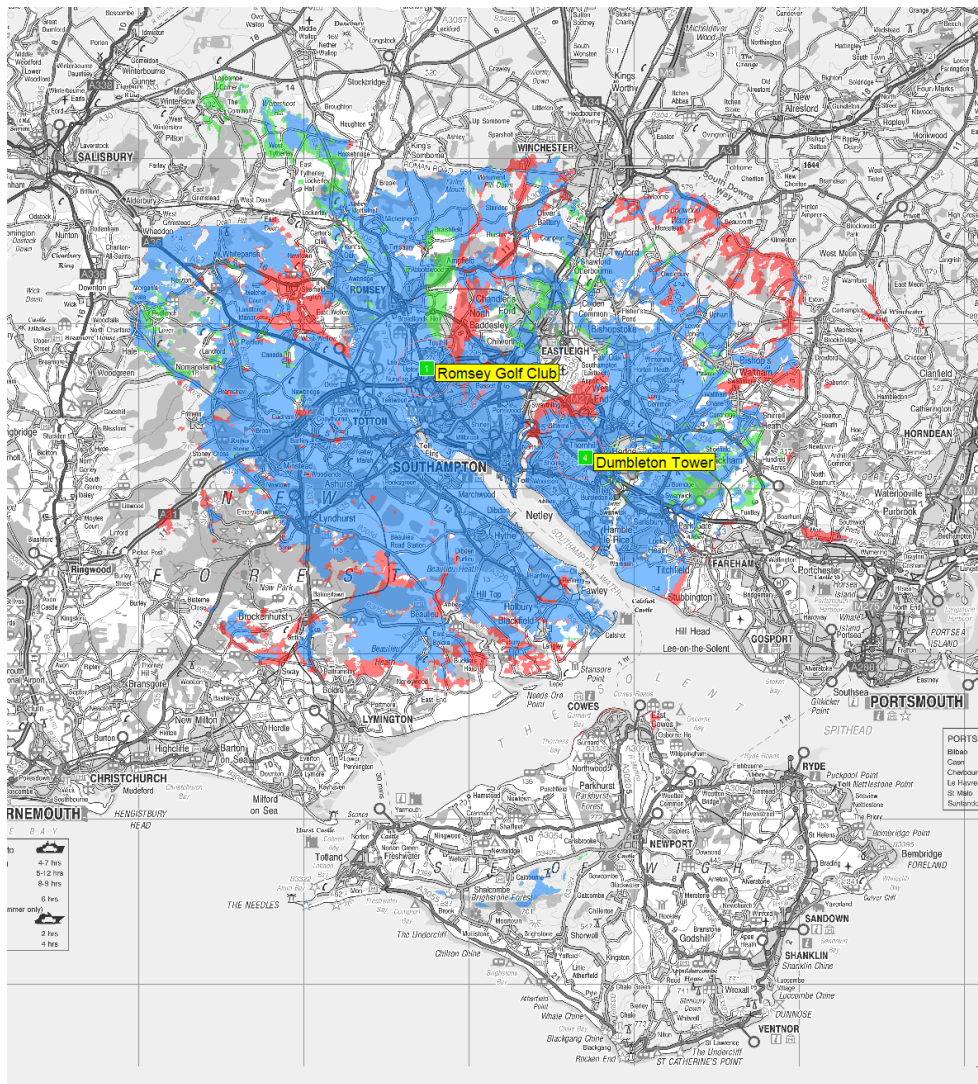
		HTZ)			
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Map of proposed coverage



Coverage shown is for predicted indoor coverage (63dBμV/m at 10m above ground level)

Comparison of coverage



Coverage comparison for the Southampton small-scale multiplex. Red is lost coverage, green is gained coverage and blue is retained coverage.

Coverage summary table (adults 15+)

Population served by currently licensed coverage	374,930
Population served by proposed coverage	366,150
Net population change	- 8,870
Population retained (blue areas)	350,765
Population gained (green areas)	15,385
Population lost (red areas)	24,165

A2. Impact assessments

Impact assessment

- A2.1 Section 7 of the Communications Act 2003 requires that, where we are proposing to do anything for the purposes of, or in connection with, the carrying out of our functions, and it appears to us that the proposal is important, we are required to carry out and publish an assessment of the likely impact of implementing the proposal, or a statement setting out our reasons for thinking that it is unnecessary to carry out such an assessment.
- A2.2 In approving the request request, there will be reduced coverage by the multiplex service, compared with the service currently required to be provided. The multiplex is required to provide capacity for community digital sound programme services, a characteristic of which is that they are provided for the good of members of the public or particular communities, and social gain within the locality. Commercial digital sound programme services do not have requirements in relation to social gain, but it is recognised that some have a particular community focus and in practice provide some benefits to listeners.
- A2.3 Therefore, the changes will have an adverse effect on some consumers in the Southampton multiplex area when compared to the current coverage. This is due to the reduced coverage to the north and west of the existing licence area, which, while mitigated by relatively small coverage gains elsewhere, would amount to a net loss of 8,750 adults. However, Ofcom judges it appropriate to consider the alternative counterfactual that the Southampton small-scale radio multiplex service would either cease to be provided in the areas formerly served by the Millbrook Tower transmitter, or use an alternative transmitter site providing inferior coverage to that being proposed. As such, we believe the adverse impacts on consumers to be acceptable, as around 366,000 adults will continue to be able to access the service if the proposed changes are enacted.

Equality impact assessment

- A2.4 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the 2010 Act) imposes a duty on Ofcom, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct related to protected characteristics under the 2010 Act. The 2010 Act also requires Ofcom to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share specified protected characteristics and persons who do not.
- A2.5 Regarding Ofcom's duties under the Equality Act, community radio services in particular can provide benefits to listeners sharing protected characteristics, and foster good relations between such people and others. Under the proposals, there would be a net reduction in the availability of such services resulting from the change in location of the multiplex's main transmission site. However, referring to the general Impact Assessment above, Ofcom considers this to be acceptable due to the alternative, which would be that the Southampton small-scale radio multiplex service would cease to be provided in the areas formerly served by the Millbrook Tower transmitter, or use an alternative transmitter providing inferior coverage to that being proposed.
- A2.6 Ofcom has not identified any further disproportionate benefits or adverse impacts on consumers and communities.