

# Executive

## The Future of RAF Bicester

18 June 2012

### Report of Chief Executive

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To highlight the opportunities presented by the marketing of RAF Bicester in relation to Heritage and economic growth and to seek approval for Cherwell District Council's involvement in the project.

This report is public

#### Recommendations

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The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) Approve the establishment of a strategic partnership (Cherwell District Council, Bomber Command Heritage and other key agencies and interested parties) to investigate the potential of securing the site for heritage purposes, to enable the provision of an education centre and museum.

#### Executive Summary

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##### Introduction

- 1.1 RAF Bicester technical site is currently owned by the Ministry of Defence and they have recently confirmed their intention to market the site with a view to its disposal
- 1.2 Having satisfied the criteria established by the Crichel Downs process, MoD have determined that the land is indeed theirs to sell and no previous owners have a claim on it for it to be returned into their ownership. Bomber Command Heritage (BCH) aspire to acquire the site and to develop an education centre and museum. BCH has approached this council to request assistance in developing the project. The project would be overseen by a strategic partnership including BCH and CDC, possibly with other interested parties also.
- 1.3 The site represents a significant opportunity to restore and preserve a particular Heritage form and to develop RAF Bicester as an attraction

## **Proposals**

- 1.4 Members are asked to approve the establishment of a strategic partnership (Council, Bomber Command Heritage (BCH) and other key agencies/interested parties) to investigate the potential of securing the site for heritage purposes.
- 1.5 The project as proposed by BCH is focussed on:
  - Preserving the unique factors of the flying field and tower and associated technical buildings plus the landscape that provides a very distinct sense of place.
  - Developing a plan to enable access to the site as a specialist educational resource around the role of Bomber Command in WWII
  - Developing a unique visitor attraction to further expand the attractiveness of Bicester as a visitor destination and create employment
  - Secure a range of funding through various initiatives to assist in the process
  - Having a whole place approach to this site and its importance to Bicester and as a national heritage asset
  - Drawing together stakeholders to develop a comprehensive and cohesive approach to the development
- 1.6 Cherwell District Council would provide support to the strategic Partnership by assisting with the development of the proposals and helping to secure external funding.

## **Conclusion**

- 1.7 The development of an education centre and museum on the current RAF Bicester technical site would provide employment opportunities to local people and a visitor attraction that would appeal on a local, national and potentially international scale. BCH believe that the contribution that this council can bring to the project will be critical in determining the way forward

## **Background Information**

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- 2.1 The site presents any developer with a range of issues: the principal one being how to deal with the various dilapidations of the listed buildings on site. There has been minimal repair and maintenance of these buildings, but as soon as a developer takes ownership of the site they would have a considerable liability to manage in relation to these dilapidations and estimates of £35 million have been made over a period of ten years to return all buildings to their former condition and functionality.
- 2.2 Cherwell has had a well-documented approach to the development of the site in its local plan documents. In 2002 the area was designated as a conservation area and the Council asserts that no domestic residential development should be allowed on this site and only development that preserved the vista and flying field would be considered, along with sensitive reuse and refurbishment of the technical buildings.
- 2.3 BCH is a group of local volunteers who have a keen interest in Bomber Command and its role in securing an allied victory in WWII. They have spent time and their own resources pulling together a business plan and feasibility study for the site, with an ambition to develop an education centre, visitor attraction and encourage businesses to occupy some of the facility to develop linked activity, such as engineering and aerospace related work.
- 2.4 BCH have made a formal approach to Cherwell District Council regarding their plans and have sought Council support for them. In particular, support is required to secure external funding, but also to develop the proposals further, particularly in relation to the planning aspects and future viability.

## **Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options**

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- 3.1 The creation of an education centre and museum would contribute to the economic growth of Bicester and the present heritage of the site.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

**Option One**                      Support the proposals as set out and approve the establishment of a Strategic Partnership

**Option Two**                      No to support the proposal

## **Consultations**

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None at this stage.

## Implications

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**Financial:** Initially, existing revenue budgets will be utilised to support the work. Should any additional funding be required, a fuller report will be presented to the Executive for the consideration.

Comments checked by Martin Henry, Director of Resources, 0300 003 0102

**Legal:** There are no legal implications arising from this report

Comments checked by Nigel Bell, Team Leader – Planning and Litigation 01295 221687

## Wards Affected

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All

## Corporate Plan Themes

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- A District of Opportunity
- A Safe, Healthy and Thriving District
- An accessible Value for Money Council

## Lead Member

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Councillor Barry Wood

## Document Information

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Appendix No	Title
None attached	
<b>Background Papers</b>	
No background papers at this stage.	
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