



## **Planning and Heritage Impact Statement**

**Site: Building 105- Petrol Tanker Shed**

**Former RAF Bicester**

**Applicant: Bicester Heritage Ltd**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

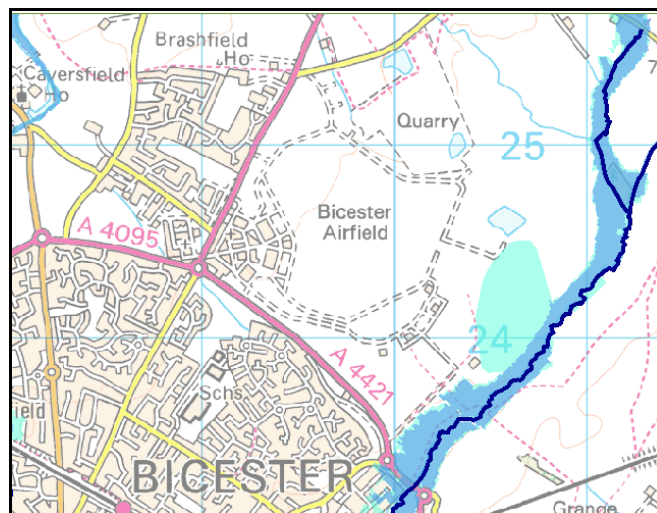
- 1.1 This statement has been produced by JPPC to accompany the application by Bicester Heritage Ltd seeking planning permission for the change of use of Building 105 at RAF Bicester to B1 workshops and offices, B8 storage and A1 showroom. The applications also seek the Council's approval for a number 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 Bicester Heritage 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 The former 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 105 is one of six 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 105.
- 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.
- 2.11 Applications have also been submitted for the conversion of buildings 92, 93 and 94 at the site. The proposed conversion of building 94 is particularly relevant as this structure is another of the site’s Petrol Tanker Sheds. At the time of drafting this report the application was unregistered and therefore without a reference number.

## Proposals

- 2.12 Bicester Heritage has created the nation's first business park that is dedicated to historic aviation and motoring excellence and a campus of leading specialists. In this context, the overall vision has been 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.
- 2.13 This application proposes the change of use of Building 105 to commercial uses in line with the vision for the former RAF Bicester. The building is proposed to change to B1 office and workshop, B8 storage and A1 showroom. The works proposed as part of the change are considered in detail in the accompanying Design and Access Statement and summarised below.
- 2.14 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 the two westernmost bays of the shed. The proposed glazing has a vertical emphasis respecting the building proportions and the overall character of the structure.
- 2.15 Internally limited changes are proposed with the bays retained as single open spaces. Sinks and tea making facilities are to be inserted to the front of the two western units in a modest cupboard integrated into the shop front. Occupants of the units will have the use of communal W.C. facilities on the site. 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 27<sup>th</sup> 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 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 (NSCLP)**

- 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**

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 The proposed alterations to the building are visually discrete and in character with the existing structure 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 two bays. 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.

- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 The buildings benefits from vehicular access points by virtue of its original use as a petrol tanker shed. Building 105 is set in a mature planned landscape that forms an integral part of the character of the area. The proposed development does not require the removal of any landscape features, nor is it considered necessary to add to it.
- 4.5 It is considered that the proposed re-use of the building 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 is in accordance with those uses encouraged in the draft Bicester Masterplan.
- 4.6 In these circumstances, therefore, it is hoped that Officers will support the application and recommend that planning permission and listed building consent is granted.