

RAF BICESTER PLANNING BRIEF

incorporating

Part A

INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES FOR THE WHOLE SITE

and

Part B

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE DOMESTIC SITE

DRAFT MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE FLYING FIELD AND TECHNICAL SITE

7 September 2009

[approved by The Executive on 7 September 2009](#)

[blue indicates text that was amended following consultation with stakeholders](#)

RAF Bicester
Planning Brief

PART A
INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES
for the flying field, technical site and domestic site

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

The former RAF Bicester currently comprises the flying field, the technical site, the domestic site and the former airmen's housing. The flying field and one hangar within the technical site is leased to Windrushers Gliding Club. The rest of the technical site is mothballed. The domestic site has been occupied by Defence Equipment and Support (DES) (Caversfield) for a number of years. The housing areas are partly occupied by United States Air Force (USAF) personnel stationed at Croughton and partly, in properties made available on the open market, by civilians. This document covers the flying field, the technical site and the domestic site. There are references in the text to each of these areas individually by name but where the term "the site" is used, this refers to the whole of the area covered by this document: the flying field, technical site and domestic site.

1.2 Purpose of the document

The domestic and technical sites, together with the flying field, at RAF Bicester have been declared surplus to Defence Requirements. The purpose of this document is to set out the planning context, the many constraints and opportunities offered by this complex but exciting site and what the Local Planning Authority considers appropriate for the future of site. This document has been prepared [following a meeting with](#) Kevan Jones, Under Secretary of State for Defence on 20 May 2009.

1.3 Relationship with Defence Estates disposal process

[Defence Estates put the domestic site up for sale on the open market in early July 2009 with a view to concluding a sale by 31 March 2010. Defence Estates has also recently contacted former owners of land within the flying field under the Crichel Down rules and, subject to the outcome, this may ultimately lead to the sale of the flying field and technical site in due course. MOD has instructed Defence Estates to dispose of the site in two phases, but this is not the only way it could be done. There would be advantages to the sale of the site in its entirety, as this would enable cross subsidy from the domestic site to the technical site. There is agreement that the former RAF Bicester was originally one planning unit. The Council considers that it continues to be one planning unit and therefore is publishing this document to cover the whole site, irrespective of phasing of the sale.](#)

1.4 Policy Context including LDF timescale

The Development Plan comprises the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East of England (known as the South East Plan) and the saved policies of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan (CLP) 1996. The policies and proposals of the Non Statutory Cherwell Local Plan (NSCLP), 2004 have not been subject to all of the statutory local plan preparation procedures including the public inquiry and therefore do not have statutory development plan status. However, the NSCLP does set out a detailed basis for coordinating land use in the District. It is used for development control purposes and the policies of the NSCLP are an important material consideration together with other relevant considerations in determining planning applications. A list of relevant policies is listed at Appendix B and described in more detail below.

The South East Plan was adopted in May 2009 and replaces the saved policies in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016. It sets out the long term spatial planning framework for the region over the years 2006 – 2026. The South East Plan identifies nine sub regions as the focus of growth and regeneration (Policy SP1). The site is within the Central Oxfordshire sub region. The strategy for the Central Oxfordshire sub region is to strive to be a world leader in education, science and technology building on the region's strengths (Policy CO1) and priority should be given to

development which supports these sectors (Policy CO2). Policy CC9 sets out the regional policy on the use of major sites in public ownership. "Major sites" are defined as those sites that would be referred to the regional planning body as major planning applications. The South East Plan states that the region has a substantial portfolio of land including land held by the defence sector. Policy CC9 recognises this and encourages Government departments and public land owners to undertake strategic reviews of their landholdings taking into account the policies and objectives of the South East Plan as a primary consideration in the use and disposal of land. Some sites offer considerable potential making the issue of the use of public land of strategic importance. [Policy BE6 of the South East Plan encourages proposals that make sensitive use of historic assets through regeneration, particularly those that bring redundant or under-used buildings into an appropriate use.](#)

Part of the airfield at RAF Bicester surrounding the existing hangars was allocated for employment generating development with the remainder identified for recreational uses in Policy EMP2 of the adopted CLP. However, the policy was not saved. As a result, Policy EMP 4 refers to employment generating development in rural areas. According to Policy EMP4, the conversion of an existing building or group of buildings to employment use in rural areas will normally be permitted provided the form, bulk and general design of the buildings is in keeping with the surrounding area. However, Policy EMP4 was clearly worded with farmsteads in mind, rather than the scale of buildings that exist at RAF Bicester. Given the location of RAF Bicester, close to and accessible from Bicester and Caversfield, it is not considered that the scale and reuse of buildings that could take place would be inappropriate. Nevertheless it is important that reuse does not take place in a piecemeal fashion that does not preserve the landscape and setting of the Conservation Area.

The Government's policy, as set out in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (August 2004), is to support the reuse of existing rural buildings where suitably constructed and appropriately located where this would meet sustainable development objectives. It goes on to state, that reuse of such buildings should be supported in locations adjacent to or closely related to country towns. RAF Bicester is adjacent to the built up limits of both Bicester and Caversfield, as defined Policies C8 and C9 of the adopted CLP. In the case of buildings beyond the built up limits of an existing settlement policy EMP4 of the CLP supports proposals for employment generating development provided they do not require not major rebuilding or extension.

There have been material changes since the adoption of the CLP. For example, RAF Bicester was designated as a conservation area in July 2002. The site was therefore not allocated for any specific use in the NSCLP subject to satisfying the criteria set out in Policy EN49a. which refers to the buildings within the Technical Area shown on the NSCLP Proposals Map. The supporting text states that the Council will work with Defence Estates and prospective developers to ensure that proposals are set within a comprehensive and viable plan for the whole of the area. In principle, appropriate uses could include offices, light industry, manufacturing and storage. In addition, cultural uses such as an aviation museum and leisure facilities, both indoor and outdoor, may be appropriate. In terms of employment uses paragraph 4.47 of the NSCLP states that B1, B2 and B8 uses could be acceptable at Bicester Airfield provided they comply with Policy EN49a.

There are no policies in the NSCLP referring specifically to the RAF Bicester Domestic site or flying field. However, Policies EMP4 and EMP6 refer to existing employment sites and re-use of rural buildings respectively with EMP6 supporting reuse provided proposals does not harm the character or the setting of buildings of their architectural or historic interest. Policy H1a sets out the criteria for assessing the location of new housing including the availability of previously developed sites and empty of under utilised buildings.

The Cherwell Local Development Framework (LDF) is in preparation following the publication of the Options for Growth document as part of the Core Strategy in September 2008. The Core Strategy

will set the broad planning framework for the District over the period to 2026. The Council consulted on general issues and options for the Core Strategy in 2006 and carried out further consultations on site specific allocations between July 2006 and February 2008. Further evidence gathering is currently being carried out before the publication of a Preferred Options Core Strategy in late 2009. At this stage it anticipated that the Core Strategy submission will be in Spring 2010 with adoption of the Core Strategy later in 2010. It may also be necessary to review the Local Development Scheme (LDS) following the announcement on the Eco-towns Planning Policy Statement (PPS) expected in July 2009.

The future use and development of the site needs to be considered through the preparation of a comprehensive framework / plan for the future ownership, use, development and management of the site. This plan should be prepared by Defence Estates and the Council, working with prospective purchasers/developers. The site is regarded by the Council as a single planning unit and there are very important relationships between possible land uses and access arrangements on the different parts of the site. These relationships are complicated because of the conservation area status of the site, the preference for appropriate land uses (especially aviation) to safeguard the conservation interest and the requirements for future maintenance and management of the historic environment.

The Local Planning Authority would seek to grant appropriate planning permissions on individual sub-parts of the site only in the context of an agreed plan and agreements that safeguard these important planning and conservation interests.

1.5 Public consultation on the draft document

A Draft document was published for consultation with stakeholders on 3 July 2009, having already incorporated contributions from Defence Estates and English Heritage. Comments on the Draft were received from Defence Estates, Oxfordshire County Council, Bicester Town Council, Launton Parish Council, English Heritage, Windrushers Gliding Club, Bomber Command Heritage, Bicester Vision and BBOWT. All comments received were reported to the Council's Executive on 7 September 2009 and the document was amended as a result and the content was approved by the Executive.

1.6 Status of the document

This document will constitute Informal Development Principles. It will not have the status of a Supplementary Planning Document. The purpose of this document is to respond quickly to provide guidance on the future of this important site to advise potential purchasers. It sets out Cherwell District Council's aspirations for the site and the future uses that are considered appropriate. The Brief is issued without prejudice to the consideration of future planning applications on the site. The purpose of the document is to set out the planning parameters for the site so that both vendor and any prospective purchasers are aware of the planning context, constraints to development and what the Local Planning Authority considers appropriate in terms of land use, amount and appearance of development. The document has been the subject of public consultation, amended as appropriate and approved by the Council's Executive. The Planning Brief will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications on the site.

2 THE SITE

2.1 Location and extent

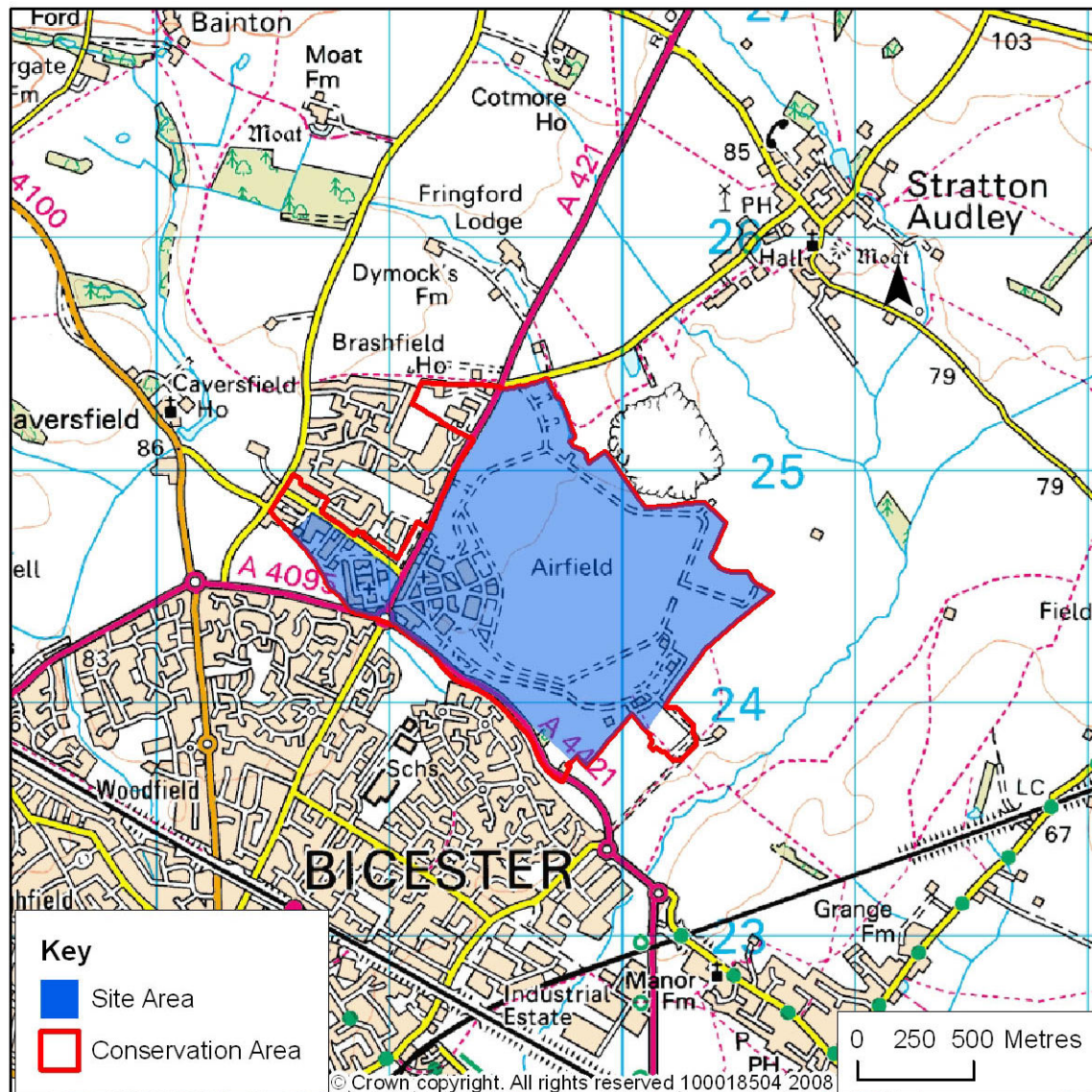


Fig 1 Location of RAF Bicester (amended to exclude land outside MOD ownership from the site boundary)

RAF Bicester is located on the north eastern periphery, 2.4km (1 1/2 miles) from the centre, of the fast growing town of Bicester in NE Oxfordshire. It sits astride the A4421 Oxford to Buckingham Road. The domestic site is 9.17hectares in extent and the technical site and flying field extend to 141.5 hectares. To the north and east lie a former quarry, now a Site of Special Scientific Interest and agricultural land respectively. Immediately to the south is the A4421, effectively part of the road system around Bicester, enclosing residential and employment development, and to the west lies former military housing, including that dating from the 1920s and 1930s associated with the bomber station, but predominantly from later periods associated with the USAF presence at RAF Croughton, totalling some 700 dwellings. There are no education, retail or community facilities in this area.

2.2 Site description

The site comprises those parts of former RAF Bicester that have been declared surplus to Defence requirements. This constitutes the flying field and technical site together with the domestic site. The site excludes Airmen's housing and Married Quarters, also located west of A4421 which, although included in the Conservation Area designation, are not being sold as part of Defence Estates proposed sale and are therefore not covered by the provisions of this document..

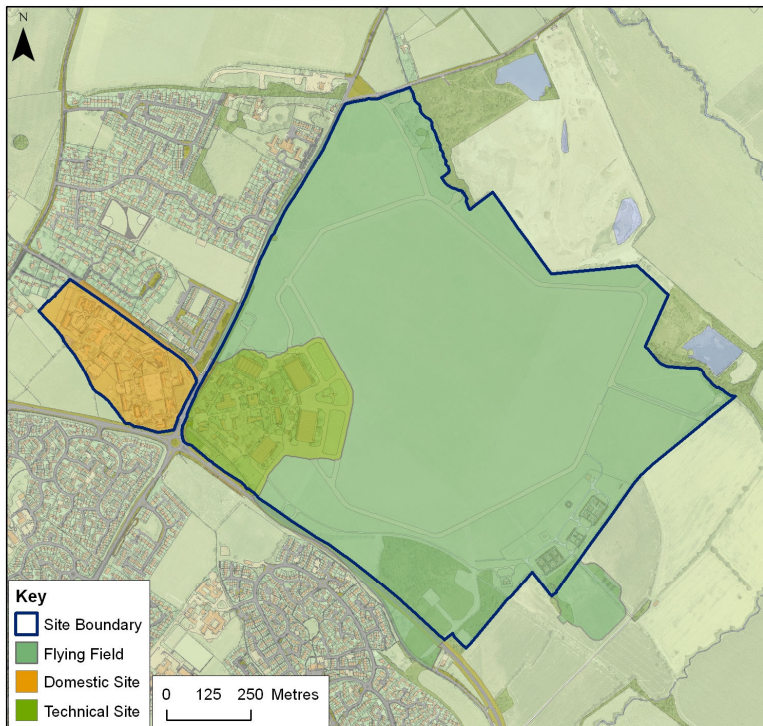


Fig 2 The Flying field, technical site and domestic site (amended to exclude land not in MOD ownership from site)

Although separated by the A4421, the technical site to the east and the domestic site to the west, the two are functionally related and this is historically important, as explained in paragraph 2.6. The Council considers the site to remain one planning unit, where sui generis military use of the airfield is carried on, the nature of which encompasses a range of uses including offices etc, all of which exist and are used to fulfil the military use of the site. The planning decisions required to provide for new ownership and uses, creating separate planning units, need to be considered from this base line. Further, the Council is seeking a comprehensive approach to the management and maintenance of the site in the future.

2.3 Relationship with other development proposals

Bicester currently has a population of about 30,000 and is due to expand further to the south west through the construction of a 1,500 dwelling urban extension for which outline planning permission has already been issued and by 4,900 under the provisions of the SE Plan. On 16 July 2009 the publication of a supplement to PPS1 announced that NW Bicester was one of four locations chosen by government for an Eco-Town as a result of which, the Council considers that its residential land allocation in Bicester is effectively catered for until 2026. Detailed consent has been granted for a mixed use town centre development including food store, library, cinema and further retail units to respond to the growing population, taking Bicester from a small market town towards a thriving sub

regional centre to complement the retail provision at Bicester Village. Although not contiguous, the proximity of the proposed Eco-Town will have a potential beneficial economic and social impact on the regeneration of this site.

2.4 Geology, topography and drainage

The land is low-lying and, as would be expected of an airfield location, is flat, with an imperceptible fall to the east from 85m to 75m. The site overlies Cornbrash geology, which is characterised by thin soils, and appears to be free draining towards the Langford Brook that flows north south beyond the eastern boundary. The level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for Cherwell District (2009) states that the wider NE Quadrant of Bicester is not considered to be at risk from groundwater flooding. A Flood Risk Assessment will be required because PPG 25 advises that one is required for an application that is classified as a major Development (ie residential development of sites greater than 0.5 h and commercial development of sites greater than 1h).

2.5 Landscape character

The site lies within the Otmoor Lowlands landscape character area, as defined in the Cherwell District Landscape Assessment (1995), which comprises a predominantly flat, low-lying landscape. To the north and east the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands character area displays distinctive estate landscape of large scale undulating farmland with a weak field pattern to the north getting progressively stronger to the east. The site itself is identified as “airfield (operational and disused)” and bordered on the east by “elevated or low-lying arable farmland with weak structure”. The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study identifies the site as lying between the Wooded Estate lands to the west and the Clay Vale to the east. The wooded estate landscape is characterised by arable farming and

- Rolling topography with localised steep slopes.
- Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes.
- Large parklands and mansion houses.
- A regularly shaped field pattern dominated by arable fields.
- Small villages with strong vernacular character.

The Clay Vale landscape type extends from the vale landscapes adjacent to the northern part of the River Cherwell to the Upper Thames area south of Bicester and is characterised by

- A flat, low-lying landform.
- Mixed land uses, dominated by pastureland, with small to medium-sized hedged fields.
- Many mature oak, ash and willow hedgerow trees.
- Dense, tree-lined streams and ditches dominated by pollarded willows and poplars.
- Small to medium-sized nucleated villages.

OWLS does not classify the site itself.

2.6 Special importance and statement of significance

When the RAF was formed as the world’s first independent airforce in April 1918, General Sir Hugh Trenchard, its founding father and Chief of Defence Staff, concentrated on the principle of offensive deterrence, which saw fleets of self-defending bomber formations as the instrument of war most likely to ensure a swift victory. The location of these bomber stations were chosen across East Anglia and Oxfordshire to create an aircraft fighting zone some fifteen miles deep and extending around London from Duxford in Cambridgeshire to Salisbury Plain. All the air stations were planned in accordance with Trenchard’s requirements that the fabric must be dispersed against attack. In all cases the technical site, comprising hangars and workshops with the guard room and station headquarters placed at the site entrance, was separated from the domestic site with its barracks, institute and mess. This generated a particular layout and, whilst RAF Upper Heyford was the test bed, RAF Bicester is the most structurally representative the country and the most complete airfield to have survived from the pre-1934 period.

In its thematic study of English military aviation sites in 2000, English Heritage described RAF Bicester as

“retaining better than any other military airbase in Britain, the layout and fabric relating to pre-1930s military aviation..... it comprises the best preserved bomber airfield dating from the period up to 1945 It also comprises the best preserved and most strongly representative of the bomber stations built as part of Sir Hugh Trenchard’s 1920s Home Defence Expansion Scheme”

The development of airfield design can be clearly traced in the layout of the flying field and buildings on the site. Each of the periods of development is represented, from the 1920’s Air Defence of Britain, through the RAF Expansion period in the 1930s to readiness for war. The layout has not been affected by later infilling, as at RAF Upper Heyford for example, nor have the structures been altered significantly. A number of the buildings and structures are the only remaining examples of their type in the country, whilst others are the best preserved examples. The functional spatial relationship within and between parts of the site can still be appreciated and understood. It is therefore not only individual buildings but the spaces between them and the relationship with the open flying field that constitute the special importance of the site.

RAF Bicester conservation area was designated in 2002 and includes the technical site, the domestic site and the flying field that are the subject of the document, but also covers the pre-war married airmen’s housing and the former officers’ mess that lie beyond the scope of this document. The site contains a Scheduled Ancient Monument which has 16 component area and 36 Grade II Listed Buildings.

3 SITE CONSTRAINTS

3.1 Conservation area and setting

RAF Bicester Conservation Area was designated in 2002 and extended slightly in 2008 following a Review and is indicated on Figure 1. The Conservation Area Appraisal can be viewed on the Council's website. The Conservation Area includes the whole of the flying field that now remains, the entire technical and domestic sites, including the former Officers' Mess, now Cherwood House, and the pre 1939 married Airmen's housing, and this is equivalent to all that currently remains of the Bomber Command Station as it was at the outset of the Second World War. Cherwood House and the housing are outside the scope of this document, so that this document does not cover the entire conservation area.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to identify those parts of its area, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate those areas as conservation areas. The local planning authority then has a duty to have regard to the desirability of the preservation or enhancement of the conservation area in the determination of development proposals within the conservation area and its setting.

3.2 Protected buildings and structures and setting

On the flying field, a Scheduled Ancient Monument containing sixteen areas covers part of the bomb stores and the Mushroom Pill Boxes and Seagull Trenches in the south east of the flying field, together with a dozen defensive structures within and adjacent to the Technical site such as air raid shelters. On the Technical Site, twenty two buildings are Listed Grade II and twenty three are identified as making a positive contribution to the conservation area. Nineteen buildings on the Domestic Site are Listed Grade II and six others are identified as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. These are identified on Figure x. A full list of buildings can be found at Appendix x.

Paragraphs 2.16 and 2.17 of PPG 15 advise that the setting of listed buildings should not be interpreted too narrowly. The fact that there has been virtually no later development or infilling, virtually no alteration to the structures and relatively little demolition means that, in addition to their individual value, their group value contributes to their special quality as do the vistas and views. The 2003 CGMS Study defines the level of preservation as a group of buildings as "quite remarkable". Allied to the group value, is the concept of the setting of individual buildings. Clearly the setting of large buildings, such as the hangars on the periphery of the technical site, extends across the flying field and would be a material consideration in any proposals for the site. Where other listed buildings are close together within the domestic and technical sites, their interrelated layout and grouping would also be a material consideration in any application affecting them or their setting, making the pattern of spaces and routes between them important as well as the buildings themselves.

Domestic site building numbers

- 14. Squash racquets court
- 16. Officers' mess and quarters
- 19. Ration store
- 20. Dining room and institute
- 22. Central heating Station
- 23. Type H Barrack Block

- 24. Intake Sub-station
- 25. Type H Barrack Block
- 28. Sergeant Pilot's Mess
- 29. Type E Barrack Block
- 31 Sergeants' Mess
- 32. Institute
- 33. Barrack Block
- 34. Fire Pool Hut
- 35. Type E Barrack Block
- 36. Type E Barrack Block
- 42. Type E Barrack Block
- 43. Annex to Station Sick Quarters
- 44. Mortuary
- 45. Ambulance Garage
- 46. Station Sick Quarters
- 47. Ration Store
- 48. Dining Room and Cookhouse
- 50. Decontamination Centre
- 204. Garages

The technical site Building numbers

- 79. Type A Aeroplane Shed
- 81. Reservoir
- 82. Power House
- 84. High Level Water Tank
- 86. Bore Hole Pump House
- 87. Fire Party House
- 88. Fire Party Hut
- 89. Guard and Fire Party House
- 90. Main Stores
- 92. Parachute Store
- 93. Power House
- 94. Petrol Tanker Shed
- 96. Lubricant Store
- 97. Inflammable Store
- 99. Main Workshops
- 100. Technical Latrine
- 101. Spotlight (Turret) Trainer
- 102. Engine Test House
- 103. Link Trainer
- 104. Meteorological section
- 105. Petrol Tanker Shed
- 106. Pyrotechnic Store
- 107. Technical Latrine

- 108. Type C Aircraft Shed
- 109. Watch Office with Tower
- 111. Fire Tender House
- 112. Fuel Tanker Shed
- 113. Type C Aircraft Shed
- 114. Technical Latrine~
- 116. Petrol Tanker Shed
- 118. Petrol Tanker Shed with Compressor
- 119. FFMT Shed
- 121. Fire tender and Hucks Starter Shelter
- 122. Small Arms Ammunition Store
- 123. Station Armoury and Lecture Rooms
- 126. Pyrotechnic Store
- 129. Protected Long Bay
- 130. Motor transport Shed
- 131. Motor transport Shed
- 133. Articulated Trailer Shed
- 134. Motor Transport Sheds
- 135. Special Repair Shed
- 136. Petrol Tanker Shed
- 137. Type A Aeroplane Shed
- 138. Coal Yard
- 139 & 304. Nissan Huts
- 140. Works Squadron Hut
- 142. Works Service Building
- 143. Gas Defence Centre
- 144. Works Services Building
- 146. Operations Block
- 147. Station Offices
- 203. Technical Latrine
- 305. Timber Hut

Defence Structures

- A Air-Raid Shelter
- B Air-Raid Shelter
- C Air-Raid Shelter
- D Air-Raid Shelter
- E Blast Shelter
- F Air-Raid Shelter
- G Air-Raid Shelter
- H Defended Air-Raid Shelter
- I Defended Air-Raid Shelter
- J Pill Box



Fig 3 Location of scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings and buildings making a positive contribution (amended to exclude area outside MOD ownership from the site)

- K Signals Square
- L Airfield Code Letters
- N. Mushroom Pillboxes and Seagull Trenches

Bomb Stores

- 210. Fusing Point Building
- 211. SAA Stores
- 212. 2 Pounder SAA Store
- 213. Component Store
- 214. Component Store
- 216. Bomb Store
- 218. Fused and Spare bomb Store
- 220. Pyrotechnic Store
- 221. Incendiary Store
- 222. Ammo Store Group XII
- 223. Incendiary Bomb Store
- 224. Bomb Store
- 225. Fusing Point Building
- 226. Fusing Point Building
- 229. Fusing Point Building

3.3 Heritage at Risk and Buildings at Risk Register

The scheduled monument, which includes the southern group of bomb stores, is included on the English Heritage's Heritage at Risk Register 2009 as in a generally unsatisfactory and declining condition with major localised problems. All the statutorily listed buildings within the Technical Site and on the Flying Field are identified as being 'at risk' in English Heritage's 'Biennial Conservation Report on the Government Historic Estate', with the exception of Building 113 (in use by the Windrushers Gliding Club). Twelve of these buildings are identified as Category A - 'Immediate risk of further, rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed'; the other six buildings are identified as Category C - 'slow decay; no solution agreed'. In November 2008 a letter from Will Holborow, Head of the Government Historic Estates Unit at English Heritage, described the technical site as "the most worrying heritage site on the whole government estate in terms of the number of neglected buildings and structures, the scale of the maintenance backlog and the lack of progress that has been made towards finding a new use for them". This assessment was repeated in a letter from EH's Chief Executive Simon Thurley, in April 2009.

3.4 Archaeology

The area has been identified as having significant archaeological potential as it lies astride the route of the Alchester – Towcester Roman Road. Roman inhumations have been recorded within the area of the technical site in the C19th (PRN 1611) and evidence for Roman settlement in the area was recorded immediately south west of the site during a watching brief carried out as part of a housing development (PRN 16217). A Roman Villa is recorded along the route of the Roman Road 1km North of the Airfield (PRN 1623) and a recent geophysical survey on Land between this Villa site and Caversfield has revealed linear features thought to relate to Roman field systems (PRN 17498). It is highly likely that further Roman deposits were originally present within the area of the Airfield.

As well as this at least seven ring ditches, thought to be Bronze Age barrows, are visible on early aerial photographs within the flying field and immediately to the south (PRN 5628). Two further

possible barrows have been recorded to the North of the flying field on a later photograph but it is possible that these relate to a Second World War defensive site such as a searchlight or gun emplacement (PRN 13910). An archaeological watching brief was carried out within the technical area of the site which did not record any archaeological deposits however any surviving deposits within this area may have been disturbed by the development of the airfield itself. Despite the modern disturbance it is possible that aspects of these features could survive within the area of the airfield, under the current flying field.

A watching brief was carried out during geo-physical trials in 2002, but did not reveal any finds or deposits of archaeological interest on the site. However, the watching brief was restricted to the technical site and did not therefore include the flying field or the Domestic site.

PPG 16 Archaeology and Planning, 1990, suggests the need to understand the impacts on archaeology prior to determination and makes a presumption in favour of the in situ preservation of nationally important remains, whether scheduled or not. It also indicates that archaeology should be a material consideration in the planning process, requiring archaeological recording in advance of redevelopment or removal.

Activities such as relaying hard standing and adding new service runs could have the potential to disturb archaeological deposits. Therefore, the County Archaeologist considers that any such undertakings on the site, particularly in the area of the flying field could require some form of archaeological investigation.

PPG 16 Archaeology and Planning, 1990, makes a presumption in favour of the in situ preservation of nationally important remains, whether scheduled or not. It also indicates that archaeology should be a material consideration in the planning process, requiring archaeological recording in advance of redevelopment or removal.

The County Archaeologist states that, if there is to be any below ground disturbance, some form of archaeological investigation, probably a watching brief, will be required.

3.5 Trees, vegetation and open space

The Flying Field is characterised by an expansive, open grassed area, fundamental to its operation, enclosed by an almost complete perimeter track and characteristically remote Bomb Store Area and this is one of the most fundamentally vital characteristics of the whole site. The flying field is bounded by hedgerows, reinforced, where there are gaps, by post and rail fencing, for example along the northern boundary.

The very strong Trident road pattern is reinforced on the outer routes by avenues of trees, originally planted to assist with camouflage. They are mature specimens today, their height approximately equivalent to the hangars, and make a very positive contribution to the character of the area, contrasting with the open character of the flying field. There are also self sown birch and sycamore trees. An arboricultural survey in 1999 identified that all the birch trees were over mature and declining rapidly. The majority of the horse chestnut trees were mature to over mature and crown reduction has been carried out on a number of old specimens along the main routes. Several trees are reported to have suffered root damage as a result of site works. It is imperative that the arboricultural study is updated to indicate canopy spread, condition, tree root protection zone and recommended remedial work.

On the domestic site, all the buildings sit within open grassed landscaped grounds, which are currently well maintained, and tree planting is a significant feature of the character, albeit less so than on the technical site. There is a dense hedgerow along the northern boundary with Skimmingdish Lane and east along the A4421. Along the southern boundary, however, there is no

enclosure and open views are available of recent residential development in Bicester. The wedge of farm land between the site and Bicester is critical in preserving the setting of the site and retaining its physical and visual separation from Bicester as well as being crucial for airfield operations towards the town.

3.6 Important views, visual relationships and zone of visual influence

Vistas across the flying field from various key vantage points were imperative in both in the operation and defence of the air station, for example the expansive vista from the Control Tower across the flying field and to the countryside beyond. The pill boxes were strategically placed in an arc around the technical site to provide a wide range of fire across the entire flying field to defend it against enemy landing. There are also views towards the bomb stores from the Control tower, set against scrub planting for camouflage. There is very little visual containment to the flying field, except for small areas of scrub woodland adjacent to the quarry to the north and around the bomb stores in the east. Crash barrier entrances from the A4421 remain open and provide views into the flying field and the entrance currently used from the A4421 provides an oblique vista cross the flying field. Other than this, the regenerating scrub woodland adjacent to Skimmingdish lane in the south effectively restricts views into the site and screens the built up area of Bicester from views from the technical site and flying field. Other than here the flying field has a strong relationship to areas of countryside beyond the site boundary, particularly to the north and east. This close relationship is strengthened by long and middle distance views to wooded and farmed hills (Graven Hill, Muswell Hill and Poundon Hill on the horizon). The virtually unaltered views from the technical area and

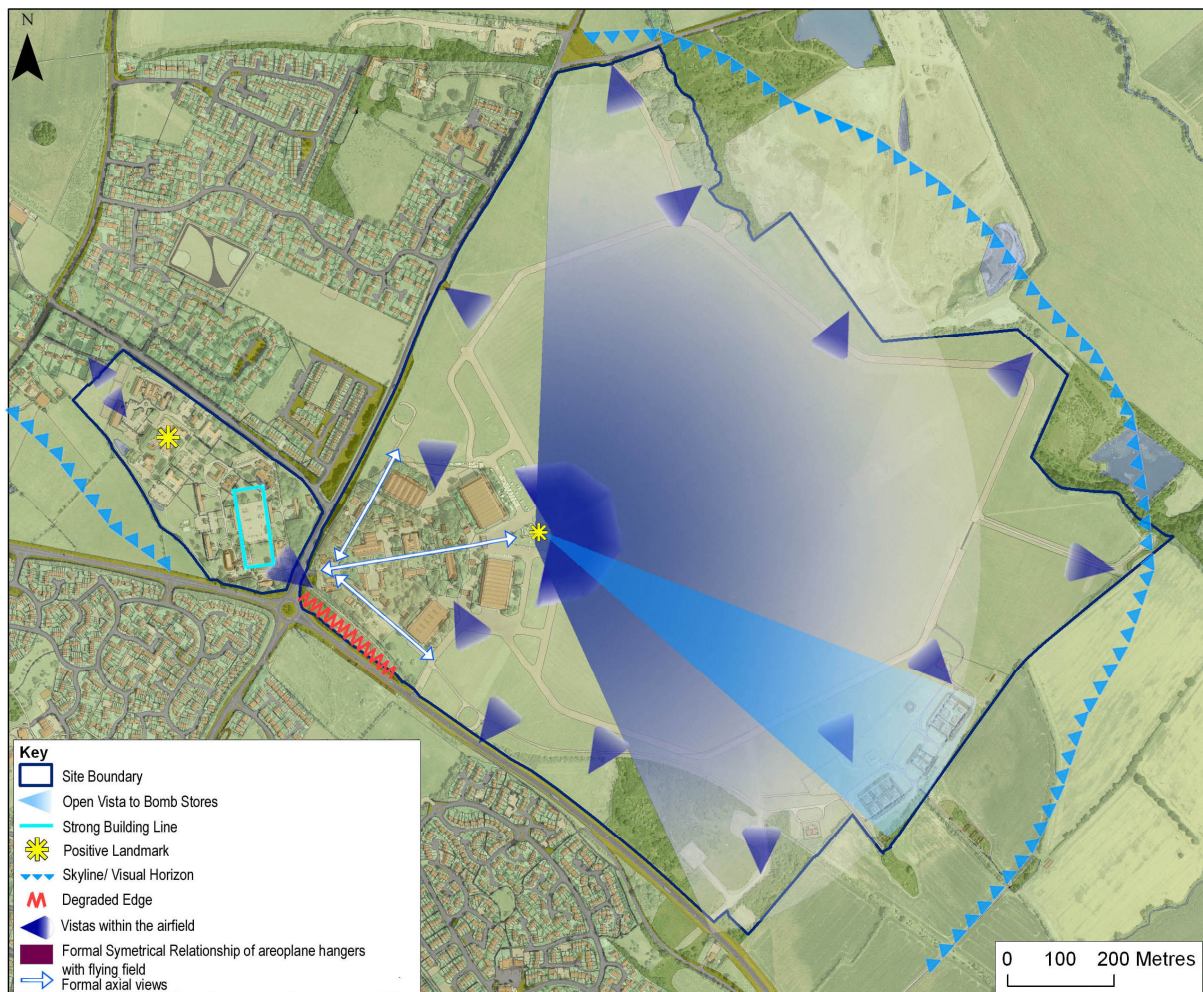


Fig 4 Important views

flying field are an intrinsic part of its appeal and contribute to the reasoning behind the conservation area and listings.

The technical site is characterised by key buildings associated with the site's operational war time status placed in a functional manner along the Trident layout of roadways. The pattern terminates with the symmetrical arc of four hangars and the centrally located Control Tower. The linear views along these avenues are an important feature of the site and the linear view from the entrance to the site is of particular note. Glimpsed views into the technical site are available to those travelling along the A4421 along the western and, less so, the southern boundaries.

The Domestic Site is characterised by an open plan campus style layout. The barrack blocks and other principal buildings are arranged around the parade ground in a formal and symmetrical arrangement. The parade ground is oriented almost due north south and, at 80 by 50 metres within a larger space 170metres by 60 metres framed by the buildings, is a significant feature within the site. This formality and near symmetry, together with the lack of any means of enclosure within the site, emphasises the very deliberate and planned layout.

The Zone of Visual Influence of the Technical site and flying field was examined in the 2003 CGMS / LDA study and revealed that middle distance views are restricted to filtered views, the most significant vantage point being Poundon Hill. Landform and vegetation restrict long distance views.

3.7 Ecology

To inform the land allocation policies in the preparation of the (now) Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011, a Phase 1 Ecological Study of the Technical site was commissioned in 2002 from by Scott Wilson. This revealed the presence of protected species and recommended further work on bats (in respect of both buildings and trees), badgers and terrestrial invertebrates. As the site was not allocated for development, no stage 2 survey work was commissioned. Due to the age of this study an updated study will be required. Other than bats, the site is a potential habitat for other protected species such as barn owls ([one is currently known to inhabit the bomb stores](#)), badgers, and great crested newts. [BBOWT has asked to undertake a full ecological survey.](#)

The flying field, which is unimproved grassland, is a proposed Local Wildlife Site and therefore has the same status as a designated LWS. The TVERC has a programme of surveys of Local Wildlife Sites. There is potential to enhance the biodiversity of the flying field.

Stratton Audley Quarry, immediately to the north is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a 2007 Phase 1 Habitat Survey revealed that most of the southern half of the site has high ecological value. The quarry also has Local Wildlife Site status, a designation that extends beyond the SSSI boundary. The quarry is being restored in association with a 1998 Oxfordshire County Council planning consent and has been the subject of land fill and currently has a recycling facility. The intention is to restore the quarry to a Country Park, but the future ownership of this facility remains unresolved.

3.8 Contamination

There are potentially contaminative sources on site and off site. The potential on site sources include (but are not limited to):

- Areas of on site quarrying or unlicensed waste disposal activities
- Bomb Storage activities
- Coal Transport Yard
- Electricity transformers / sub-station
- Engineering workshop / activities
- Fuel storage - Above ground and underground fuel storage tanks

Fuel transport – Above ground and underground piping
Historical Railway lines
Paint shops
Transport of materials
Vehicle washing activities

The potential off site contaminative sources include (but are not limited to):

Land filling activities
Quarrying activities
Historical sewage works
Adjacent historical military activities

The potential contaminants that may be associated with the above contaminative sources is extensive and includes (but is not limited to):

- Asbestos bearing materials
- Ash
- Cresols
- Chlorinated and non-chlorinated solvents
- Detergent constituents
- Ferrous residues
- Fuel Oils
- Hazardous ground gases e.g. methane, carbon dioxide
- Heavy metals / metalloids
- Herbicides
- Lubricating Oils
- Petroleum hydrocarbons
- Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons
- Phenols
- PCB's
- Sulphate
- Unexploded ordnance

These lists are indicative of what potential on-site and off-site contaminative sources may be present on the site due to current and historical activities. It does not take into account potential receptors or pathways. To determine the potential risk to the site currently, or associated with a proposed use, further investigatory and risk assessment works are required.

3.9 Vehicular access

The footways, roads, landscaping areas etc within the site are privately maintained; therefore any future development will be expected to carry on this arrangement; although a Private Road Agreement may be required between a developer and the Local Highway Authority. If the roads etc were to be offered for adoption a significant and costly amount of work would be required to bring this infrastructure up to an acceptable standard.

Oxfordshire County Council will be seeking sustainable drainage solutions where these can be achieved. However, it is acknowledged that the built up and campus nature of the site may make this difficult to achieve.

It is not considered appropriate to introduce any additional or alternative vehicular access points into either the technical or domestic site, as this would disturb the historic integrity of the layout, which so clearly defines the former function of the site. Dependent upon the future uses, however, it may be appropriate to re-use existing gated access points or open up new ones to ensure ease of

pedestrian and cyclists' access only, subject to safe crossing points over the existing highway network being provided

The current use of the flying field is accessed directly from the re-aligned Skimmingdish Lane south of the most southerly A type hangar. Historically, however, the entrance to the flying field was through the Technical site, from the main gate at the junction of the A4421 and the, then, alignment of Skimmingdish Lane. The Domestic site was accessed via a complementary entrance on the opposite side of the A4421 and also from the north from Skimmingdish Lane.

The road layout and hard surfaced areas of both the technical site and the domestic site are a key component of the historic character of the conservation area. A car parking management plan will be required to demonstrate that the number of car parking spaces required by standards current at the time can be accommodated on the existing amount of hard standing. In the event of a shortfall of space for parking the Council will expect the Travel Plan and the Management Plan to address the issue.

The proposals should comply with the relevant transport policies in the South East Plan.

The highway Authority has examined the potential for re-use of the existing vehicular access points and provides the following advice:

3.9.1 Access to the flying field

The existing (main) access to the flying field from Skimmingdish Lane (A4421) which is currently used by the Gliding Club will meet the required visibility standards of 4.5m x 160m (50mph speed limit) once all the vegetation within these vision splay has been cut back/down (and maintained). Currently vision to the left is obstructed. Assuming the number of vehicles using this access remains similar no alterations may be required. However, a right turn lane will be desirable if the traffic movements increase to over 500 movements per 12 hour period, which is the current threshold. Access for major events, such as air shows, would need to be from this entrance and would be subject to a routeing agreement.

There is a footway/cycle link on the opposite side of the Gliding Club entrance along Skimmingdish Lane and a similar footway will be required from the roundabout along the north side of A 4421 as far as the entrance to the flying field.

3.9.2 Access to the technical site

The existing (gated) access serving the technical site is located just off the roundabout of the A4421/A4095 & Skimmingdish and is unsuitable for any significant increase in traffic movements, due to the visibility available, speed of traffic, access geometry etc; therefore it is likely a restriction on the traffic movements generated using this junction will be required/imposed, ideally being retained for pedestrian and emergency use only. However, if significant improvements are provided i.e. reduction in speed limit, increase in visibility, measures to deter rear shunts for turning vehicles such as a right turn lane, adequate protection within de-acceleration to deter HGV parking, pedestrian & cyclist links (with controlled crossing points) etc such restrictions may not be required. Please note any proposals will require a safety audit to be carried out by an independent party.

Access to the north of the site from the Bicester Road (towards Stratton Audley village), will not be supported by the Local Highway Authority because the Bicester Road/A4421 junction has its poor visibility and geometry.

3.9.3 Access to the domestic site

The historic access was off the A4421 directly opposite the access to the technical site but this is not currently in use. Its re-use raises a safety concern due to the busy and fast nature of this road and the closeness of the A4421/A4095 roundabout i.e. risk of rear shunts due to turning vehicles; therefore a restriction on its use or the number of vehicles using this access may be appropriate. Ideally for highway safety reasons the use of this should be restricted to pedestrians and cyclists.

The majority of the existing accesses serving the site appear acceptable off Skimmingdish Lane, but may require visibility improvements. Use of the existing, disused and proposed but not implemented access points from Skimmingdish Lane will be acceptable in highway terms subject to keeping the sight lines clear of vegetation.

However, the junction of Skimmingdish Lane and the A4421 does not appear to be to standard in terms of visibility; in addition joining the A4421 can be delayed due to the number of vehicles travelling past, which is something that will require further thought. If the speed limit along Buckingham Road were to be reduced to 30mph the visibility splay would be reduced to 4.5m x 90m, which should be achievable. Oxfordshire County Council will investigate such an extension, but developer contributions would be required towards the costs of amending the traffic order.

3.9.4 Pedestrian, cycle and public transport linkages

The location of this site is away from the majority of Bicester and is in need of significant improvements in terms pedestrian and cycle links and public transport to reach the closest local infrastructure and services. Another area of concern is the how pedestrians etc will cross the A4095 and the A4421 (to reach Technical site) and the type of measures required i.e. controlled crossing, reduction of speed limit etc. To address these concerns the Highway Authority will be seeking

- a bus stop on the east side of A4421 Buckingham Road within the existing deceleration lane (this is considered not to pose an obstruction to traffic due to infrequency of obstruction and deceleration of traffic)
- a pedestrian crossing with a central refuge to enable pedestrians to cross both east west and north south to this point.
- a controlled pedestrian crossing, subject to a safety audit, but the preference would be that signalisation at this roundabout be avoided.
- There is a permissive path running within the southern boundary of the domestic site, which egresses close to the roundabout and runs to cross the A4095 near the roundabout.

Links within the site (and improved transport links) should also be taken into consideration as well the existing routes the community of Caversfield currently enjoy i.e. if a residential development is sought, it would be appropriate to have pedestrian/cycle links through site to the A4095.

Depending on the type of development that comes on in the future a Travel Plan will be appropriate to reduce the reliance on the private car and developer contributions will be sought towards improvements to public transport. It is unlikely the roads within the site would be offered for adoption so a private road agreement will be sought.

3.10 Services

Infrastructure is unadopted. Information is available from Defence Estates

3.11 Retained uses

3.11.1 Flying field

The flying field and Building 113, one of the Type C hangars, are in use by The Windrushers' Gliding Club under a lease from Defence Estates. The Council supports the retention of aviation activity on the site, as this, in accordance with PPG15, continues the original use and the particular character and appearance of the historic airfield. This is a civilian club, which currently enjoys a lease from the MOD. The Club welcomes local people to become social members and to use the airfield for dog walking, kite flying etc.

It is understood by the Council that the Club aspires to expand this recreational use to include adventure courses for local young people, golf putting greens etc if it is successful in securing a long term future at the site and freed of current restraints on the lease. At the same time, the club has aspirations to expand and develop. The club advises that the flying field is also the best drained in the UK such that it has never lost a day's flying by memory as far back as 1963, and that the flying field is the only remaining grass airfield capable of take-off in any direction. The gliding club is successful and its operations are fully booked at present and it has aspirations to develop to become a major national recreational gliding centre, hosting an aspirational Bicester Air Show, an annual national aviation event. The Council wants to ensure that aviation use can continue.

The current use involves stationing a number of caravans to accommodate members of the gliding club overnight. [The existing location of these caravans is not an acceptable use of the site](#) and alternative overnight accommodation will need to be found for club members, on or off site. Many of the buildings on the domestic site would be entirely appropriate for this use, having been designed as barrack blocks, but even some on the technical site would be capable of conversion to overnight accommodation. [Any external stationing of caravans would need to demonstrate that no harm was caused to the character or appearance of the conservation area or to scheduled ancient monuments or to the setting of listed buildings.](#)

3.11.2 Technical site

There are no existing uses within the technical site, other than the use of building 113 by Windrushers Gliding Club.

3.11.3 Domestic site

The domestic site has been occupied Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S), which has used the premises predominantly for offices and storage. DE&S are vacating the site. This mixed use is a sui generis use and, once the military use ceases, the site will require planning permission for alternative non-military uses. A [modular](#) building north east of building 33 is currently in use by the Air Training Corps. Retention of this use on site in an alternative building would be desirable. Ideally this would be one that could be independently accessed such as the ballistics firing range in the west of the site which is not part of the historic fabric.

3.12 Constraints associated with continued aviation use

The grass strip enables take off and landing in a range of directions. The flexibility offered by the grass flying strip also requires controls to minimise nuisance to neighbouring residential areas. The above figure illustrates the flying routes used by the existing club. Development in the vicinity of the airfield, but most particularly of the small safety strip to the west, would severely compromise the aviation use, rendering the site inoperable in its present form. The Windrushers Gliding Club claims that the restricted climb out paths make the site unsuitable for any form of powered flying training that requires a sequence of take off and landings.

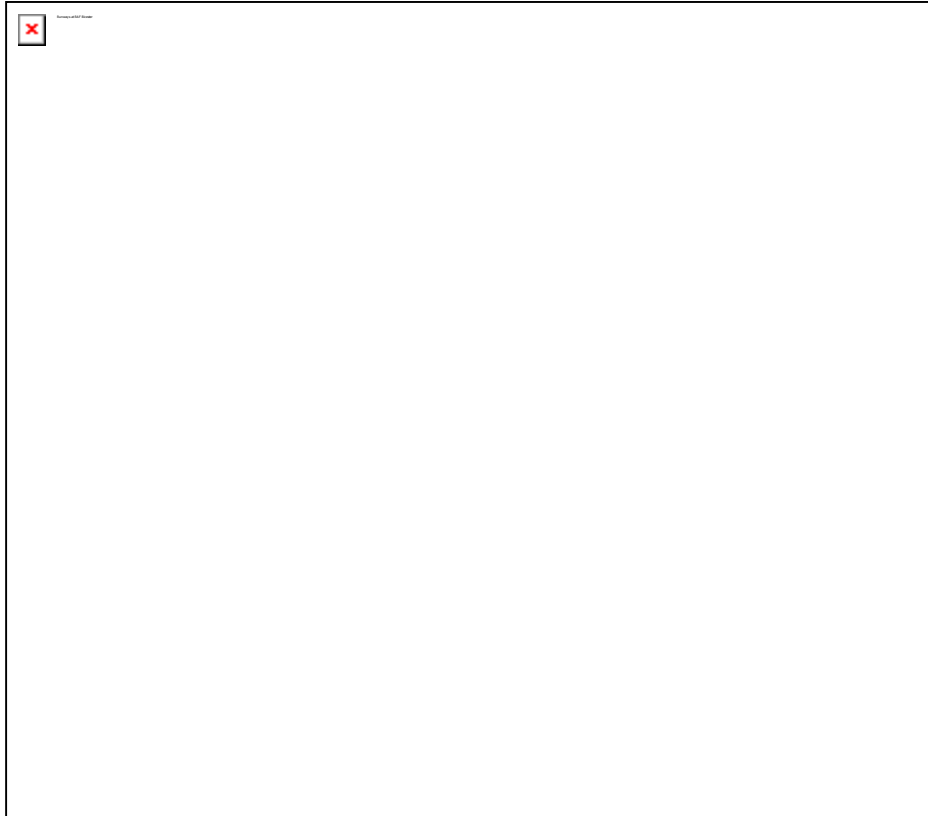


Fig 5: Landing and take off strips on the flying field (courtesy of Windrushers Gliding Club)

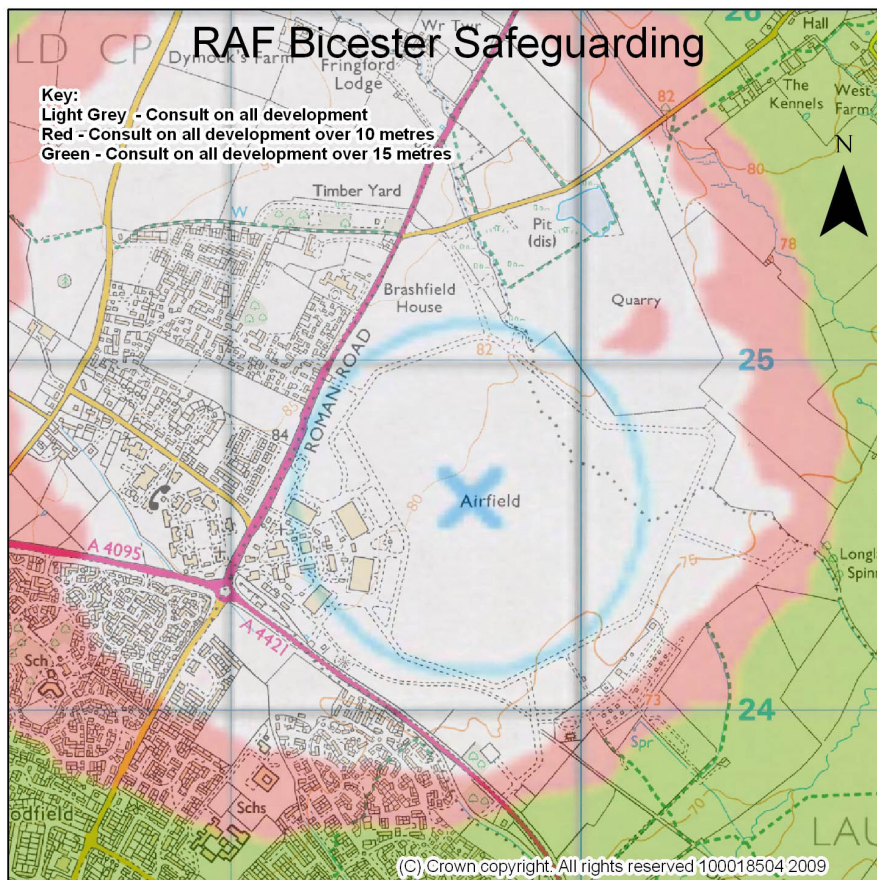


Fig 6: RAF Bicester safeguarding plan

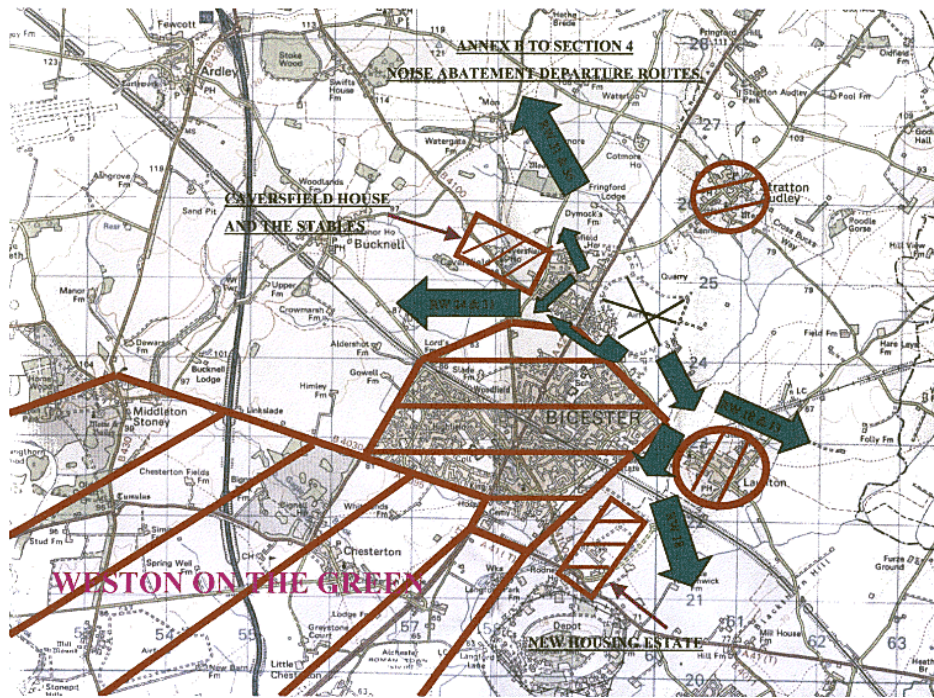


Fig 7: Noise abatement departure routes (courtesy of Windrushers Gliding Club)

4 SITE OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for preservation

There is a strong presumption that all the listed buildings and the buildings identified as making a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area will be preserved, renovated as required and put to an appropriate new use. The challenge is to find those new uses, particularly for some of the specialist technical buildings, which are compatible and which will not cause harm to the special character of both the buildings and the wider landscape of the conservation area.

4.1 Use of flying field

4.1.1 Continued aviation use

The CGMS 2003 report on the capacity of the technical site and flying field to accommodate development states “The current use of the flying field for gliding would seem to be entirely appropriate and, apart from the establishment of other aircraft related uses such as a helicopter base for business users, or a small civil airport comparable with Oxford airport, (both of which would have the disadvantage of being noisier), it is hard to envisage a more suitable use for the land.”



View across the flying field from the east towards the aircraft hangars

The Council's preference is strongly for the continued use of the flying field for aviation purposes. Whether this is restricted to the current occupiers and /or gliding use only is a matter for discussion. The impact of powered flights on the amenity of residential properties in the vicinity will be a consideration, albeit that occasional use (e.g. for air displays, historic re-enactment events etc) would be likely to be more acceptable than a commercial operation. The 2003 [CGMS](#) report suggests that the development of a dedicated training centre for gliding would be an option worth pursuing. The Windrushers Gliding Club has stated that it has aspirations to become some of the

UK's largest gliding centres and the "first major national gliding centre" that embraces other activities as well.

4.1.2 Access to the flying field

Access to the flying field [beyond the perimeter track](#) is currently enjoyed by the public, as members of the Windrushers Gliding Club, as required by the lease from Defence Estates, for dog walking, jogging, kite flying and general recreation. Low key recreational use, compatible with the character and appearance and continued aviation use, is supported

The Council considers that aviation use should not preclude controlled access for recreational use, [whilst acknowledging that unrestricted public access would not be acceptable on safety grounds](#). [Reconciling the aspirations for public access to the flying field as a major recreational resource for Bicester and ensuring public safety with the continued aviation use is a significant issue to be grappled with](#). It is the role of the Brief to flag up the expectation that the public will be able to have continued access to parts of the flying field, albeit in a controlled manner as at present. Exactly how this is to be achieved will depend upon the future use and future ownership and the details can be negotiated once these are known.

Continued public access to the flying field is a pre-requisite of any future use, albeit, if aviation continues, this may need to be restricted for reasons of public safety in some areas on some occasions. [Measures will need to be put in place to ensure that members of the public do not trespass from one part of the site to another in an unauthorised or dangerous manner](#).

The bomb stores and any other risk to health and safety will need to be made safe prior to public access being allowed. Visitor interpretation of the significance of particular vantage points will be required.

A heritage centre / museum of military aviation was promoted as an appropriate use in the 2003 report, utilising both buildings in the technical site and the flying field. A combined nature / memorial trail for visitors and the local community, that involved the boundary areas and principal external features such as the bomb stores, air raid shelters, mushroom pill boxes and seagull trenches was suggested. Such a trail would not be dependent upon a museum being established, but will be required as part of continued public access, and this could also be compatible with continued aviation use.

4.1.3 Non-aviation uses of the flying field

Should aviation not continue, alternative uses of the flying field must ensure the retention of the open grass flying field across its existing extent. New uses should not result in the erection of any structures, either temporary or permanent, on the open flying field,

Other temporary uses considered appropriate in the 2003 study include temporary festival use and outdoor concerts. Occasional markets and shows could also be acceptable provided that this did not involve the erection of any permanent structures on the flying field or temporary structures that caused harm.

The use of the flying field for sports pitches is a possible alternative use. However, recently proposed provision at SW Bicester will provide for latent demand and pitches could cause harm to the conservation area. The 2003 report considers flood lighting to be inappropriate and that even the clutter associated with goal posts might be considered intrusive. This would limit the viability and attractiveness of the site for potential users.

The 2003 report states that semi-permanent uses, such as external storage, which would be visually intrusive, would not be acceptable. Since the report was written the Secretary of State has confirmed that car storage on the runway at RAF Upper Heyford causes harm to the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and the open character of the flying field. The Council will not countenance any outdoor storage at RAF Bicester, temporary or permanent due to the adverse impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The future maintenance and management of the flying field will need to be detailed in a management plan that will be agreed with the Council and attached to the grant of any planning consent by way of legal agreement.

4.2 Use of buildings and structures on the technical site

Paragraph 3.10 of PPG 15 states that the best use of buildings within a conservation area is their original use. The retention of aviation use would require the continued use of some buildings, particularly the hangars and Watch Tower for associated purposes, and this would be very much welcomed. More specialist buildings could also be re-used if there was significant aviation use, including Building 102, the Engine Test House, and Building 103, the Link Trainer, designed for training pilots in instrument flying. If parachuting were to be introduced, Building 92, the parachute store, specifically designed to enable silk parachutes to be hung to dry, could be put to its intended use once more. It is accepted that not many of the buildings will be capable of re-use for their original purpose, however, and that new uses will need to be found.



Building 79 A type hangar

It is most important that a comprehensive approach to the management of the technical site is taken, which ensures a consistent maintenance regime across the campus style layout and no subdivision of the landscape with means of enclosure.

The level of interest in the site from local people is significant. There is further interest from war veterans and their families. The ability of the site to bring alive the history of early 20th century Europe for educational groups and general visitors should not be underestimated. Therefore the concept of a history of aviation museum in association with the active use of the flying field and

involving visitor interpretation would be warmly supported. This, together with continued gliding, is the Council's preferred option for the site. It is recognised that significant financial investment, for example from the Heritage Lottery Fund, would be required to enable such a project.

Some buildings, such as the A type and C type hangars, present an opportunity for cultural, sporting and community uses (events, theatre, galleries, music venues, indoor pitches, training, cycling, go-karting, roller skating, climbing walls, markets, fundraising, circus for example) and such uses would be supported proving that there were no other adverse impacts, such as vehicular traffic or damage to the buildings.

The 2003 study suggested that a number of buildings would lend themselves for conversion to employment use: for example the station offices (building 146), the guard house and fire party house (buildings 87 and 89) and the station armoury and lecture room (building 123); for workshops or workshop / office use with the insertion of mezzanine floors for example the two power houses and bore hole pump house (buildings 82, 86 and 93), the main workshop (building 99), the lubricant store (building 96) and the motor transport sheds (buildings 129, 130, 131 and 134). However, any physical works to the buildings would need to be carefully handled. Light manufacturing or bulk storage could be appropriate for hangars not required for aviation use.

The 2003 study considered that, other than the Guard House (building 89), the Operations Building (buildings 146 and 147), the Station Armoury (building 123) the relatively specialist buildings on the technical site would not lend themselves to conversion to residential conversion without unacceptable alteration.

The introduction of non aviation use could bring with it associated activity and requirements that could have an adverse impact on both individual buildings and on the character and appearance of the wider conservation area [and non-aviation uses will be considered on their merits](#). More detailed guidance on this is given in section 5. The introduction of a mix of uses will require careful management to ensure compatibility.

4.3 Use of buildings on the domestic site

The fact that these building have continued until recently in productive employment use for the military is positive. Many have been refitted for office or laboratory use. A detailed specification of this is available with the sale particulars. Central facilities, such as the Institute, with its catering and conference facilities, could continue in that role; the parade ground and other areas are suitable for continued use as car parking provided that this does not result in the ability to appreciate the original space; the open campus landscape provides a very attractive working environment and a business park environment would secure its continued open character and good management. These matters make employment a suitable future use.

The scale and appearance of many of the buildings would appear to be compatible with residential use, and the conversion into flats, particularly of the former barrack blocks (which have a central vertical movement core serving wings of suitable scale for conversion to apartments) could be relatively straight forward. In order to preserve the open campus landscape some restriction would be placed on the personalisation of the external environment, such as no demarcation of personal outdoor space, patios, planting beds, washing lines, sheds and other domestic clutter. However, historic apartments in a spacious managed landscape could also be an attractive living environment that would appeal to many. More specialist living accommodation could also be appropriate for the site, for example: A retirement community where the Officers' mess and Institutes could serve community / communal uses and the landscape could continue to be managed comprehensively; a nursing home with extra care facilities could utilise the site in a similar manner; as could an hotel or hostel.

Educational use might be appropriate, particularly involving accommodation, but the expectations of modern learning environments could require structural changes to buildings that would adversely affect their character and appearance.



4.4 Monumentalisation

RAF Bicester, however, is well located adjacent to a growing market town, astride frequent bus routes, and contains traditionally constructed buildings of domestic scale capable of making a significant contribution to the socio economic contribution to the town. There is no desire to see any monumentalisation, with the exception of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments of the bomb stores, the air raid shelters, the Pill Boxes and Seagull Trenches, all of which should be made safe and furnished with some visitor interpretation setting out their function and significance.

4.5 Opportunities for enhancement

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act places a duty upon local planning authorities to set out proposals for the preservation and enhancement of a conservation area at a public meeting. This was undertaken at a well attended public meeting at the offices of Bicester Town Council on 2 July 2008. The Conservation Area Appraisal sets out a number of general ways in which the site could be enhanced, prepared prior to the decision to sell the Domestic site. This section makes additional references with respect to potential new uses.

4.6 Public access and visitor interpretation

Prior to the construction of the airfield there were several public rights of way across the area now covered by the flying field. One ran north easterly from Skimmingdish Lane to Stratton Audley, across what is now the former quarry. Others ran east west, meeting towards the north east of the flying field and these, including the track that runs along the western boundary of the former allotments, now terminate at cul de sac near the bomb stores. The Council is usually supportive of

the re-instatement of closed public rights of way in order to preserve historic landscape features and enable public access to the countryside. However, in this instance, it is considered that the landscape has been changed considerably by the imposition of the airfield, which, in effect, has become the new landscape. Therefore the Council is seeking public access across the area via the perimeter track and that the perimeter track be accessed from Skimmingdish Lane in the south, the A4421 in the west, connected with the terminated public rights of way in the east in the vicinity of the bomb stores and, in due course, the restored Stratton Audley Quarry in the north. There will therefore be no requirement to re-open the former public rights of way along their original routes.

Continued public access to the flying field itself, both for low key recreational use and heritage purposes is a pre-requisite of any future use, albeit, if aviation continues, this may need to be restricted for reasons of public safety in some areas and on some occasions. The bomb stores and any other risk to health and safety will need to be made safe prior to public access being allowed. Visitor interpretation of the significance of particular vantage points will be required. It is recommended that this should be in the form of plaques on site as this enables independent visits.

The use of the technical site and flying field for a heritage centre / museum of aviation history would enable public access to what has historically been a site closed to the public and this is the Council's preferred option. Access to all parts of the technical site and into key buildings and defended structures will be required.

Access to the domestic site should be made available as part of special heritage open days and special events and information on / interpretation of the domestic site should be part of any museum facility.

4.7 Links with Bicester

Although some local residents may have worked on the site, the majority of Bicester residents have, until now, been denied access to the site. There is a pride in the town of the airmen who were stationed in Bicester and the work they did in the Defence of Britain. There is therefore a high level of interest in the site from local people. Further, there is potential for the site to make a positive contribution to the recreational, social, economic and community aspects of life in the town.

Its physical separation from Bicester is a key characteristic of the former military site, being inward looking, self contained and enclosed by a security fence with restricted and controlled points of entry. It is not proposed that this should be changed as, to do so, would erode the established character. The two gated entrances either side of the A4421 should be re-opened for vehicular and pedestrian access as the prime entry points into the site. The existing vehicular access from Skimmingdish Lane to the domestic site can be retained and the existing access from the south into the flying field can be retained for independent access to the gliding club. Additional pedestrian routes linking the flying field with Bicester across Skimmingdish Lane will be required. Good access with the rest of the town will be required for pedestrians and cyclists and safe crossings of Skimmingdish lane will be required.

The security fence causes less visual intrusion in the wider landscape than that at RAF Upper Heyford, nor is it particularly intrusive or aggressive in its appearance. If its retention could assist with the operation of future uses of the site, and in particular enable controlled access to the flying field, its retention will be considered.

4.8 Building restoration

There are 19 buildings and structures on the airfield and technical site on English Heritage's list of Buildings At Risk.

Also at risk are the main bomb stores located in the SE corner of the flying field (now partly scheduled as an Ancient Monument). [A letter dated 19 February 2009 from English Heritage's Inspector of Ancient Monuments described the bomb stores as having some smaller gables with no base and that it was "possible to move one wall by hand" and that they presented "a danger to unauthorised persons", requiring perimeter fencing and advice regarding signage warning of dangerous structures.](#) These will need to be made safe prior to public access becoming available. In the case of the revetments this will require the earth support to be built up and the surface stabilised with the exclusion of rabbits to prevent future damage.

The Council has recently gained access to undertake a photographic survey of the buildings on the technical site. This has revealed a number of buildings in a poor state of maintenance, although, other than building 144, which has suffered fire damage, and building 147, which has significant water penetration, buildings are not generally structurally unsound. The main problems are caused by poor maintenance of simple cause: water ingress, due to rainwater drainage pipes not being maintained leading to blockage, water overflow and brick erosion; broken windows and slipped roof slates, all of which let in water and wildlife. They are relatively straightforward repairs to undertake. A schedule of works to bring the buildings into a wind and water tight condition is listed at [Appendix 1 to Part B of this document, Draft Managements Guidelines for the technical site](#). The Crown has immunity from prosecution and so the Council has not been able to serve the legal notices required to pursue repair of the buildings. This will not be the case with a potential purchaser. The Council expects to be able to agree a programme of repair and does not rule out use of the powers at its disposal of serving an Urgent Works Notice or Repairs Notice to ensure buildings are made wind and weather tight.

The buildings on the Domestic site have been the subject of renovation, in accordance with Management Guidelines prepared by English Heritage and the Council in 2000, which, with the exception of pointing of brickwork which is not historically accurate, has generally been undertaken with good intention. There are some replacement window casements, additions to the exterior of buildings and alterations to interiors that have affected their historic interest to some degree. Some buildings are beginning to show evidence of poor maintenance, but this does not appear to have resulted in structural damage to date.

[Part B 1 provides guidelines for the repair and management of the buildings and landscape on the domestic site and Part B2 provides guidelines for the repair and management of buildings and landscape on the technical site and flying field.](#)

4.9 Potential for demolition of unlisted buildings that do not make a positive contribution

There is a presumption in favour of retention of buildings within a conservation area and the Conservation Area Appraisal indicates that, apart from those buildings that are statutorily listed, most of the other minor buildings make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. This is generally due to their functional historic relationship and many are curtilage listed due to their proximity, ownership and function and / or are located within the setting of a listed building. Whilst several of these minor buildings, such as sheds on the technical site, are not buildings of beauty, there is a presumption in favour of their retention as set out in paragraph 4.27 of PPG115. Paragraphs 3.16 – 3.19 of PPG 15 provides tests against which applications for consent to demolish buildings in a conservation area should be assessed. This, in brief, includes the condition and the cost of repair relative to its importance, the adequacy of efforts to retain it and the merits of alternative proposals. It is likely that the use of the technical site for an aviation museum would see such buildings as making a positive contribution as part of the interpretation of the site, whereas the introduction of other uses, such as employment, but most particularly residential, could see these as eyesores, detracting from a somewhat gentrified aspirations for the site.

On the technical site there are few buildings where a case could be made for their demolition, one exception possibly being building 112, a fuel tanker shed, which terminates views up the central arm of the trident, obscuring views of the Watch Office with tower and open flying field beyond. It is possible that a case could be made that the appreciation of the relationship of the technical site to the flying field could be enhanced by the demolition of the building.

On the domestic site [the ballistics firing range](#) is of recent construction, and makes a neutral contribution to the special character of the area, albeit it is a specialist building and could be put to productive use. The building to the east of building 33 is also of later date and of [modular](#) construction, making no contribution to the historic character and therefore its removal would be of benefit.

4.10 Opportunities for new development

The 2003 CGMS / LDA study brief was to establish whether there was any capacity for development on the technical site or flying field, to inform the land allocation policies in the (now) Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011.

4.10.1 Flying field

In respect of the flying field the study considered that its retention as an unobstructed area of green space was “essential to ensure its historic integrity” and concluded that “any loss of the extent of the flying field, or incursion into it by built development, would be wholly unacceptable and detrimental to its importance as an integral part of the conservation area”.

4.10.2 Technical site

In respect of the technical site, it examined whether there was any scope for total demolition and redevelopment, substantial redevelopment (retaining listed buildings only) or partial redevelopment involving selective demolition and new build. The study concluded that the number of listed buildings, the spatial arrangement of buildings and road layout and heavy tree cover restricted potential for new building to “the area between the line of the old Skimmingdish Lane and the present by pass”. However, [although it is believed to be in the ownership of the MOD](#), it is outside the conservation area, [outside the technical site boundary](#) and outside the area covered by this document.

4.10.3 Domestic site

The 2003 study did not examine the development potential of the domestic site [because at that time it was expected to remain in military use](#). Conservation Area designation does not, of course, prevent development and [officers have given consideration as to whether there are any locations where infill or redevelopment would be appropriate](#). The spatial relationship restricts possibilities but two locations were identified for consideration: to the south west of former barrack blocks 29 and 42 and on the footprint of the demolished barrack block 39, which lay between these two. In respect of the former, [officers](#) concluded that new building here would disrupt the historic visual relationship of the listed buildings and the conservation area with their setting, being the open countryside separating the site from Bicester. With respect to the latter, [officers](#) concluded that the effective “reconstruction” of building 39 would in effect need to be just that and this would be difficult to achieve as it is believed that the original building was a temporary structure. It would be important to ensure that the resultant building was not a pastiche copy of other buildings, which would undermine the coherence and quality of the historic buildings. Therefore [officers](#) concluded that there was no scope for new development on the domestic site.

4.11 Opportunities for enabling development

The CGMS study also examined whether there was a case for any “enabling” development.

4.11.1 Technical site

In brief, the report concluded that, as the buildings on the technical site were capable of conversion to beneficial new uses with the minimum of repair or alteration, the case for enabling development was premature. It concluded that

- new development, whether on the flying field, or involving demolition or infill development would be almost certain to cause some material harm to the architectural, historic or landscape interest of the site
- new development on the flying field or within the technical area would almost certainly result in the fragmentation of management
- whilst the long term future of one part might be secured by development elsewhere, this would cause significant harm to one part to benefit another
- the buildings on the technical site could be re-used with limited repair and alteration, and questions whether there is a problem that needs solving.
- Financial assistance may be available from other sources, (in association with the re-use of the site, for example heritage lottery fund)
- It could not be argued that enabling development was required to secure the future of the heritage asset, as the buildings are capable of repair and re-use.
- The long term costs and disbenefits of the enabling development would outweigh the retention of the asset.

Paragraph 2.1 of English Heritage’s guidance on Enabling Development applicable at the time of the study suggests that timely action by the owner to prevent or limit deterioration can avoid the need for financial subsidy through enabling development. Thus inadequate maintenance of protected buildings and structures over a prolonged period should not be used to justify enabling development.

There has been a deterioration in the condition of some of the buildings on the technical site in the six years since the CGMS / LDA study; English Heritage’s Head of Government’s Historic Estate noted in a letter dated 28 November 2008 that there did not appear to have been any maintenance of buildings on the site since his last visit in 2003.

Since the CGMS report, English Heritage has published new guidance, *Enabling Development and the Conservation of Significant Places*, (English Heritage 2008).

This document includes a Policy that defines Enabling Development as needing to meet ALL of the following criteria:

- It will not harm the heritage value of the place or its setting
- It avoids detrimental fragmentation of management
- It will secure the long term future of the place and, where applicable, its continued use for a sympathetic purpose
- It is necessary to resolve problems arising from the inherent needs of the place, rather than the circumstances of the present owner, or the purchase price paid
- sufficient subsidy is not available from any other source
- It is demonstrated that the amount of enabling development is the minimum necessary to secure the future of the place and that its form minimises harm to other
- the public benefit of securing the future of the significant place through such enabling development decisively outweighs the disbenefits of breaching other public policies.

It is considered that, despite the deterioration in the condition of the buildings, circumstances have not changed to justify enabling development, due to the harm that would be caused by that development. The DCMS protocol (2003) for the disposal of historic buildings and structures also states that financial consideration should not be the over-riding criterion in determining the disposal of a site.

In its letter dated 21 August providing comments on the Draft Brief, English Heritage states that the 2008 guidance “would support the Council’s argument that the criteria for enabling development are not met in this case”.

4.11.2 Domestic site

On the domestic site, the number of listed buildings, their spatial arrangement, the character of the open campus landscape setting and the fact that the buildings are generally in a good state of repair and capable of a range of uses leads the Council to conclude that there is no case to be made for enabling development per se on the grounds of lack of need and of harm that would be caused. However, the Council does consider that the re-use of existing buildings on the domestic site could provide cross-subsidy for the repair of buildings on the technical site.

5. GUIDANCE ON SUBMITTING PLANNING APPLICATIONS

5.1 Comprehensive approach

Comprehensive proposals for the whole site will be sought. A planning application for the whole site will be required that sets out the vision and the overall master plan.

5.2 List of documentation required to be submitted with a planning application

5.2.1 It is essential that any planning application on the site is supported by the necessary information to enable the Council to determine the planning application. The Council is in the process of adopting a Local Validation checklist setting out the information required to support planning applications. It is recommended in the first instance that reference is made to the validation Checklist.

5.2.2 The unique nature of the RAF Bicester site is recognised and therefore there are some site specific requirements that should be considered. Of particular importance will be the need to demonstrate how the character and appearance of the conservation area will be preserved or enhanced, in particular addressing the issue of long term management. It is advised that early contact is made with the Development Control and Major Developments Section for further information regarding the information required to accompany the application.

5.2.3 Such proposals will need to be accompanied by Design and Access Statements, which should include

- A statement of historic significance
- Arborecultural Survey and report
- Ecological appraisal
- Assessment of contamination
- Transport Assessment
- Archaeological Assessment.

5.3 Preliminary guidance on need for Environmental Assessment

Guidance on Environmental Impact Assessment is provided in Circular 2/99. The Council will screen all major proposals for the need for Environmental Impact Assessment. Requests for screening opinions will be encouraged prior to the submission of any planning application. Where proposals fall within Schedule 2 and are likely to have significant environmental effects, Environmental Impact Assessment will be sought.

5.4 Contents of a Design and Access Statement for the site

5.4.1 The Council considers that Design and Access Statements accompanying planning applications and applications for listed building consent are important documents in explaining how development proposals have been designed to respond to the site. Design and Access Statements should be prepared in accordance with the advice in Circular 01/06. The Council encourages early discussion, prior to the submission of an application, with regard to development proposals and emerging content of a Design and Access Statement.

5.5 Works for which listed building consent or conservation area consent will be required.

The wording is not intended to be exhaustive but to provide a clear indication of the sort of works that need consent.

- Works on listed buildings, [other than minor repairs carried out in a like-for-like fashion](#), involving replacement of an original element e.g. replacement of window casements, demolition of walls, creation of new openings.
- Works affecting the character and/or appearance of the conservation area e.g. Removal of original signage
- Repainting of listed buildings in a new colour
- Demolition
- New development
- Extensions, including side extensions, roof extensions and porches
- Cladding or rendering of the outside of buildings
- [Internal works that would affect the special character of the building.](#)

5.6 List of documentation [that may be required to be submitted with a listed building consent or conservation area consent application.](#)

[The level of information supporting applications for listed building consent and conservation area consent will vary depending upon the nature and scale of the works. You are advised to discuss proposed applications and the level of information required to support them with the Council at the earliest opportunity. Set out below is an indication of the information that is likely to be required.](#)

- [Statement of significance](#)
- Structural surveys
- Design & access Statement [incorporating heritage impact statement](#)
- Detailed drawings for architectural details [as existing and proposed changes](#)
- Level 2 photographic and measurement survey
- Any repair/strengthening works to be supported by method statement and technical protocol

5.7 Contents of a Heritage Impact Assessment

The heritage impact assessment should demonstrate a clear understanding of the impact of the proposals on the significance of the site, as well as an understanding of the site's vulnerability. The assessment should demonstrate the impact of particular elements of the proposed scheme on the different aspects of significance.

Type of significance to be addressed:

- Archaeological
- Historical/ associational/ use
- Architectural
- Landscape
- Ecological
- Group
- Overview

The impact assessment should demonstrate that the applicant has sought to minimise the detrimental impact of proposals on that significance. The document should culminate in a clear statement of the unavoidable impact of the proposals, as required by PPG 15 and PPG 16, and a mitigation strategy. [Where a Design and Access Statement is also required the Council will expect the heritage impact statement to form part of the Design and Access Statement.](#)

5.8 Transport Assessment

Oxfordshire County Council will require a robust Transport Assessment to accompany a Planning application for development, which must consider the following:

- Detailed information of the level of traffic generated by the site's existing uses
- Site history
- Traffic generation for the proposed development(s);
- Assessment of existing public transport, pedestrian and cycle links
- Accident records (previous 5 years)
- Provisions of off-site infrastructure and financial contributions towards enhancing local services and towards the Bicester Integrated Transport Strategy.
- Travel Plan for site.

5.9 Planning Obligations

The Council has informal guidance on Planning Obligations, which is available on its web site. The Council is currently reviewing its approach and looking to produce SPD on planning obligations. Matters such as securing access to the site, the provision of a management plan etc will be attached to any permission by legal agreement. It is difficult to give detailed advice about the planning obligations that would be sought for this site in advance of an understanding about the land uses proposed. Appropriate planning obligations associated with any future redevelopments would need to be agreed prior to the granting of planning permissions. Prospective developers should be encouraged to talk to Cherwell District Council and the County Council prior to the submissions of planning proposals.

5.9.1 Transport financial contributions

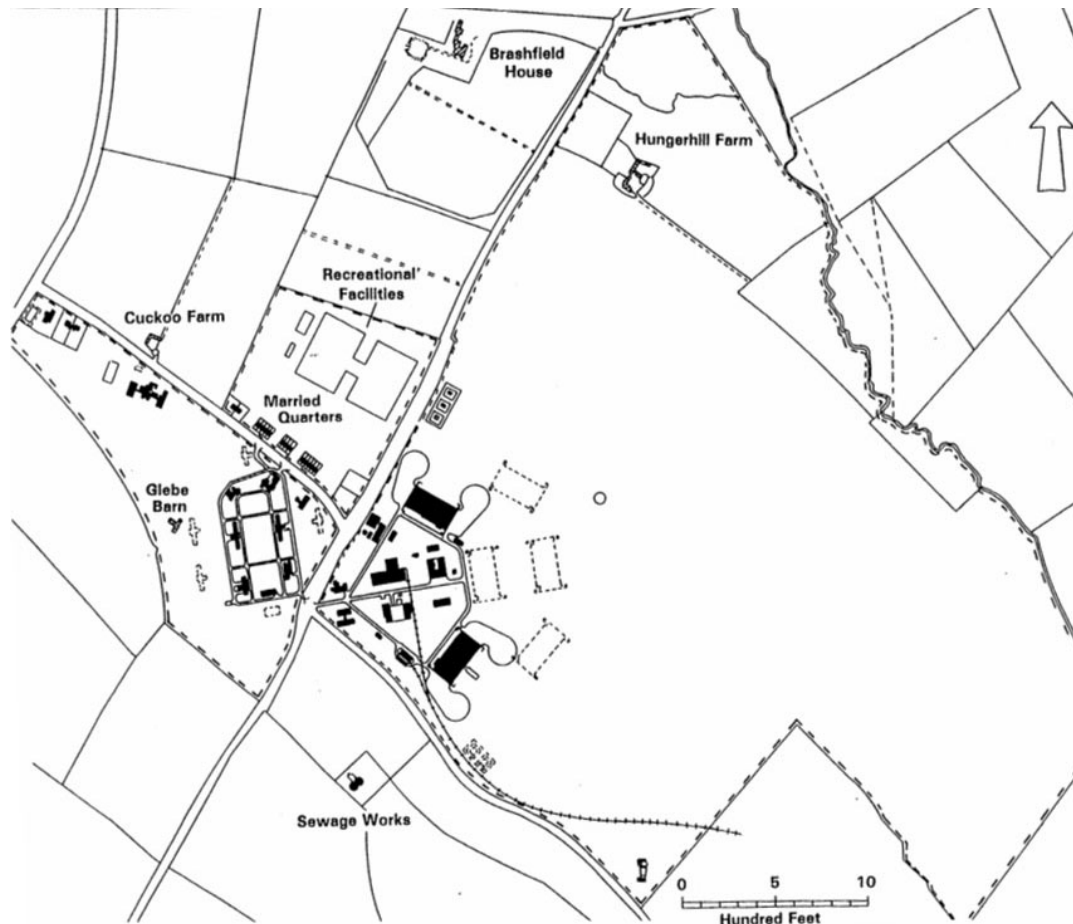
Oxfordshire County Council will seek Developer Contributions towards the Bicester Integrated Transport Strategy. The precise content of this will be dependent upon the proposed uses. At this time (August 2009) the figure is around £6,500 per additional average 2 way movement at peak times (varies per use) per residential unit or 100m² for other uses i.e. B1 use. Public transport subsidies will also be required to continue/enhance existing services, provide new services or divert existing services to serve the proposed sites. Public transport infrastructure will also be sought i.e. Real Time Information, bus shelters, flags etc.

5.9.2 County Council Services

The County Council advises that many services are at capacity and so can not cope with a population increase in Bicester. Residential development including that created out of existing buildings would need to make contributions to service infrastructure so the existing population is not disadvantaged. Further work would need to be done to identify the full impacts of development, assess whether new and/ or improvements to the full range of County services and facilities would be required to accommodate the additional demands, with costs, phasing and funding sources identified to feed into the district's infrastructure delivery plan.

APPENDIX 1
A History of RAF Bicester

RAF Bicester opened on 1 October 1918 as the home of 44 Training Depot Station, preparing pilots for service with front line units in France. The aerodrome had a landing area of 1,150 yards by 1,000 yards, including 30 acres occupied by the station buildings. With only six weeks of the Great War remaining however, cut backs soon started and the station closed down in March 1920 and the complete camp was demolished soon after.

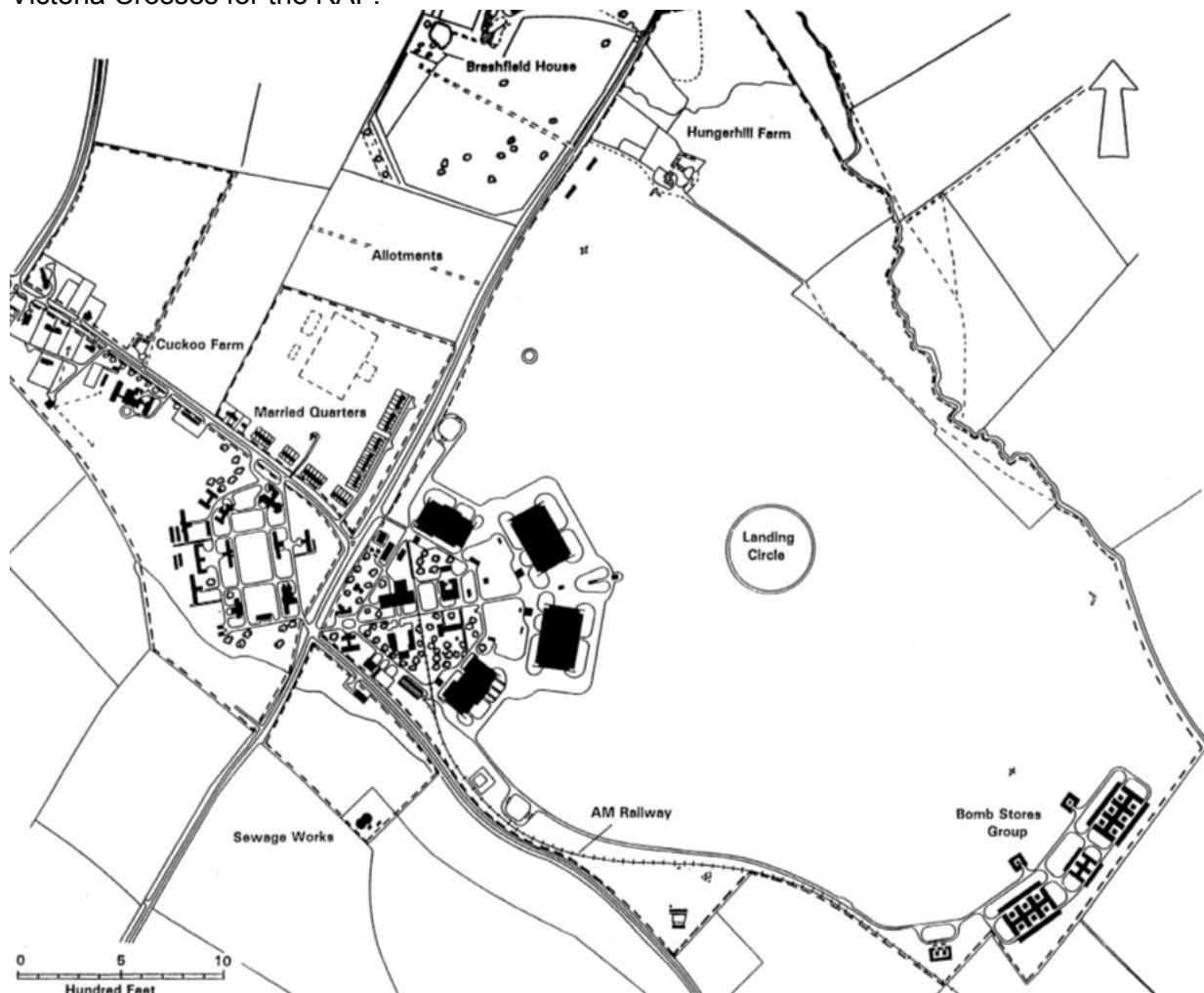


Proposed layout 1926

In 1924, identified as a station in the Air Defence of Great Britain, the expansion of the airfield was planned. Additional land was acquired to the north, enabling a maximum take-off run of 1,390 yards and land west of Buckingham Road was acquired for the construction of married quarters and recreational facilities. On the domestic site two storey barrack blocks, each with its own sanitation, were built and arranged in a grid pattern with the dining Room and Cookhouse, Institute, Station Sick Quarters and Sergeants' Mess. The layout of the technical site followed Trenchard's characteristics radial road pattern, with the Guardhouse and Station Offices constructed at the site entrance and three roads branching out, each with a different function. The central road gave access to buildings associated with aeroplanes and motor vehicles; the left branch connected buildings essential to the day to day running of the station; and the right branch served non-essential buildings used for maintenance and running of the station. A range of single and two storey permanent brick buildings were erected, including some that had not been seen before such as the Operations Block, the Parachute Store and Watch Office. A railway linked the coal yard and main stores and, later, the bomb stores.

In 1934, following the collapse of the Geneva disarmament talks, the RAF expansion Scheme got underway, starting with the erection of further Barrack Blocks and Airmen's Married Quarters, together with Petrol Tanker Sheds, an Ambulance Garage and other technical buildings were extended or altered. The second contract around 1936 involved the construction of 2 C type aircraft hangars, enabling the new 90 Squadron to be accommodated. A further contract in 1938 resulted in the erection of the Aviation Petrol Installations, a Fire tender Shelter, a Watch Office with Tower, Bomb Stores and connecting road and new hangar aprons.

In 1938 new contracts were placed for a major building programme to bring the station in line with the new Expansion Period RAF Stations, including further technical accommodation, Type H Barrack Blocks, a new Institute and Dining Room, the Decontamination Centre and a Central Heating Station. Brashfield House was requisitioned and additional Officers' Mess and single Officers Quarters were built on the site some distance from the rest of the domestic site, north up Buckingham Road. Construction work was still underway at the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. As both 90 and 101 Squadrons departed for their operational stations in 1939 their place was taken by 12 and 142 squadrons until their preparations for front line service were complete and they departed for France. The bombing regime was punishing and it was Bicester crews who were the first to win Victoria Crosses for the RAF.



Site Plan 1945

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the role of the station changed to training and this saw the construction of a larger number than average pillboxes and trenches for the close defence of the airfield. The flying field was considerably enlarged to the north and south with tracks and 41

panhandle standings to enable the dispersed parking of aircraft. So dispersed was this, in line with Trenchard's philosophy, the length of the perimeter track and dispersal tracks totalled nearly six miles. The Battle Instruction School was set up in 1940. An important structure, Battle Headquarters for the co-ordination of airfield defence during an invasion, was located between the north dispersal track and the north section of perimeter track. This was surrounded by a ring of five pill boxes. By now the buildings at Bicester had been camouflaged and blackouts were enforced.

From October 1940 an increasing emphasis was being placed on night flying. Bicester was unsuitable due to its compact layout, the large number of trees on the approaches and its vulnerability to bombing if lights were shown. Lacking concrete runways, Bicester was also subject to spells of unserviceability. Therefore a satellite landing ground was brought into use at Hinton-in-the-Hedges, although it quickly became unserviceable due to severe winter conditions. The landing ground at Brackley, later known as Croughton, was shared with 16 OTU from Upper Heyford. During 1942 practically all the crews trained at Bicester were going out to the Middle East.

The Operational Training Unit continued until October 1944, flying Mosquitoes on what by now had become a very small airfield by comparison with standards elsewhere and the size of the aircraft highlighted the limitations of the rough grass landing ground. Once better stations became available following the mass departure of tactical flying units to the Continent after D-Day this enabled 13 OTU to be transferred.

In the autumn of 1943, Bicester became a Forward Equipment Unit and the airfield was used to store vital equipment necessary for the invasion of north-west Europe. By the autumn of 1944 the unit had grown in size and was manned by over 1,000 personnel with equipment stored in ten canvas hangars. Most of the equipment was transported by road. On 1 January 1945 the unit was re-titled 246 Maintenance Unit (MU) and the station was effectively relegated to the status of a storage centre. The end of the war saw little reduction in the activities of the unit, although visiting aircraft now became fewer.

After 1945, the station continued to be used as a Maintenance Unit, together with the Parachute Packing and Servicing Flight and the headquarters of 40 Group, Maintenance Command, was also based at Bicester. 71 Maintenance Unit was formed here in 1953 with responsibility for crash investigation. A Bomb Disposal Flight was also transferred here. The Windrushers Gliding Club was formed in January 1956 and the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association was formed here on 1 November 1963. By the mid 1970s the strength of the RAF was much reduced and RAF Bicester was closed down on 31 March 1976.

After a short period under the control of the Army the station once again became RAF Bicester in November 1978. Authority had been given for the site to be made available to United States Air Force in Europe and some of the technical buildings were converted into offices and a medical storage facility. The domestic site was converted into a USAFE Military Hospital and this was eventually closed when RAF Upper Heyford closed in 1994, although some of the married servicemen's housing is still occupied by USAF personnel based at Croughton.

These uses, administration, storage and glider training, have ensured the preservation of the inter-war character of the site and the rare and consistent preservation of exterior detail and fittings. Post war residential development and quarrying has encroached onto the site, effectively removing the Second World War extensions to the flying field.

However, in all its years of operational service, RAF Bicester was not once used in armed combat.

APPENDIX 2
Relevant Development Plan Policies

South East Plan Policies, May 2009

SP1, C5, C6, CO1, CO2, CC8, CC9, BE1

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan Policies 1996

EMP4

Cherwell Non Statutory Local Plan Policies, 2004

EMP4, EMP6 and H1a

