

IRS PROGRAMME

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Introduction

In the London area the switch from terrestrial to digital TV transmissions is scheduled to take place in the year 2012. To meet its obligations to its tenants, the London Borough of Camden has embarked on a programme of replacing the reception equipment on its residential properties.

The programme of work has been divided into a 'Year 1 Programme' and a 'Years 2 to 4 Programme'. In considering the buildings in the programmes it was noted that some of these lie within Conservation Areas and would, therefore, require a Planning Consent for work outside the scope of permitted development. A few are also Listed requiring a Listed Building Consent.

The buildings to which the current applications relate are blocks where several dwellings share a communal aerial system. In accordance with advice from the duty Planning Officer we have made one application for each Estate where work is to take place.

Siting of Equipment

The IRS (Integrated Reception System) includes one aerial and two satellite dishes per block. Wherever possible, these have been sited discreetly – on roofs where they are not easily seen from street level or on the rear or side elevations of the properties. However, the position is ultimately determined by the technical requirement to get a clear line of sight to the satellites and transmitter avoiding obstructions such as mature trees and taller adjacent buildings. The siting of the aerials and satellite dishes shown on the attached drawings and annotated photographs is a best compromise between the technical requirements and the need to minimise the visual appearance of the equipment and its impact on the Conservation Area.

The installation also includes an external cabinet/junction box, usually located at high level on one of the external elevations. These have been sited to be as discreet as possible, but also reflecting the chosen cable routing as discussed below.

In considering the locations of equipment we have had to be cognisant of the requirements of safe access for repair and maintenance. In general 'active equipment' must be accessible by one man using a ladder only (10m reach) i.e. using no specialist access equipment. 'Active equipment' includes relays within the cabinets and the LNB's at the focus of the satellite dishes. Aerials are considered non-active but the satellite dishes sometimes need realigning which requires the operative to manhandle them so provision has to be made for this to be done safely.

In exceptional circumstances equipment may be located where it can only be reached by scaffolding, cherry picker or other access equipment. However, arranging for this specialist equipment to be brought in can slow the response time, increasing the time residents are without television signals, it also increases to the cost of repairs to the Landlord – in this case the London Borough of Camden.

There might in these instances be undue pressure on the maintenance contractor to work in an unsafe manner in order to restore service more quickly so is not the favoured approach by London Borough of Camden.

Routing of Cables

Each property is connected to the Junction Box by two cables, the routing of these has been carefully considered in relation to each property. Each of the properties was visited to establish whether a viable internal route existing for the cable runs. Where an internal route exists this has been chosen, even though this is more difficult and expensive to install.

Where no viable internal route exists the cables have been routed to ensure they are as discreet as possible, using the architectural features of the building to disguise the cable runs. For example cables are run tight under the eaves, or tucked under string courses, or dropped in the back corner of recesses in the facade where they are less visible from the street. External cable runs are generally being run in brown cabling as this blends with the brickwork of the wall behind, or in white where they run over painted render.

Cable runs have also been positioned to take account of the need to be a minimum arm's length from balconies to avoid tampering.

Cables are bunched together in 'looms' and the loom sizes depend on the number of properties being served. At the start of the run there 2 cables x number dwellings on run (e.g. 4 flats would start at 8 cables thick) but diminishes in size as the run passes each property getting two cables less each time, until just two cables remain to serve the last property. The numbers of cables applicable to particular blocks are marked on the elevation drawings and indicative sizes are given in the table at the side of the elevation drawings.

Where cables have to be fixed to elevations that are very high or difficult to access safely the contractors use a 'catenary wire'. This is a stainless steel cable stretched between fixings at the top and bottom of the building. This cable provides a support for the aerial cables.

Wherever possible cables are not run on the Street elevation of properties. However, cables enter directly to the Living Rooms of each dwelling to avoid major works and disruption within the dwelling. Where Living Rooms are located on the Street elevation of the property then the cables must also be run on this same elevation.

Existing Equipment

The new IRS installation will provide an opportunity to remove existing unsightly satellite dishes that have been haphazardly installed with little respect for the building or Conservation Areas in which they are located. It is understood that a separate contract will be let by London Borough of Camden to remove individual satellite dishes and return these to residents where these duplicate the service being offered by the IRS. This is likely to take place after the switchover in 2012.

Many of the blocks are also served by cable TV, originally installed by Cable London but now owned by Virgin Media and maintained by them. This equipment and cabling is providing an alternative service to residents and is not under the direct control of the London Borough of Camden. For these reasons it is not possible to remove the equipment and cabling and it will remain in-situ alongside the new IRS Installation.

Overall the finished installation should provide an improvement to the Camden Conservation Areas and will most definitely improve the amenity of the residents in the blocks where work is carried out.