

Application No: 11/00153/LB	Ward: Caversfield	Date Valid: 03/02/2011
Applicant:	City and Country Bicester Ltd	
Site Address:	Former DLO Caversfield, Skimmingdish Lane, Caversfield	

Proposal: Refurbishment and alterations to listed buildings, including some partial internal and external demolition in association with their conversion to residential use and use of building 50 for storage purposes

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 The site was formally part of RAF Bicester and is located to the south of Caversfield and north of Bicester and consists of what is referred to as the domestic site. The domestic site has close historic links to the technical site and airfield which are located on the west side of Buckingham Road.
- 1.2 The site is a significant part of the Conservation Area and contains many listed buildings. The site includes buildings such as Officer's mess and quarters, barrack blocks, ration stores, decontamination chambers and central heating stations.
- 1.3 The RAF first used the site in 1918 but no buildings were retained from this time. However some buildings do date back to the 1920's and 30's. The site has been described by English Heritage as comprising the best preserved and most strongly representative of the bomber stations built as part of Sir Hugh Trenchard's 1920's Home Defence Expansion Scheme.
- 1.4 This application deals with the works to all of the listed buildings on the site required in order to convert the majority of them into residential accommodation. Building 50 (a decontamination chamber) is the only listed building not being converted to form residential accommodation but instead it is proposed to be used for storage in association with the residential use of the site. The nature of the work differs for each building but in general terms it includes the demolition of modern external accretions, removal of modern partitions, insertion of new partitions, the creation of a small number of new openings and general repairs to the fabric of the buildings including walls, staircases, windows and doors.

2. Application Publicity

- 2.1 The application was advertised by way of a site notice and press notice. The final date for comment was 25 March 2011.
- 2.2 No letters of objection have been received from neighbouring residents in relation to this Listed Building Application.

3. Consultations

- 3.1 A summary of the consultation responses is set out below (see electronic file for full details)
- 3.2 **Caversfield Parish Council** has not commented specifically on this application but has expressed general support for the scheme as a whole.

3.3 **Bicester Town Council** welcomes the retention of the listed buildings in their original state.

3.4 **English Heritage** commented on the proposal prior to any amendments being made, some of the concerns have been addressed but their response in relation to the listed building work is summarised below;

- Did not wish to comment in detail but offer following general observations
- Proposed conversion of existing buildings to residential use is reasonably sympathetic to the historic fabric
- Creation of some extra doorways by dropping the cills of windows are necessary in order to achieve workable plans these should be kept to minimum and away from principle elevations
- Recommended that application be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance and on basis of Council's own expert conservation advice.

3.5 The **Council's Conservation Team** provided detailed comments on the work proposed to each building. These comments will be expressed in Section 5 but the summary of the response is that;
'Although there is a general trend toward building-led conversion and the majority of the alterations are minor and sympathetic to the listed buildings, there are some areas where the proposal could be improved to better protect the historic assets'.

Since these comments were received amendments to the proposal have been made which largely overcame the concerns expressed.

3.6 **The Ancient Monuments Society** wished to defer to English Heritage who appear to have a detailed knowledge of the site and its history.

4. Relevant Planning Policies

4.1 Central Government Guidance
Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 5 – Planning for the Historic Environment

4.2 South East Plan Policies
BE6 Management of the Historic Environment

4.3 Adopted Cherwell Local Plan
C18 Applications for Listed building consent

4.4 Non Statutory Cherwell Local Plan
EN39 Preservation of listed buildings

5. Appraisal

5.1 Main Considerations
The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are as follows –

- Impact on the listed building
- Implications of approving this application in isolation from the other applications.

Given the number of buildings covered by this application each building will be considered individually and referenced by its allocated number as it would have

been when the site was operational.

5.2 Building 16 – Officers’ mess and quarters

5.2.1 Constructed in 1926 with later additions, this building is of a unique design pre-dating the later standard RAF design. Its location at the edge of the site served to distinguish the higher rank while maintaining the dispersed layout of the buildings. The internal layout has not been greatly altered over the years, except with the installation of laboratories and upgrading of fire doors, windows and internal decoration. The upper floors in particular retain their original layout, although the majority of decorative features have been removed.

5.2.2 The proposals include minimal alterations to the historic fabric, as the creation of the laboratories eradicated some of the historic features on the ground floor. The proposed removal of the chimneys and external stairs would have an improving effect as it would return the building to an appearance closer to that of the original.

5.2.3 Amendments have been made to elevation 5 of this building to reinstate a single width door where in the past a non-traditional double door had been inserted. This addresses comments by the Council’s Conservation Officer.

5.4 Building 20 – Dining Room and Institute

5.4.1 Constructed in the third development phase in 1939 in preparation for World War II, the NAFFI is easily the largest building on site. The east elevation overlooks the square and would have been an impressive building to see when entering the site beyond building 19. The main elevation is identical to the one at RAF Upper Heyford and is of a standard military design with Art-Deco motifs, string coursing, rendered main entrances and a rendered plinth. The west elevation has the appearance of being ‘at the back’ due to its lack of regularity, although two low glazed lanterns give a degree of prominence. A central walkway through the rear elevation meets up with the main block providing access for deliveries to the kitchen area. Elements of original tiling and joinery exist, but the majority has been covered or removed for modern materials. The large dining area is still striking with its high ceiling but this has been reduced with the installation of modern ceiling tiles.

5.4.2 The proposals include the retention of the Art-Deco staircases, although it is proposed that they are to give access to relatively few properties, which seems to be a wasted opportunity. The modern plant on the roof is proposed to be removed, which would greatly enhance the external appearance from a distance, as would the upgrading of the windows and the proposed removal of the single storey modern plant extensions. The proposed removal of the concrete ramps is encouraging, as this would add weight to an already impressive front elevation.

5.4.3 Most of the original internal walls are being retained and utilised in the creation of 33 residential units. A large number of further internal walls are being inserted.

5.4.4 The proposal has been amended to overcome concerns about some inappropriate fenestration and to remove unsympathetic and unjustified roof lantern extensions. As a result of these changes some of the proposed internal layout has also been amended.

5.5 Building 22 – Central Heating Plant

- 5.5.1 Constructed in the third development phase in 1939 in preparation for World War II, this building has possibly the widest impact off-site, with its tall ventilation tower being visible from the south. Its decoration is minimal, being an entirely functional building, and part of its special interest comes from the high proportion of masonry to openings, particularly on the eastern and southern elevations. The north elevation contains a large opening. The rear (west) elevation is partly obscured by a single storey extension and brick enclosing wall which housed oil tanks and a yard for deliveries. The original layout remains, although some areas of this open space have been covered over with flat roofs. The interior contains a double height space filled with modern plant machinery.
- 5.5.2 The conversion of this building into a four bedroom house proposes to retain the double height ceiling, which is encouraging. The proposed retention of the existing boundary walls also maintains the ground plan of the building. At present the rear enclosure is only accessible from the rear (south) and a terrace is proposed for the top of the new single storey extension (acceptable due to it being mainly hidden by the raising of the wall above this extension), together with a large private garden and parking area.
- 5.5.3 The proposal submitted as part of this application and in relation to the first full planning application (11/00151/F) has been amended to remove unnecessary breaks in the external walls and a terrace which was proposed externally to the private enclosed garden. Furthermore a subsequent application has been submitted which seeks full and listed building consent for the creation of two additional single storey dwellings within the yard wall. In the event of both schemes being considered acceptable the applicants will have the option to build either scheme.
- 5.6 Building 23 – Type H Barrack Block
- 5.6.1 Constructed in the third development phase in 1939 in preparation for World War II, the two storey building lies between the central heating plant and building 29. Originally used as a dormitory, it has since been subdivided for offices in the central area. Four large rooms remain in the protruding sections. The symmetrical style seen across the site continues with added Art-Deco features such as the main entrance rendered pillars and hood, and the elegant staircases. In some areas, additional mouldings survive.
- 5.6.2 The proposed re-use of existing entrances has reduced the need to create additional ones, which reduces the exterior impact of conversion, as would the proposed use of the staircases as central axis for the building. This appears to be an encouraging building-bed proposal for conversion.
- 5.7 Building 25 – Type H Barrack Block
- 5.7.1 Constructed in the third development phase in 1939 in preparation for World War II, the two storey building is similar in form, style and decoration to building 23 and stands facing the guard house (19), with extended wings to the north and south.
- 5.7.2 The proposed subdivision is more noticeable due to these extended wings, as the four large rooms also remain in the protruding sections. The proposed re-use of existing entrances has reduced the need to create additional ones, which would reduce the exterior impact of conversion, as would the use of the staircases as central axis for the building. The subdivision of the wings is unfortunate but is a

consequence of conversion to residential and not considered to be so detrimental as to warrant a recommendation of refusal.

5.8 Building 29 – Type E Barrack Block

5.8.1 Constructed during the second building phase in the 1930s, it follows the plan of buildings 35 and 36, their main elevations looking away from the parade ground towards the west and open countryside, from which direction it is visible. This main elevation is very plain, with an uninterrupted pitched and hipped slate roof and regular fenestration, the main door is in a more simple style to that of 35 and 36. There is a significant lack of doors, requiring the use of external fire escapes at either end, and the protruding wing to the east is subservient, with a lower ridge height and smaller fenestration, reflecting its status as the wash rooms. Internally the north and south wings are open, retaining their dormitory character.

5.8.2 The building is proposed to be divided up into 10 dwellings, six of which are to be accessed from the central staircase. The removal of the external staircases is an enhancement to the building as they are no longer needed as primary fire escapes. The use of fully glazed doors to replicate the existing windows does produce an odd appearance, although the alternative would be to use 'proper' doors, which would increase the domestic nature of the elevation. For this reason, the 'window doors' are acceptable on this and other similar buildings.

5.8.3 The Historic Impact Assessment (pg. 18) states that 'some of the internal proportions will continue to be legible', yet this is difficult to appreciate as both the ground and first floors are being completely subdivided to create additional properties. It is unlikely that these buildings would ever be read as former dormitories except externally.

5.8.4 Plans have been amended to show a more appropriate use of existing openings, reducing the need to alter more prominent openings.

5.9 Building 31 – Sergeants' Mess

5.9.1 Constructed in 1926 as part of the original airfield, the E-block differs from the grander officers' mess to the north in plan form, although noticeable similarities include the heavy external corncicing and pitched slate roof. The exterior style of form and fenestration is simpler, reflecting rank.

5.9.2 The proposal includes the removal of a flat roofed single storey modern extension without replacement. There is no provision for the creation of any additional openings. The provision of terraces in the courtyards should be resisted to prevent personalisation of outside space. The main thoroughfare which bends to the west of the parade ground is directly adjacent to these proposed terraces, making them visible from the public domain.

5.10 Building 32 – Airmen's Institute

5.10.1 Constructed in 1926 as part of the original airfield, this building originally functioned as a NAFFI. The building is of a similar style to the other late 1920s buildings, replicating the simple form and fenestration. The interior has an interesting barrel vaulted ceiling on the first floor. Unusually for the site, this building retains a higher proportion of original or historic features, such as ceramic bricks and bronze handles to the Crittall windows.

- 5.10.2 The uPVC conservatory at the front of the building is proposed to be removed and the original openings restored. This would greatly improve the southern elevation of the building. The kitchen extension is proposed to be removed and rebuilt in a sympathetic style with a pitched roof. There is an issue here in the loss of the sight of a blocked first floor window. However, this replacement is acceptable provided that the detailing is of sufficient quality, for example the new windows should replicate those on the same elevation.
- 5.10.3 As with other buildings the applicants have taken on board concerns expressed by the Conservation Officer and amended the plans. These principally dealt with replacement fenestration where inappropriate double doors were being replaced with similar size windows and doors rather than reflecting the historic character and appearance of the building.
- 5.11 Building 33 – Type E Barrack Block
- 5.11.1 Constructed during the second building phase in the 1930s (datestone 1934 in the door surround), the single storey building is simple but elegant in exterior decoration, the eastern elevation being the ‘front’, due to its more fine construction, facing the technical site. Its symmetrical appearance is its most striking feature. The main elevation is proposed to be untouched, retaining its integrity and historic appearance. The less symmetrical western façade is proposed to be rationalised with matching entrances at either end. There has been some attempt to preserve the axial arrangement in this building and also the spatial characteristics of the former dormitories through open-plan living/kitchen areas.
- 5.11.2 Initial concerns expressed by the Conservation Officer have been addressed through the submission of amended plans.
- 5.12 Building 35 – Type E Barrack Block
- 5.12.1 Constructed in 1926 as part of the original airfield, together with building 36, this building flanks the parade ground. The symmetrical elevations of the building are its most significant features, with flanking turrets either side of the main entrance, and with its almost identical counterpart, building 36, is a key building defining this important historic space.
- 5.12.2 The proposals retain the external appearance facing the parade ground, and add full height glazed doors to the rear as additional entrances. Replica fenestration is also proposed to be added where unsympathetic modern windows had been fitted.
- 5.12.3 The comments regarding the subdivision of the wings are the same as for building 29.
- 5.13 Building 36 – Type E Barrack Block
- 5.13.1 Constructed in 1926 as part of the original airfield, this building flanks the parade ground with building 35. Again the symmetrical nature of the elevations is a key feature of its significance.
- 5.13.2 Similar alterations are proposed to be made to upgrade fenestration and provide additional rear entrances. The comments regarding the subdivision of the wings are the same as for buildings 29 and 35.
- 5.14 Building 42 – Type E Barrack Block

- 5.14.1 Constructed during the second building phase in the 1930s, it replicates building 29, following the plan of buildings 35 and 36. Unlike building 29, two chimneys have been constructed above the entrance turrets, although the same simple form and lack of entrances remain.
- 5.14.2 The building is proposed to be subdivided in the same fashion as building 29, and therefore the same comments regarding to the proposed insertion of a number of doors and the principle of the subdivision apply.
- 5.15 Building 43 – Station Sick Quarters and Mess
- 5.15.1 Constructed in the third development phase in 1939 in preparation for World War II, the structure stands at ground level, with a tall grass embankment on all sides giving it an ‘underground’ feel. The majority of this building has already been stripped out, leaving almost nothing of its original internal arrangement. The significance of the building has already been eroded by the removal of the internal partitions, and therefore the retention of the grass embankment is essential to preserve its unique character.
- 5.15.2 This is proposed to be one of the most unusual conversions on the site. The proposed method of cutting through the roof to provide day light, is generally acceptable in terms of not creating holes in the embankment. However concern was expressed by the Conservation Officer with regard to the method of conversion. However additional survey work has been carried out and initial objections have been addressed.
- 5.15.3 Details of damp-proofing will need to be provided to ensure that suitable materials are used, as damp has already set in within this structure. The proposed use of the main entrance as the front door is encouraging, as this reinstates its importance.
- 5.16 Building 46 – Station Sick Quarters and Mess
- 5.16.1 Constructed in 1926 as part of the original airfield, the single storey structure has four large chimneys and a simple form with unusual sash windows, the bottom of which open inwards rather than sliding upwards. The siren system is still in place, and the rear doors are recessed to allow close ambulance access. The building is linked to the decontamination building (43) by a narrow flat roofed corridor leading southwest.
- 5.16.2 It is proposed that the exterior accretions such as the modern extractor fans are to be removed, which would improve the overall appearance. The proposed conversion appears to be suitable.
- 5.17 Building 47 – Ration and Adjutant Store
- 5.17.1 Constructed in 1926 as part of the original airfield, this building is probably the most simple in terms of exterior decoration. It is almost identical to one at RAF Upper Heyford, although better preserved. The rafter feet project in a different fashion to the other buildings and the roof is notable for a projecting portico over the north eastern end of the building. Internally the building is clearly divided into four cells by brick partitions, each of which has an external entrance, used to store supplies.
- 5.17.2 The exterior is not proposed to be altered greatly, although the double doors on the east are proposed to be changed for a full height window. This building is proposed to be divided into three units, inevitably resulting in what the Historic Impact

Assessment (p.21) calls a 'disturbance of legibility of original plan form' although the historic fabric survives. As form is integral to legibility, it appears that this building would be better preserved as two units rather than three.

Whilst three units have been retained the internal arrangements of the building have been amended to take account of the concerns of the Conservation Officer.

5.18 Building 48 – Dining Room and Cookhouse

5.18.1 Constructed in 1926 as part of the original airfield, the south eastern elevation of this building relates to the newly proposed pedestrian access onto the A4421. Originally the building was the pedestrian connection between the domestic and technical sites. The main elevation of the building faces the southern end of the parade ground; the western façade appears symmetrical, while the eastern side reveals two different L-shaped wings joined by modern infill. The regular order of the western elevation echoes the elevations of buildings 36 and 35, and the lack of order to the eastern side means that that elevation feels at present to be the rear of the building.

5.18.2 The existing modern infill between the wings is proposed to be removed and the windows restored. The majority of entrances are proposed to be on the 'rear' of the building, which could undermine the importance of the main elevation, but reduces the unacceptable impact of several front doors overlooking the parade ground.

5.18.3 Reorganisation of the interior living space since the original submission has overcome the need for new pathways and new doors to units 5 and 7 which were having an adverse impact on the importance of the south eastern elevation. Furthermore detrimental terraces have been removed.

5.19 Building 50 – Decontamination Centre

5.19.1 Constructed in the third development phase in 1939 in preparation for World War II, the building was designed for its function, and the internal layout shows the clear flow of arrival and decontamination for sick airmen (entrance at the east, exit at the west). The most complete and therefore most sensitive building on site, building 50 is proposed to be left in tact with restorative works conducive to ensuring its longevity. As a part of the site's heritage, it is proposed to be opened to the public as part of open days and for special interest groups. However, for the remainder of the time it is proposed to be used as bicycle storage. This form of use will require the insertion of bike racks, the quantity of would depend on demand. However the nature of such an addition would not affect the fabric or layout of the building.

5.20 Implications of approving this application in isolation from the other applications

5.20.1 Whilst the granting of listed building consent does not permit the use of the buildings for residential purposes it is advised that regard be had to the full applications which seek consent for the change of use of the buildings. It should be noted that in approving this application in isolation and in the event of the full application being refused the physical alterations to the buildings could be implemented resulting in buildings being capable of residential use but not benefiting from consent for such use.

5.21 Conclusion

5.21.1 In general terms it is considered that the proposals for conversion have been well thought out and respect the historic fabric and special interest of the listed buildings. The applicants have listened to the concerns of the planning and

conservation officers and amended the plans accordingly. Whilst there are elements of the scheme that result in the subdivision of dormitory spaces this is a result of having to find an appropriate alternative use for the buildings, residential probably being the most appropriate use. Based on the above assessment it is considered that the proposals for listed building consent comply with guidance contained within PPS5 and policies BE6 of the South East Plan and C18 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan.

6. Recommendation

Approval subject to the following conditions;

1. SC1.5A Listed Building: Duration Limit (3 years) (RC3)
2. Except where otherwise stipulated by conditions attached to this permission, the development shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the following plans and documents:
3. That any replacement, repairs and making good of external walls and roofs shall be constructed in accordance with a detailed schedule and specification of materials and finishes which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the works hereby approved. Samples of materials shall be provided if requested.
Reason - To ensure the completed development is compatible with the listed building and to comply with Policy BE6 of the South East Plan 2009 and Policy C18 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan.
4. SC 5.7C Making Good in Materials to Match (RC27AA)
5. SC 5.1AB Safeguard Existing Buildings (RC24AA)
6. SC 5.2AB Hand Demolition and Safeguard Existing Buildings (RC24AA)
7. SC 5.4A Protect Existing Architectural Features (RC26A)
8. SC 5.3AA Demolition of Buildings (RC25A)
9. SC 5.3C No Other Works Except as Plans (RC27AA)
10. SC 5.13AB Building Recording (RC63AA)
11. That all new or replacement windows, doors and openings shall be in accordance with details to no less than 1:10 (including cross section, plan, elevation, glazing and colour/finish) which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the works hereby approved. (RC79A)
12. SC 5.16B Details of damp proof course (RC27AA)
13. SC 5.5AB Submit New Design Details (RC27AA) – flooring, ceiling, wall treatments
14. SC 5.5AB Submit New Design Details (RC27AA) – staircases, the method of breaking through the first floor slab and fixing details
15. The use of cement is not permitted unless for the purposes of repairing similar or otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. (RC27AA)
16. The use of modern plaster is not permitted unless for the purposes of replacing or repairing similar or on approved partition walls or otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. (RC27AA)
17. SC 5.5AB Submit New Design Details (RC27AA) – any new external steps, ramps and handrails
18. SC 5.5AB Submit New Design Details (RC27AA) – external access gates

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF LISTED BUILDING CONSENT AND

RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

The Council, as local planning authority, has determined this application in accordance with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Government advice contained within PPS5 and the development plan unless material considerations indicated otherwise. The development is considered to be acceptable on its merits as the proposal preserves the character and appearance of the listed building. As such the proposal is in accordance with Policy BE6 of the South East Plan 2009 and Policy C18 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, the Council considers that the application should be approved and listed building consent granted subject to appropriate conditions, as set out above.

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