



Editorial Complaints Unit

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Dear Mr Mallett

**9/11: Conspiracy Road Trip, BBC3, 8 September 2011**

Thank you for the various emails you sent in response to my summary of your complaint dated 24 February. I have now completed my investigation into the concerns you have raised about the above programme. In the course of that investigation, I have watched the programme, given the programme-makers an opportunity to respond to the points you have raised and carried out some additional research. This has included reading the official reports into the events of 9/11 and studying much of the evidence put forward by organisations which dispute the official version of events of 9/11. As I explained in my previous letter, I propose to respond to your complaints about each programme separately and I will write again shortly with my finding on your complaint about **The Conspiracy Files: 9/11 Ten Years On**.

I have amended my original summary to take account of the changes you suggested in your emails of 27 February. I have considered each point against the relevant section of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines.<sup>1</sup> To avoid any doubt, I should reiterate that I am only able to look at issues raised by the content of these specific programmes and not your broader concerns about the BBC's overall coverage of 9/11.

**1. The programme made it clear from the start that its approach was not open-minded and those who doubt the official version of events are delusional.**

The BBC's Editorial Guidelines on Impartiality make it clear that programmes can take a particular approach to a subject without necessarily falling foul of the requirement for due impartiality. The guidelines refer to "due impartiality" where *"the term 'due' means that the impartiality must be adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation"*. I think this makes it clear that the necessary due impartiality for

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/>

a programme has to take into account what the programme is about and the approach the programme takes to its subject matter. It follows that due impartiality does not require a consideration of issues which are not relevant to the subject matter of a programme or to the approach that is taken. I have therefore endeavoured to bear in mind what this programme was about (and what it was not about) and consider your complaint accordingly. I appreciate that you may regard the approach of the programme to be flawed but I hope you can see why I have to consider what was broadcast in the context of what the programme set out to do.

In this case, viewers would have been aware from the outset that the presenter, Andrew Maxwell, had a clear view about what he thought happened on 9/11 and who was responsible. As you may recall, he began by saying:

*Unbelievably there are many people who doubt the conclusions of the original investigation and want to believe the American Government was in some way responsible for this tragic event. I'm taking five of them to America on an extraordinary journey to see if I can change their minds. It'll be a tough mission. These guys appear to be convinced conspiracy theorists.*

He went on to add:

*Personally I'm as certain as certain can be that the attacks were ordered by Osama bin Laden.*

The programme then introduced the five people on the road trip and explained the reasons why they do not believe the official version of what happened on 9/11. Mr Maxwell recognised that many ordinary people share the scepticism of those on the road trip:

*Even though an independent commission concluded it was the work of Al Qaeda, my five, and allegedly up to a third of Brits and Americans just don't believe it.*

He went on to explain that each of the five would be given an opportunity to put forward their theories about what happened on 9/11:

*Over the next week each of my fellow travellers is going to challenge me on a conspiracy theory they believe proves the official version wrong.*

It seems to me that the premise of this programme was clearly established at the start and the audience would have been in little doubt that Mr Maxwell's aim was to challenge the views of the five and persuade them round to his way of thinking. As he put it "*Will I end up changing their minds?*" In my view, it was reasonable for Mr Maxwell to express his views on the various conspiracy theories, and his views of those who hold such theories, just as it was reasonable for the programme to include the contrasting views of the five people on the road trip. Viewers would have understood that the premise of the programme was to see whether Mr Marshall was able to change the minds of the five and would have judged the content accordingly. The programme was not an attempt to analyse each and every theory about 9/11, nor was it a typical investigative-style documentary weighing the evidence for and against various theories.

I should add that the Editorial Guidelines recognise that there may be occasions when it is acceptable to allow contributors to express views which might be regarded by some as contentious and the section of the guidelines on Personal View Content makes it clear that "*The BBC has a tradition of allowing a wide range of individuals, groups or organisations to*

*offer a personal view or opinion, express a belief, or advance a contentious argument in its output”.*

I therefore do not have grounds to uphold this point of complaint.

- 2. The programme deliberately chose five young people who did not have the knowledge or experience to be able to counter technical opinion put forward by the programme’s experts.**

It is a matter of editorial discretion for programme-makers to choose the subject of programmes and the manner in which any subject is approached. As I have explained, the audience would have been well aware that this was a programme where a comedian sought to challenge the views of five young people who do not believe the official version of what happened on 9/11. Of course, the programme could have chosen five people with technical expertise or knowledge as you suggest but that would have resulted in an entirely different programme. The nature of this programme was clearly set out; the five people featured in this programme were “ordinary” individuals who find aspects of the official version hard to accept, and Mr Maxwell was trying to convince them they were wrong. Viewers would have judged the content of the programme accordingly.

- 3. The demonstration to show that a person with no flying experience can pilot a 4 engine Boeing 767-200 Airliner was flawed; it did not reflect the view of qualified airline pilots who have proved using a simulator that even an experienced pilot could not have flown a passenger plane into the Twin Towers or Pentagon in the manner described in the official story. It also did not mention the fact that according to accurate radar tracking information the flights which hit the towers 1 and 2 were travelling speeds well in excess of their capabilities.**

As I have explained, the presenter set out to challenge the particular views of the five individuals who were invited on the road trip. As Mr Maxwell said:

*We’re going to the sights of 9/11, to the actual places and I want to see what difference that makes to their opinions. Does that calcify them, does it even harden their opinions? Or do they step back and realise this is real - there’s real suffering here?*

The programme took the views of each person and examined each one in turn. The first theory was put forward by Charlotte:

*Charlotte: OK basically I’m, I’m going to be discussing the major queries regarding the amateur pilots.*

*Andrew Maxwell: She can’t believe that hijackers barely out of flying school could have steered jetliners into the twin towers with such deadly accuracy.*

*Charlotte: I can’t imagine that somebody that’s had training in some flight simulators and can barely fly a Cessna could get into the seat of a 767 and hit that kind of target at the velocity and speed and everything that’s needed, one time, no, no practice run. I feel that it couldn’t have been done at that speed, it couldn’t have been done at that velocity. So either the data is faulty or someone’s pulling the wool over our eyes.*

The programme took the five to a flight centre where one was given a flying lesson in a light aircraft by an instructor. The aim was to find out whether, in principle, someone with no flying experience could learn the basics required to pilot (and land) a small plane, and

whether it would be possible, in theory, for such a person to fly a passenger jet. Mr Maxwell explained this as follows:

*Robert Hadlow is an experienced flight instructor so I want him to show how hard or easy it is to control an aircraft for someone who has never done it before.*

I accept that this was far from scientific and certainly didn't prove one way or the other whether the two planes which hit the Twin Towers were piloted by terrorists. However, I think it is reasonable to assume that viewers would have judged what they saw accordingly and would have drawn their own conclusions. The programme reflected the views of a qualified flight instructor that a relatively inexperienced pilot could have flown a plane into the Twin Towers and it also included the response from Charlotte in which she made it clear she was still not persuaded:

*Robert Hadlow: All they had to do is fly straight and level towards a, a target.*

*Charlotte: So people that trained them didn't believe they could do this and yet the rest of us will just accept that they could and will dismiss any other possibility.*

I appreciate that the programme did not include the kind of informed comment that you think was necessary, such as a contribution from a member of Pilots for 9/11 Truth, or any reference to the speed of the planes which hit the Twin Towers, but there was no requirement to include this information. As I explained in my response to Point 1, the programme had a clearly defined but limited scope and was not seeking to examine all aspects of the various theories surrounding 9/11. The programme achieved the necessary due impartiality when judged against its subject and content.

**4. The explanation of how the Twin Towers collapsed did not include a contribution from an engineer from the truth movement to offer an alternative theory.**

As I explained in my response to the previous points, the Editorial Guidelines do not require that every point of view or perspective is included in an individual programme. The due impartiality of a programme has to be judged against its particular nature and content. In this case, the five people on the road trip were given the opportunity to explain their concerns about the official version of events and Andrew Maxwell sought to present evidence to challenge their views. I have already acknowledged that the programme could have taken a different approach to the conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11 but it chose to adopt a particular approach which was clearly explained to the audience at the start and it is on that basis that I have to consider your complaint.

I am therefore unable to conclude that the programme should have included a contribution from a member of Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth or conducted a detailed analysis of what caused World Trade Centre Tower 7 (WTC7) to collapse. It gave the five people on the road trip the chance to question a demolition expert about the Twin Towers, included his response and their reaction to his response.

**5. The programme did not explain that World Trade Centre Tower 7 (WTC7) collapsed in free fall and that this could only have occurred if the tower was brought down in a controlled demolition using explosives.**

None of the five people on the road trip raised concerns about the collapse of WTC7 and so I cannot conclude that there was a requirement to consider this point.

- 6. The demonstration to show that thermite could not have been used to demolish the towers was flawed and misleading. It did not draw on evidence freely available from Architects and Engineers for 911 Truth that proves thermite can do all the things the program stated it could not do when used in simple containment vessels to efficiently direct its energy.**

There are two reasons why I do not believe that the manner in which the programme demonstrated the effect of thermite was misleading or led to a lack of balance.

Firstly, the sequence began with a contribution from a mechanical engineer called Tony Szamboti who explained why he believes the towers were brought down with the use of thermite:

*Andrew Maxwell: Tony Szamboti is a mechanical engineer who's written articles in professional journals about the Twin Towers. He's willing to agree it would have been impossible to pre-cut all the steel girdles un-noticed. But he has an answer.*

*Tony Szamboti: And I want to show you right here, these are pictures of the paper put out by these scientists who found active thermitic material discovered in dust in the 9/11 World Trade Centre catastrophe. And they looked at these red and grey chips, they found they had the constituents of thermite.*

*Charlotte: Wow.*

*Tony Szamboti: In addition to that, this is a big thing, these chips ignite.*

*Sync Charlotte: Right, yes, exactly and...*

*Tony Szamboti: The thermitic reaction was going on.*

*Andrew Maxwell: He thinks an incendiary called thermite was involved. It's a fine powder that can melt steel when ignited.*

*Tony Szamboti: Now, there's no way to structurally explain the freefall other than some form of controlled demolition. Why weren't those questions asked?*

That established that there are engineers who have been published in professional journals who believe that the towers were brought down by controlled demolition and believe that thermite could have been used. Mr Szamboti cited evidence which he says supports this theory and so I think that went some way towards addressing your concern about the omission of any reference to the position of members of Architects and Engineers for 911 Truth.

Secondly, the demonstration in the programme was clearly presented as “a DIY chemistry experiment” to see how thermite affects steel. The experiment showed that “three kilos of thermite has barely affected the steel beam at all”. The person from the University of California who conducted the experiment, and who was described as “a real boffin, a thermite expert” concluded that to burn through steel, “you need a lot, yes, probably hundreds of pounds. It seems unlikely that so much Thermite could be strategically placed like this”. Viewers then heard the five “road trippers” discussing the outcome and disagreeing as to whether or not it shed any light on the theory that the towers were brought down by controlled demolition.

It may well be that thermite packed in small steel containers could have a more damaging effect on beams and girders. I have watched the video you have cited<sup>2</sup> and it does appear to show that, contained in a specific way, thermite could burn through, or seriously weaken, steel girders (although I am not in a position to assess or verify the manner in which the tests in the video were carried out). However, I cannot conclude that the evidence of one “DIY” experiment should be given significantly more weight than another.

- 7. The program made no mention of molten iron found under WTC towers 1, 2 and 7 for weeks afterwards and offered no explanation for it. Office fires and jet fuel cannot reach the temperatures in ideal circumstances to melt steel. There had to be a high energy substance such as thermite present in large quantities to achieve this.**

None of the five people on the road trip raised concerns about the presence of molten iron under the three towers and so I cannot conclude that there was a requirement to consider this point in this programme. I would add while that the video to which you provided a link<sup>3</sup> appears to show that some people say they saw pools of molten steel, it also confirms that this has not been accepted by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the organisation which conducted the official investigation into the collapse of WTC1, WTC2 and WTC7.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the NIST report concluded that it found “*no corroborating evidence for alternative hypotheses suggesting that the WTC towers were brought down by controlled demolition using explosives planted prior to September 11, 2001*”.

Although I do not feel able to uphold your complaint on this occasion I hope I have been able to go at least some way to addressing your concerns. Nevertheless, if you are not satisfied with my decision I would be happy to consider any points you might wish to make on my finding. I would be grateful if you could let me have any comments within ten working days of this letter. You can also ask the Editorial Standards Committee of the BBC Trust to review my finding. Correspondence for the Committee should be addressed to Lucy Tristram, Complaints Advisor, BBC Trust Unit, 180 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5QZ or you can send an email to [trust.editorial@bbc.co.uk](mailto:trust.editorial@bbc.co.uk). The Trust normally expects to receive an appeal within four weeks of the date of this letter, or of any further substantive correspondence between us, and expects complainants to limit the details of their appeal to no more than one thousand words.

Yours sincerely



**Colin Tregear**  
Complaints Director

The BBC Trust is proposing some changes to the complaints service.  
Have your say at: [http://consultations.external.bbc.co.uk/bbc/complaints\\_framework](http://consultations.external.bbc.co.uk/bbc/complaints_framework)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d5iIoCiI8g>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcqf5tL887o>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nist.gov/customcf/get\\_pdf.cfm?pub\\_id=861610](http://www.nist.gov/customcf/get_pdf.cfm?pub_id=861610) (NCSTAR 1A)

[http://www.nist.gov/customcf/get\\_pdf.cfm?pub\\_id=909017](http://www.nist.gov/customcf/get_pdf.cfm?pub_id=909017) (NCSTAR 1)

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