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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

20 December 1984

From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State's
Private Secretary

Dear Tim,

JK
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Please find enclosed a copy of a letter from Tim Renton to Neil MacFarlane. I thought that, in view of the sensitivity of the subject matter (particularly the second page) I should send it to you personally rather than simply marked to your office.

Yours sincerely
Alistair Harrison

Alistair Harrison
Private Secretary to
Tim Renton MP

Tim Flesher Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON

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From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

19 December 1984

Dear Neil,

PROPOSED BBC TRANSMITTING STATION AT BEARLEY

Thank you for your letter of 19 November. We have studied your views, and the Report of the Inspector who conducted the public inquiry, very carefully.

I am bound to say that there are some views expressed in the Report with which we would disagree. The Inspector recommends against granting the BBC's application on two grounds, environmental and technical. The environmental arguments are a matter for subjective judgement, and I accept that you and the Inspector are better qualified to assess them than we are. But on the technical side it is our opinion that the Inspector has been strongly swayed by those who for a variety of reasons oppose the construction of the transmitting station, and that he has given undue weight to fears which there is little reason to believe would prove justified.

Nevertheless, I accept that for a number of reasons, including the very strong public feeling which has been aroused by this application, it would be difficult for you to do other than to accept the Inspector's recommendation. We agree therefore with the decision to refuse the application. However, the BBC fear that if undue emphasis is given to the technical case as against the environmental one and the evidence is circulated, it could expose them to expensive legal problems in connection with their other operations in the UK, not least at Daventry. They would probably feel obliged to make some statement saying they disagreed with the technical case, while accepting reluctantly the environmental one. On the assumption that it is unavoidable to quote the Inspector's technical arguments, would it be possible for you to modify the Department of the Environment commentary on them by introducing the notion that the technical case is not entirely proven. This could be done by amending paras 4 and 5 of the draft decision letter in the form enclosed with this letter.

/I would

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Neil MacFarlane Esq MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department of the Environment



Neil MacFarlane Esq MP

19 December 1984

I would also draw your attention to the fact that the new UK transmitting station for the BBC's External Services is a central element in the £102 million audibility programme which we announced in 1981. We are committed to the completion of this important programme, which because of delays over Bearley is now behind schedule. You will be aware that we have identified a possible alternative site for the transmitting station at Orfordness, which, although more expensive to develop and to operate than Bearley, should serve the purpose equally well. We are most anxious that announcement of the Bearley decision should not adversely affect consideration of the application to construct the station at Orfordness. I very much hope therefore that it will be possible for you to delay sending the letter to the Chief Executive of Stratford-upon-Avon District Council until the Orfordness decision, which is imminent, has been announced. If the Orfordness application were also to fail the audibility programme would be in very serious trouble, since, contrary to suggestions made by objectors at the Bearley public hearing, it could be extremely difficult to find another suitable site. Yet another application for planning permission would probably involve a lengthy and controversial public hearing, and following the precedent of Bearley and Orfordness the outcome might well be unsatisfactory.

There is one further point that concerns us about Orfordness. The planning procedures have been completed there with the District Planning Authorities. There has, however, now been a change of rules and there appears to be a danger that the procedures may have to be gone through again at County level. We are naturally anxious to avoid this since we would then face a further delay to the Orfordness decision. I understand that officials from our Departments and the PSA are in touch about our concerns on this point.

I am sending copies of this letter to Grey Gowrie, Norman Lamont, David Trefgarne and to No 10. ✓

*Yours**Tim*

Tim Renton