

The Teleport – Kim Wilkie Associates

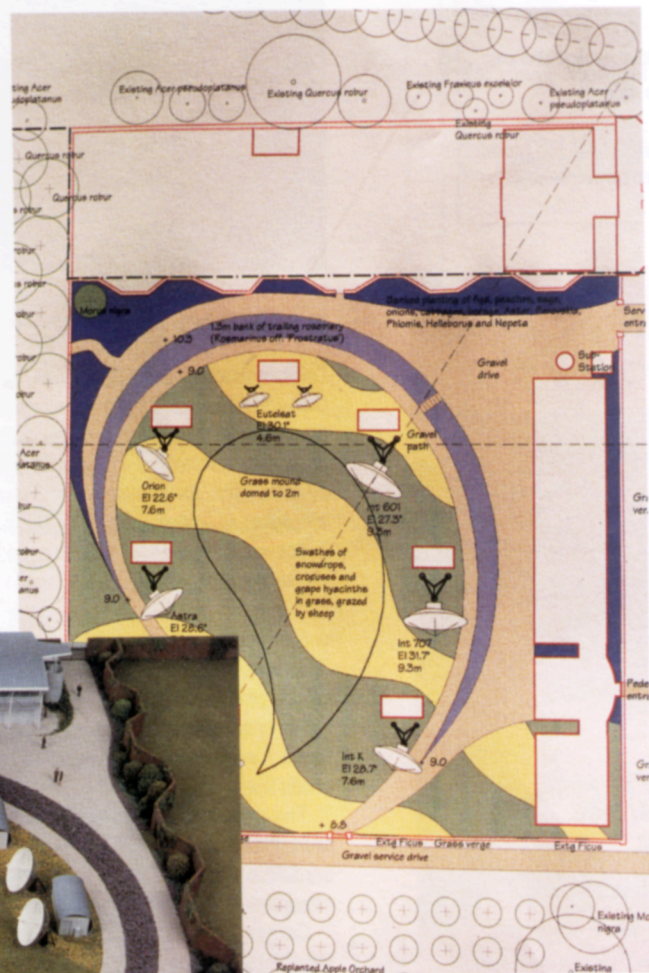
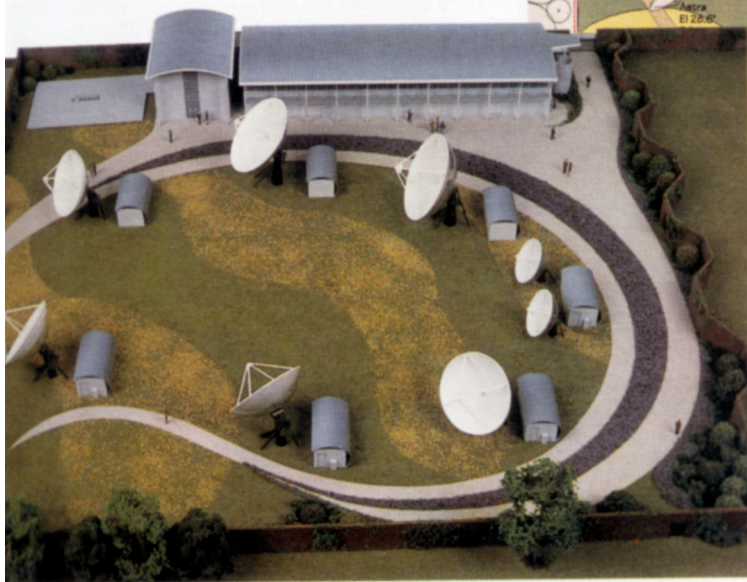
Kim Wilkie has a rare talent. He can see beauty where others would prefer to turn a blind eye. One of his most unusual projects has been the design of a hi-tech teleport set inside a walled garden on a grand country estate near Portsmouth. Here he has planted satellite dishes into the landscape to make a curiously beautiful garden of sculpture. 'The landscape architect is usually called in to cover things up, disguise blots and mask ugly intrusions, but my philosophy is based on taking a fresh look at things. In this case the urge was to hide these satellite dishes, but they do have their own grace and beauty, so I produced a design to celebrate that.'

The site is an 18th century country estate, complete with grand hall and parkland grounds. For around two decades it was empty while plans were drawn and then redrawn to flatten the lot and use the plot for housing. But the figures never stacked up. Wilkie was then contacted by the site developer Strand Harbour Securities to work on ideas for re-use. He suggested keeping the buildings and reinterpreting the land as a business park, the idea appealed to the developer and local planners and work is in progress. Critchell Harrington is project architect.

The teleport is run by the broadcaster Merlin which, in the past, has been content with a concrete or Tarmac setting for its discs, but here the issue of planning permission was critical. 'Although the site wasn't listed, it was sensitive and I'm fairly sure in this case that the landscape design was helpful in securing planning permission,' Wilkie says. 'The key consideration with dishes of this sort is that they must

be facing a particular point in space and mustn't interfere with signals to and from each other. In the early stages, the dishes were to be set up randomly and I was asked to design a pottager garden around them. My idea was to position them like sculpture in a setting. It took hours of careful placing and adjustment, but a flowing arc was created that would accommodate them all and not interfere with the astronomy.' The arc doubles as an access path for engineering teams.

For planting, Wilkie suggested low maintenance grasses and the planting of broad, wavy bands of spring and autumn bulbs. 'Merlin was happy with the grasses, but then pointed out that mowing the lawn around the satellite dishes was out of the question because the mower engine destroys satellite waves. The solution has been to install a couple of sheep,' he says. ►



Left: Merlin teleport by Kim Wilkie Associates; Above: plans for the teleport