

**Police and Crime Panel**  
**6 April 2023**  
**Former Tele-communications Mast**  
**Report of Police and Crime Commissioner**

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## **Purpose**

To present to the Police and Crime Panel a summary of the history of the former tele-communications mast formally located on the site of the old police headquarters, a chronology of the main issues of the mast from the period 2011 to 2023, and related governance issues.

## **History of the Mast**

Durham Constabulary moved to its former HQ site in 1964. It required a communications mast to enable day to day communication with officers and the then county architect and structural engineers Ove Arup designed, built and erected the mast to enable this. The mast was erected in 1968.

The mast ceased to be an operational asset a number of years ago. Eventually, it was granted statutory protection by Historic England in 2003 when it became a grade II listed building.

## **Chronology**

Appendix 2 outlines the main issues in relation to the mast from 2011 to 2023. It sets out the various dates where work has been commissioned, reports received, and applications made.

## **Governance issues**

These are set out below:

- Asset ownership rests with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Chief Constable does not own the mast, or other assets. (The Chief Constable does, however, have day to day direction and control of operational assets.) The Chief Constable does not have any decision-making powers in relation to the mast.
- External funding: the OPCC has sought external funding for the mast but so far has been unsuccessful. This is a continuing piece of work although a number of grant givers only award small sums of money ie less than £20,000, where applications are agreed.
- Re-erection: the OPCC is currently carrying out a market test to identify if there are contractors who would be capable of re-erecting the mast. Given the complexity of the project, this is expected to be a difficult exercise to successfully complete. Given the complexity of the project, it is expected that the cost of re-erection, maintenance and eventual dismantling and disposal will be higher than planned.
- Gifting: the OPCC has previously explored the option of gifting the mast to a third party, however, this was unsuccessful due to cost implications in relation to relocation costs.

**Current Position**

The OPCC has instructed consultants to engage with the planning department in relation to the mast.

**Recommendations**

Members of the Panel are recommended to note the report.

**Joy Allen**  
**Police and Crime Commissioner**

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## Appendix 1: Risks and Implications

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### Finance

n/a

### Staffing

n/a

### Equality and Diversity

n/a

### Accommodation

n/a

### Crime and Disorder

n/a

### Children's Act 2004

n/a

### Stakeholder/Community Engagement

n/a

### Environment

n/a

### Collaboration and Partnerships

n/a

### Value for Money and Productivity

n/a

### Potential Impact on Police and Crime Plan Priorities

n/a

### Commissioning

n/a

### Other risks

n/a

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## Appendix 2: Chronology

- 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011 – Application submitted to Durham County Council Planning Department for demolition of Mast. Subsequently, the Council verbally requested the Police Authority to withdraw the Application, in view of the forthcoming local development plan.
- 27<sup>th</sup> January 2012 – ARUP (original Mast engineers) report received on potential to dismantle and re-erect Mast. It concluded that this may be possible subject to various risks including:
  - ground conditions
  - existing joint work
  - connection bolts
  - breakage
- 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012 – Application to relocate Mast submitted to Durham County Council.
- 26<sup>th</sup> October 2012 – Planning Permission for relocation granted.
- 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013 – 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 2014 - new HQ under construction.
- August 2014 – May 2015 - phased relocation of old HQ staff into new HQ and other assets. Building snagging carried out.
- 5<sup>th</sup> June 2015 – discussions began between force Estates staff and Durham County Council Planning Department regarding positioning of the Mast on the field adjacent to the new Headquarters site and associated Planning conditions.
- 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015 – exchanged contracts with Persimmon regarding the former HQ site (subject to them obtaining full Planning Permission). No requirement within any Planning consent to set aside money from the sale of the old HQ site for any specific purpose.
- 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016 – completed the sale with Persimmon regarding the former HQ. The Office of the PCC received a gross capital receipt from which was deducted a sum of money payable to the County Council in respect of affordable housing provision. Initially this was for affordable housing schemes within the city locality. The County Council subsequently requested agreement from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to spend this sum across wider areas of the County. This was agreed. At outline Planning stage it was assessed by independent valuers acting on behalf of the OPCC, that relocation of the Mast would result in an increased capital receipt of around £0.9m assuming a five metre stand-off distance from the base of the Mast. Upon full Planning Permission and following re design of the site (i.e. identifying the developable area) by Persimmon, the relocation actually resulted in an increased capital receipt of less than £0.3m. The revised design was agreed by Durham County Council Planning Department.

- 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016 –An independent investigative market testing procurement exercise was undertaken to identify potential companies to dismantle the Mast. This indicated a lack of interest from the market due to the inherent risks involved with the project in terms of risk of breakage, joints, ground condition and connection bolts. This resulted in a direct award to O'Brien Ltd. by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for relocation works. It cost approx. £0.2m to dismantle and move the Mast.
- 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016 – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017. Various works carried out including testing for lifting, stabilisation of structure, trialling and various fulfilments of Health and Safety requirements.
- 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017 – Mast dismantled and physically moved to current location. This required the cutting of the connecting bolts between the key elements of the structure. Only at this point, with the Mast dismantled, was it possible to explore in detail the feasibility and cost of re-erection at the new site on Aykley Heads identified in the approved Planning Applications. As set out by the Office of the PCC specialist consultants, the reassembly presented some notable issues, including the cost of re-erection, ongoing costs of maintenance, security from vandalism and climbing and the safety of neighbouring buildings. Consequently, the Office of the PCC was keen to explore whether there may be alternatives to the re-erection currently consented.
- March 2017 - August 2017 – various briefing sessions held with PCC regarding issues and options. The complexity of re-erection and cost implications were also raised by the OPCC Chief Finance Officer in regular meetings with the then Head of Planning.
- 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017 – an options report was received by the PCC from Lichfields Planning consultant and Legal advice was sought from Ward Hadaway. The advice recommended obtaining a number of further specialist reports to include structural engineer's assessments and market viability opinions ( ie the possibility of re-use for its original tele-communications purpose) before more detailed option appraisal could be given. Finding specialists willing to engage proved difficult due to the unusual nature of the structure but attempts were made. During this time, the incumbent PCC became incapacitated. Meanwhile, the acting PCC sought his own independent professional advice from a Heritage architect, who advised that the services of a Planning specialist were required due to the complexity of the project.
- January 2020 - The acting PCC requested the Force Estate department to obtain updated specialist reports and these were commissioned. The Covid pandemic resulted in specialist suppliers becoming furloughed leading to further delay.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020 - A market viability assessment was received which identified that no modern telecommunications company would be interested in installing equipment on the Mast should it be re-erected. Engineers reports were slower to produce due to lack of interest in the project and also due to repeated cancellation of site visits due to Covid infection.
- 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021 – Letter requested by Head of Planning at Durham County Council formally setting out chronology to update, which was duly submitted.

- 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – Meeting with Lichfields Planning Consultants and wider consultants to commission the Planning Application to demolish the Mast.
- 18<sup>th</sup> August 2022 – Planning Application to demolish submitted to DCC to include detailed heritage assessment.
- 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022 – Email from the Parish Council to Lichfields suggesting the option of creating a monument using components of the Mast as opposed to full re-instatement. Estates Dept sought specialist engineering advice to rebut claim that laying down has caused damage. This confirmed laying down had not affected the condition of the Mast.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022- Meeting with Planning consultants, more information requested by Planning Department regarding costs & possible grant funding options. It was identified that the Mast project did not meet grant conditions so applications were not made. In addition, details regarding financial pressures faced by the force were clarified.
- 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – Lichfields issues a letter responding to objections and queries raised by respondents/ consultees in relation to the Planning Application. This letter is attached as an appendix , and was publicly available at the time.
- 20<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – Meeting between Durham Estates, Lichfields, Parish Council, City of Durham Trust and Planning Department representative. Planning Department representative expressed a personal view of not being supportive of Parish Council's proposal regarding creation of a monument although Lichfields advised this was a viable option for consideration.
- 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023 – Lichfields propose appointment of heritage landscape designer to design potential monument scheme (ONE Environments)
- 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023 - Notice from Planning Department that the Application will be considered by the Planning Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and that the recommendation will be to not support the Application.
- 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023 – Planning Committee refused Application.
- 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023 – Pre enforcement letter received from DCC giving 21 days to indicate next steps by the Office of the PCC.