



## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 November 2006

by **S J Turner** RIBA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for  
Communities and Local Government

The Planning Inspectorate  
4/11 Eagle Wing  
Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Temple Quay  
Bristol BS1 6PN  
☎ 0117 372 6372  
e-mail: enquiries@planning-  
inspectorate.gsi.gov.uk

Date

- 8 JAN 2007

**Appeal Ref: APP/F1610/A/1199731**  
**Birdlip Radio Station, Shab Hill, Gloucestershire**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- The appeal is made by GCHQ against the refusal by Cotswold District Council to grant approval under Circular 18/84.
- The consultation under Circular 18/84, Ref 06/0001/CIRC, dated 14 December 2005, was the subject of an objection by the Council dated 10 March 2006.
- The development proposed is a proposed telecommunications installation.

**Summary of Decision: I dismiss the appeal.**

### Procedural Matters

1. The application was made as a formal consultation under the provisions of Circular 18/84. Following the Council's objection dated 10 March 2006 the appellant appealed under the same Circular. However Circular 18/84 was removed in June 2006 and the appeal now falls to be dealt with under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
2. The proposed installation comprises 2 No 21.6 high square lattice towers, approximately 273.8 metres apart; installation on the eastern tower of a 4.3 metre radius radome and the provision of a new vehicular access; installation of 3 No underground ducts running between the two towers; installation of 9 metre x 2.37 metre radio equipment containers; gantries, cabling and associated development at each tower site, contained within new compounds formed by 2.5 metre high palisade security fencing, coloured to the PFA's preference; the provision of indigenous landscaping around the new compounds, the extent and composition of which are to be agreed with the LPA.
3. Both parties state that the proposal is not a telecommunications development. I note that levels and frequency of transmissions would be significantly lower than those of commercial mobile telephone operators, but the proposal is for testing communications and would accommodate equipment which would emit non ionising radiation. On this basis I have treated the application as if it were for telecommunications development.

### Main Issue

4. I consider that the main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

### Planning Policy

5. The development plan includes the Gloucestershire Structure Plan Second Review 1999 and the Cotswold District Local Plan 2006 and I consider that Structure Plan Policy NHE.4 and Local Plan Policy 7, which both seek to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the

AONB, are particularly relevant to this appeal. I have also had regard to Government advice in PPG8: Telecommunications and PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

### Reasons

6. The appeal site is a single field situated within the High Wold zone of the Cotswolds AONB. Its immediate surroundings are dominated by the existing masts, neighbouring buildings such as Acorn House and its outbuildings and the nearby kennels. However it lies in an attractive area of predominantly unspoilt countryside and has an open character with extensive views over the surrounding landscape. Its location on a plateau of high ground close to the edge of the Cotswold Escarpment makes it highly visible from the surrounding area, especially from the floor of the Severn Valley to the west. I consider that the site's high, exposed location, the natural beauty of its surroundings and its prominence and visibility from a wide area make it an extremely sensitive location.
7. Birdlip Radio Station is a longstanding site used for telecommunications purposes and was occupied by many towers and masts during the Second World War. Now it accommodates a 66.7 metre high lattice tower used by the National Grid (NG), a 35 metre high timber National Air Service Tower (NATS) and a 22 metre tower used by OFCOM. These appear as prominent features in the landscape and the NG tower in particular is visible in long views from the surrounding area.
8. The site is bounded by a mix of tall hedges and fences with access tracks running alongside the south east and part of the south west boundaries. The proposed landscape scheme would add planting along the south eastern site boundary and blocks of mixed tree and shrub planting to the north of both towers. I am satisfied that existing vegetation together with the new landscaping, which would include evergreen species, would provide screening for the ground level equipment, the lowest part of the towers and the security fencing. However it is clear that the upper part of both towers would remain visible.
9. I recognise that the height of the towers has been minimised as far as operational parameters will permit and that they have been designed to accommodate equipment and allow safe access. However as a result both towers would be large, bulky and clumsy features that would be very different in appearance to the nearby masts and would in my view be significantly more prominent. It seems to me that their appearance has been determined solely by technical requirements, with little evidence of attempts to minimise their visual impact or consideration of alternative designs.
10. The appellant has carried out a detailed assessment of the zone of visual influence of each of the towers within a radius of approximately 6 kilometres, outside which it is considered their visual influence would be minimal. I agree that their visual impact would decrease with distance and in distant views, such as from the M5 motorway, the towers would be barely perceptible. However they would each be visible from a number of public viewpoints within the 6 kilometre radius and would appear particularly prominent in close views from footpath 5, which runs immediately to the north east of the site. From many viewpoints the western mast would be seen in the context of existing masts adjacent to the site and would appear as part of the existing loose grouping of tall features. However from close to the site it would appear as a dominant independent feature. The eastern tower, with its bulky radome, would be set apart from the existing masts and would appear from close