

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: TEMPORARY ERECTION OF 9 METRE HIGH TELECOMMS LATTICE TOWER (RETROSPECTIVE), AT MORRONE HILL, BRAEMAR

REFERENCE: 04/598/CP

APPLICANT: AIRWAVE MMO2 LTD., C/O MONO CONSULTANTS LTD., ST VINCENT STREET, GLASGOW G2 5TS

DATE CALLED-IN: 14 JANUARY 2005

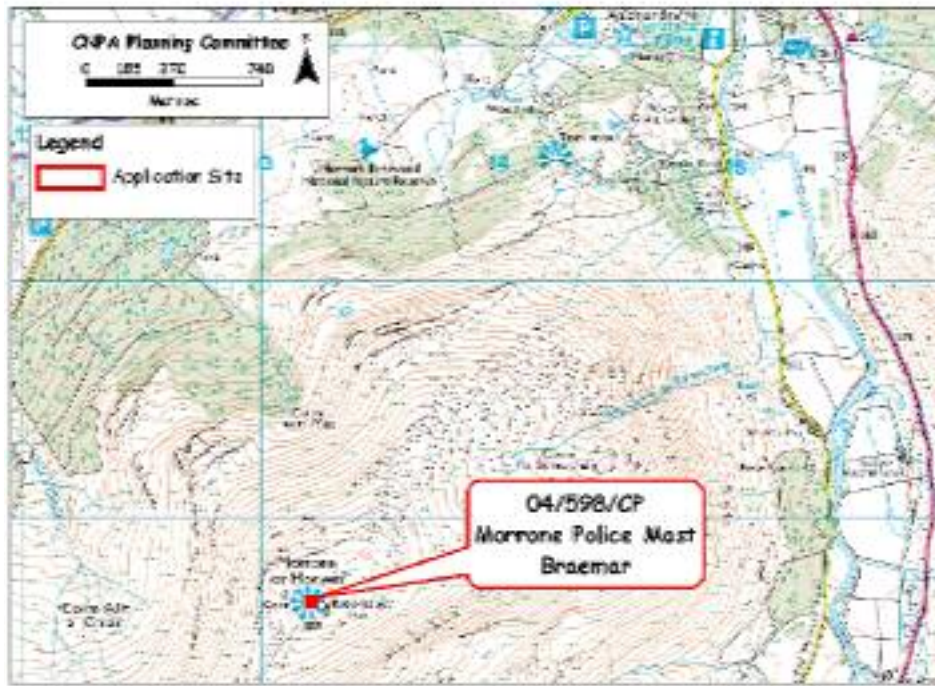


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The application is for full planning permission for the temporary retention of a 9-metre high lattice mast on Morrone Hill, which was constructed in October/November 2004. The application is for a temporary period (6 months), and the mast is for the use of Grampian Police. The mast will support 3 Antenna and a 0.6m diameter transmission dish, with ancillary equipment. The siting of the mast is immediately adjacent (to the northwest side) of the existing 33.1m high mast on Morrone Hill, to the west of the A93 heading south out of Braemar. The surrounding area is open hillsides. The existing stone building structures adjacent to the original mast house the associated radio equipment and cabinets. The existing access to the site has been utilised.
2. The purpose of this proposal is to provide temporary transmission coverage to the police emergency services of the Grampian Constabulary, for the Braemar area and surrounding network. It is felt, by the applicant's agents, that the site close to the current mast benefits from a level of screening / backdrop that will minimise greatly the impact of the installation. It is intended that the equipment that this 9-metre mast carries will be installed on the main 30-metre mast by June 2005.

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.
4. 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.
5. The **Aberdeenshire Local Plan** indicates a zoning of Area of Landscape Significance for the application site. 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.

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. **Scottish Natural Heritage** (SNH) have commented that the site lies within the Deeside and Lochnagar National Scenic Area and there are natural heritage interests of some importance at this location, however SNH does not consider that this application will have a significant adverse effect and does not object to the proposal.
8. The **CNPA Natural Resource Group** (NRG) comment that the local vegetation communities on top of the hill would appear to include wind clipped calluna heath and lichen rich boulders, NRG consider that both communities are sensitive to disturbance and should be restored to the nearest original condition when the equipment is removed. The restoration work required would need to be determined by a specialist.

REPRESENTATIONS

9. None received.

APPRAISAL

10. 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.
11. 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 major 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.

12. It has been stated that the original plan was to locate the required antenna on the existing mast at Morrone Hill, but this was temporarily rejected due to high winds in winter preventing the installation of the equipment on the tower. The temporary alternative was implemented and is required for the first quarter of 2005, after this the wind speeds are expected to drop below averages of 50mph and this will allow the necessary equipment to be installed on the original mast. There is a claimed lack of tower space to accommodate these lower down the structure, and therefore it was considered imperative to find a temporary solution, until a more permanent arrangement could be implemented.
13. It is regrettable that the situation could not be planned and coordinated with the local planning authority in order to avoid a retrospective planning application. This is particularly serious as the site is prominent and on the edge of a National Scenic Area. The dangerous weather conditions are not unexpected over the winter months, and other installations have been applied for in 2004 prior to the works being carried out. This is proposed to be a very temporary arrangement, and this needs to be the case, as a significant mast already exists at the location and should be able, or be able to be re-engineered to accommodate the necessary new communications equipment. This would ensure that the development of new telecommunications complied with planning policies- to use existing masts for additional communication needs.
14. There are 2 possible ways forward here - two options to consider. Firstly, one recommendation would be to refuse permission, as to grant consent would be tantamount to condoning a development that was both retrospective and contrary to policies. A recommendation of enforcement action to ensure removal and the proper reinstatement within a strict timescale would also have to be considered, in order to have control over the unauthorised development and the reinstatement of the site. Secondly, the Authority could grant consent for a very limited period, with conditions that require the removal of the mast and the full and proper reinstatement of the ground within a strict (but reasonable) timetable.
15. Since the weather conditions in this location have made the preferred option of erecting the equipment on the original mast difficult over the winter months, temporary consent is recommended on this occasion, with a limited timescale for the continuation of this structure. Thereafter, the mast should be speedily removed and the ground reinstated. The applicants and their agents should be advised that in future, retrospective applications will not be favourably considered where the developments clearly contravene established planning policies, both local and national,

and enforcement action may be pursued. A covering letter to this effect is suggested.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

16. This proposal has unnecessarily disturbed another area of ground adjacent to an existing communications mast. The reinstatement of this area of ground will not be an easy task in such an exposed location. However, it is also noted that this site close to the summit and existing mast is relatively bare in terms of ground vegetation cover.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

17. Some of the practical applications of the technology associated with this communications system (GPS) may help to avoid wasteful or harmful searches in this part of the National Park.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

18. The proposal may result in reduced enjoyment for hill walkers in terms of visual amenity when climbing this popular Corbett (hill over 2,500ft). However, it is recognised that this is only for a temporary period.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

19. More efficient and effective emergency services will have positive economic and social benefits for local people and 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.

20. In relation to health matters the proposal is accompanied by the appropriate ICNIRP Certificate.

RECOMMENDATION

21. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to: **GRANT Full Planning Permission for the temporary retention of a Telecommunications Mast** at Morrone Hill, Braemar, subject to the following conditions -

- i. That the permission hereby granted is for a limited period of 6 months from the date of this planning consent.
- ii. No other antennas or dishes, others fixings or any signs shall be attached to the approved mast, without the express written consent of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.
- iii. That all infrastructure and equipment, hereby approved, shall be completely removed from the site and all land relative to the development shall be restored as near as possible to its original state within 3 months of the termination of this temporary planning consent, or the communications system becomes redundant (whichever is the sooner) A full method statement detailing the restoration measures shall be submitted to the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority and the restoration shall be carried out in accordance with the approved method statement unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.

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17 February 2005