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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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

**Prepared by:** NEIL STEWART, PLANNING OFFICER  
(DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)

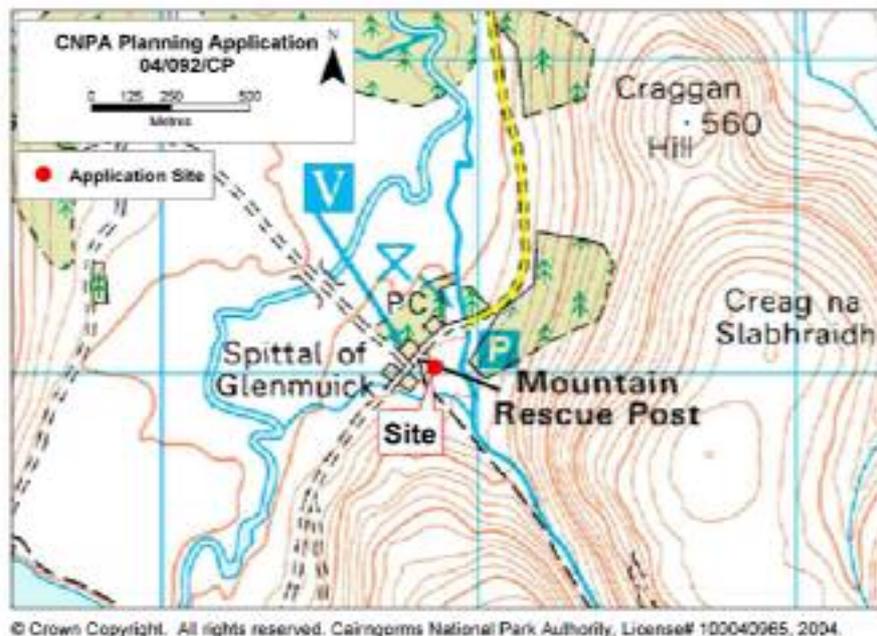
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**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAST AT THE MOUNTAIN RESCUE CENTRE, SPITTAL OF MUICK, GLEN MUICK, BALLATER

**REFERENCE:** 04/092/CP

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

**DATE CALLED-IN:** 15<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2004



**Fig. 1 - Location Plan**

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The location of this development is close to the Mountain Rescue Post building at the Spittal of Muick, at the end of the public road to Loch Muick. The proposal is for the erection of a 26 metre high monopole telecommunications mast with 3 antennas, a 600mm transmission dish and a GPS (Geographical Positioning System) antenna. Located adjacent will be 3 cabinets for associated equipment. The cabinets are to be housed within a small extension to an existing park rangers' machinery and vehicles store building. The mast is to be located beyond the hard-standing area around the Mountain Rescue Post and ranger store, within an area of maturing conifer trees presently fenced off from adjacent garden, yard and hillside areas. Most of the trees in this area are 20m high, but there are three of 25m, 26m and 28m height (approx.) in this grouping. The single mast column is 26m high, and the antennas will extend its height to 28.5m above ground level. The proposal is for the mast column (of galvanised steel) to be coloured dark green, or other colour that may be specified. There is an existing clear area within the trees with rough almost bare ground. An old length of pipe lies across this ground on the surface. Minimal disturbance to existing vegetation is proposed as a result of the development – the removal of some tree roots may be required to construct the base, and some smaller trees in the immediate area may have to be removed or trimmed back to allow for the erection of the mast. None of the significant trees in this area will be removed.
2. This mast is for emergency communications, essentially for the police but associated with the Mountain Rescue Centre at Spittal of Muick. The Mountain Rescue Centre's timber clad building is adjacent to a house, and a vehicle and machinery store. Also in the wider general area there is a visitors centre, a toilet block, and separate car and coach parking areas. The buildings are surrounded by trees of significant size, with the parking areas for visitors detached from the buildings and the more established treed areas. The surrounding landscape is expansive, open and exposed.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

3. **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 Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016 (North East Scotland Together – NEST)** Policy 4 on Telecommunications indicates that telecommunications proposals are encouraged, but that they should be sited and designed to minimise adverse impacts. Policy 19 states that development which would have an adverse effect on a National Scenic Area will only be permitted where the objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised or any significant adverse effects

on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social and economic benefits of national importance.

4. In the **Aberdeenshire Local Plan**, the site is located in an Area of Landscape Significance but outwith the National Scenic Area that encompasses Loch Muick itself and Lochnagar. The most relevant local plan policy is Policy Inf9 Telecommunications Masts, which requires the siting and design of masts to minimise visual impact, requires the developer to provide a certificate in accordance with the Public Exposure Guidelines, options of mast sharing or using existing structures need to be explored, and removal, land restoration and after use details need to be satisfactory. In National Scenic Areas and Areas of Landscape Significance additional care must be taken in the siting and design of masts and antennas.
5. 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

6. Under the terms of the Town and Country Planning (Balmoral Estate) (Consultation) Direction 1987, the factor at Balmoral Estate, and Grampian Police were consulted. The latter had no comments from a security point of view. The former (who are the landowners for the development site) have commented that they are reluctantly permitting the mast's erection due to its need for local Emergency Services, and would wish to see that the total height of the mast is kept as low as possible, and at least below the tops of the highest trees. The Estate have indicated that the trees around the mast site are to be retained, and may be added to in future years.

## REPRESENTATIONS

7. The Metropolitan Police Force have submitted a letter in support of their application. It provides a description of the need for the mast and the responsibilities that the police have for security and protection in this location, and it emphasises that they have been very conscious of reducing the visual

impact of the structure. The letter also makes reference to another mast in the locality. The application for this other mast was notified to the CNPA but the decision was not to call it in. In addition, the police state that the mast will also aid telecommunications for other blue light services and the mountain rescue teams.

8. A copy of this letter is attached for the Committee's consideration.

## APPRAISAL

9. 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. Firstly there is a good case for the Emergency 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 incidents. Automatic vehicle and person location can lead to quicker and more effective responses in emergency situations. This is of great benefit in an area where an increasing number of people are taking access into remote countryside and mountainous locations, and where from time to time emergency incidents occur.
10. Three other locations for a mast were assessed as alternative positions (at the coach park, on Lochnagar, and in Muick Forest) but each of these had greater visual or operational difficulties. The applicants have sought to balance operational needs with environmental and planning considerations in the siting and design of the proposal, and the current application site provides satisfactory operational coverage whilst minimising the visual and environmental impact of constructing and servicing such a structure. By locating the mast and its ancillary equipment in close proximity to existing outbuildings and trees most of the development will not be visible in the wider context, with only the highest part of the mast and the antennas projecting over some of the surrounding trees. Also access for the construction and servicing of the facility will have minimal disturbance to the environment, not requiring any new access tracks, using existing accesses and fenced off areas for the new facilities.
11. With a suitable colouring of the mast column, only the antennas and dish will be visible - but these will not have any great impact in the wide expanse of the landscape in this area. As the siting is on low ground – almost in the valley bottom - the visual impact will be very limited to a localised area around the visitor parking and Rescue Centre etc. From a distance, the top of the mast will be barely visible and will not break any skyline views. Alternative sites would have been in more open and exposed locations, without the surrounding cover of trees to help to soften the visual impact.
12. The applicants have considered National Planning Guidance and Local Plan policies, and have concluded that this proposal provides the optimum location for the provision of a communications mast, and that they have carefully sited the mast to fit in with the existing landscape features at the Spittal. The applicants have supplied a Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public

Exposure Guidelines (ICNIRP Declaration), ie the installation is designed to be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency public exposure guidelines.

13. Accepting the need for improved Emergency Services communications in this popular recreational area, the proposed siting of the mast is satisfactory, subject to a condition on appropriate colouring of the monopole. Normally there would be a need for consideration to be given to ensuring the protection of the existing trees surrounding a mast site. The trees in this location have little commercial value, and are largely retained for amenity and shelter purposes, and this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The landowners (Balmoral Estate) have confirmed this in their consultation response. Imposing a condition to grant consent for a temporary period for the mast, would allow for reconsideration of the mast's impact in the future, should the existing trees die, or suffer from wind throw. Should the emergency services wish to retain the mast for a longer period, at the end of the recommended 15 year period, then a planning application to renew the planning consent can be submitted. It is also recommended that the permission to erect the mast should include a condition which requires the mast to be constructed within a 2 year time frame (rather than the normal 5 years for a full planning permission). If the erection of the mast is significantly delayed (although this is unlikely in this particular instance), there may be new planning policies and priorities for this area and for communications masts in general, that the Park Authority may wish to take into account. There may also be newer technology options that become available to satisfy the emergency services' needs. There should be a requirement for the removal of all structures and equipment at the end of the temporary consent, or if the communications system becomes redundant or is replaced by newer technology.

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

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

14. This proposal does not have any discernable positive or negative impacts in this respect. The choice of a low-level mast location, outside the National Scenic Area and in an area where there is tree cover, minimises any impact on the more sensitive natural and cultural heritage assets in the area.

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

15. Some of the practical applications of the technology associated with this communications system (GPS) may help to avoid wasteful or harmful searches in emergency situations, in this part of the National Park. This may disturb local flora and fauna which would be contrary to this aim.

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

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

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

17. More efficient and effective emergency services will have positive economic and social benefits for the people that use the area recreationally, as well as for the emergency services required to operate in this locality. This will be from the provision of an integrated communications system, and from better quality communications.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to:

**Grant Full Planning Permission for the Erection of a 26 Metre High Monopole Telecommunications Mast, Associated Antennas, Dish and Other Equipment, at Spittal of Muick, Glen Muick, Ballater**, 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 matt green colour, of an exact colour (a British Standard colour) which has been agreed in writing with the Planning Authority. This colour will be applied to the column and fixings prior to the operation of the Telecoms system.
- iv. No other antennas, dishes, fixings or signs shall be attached to the approved mast, without the express written consent of 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 natural 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 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 Planning Authority.

**Neil Stewart**  
*12 May 2004*

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