

cc: *W. Wilson*

89-01-275-71e

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return to me pl.

Mrs Swann

Mr. Typet to see.

hcc R Minns DED.

We might be asked for a PES transfer - see final subsec!

Jul 27/3

FROM: J MCKERVILL
SPOB
27 March 1991

J 28/3.

PA T673 (C)

cc Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Wilson - B
Mr Bell - B

PS/Paymaster General (B&L) - B

APPEARANCE OF PERMANENT VEHICLE CHECKPOINTS

The Paymaster General will be meeting Mr Needham, at the latter's request, on Thursday at 1500 to discuss the appearance of border checkpoints. A briefing meeting has been arranged for 1430 that day.

2. Unfortunately PVCs, like other security installations, are a practical necessity in the fight against terrorism. The Army are, however, aware of the less than pleasing appearance of such installations: indeed some are hideous and, both to locals and outsiders, project precisely the wrong image of Northern Ireland. It should be remembered however that when some positions were originally constructed no one then expected that they would still be in place today. Some of the initial hasty constructions were undoubtedly eyesores but, at that stage, security came before environmental friendliness. Security, today, must still have top priority although the security forces have, and do try, to make these structures more acceptable to the eye and less obtrusive.

3. Last June Mr Needham discussed this subject with the Paymaster General's predecessor. Mr Needham stressed on that occasion the importance of not giving the impression to people visiting Northern Ireland that they were coming to an armed camp. That meeting concluded that improvements in the appearance of PVCs had to meet the needs of security but it was agreed that the NIO, the Army and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board would liaise to discuss the issue

R E S T R I C T E D

TRG/13556

R E S T R I C T E D

further, concentrating initially on the Cloghoge PVCP on the main Newry to Dundalk Road, the primary route across the border.

4. Following that meeting, in August officials from the NIO, the Tourist Board and a landscape architect from DOE paid a recce visit to the Cloghoge PVCP to hold a meeting on site with the Army and RUC. It was clear from that visit that, provided a contractor and the money could be found, a lot could be done to improve the appearance of the checkpoint without diminishing its effectiveness. But, as discussions progressed, it was clear that the first essential pre-requisite was to establish whether the security forces wished or expected to retain the checkpoint at its current location for the foreseeable future.

5. Consultations with the RUC and Army have confirmed that both believe we must have a PVCP, at least for the time being on this major road entry point into Northern Ireland. That being the case, the Army are happy that we should take steps to make the PVCP as attractive as possible provided that any measures taken to enhance the look of the PVCP should not affect operational effectiveness and that maintenance work resulting from any measures taken should not be carried out by soldiers who are deployed there to carry out operational tasks. The Army have confirmed that funding for environmental enhancement of the PVCP could not be obtained from the Army's budget. The Paymaster General will know, from Security Policy Meetings, that there are plans to create a by-pass around Newry and that this will inevitably mean the relocation of the PVCP. The latest assessment is that the Newry by-pass will be completed sometime in 1994 although a relocation of the PVCP before then, for security reasons, cannot be ruled out. Accordingly the Army have suggested that in the short term we should only make necessary cosmetic improvements to the existing PVCP at low cost (curbs, painting, gravel etc) and that when a new PVCP is built, in very much the same manner as the recently constructed new PVCP at Aughnacloy, it should be designed with its visual and environmental impact in mind.

6. Unfortunately progress on this initiative stopped when Cloghoge PVCP was subjected to a human proxy bomb attack on

R E S T R I C T E D

TRG/13556

R E S T R I C T E D

24 October last year when considerable damage was inflicted upon it. Once again, in repairing the PVCP, priority had to be given to the security of the soldiers manning the PVCP and also on re-opening the PVCP as speedily as possible, given the high volume of traffic which uses the road.

7. The Paymaster General can be sympathetic to Mr Needham's views at Thursday's meeting although he should not encourage Mr Needham to be too over-optimistic about what can be achieved. While improving the appearance of PVCPs would be certainly more environmentally friendly there must be some doubt as to whether a lick of paint etc at such installations would really boost tourism figures coming across the border. As for funding, the Army have no extra cash for this purpose: nor, do I believe, that NIO should provide funding for the improvement of Army installations, which the MOD could use against us for funding of other MOD projects in the future. Given Mr Needham's interest in this issue and DED's overall responsibility for tourism, it does seem that that Department should provide the funding for any enhancement of the appearance of PVCPs.

J M McKervill

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