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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title:** REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** ERECTION OF 18.5m HIGH MONOPOLE AND ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT AT TOMINTOUL TELEPHONE EXCHANGE, TOMNABAT LANE, TOMINTOUL. (FULL PLANNING PERMISSION)

**REFERENCE:** 04/442/CP

**APPLICANT:** AIRWAVE MMO2 Ltd., c/o MONO CONSULTANTS Ltd, 48 ST. VINCENT ST., GLASGOW, G2 5TS.

**DATE CALLED-IN:** 10 SEPTEMBER 2004



**Fig. 1 - Location Plan**

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The proposal is for an 18.5 metres high, galvanised steel monopole with one 300mm diameter transmission dish and a 600mm square panel dish . The site of the mast is within the compound of the British Telecom Exchange at Tomintoul. The Exchange is on the southern boundary of the settlement with open land on 2 sides of the site. A mature tree belt exists along the eastern side of the site, and with the mast located at the back corner of the eastern end of the exchange site, the mast will be close to these trees. The trees are estimated to be about 12 metres in height. Another mast (10metres high and with 2 transmission dishes) presently exists at the diagonally opposite corner of the Exchange site. The site is surrounded with a 1.2m post and wire fence. The site has a pitched roof building housing BT equipment, and a hard-standing area for the parking of vehicles off the public road.
2. The mast will be connected with the exchange via underground ducting for the power lines. There will be no other new visible equipment added to the existing facilities on the site. The mast is for the use of the emergency and public safety services and in particular the police.
3. The mast is classed as a “Hopper” site. This provides a link for radio signals to ensure a continuous coverage for the Airwave network in the area. As such the mast does not require the number of dishes associated with other (TETRA) base stations. The mast does however have to be associated with the Telephone Exchange in order for it to operate. It is proposed to paint the pole an olive green colour, or such other colour as may be agreed.
4. To the north across a road is the Tomnabat Court Residential Nursing Home. In the south west corner of that site is an overhead electricity transformer mounted on double poles.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

5. **NPPG19** (Telecommunications) and **PAN62** (Radio Telecommunications) set out the national policy, and siting and design principles for new telecommunications infrastructure. This guidance is incorporated in Development Plan policies, and in the new **Interim Planning Policy No.2** Document recently produced for consultation within the Cairngorms National Park Area. **In The Moray Council Local Plan** Policy L/ED9 on Telecommunications indicates that telecommunications proposals will be permitted where they are considered to meet the requirements of the environmental policies of the plan. Applicants may be asked to justify the choice of site. Measures to mitigate the impact of the installations will be sought, and the sharing of facilities will be encouraged. In the Local Plan policies for Tomintoul, ENV3 Tomnabat Lane (South), states that “the retention of tree cover in this location is a priority”. The village is surrounded by an Area of Great Landscape Value designation.

6. The **Cairngorms National Park Authority's Interim Planning Policy No.2: Radio Telecommunications** (consultation draft) sets out in Policy RT1 the criteria to be satisfied in determining new proposals. These include that the proposal should have no adverse impact on the landscape or cultural heritage of the Park, and should be sited and designed to minimise the visual and environmental impacts. There should be no significant environmental impacts on flora, fauna or habitats, or adverse impact on residential properties or communities. The development requires to have a justification and reasons for other alternative sites not being suitable, also why other sites could not be shared, perhaps by using existing masts. It is necessary to demonstrate that there is no discernable risk to public health (an ICNIRP Declaration). Also all redundant equipment and infrastructure should be removed timeously at the end of their lifespan.

## CONSULTATIONS

7. There have been no adverse comments from Moray Council consultees. These include the Environmental Health Manager, the Environmental Protection Manager, and the Transportation Manager.
8. The CNPA Natural Resources Group have advised that, at 18.5m high and situated close to a developed area, the development will have little adverse impact on the landscape.

## REPRESENTATIONS

9. A letter of objection has been received from Castlehill Housing Association, owners of the sheltered housing development at Tomnabat Court. There is concern at the height of the pole, and at the impact of the monopole and ancillary equipment on the outlook and amenity of the properties at Tomnabat Court. "Possible risks from equipment attached to the Monopole" are raised, given the proximity of the development to the residential accommodation. A copy is attached for the Committee's information.
10. While not a representation, Mono Consultants have provided some background information for the application, and indicate that by 2005, the Government will be withdrawing the existing frequencies being used by the police for their radio systems. There is a need therefore for the emergency services to provide an alternative system by that date. Airwave has been planning a new coverage for the Police using the minimum amount of base stations possible. The Airwave Service has a number of benefits, including secure communications, clearer voice quality, automatic vehicle and person location, access to local and national databases, and shared access among public safety organisations.

## APPRAISAL

11. The main issues to consider for this proposal are the need for the development, whether this is the most suitable location, and if the design is satisfactory.
12. Firstly there is a good case for the emergency and public services in the locality to have the most up-to-date communications system, with good signal quality, and shared access among the public safety organisations, leading to more effective coordination of major incidents. This mast is linked into a comprehensive digital radio network (TETRA) for Grampian Police, which is expected to provide full coverage of their area.
13. It is stated that this Tomintoul site is not a TETRA coverage site. It is required by BT so that data from Airwave's Cnoc Fergun site, which lies in a remote location to the north outwith the Park, in the Moray Council area, can be linked to the BT network and then routed back to the relevant terminal within the Police network. Without this proposed transmission link, the Cnoc Fergun site would become an isolated island of coverage unable to communicate with rest of the system. The situation is the same at the Lecht site. Effectively the proposed mast will provide a transmission link between these two other sites.
14. The nature of this "Hopper" mast does, therefore, limit its location to being in reasonably close proximity to a BT network and in this instance a line of sight for the receiving dishes, has been established at the Tomintoul BT Exchange Station. In such a location all power and equipment housing is already on site, and with the undergrounding of all cabling, the result is that the mast is the only visible addition to the site. The existing 10m mast on the site is closer to the residential accommodation at Tomnabat Court, as is the elevated electricity transformer. The new 18.5m high mast is further away from the sheltered housing (about 6 metres further back on the site) and set against a belt of mature trees which will in part reduce the impact of the new structure for the existing residents. The trees are in separate ownership (Crown Estate), but there are no plans for their removal in the near future. This has been confirmed in writing, by the Estate. Indeed the Local Plan also recognises the importance of this tree belt and seeks to promote its retention should any new developments be proposed nearby. The applicant's agents have indicated that they are not able to use the existing pole at the site. It would not take the extra microwave antennas, and there is not the necessary line of sight from this position. In order to gain the line of sight for both dishes at this location, the monopole would have to be higher than the one proposed at present.
15. The objection from the Housing Association suggests that there may be a possible health risk associated with the new mast. The applicant's agents have stated that the nature of this "Hopper" type installation, does not have these perceived health implications. There has been contact between the applicants and the Housing Association to explain the system. While there has been no confirmation from the Housing Association that they wish to withdraw their representation, the applicants have stated that all the queries raised by them were discussed and the answers given were to their satisfaction. If they had had any further queries or concerns, the Housing Association were to revert to

the applicants. The applicants have confirmed that there has been no further contact. A Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines has been submitted, although this is not actually required for this type of installation.

16. The trees will only partly provide a setting or screening for the mast, as over a much wider area, the monopole will project above the trees and most other buildings in the settlement. As a monopole structure, the impact from a wider perspective will not be so great as some other mast structures. A radio mast is not an unusual feature to be seen within a settlement, and its location on the edge of a settlement is in some ways preferable in visual terms to an isolated position in open countryside. The countryside around the settlement is designated in the Local Plan as part of the wider Area of Great Landscape Value, and therefore a new mast could not be easily located in a sensitive way and meet the technical requirements.
17. The current proposal links well with an existing facility and there is justification for its positioning in this location. With suitable colouring, it is viewed as an acceptable proposal that will meet the important communications needs in the wider area. The Moray Local Plan states that Tomintoul has “the reputation as the first village in Britain to be cut off by winter snows each year”. Therefore having a modern and effective emergency communications system for the surrounding area is important, and the proposed development helps to meet that need. Conditions are recommended that ensure that the development is implemented in accordance with the current plans, and the consent is for a limited period of 15 years, to allow for reconsideration in the future in the light of new technology improvements or on site changes.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK**

### **Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area**

18. It can be argued that the siting of a mast within the National Park will not be seen, in principle, as being positive in terms of this aim. However, in this instance, the requirement for a low-level mast location, which is associated with an existing facility, minimises the visual impacts on the more sensitive natural assets in the surrounding countryside area. The tree screening will reduce visual impacts on the village of Tomintoul.

### **Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources**

19. There are no obvious benefits in terms of this aim. However, some of the practical applications of the technology associated with this communications system may help to avoid wasteful or harmful searches in the National Park (potentially disturbing local flora and fauna in off-road situations), which would be contrary to this aim.

### **Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area**

20. This proposal is not particularly relevant to this aim.

### **Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area**

21. More efficient and effective emergency services will have positive economic and social benefits for local people, for businesses, and for the people that use the area recreationally, as well as for the emergency services required to operate in this locality. The social and economic benefits of good quality telecommunications is acknowledged in National Planning Policy on telecommunications developments. The benefits will be from the provision of an integrated communications system, and from better quality communications.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

22. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to:

**Grant Full Planning Permission for the Erection of a Telecommunications Mast** at the Telephone Exchange site at Tomnabat Lane, Tomintoul, subject to the following conditions -

- i. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within 2 years from the date of this permission.
- ii. That the permission hereby granted is for a limited period of 15 years from the date of this planning consent.
- iii. That the monopole column and associated fixings shall be finished in a colour (a British Standard colour) which has been agreed in writing with the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as the Planning Authority, prior to the commencement of works on site. The agreed colour shall be applied to the column and fixings prior to the installation of the monopole.
- iv. No other antennas or dishes, others fixings or any signs shall be attached to the approved monopole structure, without the further written agreement of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as the Planning Authority.
- v. That all infrastructure and equipment, hereby approved, shall be completely removed from the site and all land relative to the development shall be restored to its original condition, within six months of the termination of this temporary planning consent, or the communications system becomes redundant (whichever is the sooner), unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as the Planning Authority. Prior to the development becoming obsolete, the date from which the six month period shall run, shall be notified to and

agreed with the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as the Planning Authority.

Reasons for conditions:

- i. To comply with Section 58 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act, 1997.
- ii. In order to be able to review the retention of this structure, in the light of the continuation of the surrounding tree cover and future technology options.
- iii. In the interests of visual amenity and to minimise the landscape impact of the development.
- iv. In order to give separate consideration to these proposals, which may affect visual amenity.
- v. In order to ensure the timeous removal of all redundant equipment and the proper restoration of the site, in the interest of the visual amenity of the area.

**Neil Stewart**  
**10 November 2004**

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