

THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE

Extracts from Report dated 27th June 1994 submitted by
A.R.Boyland B.eng(Hons) DipTP C.Eng MICE MIHT MRTPI
to Chapman Warren, acting on behalf of Roadchef Motorways Ltd

2. I held a local inquiry into the Appeal on 5 - 6 and 9 - 11 May 1994. On 12 May, I inspected the site and its surroundings, and on 13 May I made unaccompanied visits to the Sedgemoor, Michaelwood and Strensham services areas on the M5 Motorway. While visiting the Sedgemoor site I took the opportunity to view the service area from the top of nearby Brent Knoll.
3. After the appeal was made, the Council considered your client's proposal. It was resolved that, had the application been before the Council for consideration, planning permission would have been refused for the reason that the proposal is contrary to general policies L1, L2, L3 and L5 of the Gloucestershire Structure Plan First Alteration in that it would have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of this part of the defined Special Landscape Area and on views from the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
9. From all that I have seen and heard, I consider that the principal issue in this appeal is whether the proposed MSA would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside, including views from public viewpoints on the hills overlooking it and, if so, whether such harm is outweighed by the needs of motorists for a MSA on this site.
17. I accept that the MSA might provide some employment for people living in the rural area and might also obtain some goods and services from local businesses. However, I do not consider that such benefits, which could arise equally from a new commercial use within Gloucester, for example, amount to a direct association with the rural economy.
26. It was submitted for your clients that from a distance, the buildings themselves could be taken for agricultural buildings. However, it seems to me that any such impression would be negated by the surrounding vehicle circulation and parking areas, which would be far more extensive than is normally found in agricultural complexes. These areas themselves, and more particularly the vehicles on them, would be highly visible and completely out of keeping with the rural area. On viewing the Sedgemoor MSA from the top of Brent Knoll, I saw that the most prominent features were brightly coloured lorries, coaches and caravans and sunlight reflecting from car bodies and windows.

27. At night, lighting of the site, both within buildings and external areas, however well designed, would in my opinion be clearly visible in this otherwise mostly dark area. I accept that lights with cut-offs to prevent upward or horizontal transmission of light could be used. However the evidence suggests that at least some lighting columns would be 8m or more high. Also reflected light (from hard surfaces and vehicles) vehicle lights themselves and, in some conditions, diffused light, would still be seen, particularly from elevated viewpoints.
29. ...In my opinion, an MSA here, however well landscaped, would appear alien in the landscape. I cannot accept your client's contentions that it would have the same effect as a village such as Brookthorpe which has 'brown' into the landscape rather than being imposed upon it (and has few visible lights at night) or that the proposed landscaping would restore the elements lost due to Dutch elm disease.
30. ...Furthermore, from the well-used public viewpoints on Robinswood Hill (which is a Country Park) and the Cotswold scarp, it would appear alien and intrusive in the landscape by day and at night. While landscaping could to some extent ameliorate the impact of the MSA, I do not consider that it would overcome it. The MSA would, therefore, be harmful to the landscape in the SLA and, while just outside the AONB, would have an adverse effect on the landscape of the scarp slope. I find support for this view in the comment by the Countryside Commission that a development of the type proposed would have a detrimental effect on the character of the adjacent AONB.
- 32....Roads Circular 1/94 goes on to prescribe that drivers should not have to travel long distances without finding services on the motorway, but that intervals of not much more than 30 miles remain a desirable general aim from the transport point of view.
- 34....In any case, it seems to me that the welcome is extended in principle to the response of the private sector to deregulation rather than to any particular scheme. I do not consider that this can be necessarily be taken as an expression of support for the view that there is a need for a MSA in this vicinity.
35. It was acknowledged by all parties that the M5 carries heavy volumes of traffic, particularly at holiday times....Thus I do not see the need for an additional MSA in this vicinity as being justified on the grounds of frequent slow traffic speeds or excessive time taken to travel between the existing MSA'.

42. In my opinion, in this context need (for and MSA) is a matter of degree rather than being absolute. In the light of the above considerations, I consider that there is a need for an MSA in this general area, but that the need is not at present so great as to be compelling.
- 50...In evidence and **submissions for your clients, the landscape setting** for Ongers Farm was described as 'robust'. In some senses it is, but I consider that in terms of ability to accommodate the built development involved in a MSA, the area around junction 12 is much more robust.
55. Accordingly I have come to the conclusion on the principal issue that the proposed MSA would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside, including views from public viewpoints on the hills overlooking it , and that such harm is not outweighed by the needs of motorists for an MSA on this site. I further consider that it would be contrary to the County Council's supplementary policy MSA1, in addition to the conflict with the statutory Structure Plan policies and those in the emerging Local Plan I have identified above.
56. I have taken account of all other matters raised in the representations, but I find nothing of sufficient weight to override the considerations which have led to my conclusions.
57. For the above reasons, and in exercise of the powers transferred to me, I hereby dismiss the appeal, and refuse planning permission for the development described in paragraph 1.

Signed A.R. Boyland B.Eng(Hons) Dip TP C.Eng MICE MIHT MRTPI
Inspector.