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My ref: PSO/18009/83

Your ref:

1/ January 1984

Dear Ken,

-undated

Thank you for your letter of 19 December 1983 about the proposal by Mercury Communications to instal microwave transmitter apparatus in Manchester; and the City Council's refusal to grant planning permission.

Mercury Communications have not yet submitted an appeal. They have 6 months from the receipt of the notice of refusal. The earlier they appeal, the earlier they are likely to receive a final decision. The time-scale for this will inevitably depend on the complexity of the particular case and on the procedure adopted - in particular whether, as in the great majority of cases, the appeal is decided by one of my Planning Inspectors.

You will appreciate that I cannot comment on the merits of a proposal which may well come before me on appeal; I can assure you however that a decision, based on a full and fair assessment of all the planning issues, would be issued as quickly as possible, and I have asked my officials to guarantee that there will be no avoidable delays and that we do all we can to handle the appeal speedily.

I will see that you are notified if an appeal is received, and of the eventual outcome.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister.

*Yours ever*  
*Pat*

PATRICK JENKIN

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11 JAN 1984

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister ✓



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From the Minister of State  
for Industry and Information Technology

KENNETH BAKER MP

Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP  
Secretary of State for the  
Environment  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON SW1

PA  
DUB  
30/12

Prime Minister

To be aware

DUB  
29/12

MERCURY COMMUNICATIONS

I am sure that you were as disturbed as I was to hear of the refusal by Manchester City Council to grant planning permission to Mercury to instal its microwave transmission apparatus in Manchester. This will inevitably delay the extension of Mercury's service to the Manchester area, and deprive Manchester businesses of the possibility of using Mercury's competing telecommunications network.

While Manchester City Council are claiming that the decision stems from the possible health risks involved, their statements elsewhere seem to suggest that this has little to do with planning procedures but is instead a politically motivated step. I attach an article from this week's Sunday Times which would tend to confirm this view.

I understand that Mercury will be shortly lodging an appeal with you against the Manchester City Council decision. I know that you will be acting in a quasi-judicial role when considering this case, and that you will have to make your judgement on the basis of the planning issues involved.

I would therefore obviously not wish to interfere in any way in this process, but the gaining of the necessary consent is central to Mercury's expansion programme, and I would ask that their appeal is looked at with all possible urgency, in particular as it seems that other councils might well be considering similar action.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister.

KENNETH BAKER

M24/M24AAG

Sunday Times  
18/12/83

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# Councils back phone union over Mercury transmitters

by Julian Desser

THE Post Office Engineering Union has found a new weapon in its campaign against British Telecom's commercial rival, Mercury Communications. The union has enlisted the support of Labour councils to block the installation of transmitters vital to Mercury's success.

Mercury is already troubled by a lack of customers and is behind schedule in its attempts to build a nationwide network of microwave transmitters to carry telecommunications traffic. It now faces the prospect of further delays while it appeals against council decisions to refuse planning consent for them.

Last week, the Labour-controlled Manchester city council refused Mercury leave to build a 4ft-diameter rooftop microwave dish; Nottingham agreed to defer its decision and other councils are expected to follow suit.

So far only London and Birmingham have given Mercury the necessary planning consent. The company is waiting for decisions from Coventry, Leeds, Sheffield and Bristol - all Labour-controlled except Bristol, which is a hung council with the balance of power being held by the Liberals.

The reason given for Manchester council's decision was a possible health risk from microwave radiation - in spite of contrary advice from the city's own planning officer.

The council's deputy chairman, Kevin Lim, confirmed

that the refusal was in support of the union's battle with Mercury. "I was directly approached by representatives from the Manchester central branch of the union," says Lim. "They were able to supply considerable evidence and statistics to prove there is a real, potential danger to health in a crowded city.

"At the same time my Labour colleagues and I are sympathetic to the union's fight against privatisation and the establishment of a rival telephone system."

The Medical Research Council, however, says the evidence of health risks from the microwave transmitters is thin. The maximum safe level of constant daily exposure to the microwaves is 10 milliwatts per square centimetre, but Mercury's equipment will produce only 1.12 milliwatts.

Nevertheless, the union is to step up its lobbying of councils where Mercury is seeking consent.

Sandy Skinner, Mercury's communications manager, says the union's claims of health risks are nonsense. "British Telecom itself is the biggest user of microwave technology."

Mercury is alarmed by this latest tactic. It suffered damaging delays when the union refused to connect its communications system to the national network. The company eventually defeated the union in the Court of Appeal.

Further council decisions to refuse planning permission could result in more delays - of up to a year - before Department of Environment appeal inquiries can be held.

9 DEC 1983

