



Planning and Heritage Impact Statement

**Site: Building 92- Parachute Store
Building 93- Power House
Building 94- Petrol Tanker Shed**

Former RAF Bicester

Applicant: Bicester Heritage Ltd

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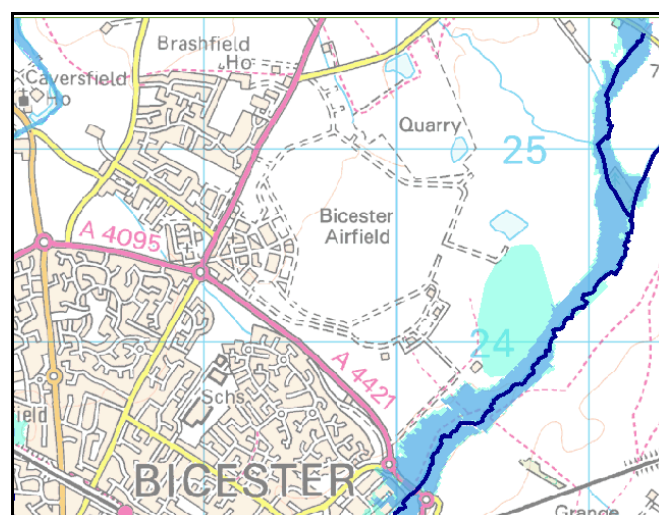
1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been produced by JPPC to accompany the application by Bicester Heritage Ltd seeking combined planning permission and listed building consent for the change of use of Building 92 at RAF Bicester to a B1 office and B8 storage. The same application seeks planning permission for the conversion of Building 93 to A1 showroom use and Building 94 to B1 workshops and offices, B8 storage and A1 showroom. The applications also seek the Council's approval for a number of associated external and internal alterations to facilitate the new uses.
- 1.2 With reference to the character of the application site and surrounding area, an appraisal of the prevailing planning policy and planning history specifically, and assessment of the planning issues raised by the proposal, this statement sets out why the development is considered acceptable.
- 1.3 The application should be read in conjunction with the plans and design and access statement produced by Gaunt Francis Architects.

2.0 Site Description, Planning History and Proposal

- 2.1 RAF Bicester is sited on the north eastern side of Bicester, north of the A4421, which is part of the "ring road" around Bicester. It extends to some 141.5 hectares and includes various buildings and a flying field. It does not include the residential site to the west of the A421.
- 2.2 RAF Bicester is a conservation area. Within the technical site there are 22 listed buildings and around the fringe of the technical site and flying field there are a number of structures which have scheduled monument protection.
- 2.3 The basis for designating the site as a conservation area, and listing or scheduling most of the existing structures, derives from the fact that it is one of the best preserved airfields of its age and has a long history of military flying.

- 2.4 Indeed, its flying field origins date back to its use as a Royal Flying Corps aerodrome towards the end of WWI and, from 1925 onwards, as a military airfield by the newly formed Royal Air Force. Whilst many of the buildings have not been actively used for decades, English Heritage identify that the site's importance relates to the fact that it retains: *'...better than any other military airbase in Britain, the layout and fabric relating to pre-1930s military aviation...it comprises the best-preserved bomber airfield dating from the period up to 1945...It also comprises the best preserved and most strongly representative of the bomber stations built as part of Sir Hugh Trenchard's Home Defence Expansion Scheme'*.
- 2.5 In addition, it is relevant to note that the technical site layout has not been affected by later infilling, as at Upper Heyford for example, nor have the structures been significantly altered. Indeed, as confirmed in the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA), the special interest of the site lies in the fact that a number of the buildings on the site are the only remaining examples of certain types of Inter-war airfield buildings and many of the remaining are the best preserved examples.
- 2.6 The site generally falls outside the areas liable to flooding on the Environment Agency website and there are some public rights of way to the eastern side of the site.



- 2.7 The buildings subject of this application numbered 92, 93 and 94, are situated towards the western edge of the site between the upper and central of the trident of roads that lead from the site entrance off the A421.

2.8 Building 92, also known as the Parachute Store, dates from the inter-war period having been constructed around 1926 and is Grade II listed. A copy of the listing specification is attached as **Appendix 1**.

2.9 The function and form of the building is also described in the 'RAF Bicester' publication produced by Airfield Research Publishing (Author Paul Francis, August 1996) in the following terms:

"From 1927 parachutes became standard equipment- all aircrew were measured up and issued with their own parachutes which had to be periodically inspected as fit for service. One of the main problems was condensation and to prevent shrinkage, they had to be dried out. A secure dry atmosphere was required with frequent ventilation and a temperature between 55-65 degrees F. The building had to be free of dust and built with a lobby so that the outer door was closed before the inner was opened. The main room had to be at sufficient height to permit parachutes to be hung so that they could be suspended from their apices for airing and drying without any part of the silk canopy touching the floor.

The Parachute Store was a specially designed building which met the requirements for parachute drying, inspection, packing and storage. The first purpose built design was 2355/25.

Construction is of permanent red brick with timber trusses carrying dormer roof light and slates.

Comments: this example is in excellent condition with all the main features present, including windows, lobby and dormer roof light. Used post WWII as the Station Church. Other buildings of this type are extant at Abingdon, Evanton Hendon, Lee-on-Solent and Upper Heyford".

2.10 Building 93 is the Power-House; although the building is not included on the statutory list it also dates from the inter-war years and was altered in the years preceding WWII as part of military re-armament.

2.11 The 'RAF Bicester' publication (Francis, 1996) gives the following description of the form and function of the Power-House:

“Although called a Power-House, an outside supply of mains electricity was probably already available when it was built and therefore was more likely to be used as a Stand-by Set House. Total output from three diesel engines in this facility was 100kw. It was built in permanent brick construction with internal brick piers supporting cased steel beams and a flat concrete roof. Surrounding the building is a tall thick-section traversed blast wall. A brick and concrete Diesel Oil Compound is located nearby. Also here is a Transformer Enclosure and feeder pillar which are still in use.

Comments: today the diesel engines have been removed, but the engine room contains a Herbert Morris Ltd 3-ton crane. The internal walls feature green glazed bricks and the floor is covered with red quarry tiles. The building is in excellent condition and could easily be reused – being ideal for a company requiring a secure building.”

- 2.12 The final building subject of this application is Building 94, one of the Petrol Tanker Sheds on the airfield; the building is described in the ‘RAF Bicester’ publication (Francis, 1996) as follows:

“Prior to the RAF Expansion Period, the method of refuelling aircraft was to taxi aircraft to the Aviation Petrol Installation where they were refuelled. After 1934, the RAF’s mobile tanker system of refuelling aircraft became the standard practice. To house the many petrol tankers required, a range of Petrol Tanker Sheds were designed for all Expansion Period stations. They were built close to hangar aprons so that tankers had easy access to aircraft dispersed out on the airfield.

Building Nos. 94 and 136 (both 3-bay sheds) were the first to be built here, located close to the Type “A” Aeroplane Sheds. Construction is in permanent brick with a reinforced concrete roof. Steel rolling shutters were provided at either end of each bay. Later sheds were built to the same drawing and had either 4 or 6 bays and built close to the Type “C” Aircraft Sheds.

Comments: the six sheds built here are present and all are in excellent condition”.

Planning History

- 2.9 Prior to the acquisition of the site by Bicester Heritage Ltd early in 2013 there had been no significant recent planning history on the site and none at all in respect of building 90.
- 2.10 Since 2013, applications for listed building consent and/or planning permission have been submitted and approved in respect of building 87 (applications 13/01774/F and 13/01775/LB), building 82 (applications 14/00072/F and 14/00209/F) and building 102 (application 14/00454/F). A planning application for the re-use of building 119 is presently under consideration.

Proposals

- 2.11 Bicester Heritage is seeking to create the nation's first business park that is dedicated to historic aviation and motoring excellence and to create a campus of leading specialists. In this context, the overall vision is the creation of a mixed use development, with continued aviation activities from the flying field, and a range of campus uses related to the storage, maintenance, repair, sales etc of historic vehicles and aircraft, together with ancillary activities including office uses, training facilities and the provision of overnight accommodation.
- 2.12 The application proposes the change of use of the buildings to commercial uses in line with the vision for RAF Bicester. Planning permission and listed building consent is sought for the conversion of Building 92 to B1 office and B8 storage uses. Planning permission is also sought for the conversion of Building 93 to a use class A1 showroom and building 94 to B1 office and workshop, B8 storage and A1 showroom. The proposed changes for each building are considered in detail in the accompanying Design and Access Statement, they are however summarised below.

Building 92- Parachute Store

- 2.13 The parachute store is a grade II listed building reflecting the structure's national importance as a heritage asset. The proposals involve minimal changes to the internal and external fabric of the building. The principal works

are those of repair with the existing fabric restored as far as possible and replaced in a sensitive manner where necessary.

- 2.14 The most significant change to the fabric is the replacement of existing asbestos roofing slates with artificial items of matching patterns and sizes. Sensitive trade signage and lighting is also proposed alongside the access door. Internally changes are minimal with a small lobby created at the access and w.c. and kitchenette facilities inserted in an existing enclosed area. The main part of the building is retained as a single open space respecting the character and original purpose of the parachute store. The proposed B8 and B1 office use are suited to the open space proposed.

Building 93- Power House

- 2.15 The proposed showroom use is entirely compatible with the large open expanse of the Power-House and would benefit from its highly secure construction. The proposal retains the open character of the building with associated offices and amenities making use of existing enclosures within the structure.
- 2.16 No significant external changes are proposed to the building with the emphasis on restoration where possible and sensitive replacement where necessary. Additional security gates required for the proposed use are proposed to be sensitively sited inside the substantial outer wall meaning they are not visible outside the structure, and not obvious from within the building.

Building 94- Petrol Tanker Shed

- 2.17 The proposed physical changes respect the existing building with an emphasis on reuse of fabric where possible. The most significant change is the insertion of a glazed frontage to each bay of the shed. The proposed glazing has a vertical emphasis respecting the building proportions and the overall character of the structure.
- 2.18 Internally limited changes are proposed with the bays retained as single open spaces. The rearmost part of the central bay is proposed to be enclosed to provide kitchenette and w.c. facilities for each unit. The proposed B1, B8 and

A1 uses are in keeping with the overall aim of the site; flexibility is intended to offer best opportunity for letting to suitable tenants.

3.0 Planning Policy

3.1 Under Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 there is a statutory obligation to determine planning applications and appeals in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

3.2 The Development Plan in Cherwell District presently consists of the saved policies of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996.

3.3 The Council has a non-Statutory Local Plan dating from 2004 which was adopted by the Council for development control purposes but which carries no statutory weight.

3.4 The Council has also submitted the new Cherwell Local Plan (2006-2031) to the Secretary of State for formal Examination. Public examination sessions have been held with the Plan being amended in line with the Examination Inspector's requirements. The Examination Inspector is yet to publish his findings from the Local Plan Examination but the plan nonetheless represents the Council's latest policy vision for the future and indicates how it wishes it to proceed in the future; therefore it is an important consideration for this statement.

National Planning Guidance

3.5 Government Guidance and Policy is also capable of being a material consideration to be taken account of in decision making. This is very up to date with the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 27th March 2012.

3.6 The NPPF presents a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In terms of proposals for development, this means that proposals which accord with the relevant development plan should be approved without delay, unless the effects of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the associated benefits (Para 14).

- 3.7 The core planning principles (para 17) underpin plan making and decision taking and state that planning should, *inter alia*, proactively drive and support economic development, encourage the re-use of existing resources and conversion of existing buildings, encourage the effective use of land that has been previously developed, promote mixed use developments and conserve heritage assets.
- 3.8 One of the central aims of the NPPF is to build a strong and competitive economy. It states that the Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity (para 18) and that planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth (para 19).
- 3.9 Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is indivisible from good planning – it should contribute positively to making places better for people (Para 56). Policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or tastes, although it is proper to seek to reinforce local distinctiveness (Para 60). Paragraph 73 recognises that access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well being of communities.
- 3.10 Local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying certain principles, as set out in the NPPF.
- 3.11 The NPPF also sets out the Government’s approach in using the planning system to conserve and enhance the historic environment. Where applying for planning permission, applicants should be required to assess the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution which is made by their setting. The level of detail provided should be proportionate to the asset’s significance and no more detailed than sufficient to assess the potential impact of the proposal upon this significance.
- 3.12 As a minimum, the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any assets which may be affected by a proposal, taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise (Para’s 128 - 129). In planning for the historic environment, local planning authorities should

have up-to-date evidence about the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment (Para. 169).

- 3.13 Finally the NPPF encourages pre-application engagement and front loading to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system.

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan (CLP)

- 3.14 The Adopted CLP is of an age which may be considered out of date by the NPPF. There have also been significant material changes in circumstances at RAF Bicester since its adoption, notably the designation of the conservation area, the statutory listing of many of the buildings and designation of scheduled monument status open other structures.

- 3.15 Part of the airfield at RAF Bicester surrounding the existing hangars was allocated for employment generating development with the remainder identified for recreational uses in Policy EMP2 of the adopted CLP. However, the policy was not saved.

- 3.16 Policy EMP 4 refers, more generally, to employment generating development in rural areas. According to Policy EMP4, the conversion of an existing building or group of buildings to employment use in rural areas will normally be permitted provided the form, bulk and general design of the buildings is in keeping with the surrounding area. The relevance of this policy, which was drafted to deal with redundant agricultural buildings, may be questionable, however it is an approach to existing buildings that is consistent with the NPPF and as such the spirit of the policy is relevant.

Non Statutory Local Plan

- 3.17 There are no policies in the NSCLP referring specifically to the RAF Bicester buildings or flying field. However, Policies EMP4 and EMP6 refer to existing employment sites and re-use of rural buildings respectively, with EMP6 supporting re-use provided proposals do not harm the character or the setting of buildings of architectural or historic interest. Again these policies are broadly in line with the thrust of the NPPF.

Cherwell Local Plan 2031 (Submission January 2014)

- 3.18 The emerging CLP has reached the examination stage and provides the most up to date indication of the Council's aspirations for development in the District.
- 3.19 Policy Bicester 8 relates specifically to the future use of RAF Bicester. It states that the Council '*will encourage conservation-led proposals to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for RAF Bicester's Technical Site and Flying Field*'. Additionally, the policy states that the Council will support a range of uses for the site - including employment, recreation, leisure, tourism and community uses.
- 3.20 It further identifies that the development of hotel and conference facilities may also be supported as part of a wider package of employment uses, but makes clear that development proposals must maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, protect listed, scheduled and other important buildings, and protect the sensitive historic fabric of the buildings and preserve the openness of the airfield.

Bicester Master Plan (SPD Consultation Draft Aug 2012)

- 3.21 The Master Plan identifies RAF Bicester as a mixed use employment area, described thus: '*providing a wide range of employment opportunities in new and refurbished buildings including the reuse of the listed buildings. Uses could include: history and heritage interpretation; conservation, repair and restoration activities; specialist aviation manufacturing and repair; community performing arts; health club and small business units and tourism facilities*'.

RAF Bicester Planning Brief

- 3.22 The Planning Brief was adopted by the Council in 2009 and, therefore, is a material consideration for future proposals at the site. It does not however have the status of a Supplementary Planning Document.
- 3.23 The Brief encourages the re-use of the buildings for their original purpose but recognises that, in most instances, a new use will need to be found. It seeks a comprehensive approach to the management of the technical site, which ensures a consistent maintenance regime across the campus style layout and no subdivision of the landscape with means of enclosure.

3.24 The Brief recognises that employment uses would be suitable for many of the buildings, but that care would need to be taken over the level of alterations to facilitate such uses.

4.0 Discussion

Listed Building Issues

4.1 Building 92 is a grade II listed building and subject to particular protection. The submitted application for listed building consent is subject to consideration beyond those of the planning application.

4.2 The proposal involves minimal physical alterations to the building. Wherever possible the existing fabric of the building is proposed to be retained and restored. The only significant change proposed is the replacement of the existing asbestos tile roof with a suitable replacement of matching appearance.

4.3 The applicants are aware of the desirability of maintaining historic fabric, however in this case the asbestos material is incompatible with modern use. The tiles are proposed to be replaced with items of the same size and a matching appearance laid in the same pattern. Sensitive replacement of the asbestos tiles will not be detrimental to the character or appearance of the listed building and will enable it's re-use. Securing a viable long-term use of the building will ensure protection of the asset in line with the requirements of the NPPF.

4.4 Other limited alterations are required to suit the building to modern purposes. A lavatory is to be created making use of the existing enclosure within the building, thereby avoiding incursion to the open space. Heating and lighting are to be installed in a non-intrusive manner respecting the importance of the open space of the building and minimising disruption of historic fabric. Insulation is also proposed within the roof space; this will be non-intrusive to the fabric and have no visual impact on the interior.

4.5 The NPPF requires that regard is paid to the particular significance of the heritage asset. In this case the particular significance is derived from the function of the building as a parachute store and how this dictated its form.

The large open space of the building that allowed the hanging of parachutes is a key part of the building's interest. The listing also refers to an entrance lobby that allowed climatic control of the drying area. The proposed use retains the open nature of the building preserving its character. The proposal also includes the reinstatement of a lobby to the external doors. The proposals respect the particular interest of the building and a viable use will ensure the future safeguarding of the building as required by the policies of the NPPF and Local Plan.

Planning Considerations

- 4.6 With regard to the overall impact of the proposed uses the commercial operations are entirely in line with the accepted vision for the site. The office, storage, showroom and workshop uses all complement the site vision for a heritage motoring and aviation hub. The proposed uses are well located within the Technical Site and are not of a nature that would give rise to any form of nuisance to neighbours, or any form of detriment to local amenity.
- 4.7 The proposed alterations to the buildings are visually discrete and in character with the existing structures and wider site. In the main physical changes are limited to restoration and necessary replacement of sub-standard fabric. The only clear visual alteration proposed is the insertion of glazing to the frontage of building 94. The proposed glazing complements the form of the original building with a simple vertical emphasis and does not give rise to any harm with regard to character or appearance.
- 4.8 The proposed developments are entirely in character with the area. A good deal of the interest of the conservation area arises from the collective value of the unusually complete group of buildings. The restoration of the historic buildings and the securing of their active use will preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area in line with the requirements of the NPPF.
- 4.9 The buildings all benefit from vehicular access points by virtue of their former use. Minor amendments and repairs are proposed to existing roadways to improve access to the buildings. Parking for the proposed units is included as part of these proposals in line with the Council's non-residential parking standards and will be provided in a sensitive manner. Where possible parking

is located on existing hardstanding; any parking that is not on hardstanding is to be surfaced in grasscrete to maintain the overall landscape character.

- 4.10 The structures subject of this application are set in a mature planned landscape that forms an integral part of the character of the area. The proposed developments have been designed to respect the existing area therefore no additional landscaping is included as part of these proposals.
- 4.11 Taken together, it is considered that the proposed re-use of the buildings for commercial purposes is in accordance with the site specific, employment and heritage related policies and guidance contained within the Adopted Local Plan, the NPPF and the Council's emerging policies. Additionally, the proposed use follows the principles set out in the Planning Brief for the site and would involve uses which are in accordance with those encouraged in the draft Bicester Masterplan.
- 4.12 In these circumstances, therefore, it is hoped that Officers will support the application and recommend that planning permission and listed building consent is granted.

APPENDIX 1

Listing Description

SP5924 A 421 (SOUTH-EAST SIDE) 1714/0/10055 RAF Bicester:
Technical Site 01-DEC-05 Building No 92 (Parachute Store)

GV II Parachute store and drying room. Dated 1926. By the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings, to drawing number 2355/25. Stretcher bond brickwork, diagonal asbestos-cement slates.

PLAN: A small rectangular gabled structure with lobby and principal space; above the main drying area a long ridge dormer light.

EXTERIOR: The main front has 4 large steel casements in 3 lights each of 8 panes, set to flush concrete lintels and stooled sills. The left gable has a wide pair of plank doors, with date-stone above, and the right gable a circular vent. The rear wall is plain, but with a central external brick buttress. Over the central bays is a continuous dormer light with 8 six-pane casements to a near-flat roof running back to the ridge.

INTERIOR: Retains original spatial layout, open to timber queen-post trusses visible, carried on internal brick piers. Panelled door to small office, with hatch.

HISTORY: The Technical Site at Bicester, separated from the Domestic Site, still has many original buildings, mostly of 1926 but with others added during successive phases of the 1930s Expansion Period. This is an important survival, virtually unchanged, that represents an unusually complete example of the earliest design for such a specialist store. An isolating lobby forms part of the layout, as it was important to reduce dust interference to the drying parachutes. For a time after World War II the building was used as the Station Church. This building comprises an unusually unaltered example of one of the first permanent designs for Britain's independent air force, standing on a uniquely important site.

Bicester is the best-preserved of the bomber bases constructed as the principal arm of Sir Hugh Trenchard's expansion of the RAF from 1923, which was based on the philosophy of offensive deterrence. It retains, better than any other military airbase in Britain, the layout and fabric relating to both pre-1930s military aviation and the development of Britain's strategic bomber force - and the manner in which its expansion reflected domestic political pressures as well as events on the world stage - in the period up to 1939. It was this policy of offensive deterrence that essentially dominated British air power and the RAF's existence as an independent arm of the military in the inter-war period, and continued to determine its shape and direction in the Second World War and afterwards during the Cold War. The grass flying field still survives with its 1939 boundaries largely intact, bounded by a group of bomb stores built in 1938/9 and airfield defences built in the early stages of the Second World War. For much of the Second World War RAF Bicester functioned as an Operational Training Unit, training Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders as well as British air crews for service in Bomber Command. These OTUs, of which Bicester now forms the premier surviving example, fulfilled the critical requirement of enabling bomber crews - once individual members had trained in flying, bombing, gunnery and navigation - to form and train as units. For further historical details see Buildings Nos 79 and 137 (Type 'A' Hangars).