

Applicant:	Bicester Heritage Ltd	
Proposal:	Extension to existing Technical Site to provide new employment units comprising flexible B1(c) light industrial, B2 (general industrial), B8 (storage or distribution) uses with ancillary offices, storage, display and sales, together with associated access, parking and landscaping	
Ward:	Launton And Otmoor	
Councillors:	Cllr Tim Hallchurch Cllr Simon Holland Cllr David Hughes	
Reason for Referral:	Major application	
Expiry Date:	23 October 2018	Committee Date: 13 December 2018
Recommendation:	Approval; subject to no objections from consultees, conditions, and S106 agreement	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATION

Proposal

The application seeks consent for the erection of 8 new employment buildings to the southern side of the existing technical site, adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane. The buildings are proposed to be used flexibly for a mix of B1, B2 and B8 uses. The buildings together will create 6530 square metres of additional floorspace.

The buildings are designed to a variety of forms and sizes and will utilise a combination of green and grey metal cladding and brickwork to the gable ends. The buildings have been arranged so as to retain the alignment of the former Skimmingdish Lane.

Consultations

The following consultees have raised **objections** to the application:

- Launton Parish Council, Caversfield Parish Council, OCC Highways and OCC Drainage
Most of these objections relate to highways matters. Appropriate highways infrastructure will be secured through a S106 agreement although at the time of writing the report, some of these matters are still in negotiation (see report for more detail).

The following consultees have raised **concerns** to the application:

- Stratton Audley Parish Council, CDC Design and Heritage, CDC Ecology and the Bicester Delivery Team (CDC) raise concerns in relation to highway matters, design, ecology and energy efficiency that have required amendments/additional

information to be submitted (*see report and sub-sections for more detail*).

The following consultees have raised **no objections** to the application:

- The Environment Agency, Highways England, Historic England, Natural England, Thames Water, Building Control (CDC), Environmental Health (CDC), Landscape Services (CDC), OCC Archaeology and Arboriculture (CDC).

No letters of objection or comments have been received in respect of the application from third parties.

Planning Policy

The site is allocated in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1, for '*Tourism Development*' which permits a variety of uses at the site including employment uses (Policy Bicester 8).

The site is located within the Conservation Area of RAF Bicester. There are 22 Listed Buildings and several Scheduled Monuments located within the main technical site and wider airfield.

Much of the adjoining airfield is an allocated Local Wildlife Site (LWS). There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within 2km of the site and a proposed District Wildlife Site (DWS) to the south, on the opposite side of Skimmingdish Lane.

The application has also been assessed against the relevant policies in the NPPF, the Development Plan and other relevant material planning considerations and guidance.

Conclusion

The key issues arising from the application details are:

- Principle of Development
- Siting, Orientation, Form, Scale and Massing
- Design and External appearance
- Heritage Assets
- Highway Safety
- Ecology
- Trees and Landscaping
- Residential Amenity
- Flood Risk and Drainage
- Contamination
- Energy Efficiency
- Planning Obligations

The report considers the key planning issues in detail, and officers conclude that the proposal is acceptable subject to conditions and a S106 agreement to secure highways improvements. The scheme meets the requirements of relevant CDC policies.

RECOMMENDATION – DELEGATE TO OFFICERS TO GRANT PERMISSION SUBJECT TO CONSULTATION RESPONSES FROM OCC HIGHWAYS, OCC DRAINAGE, CDC ECOLOGY AND CDC DESIGN AND HERITAGE IN RESPECT OF AMENDED PLANS AND INFORMATION THAT HAS BEEN SUBMITTED, CONDITIONS, AND A S106 AGREEMENT TO SECURE HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Members are advised that the above is a summary of the proposals and key issues are contained in the main report below which provides full details of all

consultation responses, planning policies, the Officer's assessment and recommendations, and Members are advised that this summary should be read in conjunction with the detailed report.

MAIN REPORT

1. APPLICATION SITE AND LOCALITY

- 1.1. The application site comprises the former RAF Bicester Airfield which is located to the north of Bicester on the outskirts of the town. The site is now occupied by Bicester Heritage, a company specialising in historic motoring and aviation. The site occupied by Bicester Heritage comprises the main 'technical site' area (where most of the buildings are located) and the flying field which extends to the north and east of the main technical site area, totalling around 141.5 hectares.
- 1.2. The whole of the site (including the flying field) is designated as a conservation area and most of the buildings within the main technical area are listed (Grade II). The remaining buildings are considered to 'make a positive contribution' to the area in the Conservation Area Appraisal and would therefore be considered as non-designated heritage assets. There are also several Scheduled Monuments located on the edges of the flying field and within the main technical area. Existing vehicular and pedestrian access to the site is gained just north of the roundabout on Buckingham Road. There are residential properties located to the west and south-west of the site.
- 1.3. For the purposes of this application, the site area and redline relates to a parcel of land situated on the southern edge of the existing technical site totalling 1.61 hectares. This parcel of land is therefore bounded by existing buildings of the technical site to its north and the airfield to the east. The Skimmingdish Lane forms the southern boundary of the site, to the south of which is currently vacant land, but there is an extant permission for a care home that has been recently granted permission on appeal (17/01428/F).
- 1.4. The existing technical site is laid out to a Trident pattern of development of 3 avenues projecting from the main entrance of the site. The buildings are generously spaced out from each other in a relatively sporadic nature but maintaining the appearance of the avenues. The hangars are arranged in an arc around the outer perimeter of the existing technical site.
- 1.5. The following constraints relate to the site:
 - The site is located within the Conservation Area of RAF Bicester;
 - The wider Bicester Heritage site contains 22 Grade II Listed Buildings with the remaining buildings making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and are therefore considered to be non-designated heritage assets;
 - There are several Scheduled Monuments located within the main technical site area;
 - There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within 2km of the site (the quarry to the north);
 - The site lies adjacent to a designated Local Wildlife Site which extends around the perimeter of the airfield;
 - There is a proposed District Wildlife Site to the south of the site on the opposite side of Skimmingdish Lane;
 - The Bicester Heritage site is bordered to the south by the A4421 Skimmingdish Lane and to the west by the Buckingham Road;

- There are residential properties to the south, south-west and west of the Bicester Heritage site (opposite sides of the road), although none immediately to the south;
- The site is allocated in the Cherwell Local Plan for 'Tourism Development' (Policy Bicester 8).

2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1. The application seeks consent for the erection of 8 new employment buildings to the south of the existing technical site, comprising an area totalling 1.61 hectares. The buildings are proposed to be used flexibly for B1, B2 and B8 uses and would provide 6530 square metres of additional floor space to the site.
- 2.2. The buildings are arranged around the retained former alignment of the old Skimmingdish Lane which runs through the site on a west-east axis. The buildings are all individual, incorporating a variety of forms, massings and orientations in order to give variety to the site. The predominant building materials are to be brick and metal cladding, with the brick elevations following a principle of being on the gable ends of the units.
- 2.3. Amended plans have been received that incorporate more brickwork to the gable ends including the sensitive elevations of the buildings, minor changes to the fenestration and some additional detailing (primarily showing signage, lighting and eaves and verge detail).

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1. The following planning history is considered relevant to the current proposal:

<u>Application Ref.</u>	<u>Proposal</u>	<u>Decision</u>
18/01253/F	Erection of hotel and conference facility with associated access, parking, and landscaping	Granted approval in principle at committee in October 2018
18/00061/SO	Request for a screening opinion for proposed employment development	Screening Opinion not requesting EIA
17/01847/F	Alterations to existing site access including installation of replacement security gates and erection of gatehouse	Application Permitted

The above planning history shows the applications directly relevant to the new technical site proposal. The adjoining technical site has a detailed planning history with several planning applications and listed building consent applications associated with individual buildings including a site wide consent for commercial uses.

The general approach taken on the technical site has been to allow changes of use that fit with the commercial nature of the site and minor physical changes to the buildings to ensure their long-term use and viability with the aim of conserving the heritage assets on the site.

4. PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

4.1. The following pre-application discussions have taken place regarding this proposal:

<u>Application Ref.</u>	<u>Proposal</u>
17/00285/PREAPP	Employment development

4.2. Pre-application advice was first issued in January 2018 requesting amendments to be made to the scale, form and massing of the development, for the layout to include the retention of the former Skimmingdish Lane, for the defence structures within the site to be retained and for amendments to be made to the design and external appearance of the buildings. A revised pre-application submission (under the same reference) was submitted in April 2018 and further advice was issued in June 2018 which concluded that the form, scale and massing of the development was now significantly improved and the retention of the defence structures and alignment of the former Skimmingdish Lane was welcomed. However it was considered that further work on the design and external appearance was still required.

5. RESPONSE TO PUBLICITY

5.1. This application has been publicised by way of a site notice displayed near the site, by advertisement in the local newspaper, and by letters sent to all properties immediately adjoining the application site that the Council has been able to identify from its records. The final date for comments was 11.09.2018, although comments received after this date and before finalising this report have also been taken into account.

5.2. No objections or comments have been raised by third parties in relation to this application.

6. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

6.1. Below is a summary of the consultation responses received at the time of writing this report. Responses are available to view in full on the Council's website, via the online Planning Register.

PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL AND NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

6.2. LAUNTON PARISH COUNCIL: **Objects.** Adequate consideration has not been given to the vehicular access and addressing Policy SLE4. No apparent provision has been made for adjusting the A4421 road outside the main entrance to accommodate vehicles turning right from the roundabout into the site. The road is extremely busy and one vehicle waiting to turn right can cause a backup onto the roundabout very quickly. At the very least a right filter lane should be provided in order that passing traffic does not get unduly, and dangerously, held up. There were no comments about the buildings themselves.

6.3. CAVERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL: **Objects.** Adequate consideration has not been given to the vehicular access and addressing Policy SLE4. No apparent provision has been made for adjusting the A4421 road outside the main entrance to accommodate vehicles turning right from the roundabout into the site. The road is extremely busy and one vehicle waiting to turn right can cause a backup onto the roundabout very quickly. [*Officer comment: this same comment has been made by both Parish Councils*] There is historical evidence of villages having to brake harshly to avoid collisions. Consideration should be given on how the safety of all vehicles

can be mitigated. Regarding pedestrian access, the Toucan crossing mentioned is not on the plans, this will be essential to assisting pedestrians crossing the road from Caversfield and Bicester with the increase in traffic and provision and funding should be made via a S106 for this crossing which should be near to the bus stops north of the Technical site entrance. The Council had no comments about the buildings which appeared to be sympathetically designed to fit in with the existing units.

- 6.4. STRATTON AUDLEY PARISH COUNCIL: **Concerns.** No concerns about the extension to the technical site but concerned about the incremental approach to applications on this site. The development will make provision for 125 car parking spaces which will generate an increase in traffic from all directions around Bicester Heritage and have a major impact on the roundabout on the A4421, compounded by the hotel application (now approved in principle at committee on 25th October 2018). The increase in traffic from the north towards Bicester will be noticeable and impact the residents of Stratton Audley who will find it takes longer to access the Bicester facilities they need. The increase in traffic will also limit the mode of transport available. There is only one bus a day and cycling is not an option as it already presents a danger to pedestrians and cyclists and this will increase as the application contains no proposals to extend the current cycleway beyond Cherwood House Care Home up to the Stratton Audley turn off. Whilst the sustainable transport provisions offered are acknowledged, are disappointed that there are no provisions for extending the current cycleway.

STATUTORY CONSULTEES

- 6.5. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY: Planning permission can be granted as long as conditions regarding contamination are imposed, as without these conditions, the development poses an unacceptable risk to the environment and would object to the application.
- 6.6. HIGHWAYS ENGLAND: No comments received
- 6.7. HISTORIC ENGLAND: No comments.
- 6.8. NATURAL ENGLAND: No comments to make. Refer to Standing Advice.
- 6.9. THAMES WATER:

Waste Water: There is an inability of the existing foul water network infrastructure to accommodate the needs of this development proposal, therefore recommends a condition regarding waste water upgrades or an Infrastructure Phasing Plan.

Surface Water: The application indicates that surface waters will not be discharged to the public network therefore Thames Water has no objection but approval should be sought from the Lead Local Flood Authority (see their comments below).

Water: With regard to water network infrastructure capacity, no objections to the application but recommend an informative regarding water pressure.

NON-STATUTORY CONSULTEES

- 6.10. CDC BUILDING CONTROL: Means of escape and travel distances to final exits needs to be in accordance with Building Regulations. Elevations close to site boundaries are to be fire protected in accordance with Building Regulations.

- 6.11. CDC CONSERVATION OFFICER AND URBAN DESIGN: Whilst the principle of the new technical site is agreed, there may be potential harm occasioned by some elevations of the proposed buildings/units, as above. It is recommended that where proposed buildings/units face onto the Conservation Area, these should be reviewed and revised. This will also enhance the quality of these elevations/buildings, which in turn will add value to the historic site as set out in NPPF (July 2018, para. 192 (c)). In respect of listed buildings and other non-designated heritage assets (buildings, air raid shelters and the pyrotechnic store), some elevations as currently proposed will again potentially harm the setting of these, and should again be reviewed as recommended. The defended air-raid shelter Scheduled Monument should be referred to Historic England; and it is considered that the harm to the pyrotechnic store is outweighed by the public benefits within the context of the NPPF. Once these recommendations have been resolved, it is considered that any harm to the identified heritage assets will be outweighed by the public benefits of developing this site (NPPF, para. 196), and its wider value in contributing to ongoing conserving costs of the historic airfield into the future.
- 6.12. CDC ECOLOGY OFFICER: The Great Crested Newt survey method does not follow Natural England Standing Advice as 2 ponds identified in the survey were noted as dry (highly likely given the dry summer) and so the assessment relies on old data from 2016 which only undertook 3 out of the minimum 4 survey visits and of which, none of the survey visits were carried out in peak season (a minimum of 2 are required in peak season). The removal of these ponds destroys a potential breeding site. The report does not go into any further assessment of the impact of the proposals on Great Crested Newts, concluding that the application site is not utilised by them, which is questioned given the limitations of the survey data. The two ponds identified in the Phase 1 survey map are not shown on the Proposed Site Plan and it is therefore assumed they are to be lost. Would recommend a precautionary approach is adopted, retaining the ponds and surrounding terrestrial habitat to the south and east within the landscaping proposal. Would also condition the submission of a Great Crested Newt working method to avoid impact on Great Crested Newts that could be present.
- 6.13. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER: **No objections** subject to conditions regarding noise, contamination and a Construction Environmental Management Plan for Residential Properties. No comments regarding air quality, odour and light.
- 6.14. LANDSCAPE OFFICER: Additional visual mitigation is required including around and on buildings where there is limited space for trees. The extensive areas of grasscrete could be visually unattractive as the grass tends not to survive due to the dryness and compacted nature of the soil, therefore more details of the specification and construction of the grasscrete is needed. Recommends other conditions in respect of landscaping details [*Officer Comment: some of these would not meet the conditions tests and so will be added as informatives only*].
- 6.15. BICESTER DELIVERY TEAM: There is limited information in the application details to demonstrate how the proposals will comply with the requirements of policies ESD1-ESD5 and ESD15 of the Local Plan. Whilst various commitments are made, they fall short of demonstrating compliance. More information is required in the form of an Energy Strategy and Sustainability Statement. In accordance with the Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy and the Local Transport Plan, cycle and pedestrian access and facilities should be provided to facilitate walking and cycling as part of healthy lifestyles and to tackle inactivity. It is noted that Highways have sought a shared use path to the site and as a minimum this should be provided.
- 6.16. OCC HIGHWAYS: **Objects.** 1) The level of car parking proposed is based on the more intensive B2 use class. Since the site will be mixed use with B8, the level of

parking proposed is above the County Council's maximum standard. The level of parking provided should be based on an anticipated breakdown of floor area between the proposed uses. 2) Furthermore, the layout and surfacing of parking spaces in certain areas appears inappropriate with certain spaces seemingly inaccessible. This may lead to ad hoc parking in other areas of the site which could obstruct emergency access.

Other points to note:

- The proposal to access the New Technical Site via the existing access on Buckingham Road is acceptable;
- The secondary access should only be retained for the purposes of emergency access and for use during special event days, where necessary;
- Note should be taken of the 'strategic transport improvements' comments and how these improvements may impact upon any future plans for access from the site onto Skimmingdish Lane;
- A contribution towards Strategic Transport Improvements is required;
- The development will lead to an increased need for a signalised crossing of Buckingham Road. It is requested that the development provide this under a S278 Agreement;
- Improvements to the bus stop infrastructure at the pair of bus stops on Buckingham Road are required;
- The proposed footways at the site access should have a minimum width of 3m to allow for shared use and should extend to the Skimmingdish Lane arm of the roundabout to provide a link with the shared use footway/cycleway on the southern side of that road;
- The County Council requests that the level of cycle parking proposed is revised in line with the County Council's minimum cycle parking standards;
- The submitted Framework Travel Plan must be revised in line with comments from the County Council's Travel Plans team;
- A Construction Traffic Management Plan will be required.

6.17. OCC DRAINAGE (Lead Local Flood Authority): **Object.** It is not clear whether infiltration testing has been undertaken at the site itself which is required to inform the detailed design. It also does not consider that sufficient information has been provided within the drainage strategy regarding the strategy to manage the high and medium probability of surface water flooding on the southern site. A SUDs Management and Maintenance Plan must be provided (to be conditioned).

6.18. OCC ARCHAEOLOGY: **No objection** subject to planning conditions in respect of a Written Scheme of Investigation, archaeological evaluation and mitigation.

6.19. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: **Supports the proposal.** The proposed development accords with the Council's Economic Growth Strategy, building upon the considerable success of Bicester Heritage in restoring this important site. The development will enhance the cluster alongside the hotel and conference proposal

and support not only existing and potential tenants but also the wider economy through the development of skills and inter-relationships.

- 6.20. The local Economic Development Strategy, adopted in 2011 by the Council, identified its desired outcome with RAF Bicester as being to:

“Conserve the heritage land and buildings through a commercially viable scheme” and “Attract more visitors & expenditure to Bicester.”

- 6.21. With the first ambition, the progress made to date has been impressive and has exceeded expectations by not only restoring the fabric of the buildings but also developing a unique cluster of commercial activity that provides high quality specialist services, employment and skills. The second ambition is being realised through a separate planning application to develop a significant hotel and conference facility on the Bicester Heritage site. The combination of both development proposals is consistent with the aims of the Council’s economic growth objectives. The resultant ‘hub’ of activity promises not only to serve the needs of existing businesses, enabling them to expand on-site, but should also create the facilities to support the leisure economy through creating experiences related to the primary uses and heritage of the site.

- 6.22. ARBORICULTURAL OFFICER: **No major concerns.** Trees proposed to be removed are category C trees. Do not feel the works will be of a negative visual impact to Skimmingdish Lane due to the retained vegetation acting as a buffer between the development and Skimmingdish Lane. Furthermore the majority of development within the site boundary is self-set, low amenity and low arboricultural merit trees that should not warrant protection, or retention over the development. A condition regarding a replanting tree plan should be imposed.

- 6.23. WILDLIFE TRUST: No comments received

- 6.24. BICESTER LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY: No comments received

- 6.25. BUSINESS SUPPORT UNIT: No comments received

- 6.26. HEALTH PROTECTION: No comments received

- 6.27. PLANNING POLICY: No comments received

- 6.28. RECREATION AND LEISURE: No comments received

- 6.29. CRIME PREVENTION DESIGN ADVISOR: No comments received

- 6.30. WASTE AND RECYCLING: No comments received

- 6.31. As a result of the consultation process, amended plans and information has been submitted at the time of writing the committee report and considered as part of this report. Further consultation is taking place with the relevant consultees and an update from those relevant consultees in respect of the revised plans and information will be reported to Planning Committee where this is possible.

7. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 7.1. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 7.2. The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 - Part 1 was formally adopted by Cherwell District Council on 20th July 2015 and provides the strategic planning policy framework for the District to 2031. The Local Plan 2011-2031 – Part 1 replaced a number of the ‘saved’ policies of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 though many of its policies are retained and remain part of the development plan. The relevant planning policies of Cherwell District’s statutory Development Plan are set out below:

CHERWELL LOCAL PLAN 2011 - 2031 PART 1 (CLP Part 1)

- PSD1 – Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development
- SLE1 – Employment Development
- SLE4 – Improved Transport Connections
- ESD1 – Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change
- ESD2 – Energy Hierarchy and Allowable Solutions
- ESD3 – Sustainable Construction
- ESD4 – Decentralised Energy Systems
- ESD5 – Renewable Energy
- ESD6 – Sustainable Flood Risk Management
- ESD7 - Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDs)
- ESD10 – Biodiversity and the natural environment
- ESD13 – Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement
- ESD15 - The Character of the Built and Historic Environment
- BIC8 - Former RAF Bicester
- INF1 – Infrastructure

CHERWELL LOCAL PLAN 1996 SAVED POLICIES (CLP 1996)

- TR1 – Transportation Funding
- C1 – Protection of sites of nature conservation value
- C2 – Development affecting protected sites
- C4 – Creation of new habitats
- C7 – Landscape Conservation
- C23 – Retention of features contributing to character or appearance of a conservation area
- C25 – Development affecting the site or setting of a schedule ancient monument
- C28 – Layout, design and external appearance of new development
- ENV12 – Development on Contaminated land

- 7.3. Other Material Planning Considerations

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal – November 2008
- Bicester Masterplan – Consultation Draft August 2012 (limited weight)
- RAF Bicester Planning Brief 2009
- Heritage Partnership Agreement – Bicester Heritage
- Cherwell Non-Statutory Local Plan 2011

8. APPRAISAL

- 8.1. The key issues for consideration in this case are:

- Principle of development

- Siting, orientation, form, scale and massing
- Design and external appearance
- Heritage assets
- Highway safety
- Ecology
- Trees and Landscaping
- Residential amenity
- Flood Risk and Drainage
- Contamination
- Energy Efficiency
- Planning Obligations

Principle of the development

Policy Position and Sustainability

- 8.2. The application site is allocated in the Cherwell Local Plan under Policy Bicester 8 for 'conservation-led' proposals to 'secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for the site and flying field'. The policy proposes a number of uses that will be acceptable at the site which includes employment uses. This proposal therefore accords with the allocation for the site within the Cherwell Local Plan.
- 8.3. In addition to Policy Bicester 8, the proposal for expanding the employment uses at the site is also supported by the wider policies of the Local Plan. Policy PSD1 ensures that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development that accords with the Plan and secures improvements to the economic, social and environmental conditions of an area, subject to other material considerations. Policy SLE1 relates to employment development and permits new employment development that is focused on existing employment sites. There is already an established employment site at Bicester Heritage in the form of the existing technical site and therefore this site is a suitable location for an intensification of that use, thereby complying with policy SLE1. It also complies with the aims and objectives of sustainability by providing additional employment development on a site on the edge of Bicester town centre, conserving the use of green field sites and being accessible to sustainable modes of transport.

Economic Benefits

- 8.4. The proposal will bring many economic benefits, not just to Bicester and the wider District but Oxfordshire, the south-east of England and the UK contributing to building a strong economy and delivering positive growth. The proposal will provide for highly skilled jobs in the areas of knowledge driven, creative and high-technology industries. Some internationally recognised brands, including some already at Bicester Heritage such as Historit and Porsche Classic Life, will be able to be retained and expand on the site whilst attracting similar new firms.
- 8.5. As set out in the applicant's Planning Statement, new businesses at Bicester Heritage will increase the potential opportunity for apprenticeship schemes and training from the specialist skills colleges on site. The site is also well connected to the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University and within the existing corridor of motorsport research and design and motorsport engineering.
- 8.6. According to the Council's Economic Development team, Bicester Heritage considers there are already 35 businesses at the site providing over 400 jobs worth around £35 million to the economy. The value added by the proposed development will expand this value considerably whilst also serving to protect existing jobs and enabling existing businesses on site to expand.

- 8.7. One of the objectives of the Local Economic Development Strategy (adopted by the Council in 2011) for RAF Bicester was to attract more visitors and expenditure to Bicester and to conserve the heritage land and buildings through a commercially viable scheme. Both of these ambitions are being delivered by the restoration of the existing buildings to an incredibly high standard and the recent approval in principle of a hotel on the site (Ref: 18/01253/F). The proposed development will further contribute to the Council's economic growth objectives.

Compliance with National Policy and Guidance

- 8.8. The proposal for new employment development, in a sustainable location such as on the edge of Bicester, is also considered to comply with the objectives of the NPPF and NPPG, in particular sections relating to sustainable development and building a strong, competitive economy. Para. 11 makes it clear that proposals that accord with an up to date development plan should be approved without delay. Para. 80 also stresses the importance that planning should create conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt and in this sense this proposal will be enabling Bicester Heritage to grow and expand further contributing to the local and wider economy.

Compliance with Planning Brief and Masterplan

- 8.9. A Planning Brief was adopted by the Council in 2009 for the former RAF site in order to secure its long-term future. This was written at a time when much of the site was identified on the then English Heritage's Heritage at Risk Register and no owner had come forward for the site. It also pre-dates the Cherwell Local Plan and the NPPF both of which now represent a more up to date policy context. Therefore, the Planning Brief is now somewhat out of date and therefore holds limited weight. However, there is some useful information within the Brief setting out the opportunities for the site and important constraints. It is considered that the proposal for new employment development complies with the site's allocation in Policy Bicester 8 of the Local Plan and generally conforms to the aspirations of the Planning Brief which was to preserve the site and secure its long-term viability.
- 8.10. Whilst Policy Bicester 8 requires development proposals to accord with the Bicester Masterplan, this document has only reached Consultation stage in 2012 and has not progressed further at this stage as it was overtaken by the Local Plan. Therefore, only very limited weight can be attributed to it. However, it is considered that this proposal, in according with other Local and National Planning policies, would be adhering to the wider aspirations of the Masterplan to encourage economic growth to Bicester and the District and improvements to social and environmental factors.
- 8.11. The proposal is not considered to impact on the continued use of the airfield as a gliding club which is set out in Policy Bicester 8 of the Local Plan and the Planning Brief that this use should be retained in order that aviation uses continue to be a feature of the site to retain links with the historic use of the site as a military airfield.

Conclusion

- 8.12. In conclusion, the principle of providing new employment development to the south of the existing technical site is considered to be acceptable and complies with the Development Plan, the National Planning Policy Framework and other material planning considerations subject to the details and all other issues being acceptable as set out in the following sub-headings.

Siting, Orientation, Form, Scale and Massing

- 8.13. Policy ESD 15 of the Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 states that new development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high-quality design. All new development will be required to meet high standards and should respect the historic environment including conservation areas and listed buildings. Policy Bicester 8 of the Cherwell Local Plan also makes it clear that development at this site is to be 'conservation-led', therefore meaning that it is what is appropriate for the site in terms of heritage related issues that must be at the forefront at all times. Both of these policies are supported by the NPPF (sections on design and heritage) which states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development to create better places (Para. 124). Decisions should ensure that (amongst other factors) developments are visually attractive; sympathetic to the local character and history and optimise the potential of the site (Para.127). Section 16 on the historic environment acknowledges that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance (Para. 184).
- 8.14. They are also underpinned by the saved policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996, in particular policies C28 and C30 requiring all new development to ensure that standards of layout, design and external appearance are sympathetic to the character of the context.
- 8.15. With the above policy context in mind, whilst the principle of new employment development at the site is supported, it is imperative that it is appropriately sited and designed to ensure that it fits in with the historical context of the site and respects the existing pattern of development.

Siting and Orientation of the buildings

- 8.16. The area proposed for the new employment development is to the south of the existing technical site, straddling an area of land that formerly was not part of the historic airfield. The former Skimmingdish Lane previously formed the southern boundary to the airfield and when this road was realigned further south, the land in-between became a 'degraded edge' to the existing airfield, covered in self-set vegetation.
- 8.17. During pre-application discussions, it was considered important from an historical perspective, that the former alignment of the Skimmingdish Lane be retained as far as practical within the proposed layout, which therefore set a constraint in terms of the siting of the proposed business units.
- 8.18. Earlier iterations of the proposal sought business units in a very regimented alignment adjacent to the southern boundary. This was considered to be unacceptable as it did not respect the sporadic, low density character and pattern of development on the existing technical site. The siting of the buildings was therefore revised and as part of this the orientation of the buildings was also amended so that there was much more variety to the units with some having their gables facing north-south and others east-west.

Form, Scale and Massing of buildings

- 8.19. There are 8 units proposed, all of different styles and arrangements. Some are more linear in form, with subservient additions (units A, C, H and F), whilst others are more square (units B and D). Unit E is to be physically attached to an existing building (building 143) in order to create a 'L-plan' form emulating the 'yard' arrangement evident in the existing technical site (buildings 129, 130 and 131). There is also proposed to be a small building (unit G) to the western end of the site to add further variety to the units.

- 8.20. The units propose a variety of heights and scales. The maximum ridge height is to be 8.1m with maximum eaves heights to be 6.1m, however in some instances these are lower at 6.1m and 4.6m respectively. Many of the units include a combination of higher and lower scaled buildings, sometimes with an element turned through 90 degrees such as in the case of Unit F, in order to break up the massing of the development. None of the proposed buildings will be higher than existing buildings on the technical site, which are shown to be in some cases 9.3m in height to the ridge (e.g. building 130).
- 8.21. Whilst the proposal seeks a relatively high density compared to the existing technical site, it is considered that with the amendments to the layout, creating variety to the siting, orientation, form, scale and massing of the development, it is considered that the amount of development proposed is acceptable.

Design and External Appearance

- 8.22. It is Bicester Heritage's desire for the new technical site to be of 21st century design and not pastiche in style, seeking to replicate the design of buildings on the existing technical site. Whilst this design approach was understood by officers and accepted to a degree, officers still felt that it was important that the design of these new buildings was appropriately influenced by the existing buildings, in order to maintain consistency in the design approach throughout the development, providing a transition between 'old' and 'new' and to be sympathetic and respectful to the heritage assets at the site. The predominant building material on the existing technical site is brick with metal cladding only really being evident on one building within the existing technical site (building 119). Whilst officers were content with a much higher proportion of metal cladding on the new technical site and did not wish for buildings to replicate those on the existing technical site, it was nonetheless considered to be important to strike a more appropriate balance between the use of brick versus metal cladding and to consider the detailing to the external appearance.

Design

- 8.23. The original submission with the application proposed buildings incorporating very little brickwork, only providing brickwork on gables ends and in some cases, not the whole of the gables ends but extending only a quarter of the way across. This was not considered to be acceptable as it was felt that the brickwork proposed was simply 'tokenistic' rather than appearing as an integral part of the design.
- 8.24. Officers requested that consideration was given to the use of brickwork around complete elements of the buildings (not just the gable ends), but Bicester Heritage did not want to consider this approach as they felt it went more towards the pastiche form of design and away from their contemporary approach. Instead they offered to increase the amount of brickwork to the gables ends. Following much discussions with the applicants surrounding this issue, officers were prepared to accept the brick gable end design approach, provided that all gable ends on the main units could be provided with brickwork. Bicester Heritage agreed to this request and it is on this basis that amended plans have now been submitted.
- 8.25. The proposals now show brickwork to all of the gable ends of the units, with the addition of more brickwork to Unit C (as part of this building is to have a flat roof) and all elevations of the smallest building (Unit G) will be provided in brickwork. The remaining elevations and all roofing will be provided with either green or dark grey metal cladding, which will be consistent with the colour palette used in the existing technical site.

Detailing and External Appearance

- 8.26. In terms of the detailing, the buildings are purposely designed to be simple and elegant, to meet the objective of a contemporary design. The buildings will include simple aluminium frames to the windows and steel flashing to the eaves and verges where the cladding meets the brickwork. In most cases, windows are provided as double or triple casements, but there are some elevations provided with circular windows, as evident on some of the existing (more prestigious) buildings within the existing technical site. The roofs are broken up with the use of linear rooflights in many cases. This design approach, does result in some elevations having blank elevations (all brickwork or metal cladding) with little or no interest via fenestration or detailing. Officers had requested the applicant's to consider providing more detailing to the buildings in the form of concrete string courses, concrete cills and lintels to windows and further fenestration. In particular, there is concern that the southern elevations require 'future proofing' in the event that highway landscaping is removed for the planned dualling of Skimmingdish Lane, to ensure that the frontage here does not result in the appearance of modern sheds. However, the applicant's amended submission does not include more detailing to the buildings as requested as they wish to retain the simple design and not incorporate pastiche elements from the existing technical site. The lack of windows to the southern elevation is due to security concerns and so they would prefer these elevations to remain as proposed.

Conclusion

- 8.27. The simple design approach is accepted by officers and it is understood that Bicester Heritage wish these buildings to be 'of their time' rather than creating a replica of existing buildings. The use of metal cladding has always been accepted as being appropriate for this purpose, but officers have maintained that the increased use of brickwork is important to ensure an acceptable integration of this large new development with the existing technical site. Whilst it would be preferable for the applicant's to have gone further to provide more detailing to the buildings to soften the appearance of these modern units, it is considered that on balance, the proposals are considered to be acceptable. With the use of lighting and signage to match the existing technical site (to be conditioned), and the significant increase in brickwork to the units from the original submission, it is considered that the development will continue to provide a high quality expansion to the existing technical site.

Heritage Assets

- 8.28. The significance of this site relates to this being one of the best-preserved examples of an inter-war airfield, developed after the First World War at a time when technological advances in aircraft led to a need for different philosophies in military architecture and urban planning, led by Sir Hugh Trenchard (founder of the RAF).
- 8.29. The Conservation Area Appraisal describes the military base at RAF Bicester as *'the quintessential airfield of its age; almost better than any other site it typifies the public perception of the World War II airfield'*. It goes on to say *'The character of RAF Bicester is unified by its function as a military station. There were principles underpinning the planning of airfields in the first half of the 20th century and these are key determinants of the character that remains today'*. *English Heritage (now Historic England) also states that 'RAF Bicester retains, better than any other military airbase in Britain, the layout and fabric relating to pre-1930s military aviation.....With West Raynham in Norfolk 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 1920's Home Defence Expansion Scheme'.

- 8.30. The base was designated a conservation area in 2002, its primary architectural and social historic interest being its interwar design, layout and use. The nature of the site is defined by the historic landscape character of distinct zones; the domestic site (to the west of Buckingham Road), the technical site and the flying field (to the east of Buckingham Road). The layout of the site is built to a 'trident' pattern – with 3 arms branching out from a central axis creating avenues. The location of buildings was deliberately spacious so that if any buildings were ever bombed other buildings may be preserved. The conservation area designation acknowledges the special architectural interest, and as a conservation area, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance and provides the context and framework to ensure the setting and appearance of sections of the military landscape are preserved.
- 8.31. Within the technical site and the flying field most of the buildings are Grade II Listed, including the A-Type and C-Type hangars. There are several Scheduled Monuments which includes airfield defence structures such as trenches, a pillbox and an air raid shelter later thought to be an anti-aircraft gun position.
- 8.32. Scheduled Ancient Monuments are designated within the context of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (AMAA 1979). This designation affords a higher degree of protection than Listing, and decisions about proposed development potentially affecting them are assessed by Historic England.
- 8.33. To date, Bicester Heritage as current owners of the site have so far focused on renovating and refurbishing the existing buildings at the site to a very high standard and bringing them back into viable use (mainly commercial with some office provision). In order to allow for the growth of the site and maintenance of other buildings, inevitably new development now needs to be considered.
- 8.34. It is in recognition of the significance of the site in the national context that Policy Bicester 8 of the Cherwell Local Plan requires a 'conservation-led' approach to the development to be taken. Policy ESD15 of the Local Plan also requires developments to conserve, sustain and enhance designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings.
- 8.35. In respect of this proposal the application needs to consider the impact of the development on the character and appearance of the conservation area, the setting of the conservation area, the setting of the listed buildings and the setting of the scheduled monuments.
- 8.36. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that special attention shall be paid in the exercising of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. Likewise, Section 66(1) of the same Act states that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
- 8.37. Paragraph 192 of the NPPF advises: *'In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:*
 - *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*

- *the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic viability;*
- *and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*

8.38. Paragraph 193 goes on to advise: *'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'*.

8.39. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a Grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, Grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

Impact on the Conservation Area and its Setting

8.40. The impact on the setting of the conservation area needs to consider views from within the conservation area and views outside the conservation area towards it. The application site is adjacent to the southern boundary of the RAF site. Three buildings (units C, D and E) are proposed to the north of the earlier Skimmingdish Lane and five are proposed to the south (units A, B, F, G and H). The three buildings to the north of the development will have a greater impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area when viewed from within the site, with the remaining five buildings having a greater impact on the setting of the conservation area when viewed from outside the site, albeit glimpses of other buildings will be possible from all angles.

8.41. Within the site, views from the north and further into the technical site will be partly obscured by existing buildings and existing trees. The amendments to the elevations of the closest three buildings (units C, D and E) to provide additional brickwork will ensure that the impact of these elevations are softened to a degree so that the appearance of metal cladding is not the predominant building material in this area.

8.42. Views from the east of the site, in particular from the nearest hanger (building 137) and building 136, the development will be more exposed. The increased use of brickwork to the gable ends of units C, D, F and B will help to alleviate this concern to an extent. The development here will also be softened by the retention of the defence structures and shelters (not listed), the green spaces and grasscrete car parking areas and the attenuation features.

8.43. Currently views from outside the site to the application site and conservation area are limited due to substantial highway landscaping to the northern side of Skimmingdish Lane. However, as advised by OCC Highways, it is the intention of the Transport Strategy for Skimmingdish Lane to be dualled in this location in the future resulting in the use of highway land currently providing this landscape screen. Whilst there is currently a slim area within the application site adjacent to the southern boundary where additional landscaping is proposed, this is unlikely to provide full screening to the proposed units in this location. However, the set back of the units, coupled with the smaller elements of some of these units (units A and

H for example) and the provision of more brickwork to the elevations (units A, B, F, G and H), is considered to reduce the harm to the setting of the conservation area.

Impact on the setting of the listed buildings and other non-designated heritage assets

- 8.44. The nearest listed buildings to the site are buildings 130, 131, 135, 137 (A-type hanger), 146 and 147. The impact on buildings 130, 131, 135 and 137 is reduced by the orientation and siting of the nearest proposed units (units C, D and E), to break up the massing and the increased use of brickwork to the gable end elevations. The impact on buildings 146 and 147 is also lessened by the creation of a smaller unit here (unit G) which is to be provided with all elevations in brickwork. Units A, E and H also have additional brickwork to the gable ends which will now help to reduce the impact to the significance of these buildings.
- 8.45. Other adjacent buildings that are not listed but make a positive contribution (considered non-designated heritage assets) are buildings 136, 143 and 144. As above, the closest proposed units to these buildings are now provided with significantly more brickwork which will soften their impact. In the case of building 143, unit E is designed to physically attach to this building in order to create a 'yard' arrangement. As this building is not listed, it is an appropriate way of transitioning the existing and new technical sites together.
- 8.46. There are the remains of a pyrotechnic store adjacent to the southern boundary of the site as well as other defence structures. Whilst these features are not listed or scheduled, they are considered to make a positive contribution to the setting of the site. Through pre-application discussions, the applicant has agreed to retain all of these within the proposals. The corner of the pyrotechnic store will be utilised as part of a bike store adjacent to unit A and the defence structures will be retained in situ to the south and east of Unit C, where they will be set amongst green spaces and grasscrete car parking areas.

Setting of Scheduled Monuments

- 8.47. The only scheduled monument that is in close proximity to the site is a defended air raid shelter at the south-eastern corner of the closest hanger (building 137). However, due to the distance from the proposals, the application is not considered to cause any harm to its significance. Furthermore Historic England has been consulted on this application and has not made any comments in this respect.

Archaeology

- 8.48. In respect of archaeology at the site, OCC has confirmed that whilst the site is located in an area of archaeological interest, the site has been truncated by various ground disturbances associated with the development of the airfield which would have disturbed any archaeological features, but the site still has potential to contain archaeological deposits. Therefore it is recommended that a condition is imposed if planning permission is to be granted to require the applicant to carry out a staged programme of archaeological investigation in order to safeguard the archaeological recording of any deposits in accordance with the NPPF.

Conclusion

- 8.49. The NPPF states at paragraph 197 that a balanced planning judgement will be required by the planning authority having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage assets.

- 8.50. In conclusion, and taking into account the advice in the NPPF, the proposal is considered to cause less than substantial harm to the heritage assets at the site. The applicants have minimised the harm as much as possible whilst also providing the contemporary design approach they are seeking.
- 8.51. Under paragraph 196 of the NPPF, the authority must consider...'*Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use*'. It is considered that the development of new employment uses at RAF Bicester provides substantial public benefit in terms of supporting and securing an optimum use for the wider site which is financially viable, bringing significant economic benefits to Bicester and the wider area and will ensure the longer-term conservation of the heritage assets on the site.

Highway safety

- 8.52. At the time of writing this committee report, negotiations are still ongoing with highways in relation to some specific matters as they have objected to the application. However neither of their objections is considered insurmountable. Their objections relate to:
1. The level of car parking proposed is based on the more intensive B2 use class, whereas the site includes a mixed use with B8 and B1 uses, which creates a level of car parking above the County Council's maximum standard. The level of car parking should be based on the anticipated breakdown of floor area for each use;
 2. The layout and surfacing of the parking spaces in certain areas appears inappropriate with certain spaces seemingly inaccessible. This may lead to ad hoc parking in other areas of the site which could obstruct emergency access.
- 8.53. Having discussed these matters with the Highways Officer and the applicant, amended plans have now been submitted to resolve these objections (amongst other issues) and re-consultation with OCC Highways is being undertaken. It is hoped that a response will be received from OCC Highways prior to the committee meeting that can be reported in the written or verbal updates, but if not, delegated authority will be requested to officers to resolve any matters still outstanding at that time. There are also some other highways issues that need to be resolved, but these did not constitute objections from Highways. One of the matters still being negotiated relates to a couple of the planning obligations requested by OCC Highways (this will be explained later in this report under the sub-heading Planning Obligations).
- 8.54. The proposals include a variety of measures in order to provide mitigation for the development to ensure that it is acceptable in terms of highway safety and provides the appropriate level of connections (public transport, pedestrian, cycling) to improve the access to the site by other more sustainable modes of transport. These measures are set out in the following sub-sections for clarity.

Traffic Impact

- 8.55. The main access to the proposal will be via the existing access to the main site just north of the Buckingham Road roundabout. This junction is expected to operate within capacity in the future year 'with development' scenario. The TA for this application shows a traffic generation of 51 two-way trips in the AM and 46 two-

way trips in the PM which equals 97 two-way trips per day. Highways do not consider this level of traffic would lead to severe wider traffic impact, but nevertheless the TA has not considered the cumulative impact of the proposal together with the live application for a hotel (18/01253/F). Despite this, off-site mitigation is not required to make this development acceptable in planning terms.

- 8.56. The existing access is to be gated and controlled with a kiosk. Whilst there is some concern that 2 or more HGV's waiting to turn right into the site would block the northbound carriageway of the Buckingham Road, these instances are likely to be rare. In addition, there is capacity for the site access to hold several smaller vehicles without blocking the highway.
- 8.57. The existing access to the south of the site direct from Skimmingdish Lane is to be retained, but only to be used as an emergency access and for special event days and this is considered to be acceptable to Highways due to the infrequency of its proposed use. An intensification of this access would not be supported and may in any case be impacted upon due to future proposals to dual Skimmingdish Lane.

Car Parking

- 8.58. The amount of car parking proposed as part of the original planning application submission was 125 car parking spaces, including 6 disabled bays. However, based on the objection from Highways this has been reduced down to 84 car parking spaces and 3 disabled spaces. This is based on a quantum of development of: B1 use – 1632 sq m; B2 use – 1632 sq m and B8 use – 3265 sq m as requested by Highways. This amount of development would require a maximum of 103 car parking spaces and therefore the amount provided is now within the County Council's standards.
- 8.59. It is recognised that the applicant wishes to have flexibility regarding this quantum of uses and as such, as requested by the applicant, it is considered appropriate to impose a condition, that should this mix of uses change and more car parking be required, that further details will be submitted. This is to ensure that there is no ad hoc car parking around the development which could be unsightly and reduce the standard of the development, whilst also causing highway restrictions in terms of turning and manoeuvring.

Public Transport

- 8.60. OCC Highways require the provision of a shelter for the northbound bus stop on Buckingham Road (there is already a shelter for the southbound bus stop) and a pair of real-time information signs for both stops given the likely increase in use of these stops and to encourage use of public transport by staff. Financial contributions for these measures would need to be secured via a Section 106 Agreement.
- 8.61. Additional improvements to the bus stops are also required via S278 agreement such as hard standing areas and electrical supply and infrastructure for the real time information systems.
- 8.62. At the time of writing the committee report, these items are still being discussed further between the applicant and Highways. It is hoped a resolution on this issue can be reported to planning committee, but otherwise delegated authority is requested to officers to resolve this issue satisfactorily.

Pedestrian accessibility

- 8.63. The Transport Assessment incorporates a plan (J32-3568-PS-001) that shows a pedestrian footpath link north of the existing access to connect to the southbound bus stop on Buckingham Road and another footpath link to the south of the existing access to connect to the island crossing point at the roundabout, creating a new tactile crossing link to the west side of the A4421. Tactile crossing points are also proposed outside the gated entrance to the site.
- 8.64. Highways have advised that these footpath links need to be increased in width from 2m to 3m. The southern footpath link should also be extended to link around to the shared footpath/cycleway on the southern side of Skimmingdish Lane. In addition, the speed restriction along the Buckingham Road will also need to be reduced to 40mph from 50mph.
- 8.65. Highways have also advised that a Toucan pedestrian crossing should be provided at the bus stops. Whilst it is noted that a crossing point is provided as part of the hotel application (18/01253/F), a crossing also needs to be shown as being provided for by this application as it will need to come forward with whichever development comes forward for development.
- 8.66. At the time of writing the committee report, amended plans in this respect have not been received from the applicant. It is hoped that an update will be provided to committee regarding this issue, otherwise delegated authority is requested to officers to satisfactorily resolve this issue in liaison with Highways and the applicant.

Cycling provision

- 8.67. Provision has been made for 15 cycle parking spaces, however this is considered to be below the County Council's minimum cycle parking standards as this is based on the less intensive B8 use rather than the more intense B2 use. The County Council wish to have further discussions regarding this issue with the applicant but it is considered this can be addressed through the imposition of a planning condition in respect of the amount of cycle parking to be provided. A condition will also be imposed to ensure the cycle provision is secure and covered.

Travel Plan

- 8.68. The Travel Plan currently submitted with the application requires several changes to be made to it however these can be dealt with by the imposition of a planning condition.

Ecology

- 8.69. The application site is adjacent to a non-statutory designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS) but it is not itself within the designation. There are two statutory designated site within 2km of the site, the SSSI to the north of the airfield (the former quarry) and Bure Park Local Nature Reserve, but these are both considered to be a sufficient distance from the site, with little connectivity, to not be affected by the proposals. Notwithstanding this, the application has been submitted with an Ecological Assessment to support the proposals and has been assessed by the Council's Ecologist.
- 8.70. Policy Bicester 8 of the CLP Part 1 which allocates the site for development purposes, requires the biodiversity of the site to be protected and enhanced and habitats and species surveys (including a Great Crested Newt Survey) should be undertaken. Policy ESD10 of the CLP Part 1 also requires due regard to be given to biodiversity and the natural environment and these policies are both supported

by national policy in the NPPF. Also, under Regulation 43 of Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017, it is a criminal offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place.

Great Crested Newts

- 8.71. The Council's Ecologist has advised, in assessing the submitted report that the Great Crested Newt survey method has not been carried out in accordance with Natural England Standing Advice, as it relies on old survey data from 2016 which did not carry out the required number of survey and was also not carried out in the peak season. There are two ponds within the application site that have been dry for some time and therefore it has been concluded in the Ecological Survey that the application site is not utilised by Great Crested Newts. However, given the limitations of the data, this conclusion is questioned as the ponds could re-fill at any time in the future. From the proposed site plan, it suggests that the ponds are to be lost through the development but there has been no assessment of this loss. A precautionary approach would be to retain the ponds in situ.
- 8.72. As part of the amended plans submission, further detail has been provided by the applicant's Ecologist in respect of the 2016 survey work undertaken. This explains that a Phase 1 habitat survey in 2016 showed the two waterbodies present as being of "poor" suitability for the species. Further survey work was undertaken as a precaution and carried out at a time of year in 2016 when Natural England accepted later dates than typical for surveys due to the particularly cold spring. It has therefore been concluded that these waterbodies are ephemeral waterbodies that are not suitable to support Great Crested Newts. During assessment by the applicant's Ecologist this year no evidence of waterbodies was discovered, only bare ground and leaf litter typical of damp, shaded scrub habitat. Notwithstanding this, whilst one of the ponds will be lost, the other pond is now to be retained as an attenuation feature (in order to address the objection from OCC Drainage).
- 8.73. At the time of writing the committee report, further consultation response from the Council's Ecologist is awaited, but it is hoped that an update on this issue can be provided to members, otherwise delegated authority will be requested to ensure this can be resolved and that there is no objection from the Council's Ecologist.

Habitats

- 8.74. The habitats within the application site are considered by the applicant's Ecologist to be of no significant ecological value including short mown semi-improved grassland, areas of recolonising and bare hardstanding, tall ruderal vegetation, waterbodies and buildings. Of slightly higher ecological value, but still of no value in the context of the wider site, are scattered trees and areas of young semi-natural broadleaved woodland. The vast majority of these habitats will be lost as a result of the development but their loss is not considered to be of any particular ecological significance.
- 8.75. Areas of semi-improved grassland will be retained within the proposed development, including those areas in the eastern part of the site and new species rich calcareous grassland will be created that will be subject to appropriate management to maintain and enhance their value for biodiversity. A number of new trees and shrubs will be provided in order to mitigate for losses of young broadleaved woodland.

Bats

- 8.76. There are no buildings within the application site shown to support roosting bats. A number of trees present in the east and north-west of the site may provide limited opportunities for roosting bats and will be fully retained in the proposals.
- 8.77. Habitats for foraging and commuting bats are available along the band of woodland to the south and west of the application site, which continue outside the site and are largely to be retained as part of the proposal so that foraging and commuting opportunities for bats is unlikely to be significantly affected.
- 8.78. The provision of new tree and shrub planting and bolstering of the retained band of woodland will provide enhancements for foraging resources. In order to provide new roosting opportunities, it is recommended that a number of bat boxes are installed on suitable trees within the application site. A lighting scheme for the development will need to ensure that these habitats are not adversely affected by artificial light by using hoods and cowls to reduce light spillage and direct lighting away from these features.

Reptiles

- 8.79. There are not considered to be any habitats within the site that are suitable for reptile species due to largely comprising heavily shaded young woodland and close mown semi-improved grassland. The proposals would have negligible potential to directly impact upon reptiles during site clearance and construction operations.
- 8.80. The proposals will provide significant areas of suitable reptile habitat in the form of long species-rich grassland and the continued management of these areas as a long tussocky sward would ensure that opportunities for this group would be enhanced in the long term.

Birds

- 8.81. There are some opportunities for nesting birds in the form of young woodland and scattered trees within the application site. A single breeding bird survey recorded the presence of a limited range of common and widespread species utilising the hedgerow. It is therefore considered that the site is of no particular significance in terms of supporting nesting or wild birds.
- 8.82. Any minor clearance of hedgerows should be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (March – September inclusive) or alternatively that checks are made for nesting birds by an ecologist immediately prior to any vegetation removal. The proposals to provide additional tree and shrub planting and bolstering of the adjacent band of woodland will provide enhancements for breeding birds and the areas of long tussocky grassland will also provide potential for ground nesting birds.

Conclusion

- 8.83. At the time of writing the committee report, the situation with regards to Great Crested Newts and the loss of the ponds is still being assessed by the Council's Ecologist and an update on this matter will be provided to committee.
- 8.84. In all other respects, the proposals are considered to be acceptable in terms of ecology at the site subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions as set out by the Council's Ecologist and that the Council's statutory obligations in relation to protected species and habitats under the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017, have been met and discharged.

Trees and landscaping

- 8.85. The application has been submitted with an Arboricultural Report dated July 2018. The proposed development will require the removal of self-set, low quality trees that run parallel to Skimmingdish Lane and a small number of individual, mature trees located within the site. The existing boundary vegetation that runs adjacent to the site will be unaffected and reinforced by the planting of trees and shrubs, both along the landscape bunds and within the site.
- 8.86. The Council's Arboricultural Officer agrees with the findings of the report in that the trees to be removed are categorised as category C trees and the majority of the vegetation within the site boundary is self-set, low amenity and low arboricultural merit trees that should not warrant protection, or retention over the development. The works are not considered to have a negative visual impact to Skimmingdish Lane. A condition is recommended regarding the imposition of a replanting plan so as to give mitigation to trees removed and giving detail as to the replanted trees and their locations. A landscape management plan will be required to ensure the successful establishment and long-term viability of the proposed landscaping.
- 8.87. In terms of hard landscaping, this is to consist of tarmac road areas and grasscrete for some of the parking areas. Officers have expressed some concerns regarding the use of grasscrete, as if used frequently; the grass becomes compacted and will not survive. However, the applicants request that grasscrete is used as it is already used elsewhere throughout the existing technical site. Therefore officers are willing to accept the use of grasscrete with the imposition of a condition for the detail of this to be agreed to ensure that a suitable method of grasscrete construction is used.
- 8.88. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been submitted with the application, which concludes that the proposals will have a significant local impact but that this impact is confined to the site itself. Wider impacts will be mitigated by existing screening from buildings that already exist on the wider site or from local screening on the highway verge, plus supplementary planting within the site as part of a new landscape scheme. Whilst there will be significant change to the views from within the site itself, it is considered that the proposed buildings will not be out of scale with the other existing buildings nearby. Furthermore new planting will in time provide maturity and setting to the buildings to ensure that the proposals are assimilated successfully into the historic setting.
- 8.89. Whilst the assessment of the Landscape and Visual Impact is not disputed by officers generally, it has however been considered necessary to minimise the visual impact from a heritage perspective to include the use of more brickwork to the elevations. Officers were concerned that the significant use of metal cladding throughout the proposals would cause harm to the heritage assets at the site (as set out in the Heritage section of this report) and that this harm could be minimised by the integration of more brickwork. With this now shown on the amended plans, the proposals are not considered by officers to have a significant adverse visual impact on the wider landscape.

Residential amenity

- 8.90. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF includes, as a core planning principle, a requirement that planning should have a *high standard of amenity for all existing and future users*. This is reflected in Policy ESD 15 of the CLP Part 1, which states that new development proposals should: *consider the amenity of both existing and future development, including matters of privacy, outlook, natural light, ventilation, and indoor and outdoor space*.

- 8.91. The nearest residential properties are some distance away from the application site and on opposite sides of the road, therefore it is not considered that this proposal will cause any detrimental impact to residential amenities.

Flood risk and Drainage

- 8.92. The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 (low risk) of flooding from fluvial, tidal or groundwater. However, Policy Bicester 8 requires development proposals to consider the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and as the proposal is a major development, the application has been supported by a Flood Risk Assessment. A Drainage Strategy and Water Quality Management Report has also been submitted with the application. These reports have been assessed by the Environment Agency, Thames Water and OCC Drainage (Lead Local Flood Authority) as necessary.
- 8.93. The FRA confirms that flooding is low risk, the main risk being from surface water flooding (high and medium probability) and infrastructure failure. However, an industry standard recommends setting finished floor levels 150mm above ground level to offer a level of protection. A condition will be imposed in any case to require finished floor levels to be submitted (on grounds of visual impact) and so this will also be able to ensure the finished floor levels also meet the minimum level required in the FRA. It should also be noted that the Environment Agency have not objected to the application or raised any issue or suggested any conditions in respect of flooding at the site.
- 8.94. OCC Drainage as Lead Local Flood Authority has however objected to the application on the grounds that 1) it is not clear whether infiltration testing has been undertaken at the site and 2) they do not consider that sufficient information has been provided within the drainage strategy regarding the strategy to manage the high and medium probability of surface water flooding on the southern site.
- 8.95. The sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs) proposed includes the use of permeable paving, swale and an underground geo-cellular soakaway. However, infiltration rates have been used from within the Bicester Heritage area but it is not clear whether infiltration testing has been carried out at the site itself which will be required to inform the detailed design. Exceedance flow routes and surface water flow paths suggest access and egress along the southern boundary would be challenged due to surface water risk. Therefore more detail is required in the drainage strategy to demonstrate that this risk has been modelled and considered and designed to reduce this risk. OCC Drainage therefore raises an objection to the proposals on these grounds. At the time of writing the committee report, a revised Drainage Strategy has been submitted but OCC have not yet had opportunity to provide comments on this and it is hoped that an update in this respect can be provided as part of the updates for committee.
- 8.96. It is also not clear from the application who will be responsible for the maintenance of the SUDs and therefore a SUDs Management and Maintenance Plan will also be required to be submitted.
- 8.97. In terms of water, Thames Water has identified an inability of the existing water network infrastructure to accommodate the needs of this development. They therefore recommend conditions regarding water network upgrades and an Infrastructure Phasing Plan to be agreed with them prior to the first use of the business units.

- 8.98. In terms of waste water, regarding water network infrastructure capacity, Thames Water has no objections but recommends an informative to be imposed in respect of water pressure.
- 8.99. In respect of foul water, the application form states that it would be the intention to connect to the mains sewer. Thames Water has not provided any comments in respect of foul water and therefore it is considered that there are no issues in terms of capacity for the development to connect to the mains sewer.

Contamination

- 8.100. The proposals have been submitted with a Phase 1 Land Contamination and Ground Condition report which concludes that the application site is of low risk from contaminants and unlikely that ground conditions or potential pollutant sources would have any significant impact on industrial or commercial development and the associated receptors identified.
- 8.101. Notwithstanding the above, the Environment Agency and the Council's Environmental Health Officer consider that for the proposals to comply with the NPPF, conditions should be imposed in respect of contamination, including a preliminary risk assessment, site investigation, remediation strategy and verification plan and report. Further conditions regarding unexpected contamination and a Construction Environmental Management Plan should also be imposed as recommended by the Council's Environmental Health Officer.

Energy efficiency

- 8.102. Policies ESD1-5 of the CLP Part 1 require development proposals to mitigate the impacts of climate change by providing a reduction in carbon emissions through sustainable construction by using decentralised energy systems and renewable energy.
- 8.103. No Energy Statement has been submitted with the application but a brief Sustainability Statement has been provided at the end of the Design and Access Statement which generally sets out the proposed approach that will be taken in respect of energy efficiency and carbon reduction at the site, including a commitment to meet BREEAM "Very Good" rating.
- 8.104. The Council's Bicester Delivery Team has reviewed the Sustainability Statement and considers the proposals do not currently meet the policy requirements as there is no evidence submitted to show how the ESD policies will be met.
- 8.105. The applicants have therefore been asked to provide a detailed Energy Strategy and this has been submitted with the amended documentation that has recently been received. The following measures are now proposed specific to the proposals:
- Reduce heating demand;
 - Natural ventilation;
 - High efficiency internal and external lighting;
 - Lighting control strategy including daylight sensing detection;
 - Variable speed drives on pumps and fans;

- Duct-work and pipework to be suitably insulated;
- Use of metering and sub-metering to monitor energy used in the buildings;
- Use of highly efficient heat recovery ventilation system where applicable;
- Consider use of instantaneous DWH systems to reduce standby/storage losses;
- Ensure the use of energy efficient white goods;
- Use of air source heat pumps;
- Consideration of use of photovoltaic panels (subject to their heritage impact)

8.106. The Bicester Delivery Team are yet to provide further comments on the Energy Strategy but it is hoped that their comments can be reported to planning committee as part of the updates but if not, or the information is not to their satisfaction, then officers will request delegated authority from Members to resolve this issue before determination or via condition.

8.107. It should be noted that, whilst it is clearly important to ensure compliance with Policies ESD1-5, the energy proposals need to be balanced against the heritage context of the development to ensure that all proposals are appropriate to its surroundings and will not adversely impact on the heritage assets. The proposals stated in the Energy Strategy are all considered to be acceptable insofar as they will not have any impacts on the external appearance of the buildings. This is with the exception of the possible use of photovoltaic panels which could be considered harmful to the significance of the heritage assets. It is considered that if this is to be proposed, details of these would be required to be submitted via planning condition so that the impact can be assessed.

Planning Obligations

8.108. As set out in the Highways section, OCC Highways have requested the applicant to contribute the following S106 contributions as a result of the development:

- Strategic transport contribution (£177,912) (still to be agreed)
- Public transport infrastructure – northbound bus shelter and 2 x Real-Time Information displays (£24,284) (still to be agreed)
- Traffic Regulation Order (£2,600)
- Travel Plan Monitoring (£2,040)
- An obligation to enter into a S278 agreement
- S106 monitoring fees

8.109. A contribution towards Strategic Transport is required in accordance with the Local Transport Plan 4 Bicester Area Strategy Policy BIC 1 scheme which requires upgrading of the A4421 to a dual carriageway between Buckingham Road and Gavray Drive and the contribution would be used towards the Eastern Perimeter Route, Skimmingdish Lane section. Currently the contribution required has been based on another site at Wretchwick Green (a mixed use site) and a formula calculated using the number of trips likely to be generated from that development compared to this proposal. This amount is still being negotiated and therefore not agreed.

- 8.110. The provision of a bus shelter and real-time information systems is considered necessary as the proposed development will increase the use of these bus stops and their use should also be encouraged by staff at the proposed development in accordance with the Local Transport Plan 4 Bicester Area Strategy Policy BIC2 and the NPPF. This is still being negotiated and therefore not agreed.
- 8.111. In respect of the other S106 obligations requested, the changes to the Traffic Regulation Order are considered necessary in order to make the development acceptable in terms of highway safety by reducing the speed limit on Buckingham Road. A contribution is also required towards the monitoring of the Travel Plan over a period of 5 years to ensure that it remains up to date. S106 monitoring fees would also be required.
- 8.112. S278 highways works will also be required for works to the site access, a pedestrian crossing, a 3m wide shared use footway/cycleway, informal tactile crossings and bus stop infrastructure. It is intended that these measures would also be secured via S106.
- 8.113. OCC considers all these of these contributions are required in order to make the development acceptable in planning terms and that they are all justified and compliant with CIL Regulation 122. At the time of writing the committee report, these contributions have not all been agreed to by the applicant and it is understood that the applicant is currently liaising with OCC about these Heads of Terms. It is hoped that an update on these discussions will be able to be provided to Members at the Committee.

9. PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

- 9.1. The application proposes the erection of 8 new business units providing over 6000sq m of new employment space at the Bicester Heritage site, a nationally significant airfield dating from the inter-war period. Whilst the Council has considered through the Planning Brief 2009 and the Cherwell Local Plan Policy Bicester 8 that there is scope for new employment development at the site, it has been critical to ensure that this development is 'conservation-led'.
- 9.2. The amended submission is considered to meet this objective by proposing the increased use of brickwork to the units to ensure that the employment units provide a better transition between the existing and proposed development at the site. The scale and massing of the development respects the established pattern of development at the site and the contemporary approach to the design will create a high quality development consistent with that already evident at the Bicester Heritage site.
- 9.3. Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal is considered to cause less than substantial harm to the heritage assets at the site, this is considered to be outweighed by the public benefits derived from the proposal in terms of finding an economically viable use for this part of the site and providing many economic benefits to Bicester and the District.
- 9.4. The proposal is not considered to cause harm to highway safety due to the mitigation measures provided, subject to agreement in respect to the requested planning obligations. Mitigation measures are proposed in relation to landscaping and visual Impact, trees, ecology, flood risk and drainage together with the imposition of conditions relating to various matters and also contamination and energy efficiency. The proposals are not considered to cause any detriment to the amenities of neighbouring residents.

- 9.5. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with the relevant policies of the Development Plan set out in the report, specifically Policy Bicester 8 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

10. RECOMMENDATION

Delegate to the Assistant Director of Planning Policy and Development to grant planning permission, subject to:

1. continuing negotiations in respect of the highways infrastructure, in particular the strategic transport contribution and other public transport and pedestrian/cycling infrastructure;
2. in the event that the highways infrastructure contributions are not resolved satisfactorily then the application will be reported back to committee with a revised recommendation;
3. no further objections are received from OCC Highways, OCC Drainage, CDC Ecology, CDC Heritage and Urban Design and the Bicester Delivery Team in respect of the amended plans and revised information submitted;
4. in the event that objections are still maintained relating to the application and these cannot be adequately resolved, the application will be reported back to committee with a revised recommendation;
5. Conditions relating to the matters detailed below (the exact conditions and the wording of those conditions to be delegated to the Assistant Director for Planning Policy and Development).
6. Completion of a planning obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as substituted by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, in accordance with the summary of the Heads of Terms set out below;
 - Strategic Transport Contribution in connection with Policy BIC 1 of the Local Transport Plan 4 in respect of the dualling of the eastern perimeter route and Skimmingdish Lane section (amount to be agreed);
 - £24,284 for Public Transport Infrastructure – for a north bound bus shelter and 2 x real-time information systems (to be agreed);
 - £2,600 for an amendment to the Traffic Regulation Order for a reduction in the speed limit on Buckingham Road;
 - £2,040 for Travel Plan monitoring
 - An obligation to enter into a S278 agreement with Highways
 - S106 Monitoring fees

Conditions:

(Full wording of conditions will be provided in the written updates)

General

1. Time limit – 3 years
2. Approved plans
3. Amount of uses approved – with flexibility

Design

4. *Finish floor levels (on grounds of visual impact and surface water flooding mitigation)
5. *Schedule of materials (including samples)
6. *Architectural detailing

7. Boundary treatment (if required) details to be submitted
8. Lighting strategy which also must take into account the recommendations in the ecology assessment and to minimise light pollution
9. Signage strategy

Trees and Landscaping

10. Landscaping scheme – hard and soft details – evergreen species, tree pit detailing
11. Further details of grasscrete
12. Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan
13. *Tree removal plan
14. Replacement tree planting plan

Highways:

15. No building to be occupied until access improvements (shared footway and pedestrian crossing) have been carried out
16. *Construction Travel Management Plan (CTMP)
17. Car parking – related to breakdown of uses
18. Cycle parking – secure and covered – amount to be increased
19. Amendments to Travel Plan – including Car Parking Management Plan
20. Secondary access emergency use only

Drainage

21. *Surface Water Drainage Strategy and SUDs management and maintenance
22. Water network upgrades or Infrastructure Phasing Plan – for water

Contamination

23. *Contamination – including a preliminary risk assessment, site investigation, remediation strategy and verification plan
24. Verification report and long-term monitoring and maintenance plan – no occupation
25. Unexpected contamination not previously identified, require development to stop and submit a remediation strategy

Energy Efficiency

26. The development should meet BREEAM 'Very Good' rating
27. Use of photovoltaic panels – details to be submitted if proposed

Noise:

28. *Plant and machinery
29. *Noise – acoustic enclosure
30. *Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP)

Economic:

31. Employment and Skills and Training Plan
32. Construction apprenticeships

Ecology

33. Accord with survey – Section 5
34. Mitigation Strategy for Great Crested Newt
35. *Landscape and Ecological Management Plan

Archaeology

36. *Written Scheme of Investigation
37. *Archaeological evaluation and mitigation

(* Approval will be required from the applicant for the conditions shown with an asterisk which at the time of writing the report are anticipated likely to need to be pre-commencement conditions)

Informatives:

1. EA advice – contamination of ground water
2. Thames Water – advice regarding water pressure, easements, wayleaves and to discuss proposed development in more detail. If wanting to connect to surface water network in future would constitute a material change
3. Architectural detailing – to include window depths and reveals; window detailing; wall finishes and colours; eaves and verge treatment details, street lighting, signage

CASE OFFICER: Maria Philpott

TEL: 01327 322261