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Sent Via Email From: Eileen O'Connor, Director EM Radiation Research Trust

To: Chris Gomm, Head of Planning
Tracey Birkinshaw, Director of Planning & Building Control

Cc: Brian Stein CBE Chairman EM Radiation Research Trust
Section 151 Officer: Adele Taylor
Monitoring Officer: Claire Hughes
Independent Auditor: Nathan Coughlin

Dear Mr Gomm and Ms Birkinshaw

We are writing on behalf of the EM Radiation Research Trust regarding the approval of tree works under Planning Reference 26/00738/CACN.

We have been contacted by concerned residents regarding the decision to approve tree works involving height reduction to trees located in the vicinity of an existing telecommunications mast. According to the application, the works were commissioned by Ground Control on behalf of Cornerstone (CTIL), acting for Vodafone and O2 Telefónica, in advance of a proposed mast upgrade and to clear what is described as an occupational ICNRIP zone.

We have a number of serious concerns.

We note that the application, planning portal summary, and Decision Notice all refer to an "occupational ICNRIP zone". This appears to be a spelling error, and we assume it is intended to refer to an occupational ICNIRP zone (International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection), whose guidelines are commonly cited in relation to telecommunications infrastructure.

Given that the justification for the proposed works appears to rest upon clearance of this purported exclusion zone, it is concerning that no technical assessment, measurements, calculations, or supporting evidence have been provided to explain the basis, dimensions, or necessity of the claimed zone. Nor is there any explanation of how this occupational designation relates to nearby residents.

No planning application appears to have been submitted for the mast upgrade itself. In the absence of such an application, it is unclear how the Council could properly assess the necessity and justification for the tree works or their wider implications.

We note that the telecommunications installation appears to be located in close proximity to residential properties, with line-of-sight orientation towards upper floor accommodation in nearby buildings. Given the reference to a forthcoming mast upgrade, we would welcome clarification as to what assessment, if any, has been undertaken in relation to changes in radiofrequency exposure levels associated with the proposed works, including whether predictive modelling or post-installation verification measurements will be made available to the Council and affected residents.

The existence of an occupational ICNIRP zone also raises an obvious question regarding nearby residents. If the Council considered this zone sufficiently significant to justify the reduction of mature trees within a Conservation Area, what consideration was given to the people living close to, overlooking, or adjacent to that zone? The public record contains no explanation of the zone's dimensions, how it was determined, its proximity to neighbouring homes, or whether any assessment was undertaken regarding residents living nearby.

The application also appears to have been approved within seven days. We would be grateful for clarification as to how this decision was reached so quickly, given that Section 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 normally provides a six-week notification period for tree works.

We note that Cheltenham Borough Council's published guidance on protected trees states that where notice is given for works to trees within a Conservation Area, the purpose of the notification process is to enable the Council to assess the tree's potential for a Tree Preservation Order. However, the public planning file contains no Tree Officer report, amenity assessment, arboricultural assessment, or other documentation demonstrating how that assessment was undertaken in this case, notwithstanding the Council's decision to raise no objection to works affecting mature trees within the Central Conservation Area. It is therefore unclear how the Council satisfied itself that the trees did not warrant further protection through a Tree Preservation Order before determining the application.

We are also concerned that the proposed works involve mature trees capable of supporting nesting birds and bat roosts. Whilst the Decision Notice contains standard information relating to bats and nesting birds, the planning file contains no arboricultural assessment, ecological assessment, bat survey, or other evidence demonstrating that these matters were considered before the decision was reached. This raises questions regarding compliance with the Council's obligations in relation to protected species and wildlife legislation.

The trees are understood to have provided natural screening between the mast and residential properties. Their reduction may have implications for residents living nearby, yet no environmental, visual, health, residential, arboricultural, or ecological assessment appears to have been made publicly available.

If the trees are considered sufficiently significant to require reduction in order to clear an occupational ICNIRP zone, it is difficult to understand how the Council concluded that their alteration would have no material implications for the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, the wider amenity of the area, or nearby residents. We would therefore welcome disclosure of any assessment undertaken in this regard.

We also request clarification on how the matters raised in this application have been considered within the Council's wider governance and risk management framework, including whether these matters are reflected within the Corporate Risk Register and how risk identification, mitigation, and allocation of responsibility have been addressed.

We would also be grateful for clarification as to whether the Council has considered any insurance or indemnity implications arising from decisions relating to telecommunications infrastructure in proximity to residential properties and Conservation Area assets, and whether these matters are reflected within the Council's insurance arrangements and risk management framework.

We would therefore appreciate:

- An explanation of the decision-making process that led to approval within seven days.
- Confirmation of whether the Council has received, reviewed, or informally considered any proposals relating to the mast upgrade.
- The scientific, technical, and regulatory basis for the occupational ICNIRP zone referred to in the application.
- Details of any environmental, visual, health, residential, conservation, arboricultural, or ecological impact assessments undertaken.
- Details of any expert advice relied upon in reaching the decision.
- Copies of any Tree Officer reports, delegated officer notes, site visit records, consultation responses, internal assessments, or correspondence relied upon in determining the application.

We also draw your attention to the Radiation Research Trust report, "RRT Challenges Colchester Council Over Misleading 5G Report", which raises concerns regarding the use of purportedly independent telecommunications reports in local authority decision making.

Finally, we question why the reduction of mature trees within a Conservation Area has been accepted as the preferred solution when the application itself states that the works are required to facilitate a telecommunications mast upgrade. Mature trees that contribute to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area should not be subjected to substantial reduction in order to accommodate telecommunications infrastructure where alternative siting solutions may be available and more appropriate. The public record provides no indication that alternatives, repositioning, or relocation of the installation, were considered before approval was granted for works that will permanently alter the form, amenity value, and screening function of these trees.

Given the seriousness of these concerns, we request a prompt and substantive response.

Yours sincerely,
Eileen O'Connor
Director
Radiation Research Trust

Brian Stein CBE
Chairman
Radiation Research Trust

References

1. Cheltenham Borough Council Planning Application 26/00738/CACN – Height reduction to trees to clear occupational "ICNRIP" zone:
<https://publicaccess.cheltenham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=TELQ31ELKL400>
2. Cheltenham Borough Council – Protected Trees Guidance:
https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/info/67/trees/510/protected_trees
3. Radiation Research Trust – RRT Challenges Colchester Council Over Misleading 5G Report: <https://radiationresearch.org/rrt-challenges-colchester-council-over-misleading-5g-report/>

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