

# Heritage Briefing Note

**Project name:** Heyford Park  
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**Project number:** P16-O631

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. An application for Outline Planning Permission has been submitted to Cherwell District Council relating to the proposed development of up to 230 dwellings, creation of new vehicular access from Camp Road and associated works (LPA ref: 21/04289/OUT) on land adjoining and west of Chilgrove Drive, east of Heyford Park, Oxfordshire.
- 1.2. The application proposals are EIA development and are supported by an Environmental Statement, Chapter 9 of which relates to Cultural Heritage and Archaeology which includes a Built Heritage Statement at Appendix 9.1.
- 1.3. Dorchester Group have commissioned this review of the application proposals, to review and consider the findings of the Environmental Statement and Built Heritage Statement.

## 2. The Historic Environment

- 2.1. The application site is directly adjacent to the former RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area, which includes a number of other designated and non-designated heritage assets within its boundaries. The Built Heritage Assessment submitted with the application considers the contribution that the site makes to the significance of the various assets within the vicinity of the site, concluding that the only built heritage asset which warrants consideration in detail is the Conservation Area.
- 2.2. However, whilst the author notes that "*given the proximity of the Site to 3 of the HASs [hardened aircraft shelters], further assessment is required to assess the potential impact of the Site's development on these non-designated heritage assets*", they undertake their assessment of significance of these assets and the impact of the development upon them together with that of the Conservation Area and not independently.
- 2.3. This is an incorrect and overly narrow approach to assessment of the significance and impact of proposals upon non-designated heritage assets within the boundaries of this Conservation Area. When assessing potential impacts on non-designated heritage assets

within a Conservation Area, a High Court Judgement<sup>1</sup> has confirmed that a two-step assessment process should be undertaken.

- 2.4. Firstly, the impact on, the non-designated heritage asset should be considered individually under Paragraph 203 of the NPPF (and relevant local policies). The impact on the change in appearance or contribution to the non-designated asset on the overall heritage significance of the designated heritage asset (the Conservation Area) should then be considered separately within the context of Paragraphs 201 and 202 of the NPPF. This two-step assessment is not undertaken within the Built Heritage Statement and thus a full and robust assessment of the proposals within the Environmental Statement has not been undertaken and is thus deficient.
- 2.5. Turning to the contribution that the site makes to the significance of the Conservation Area via setting, the Built Heritage Statement and ES Chapter concludes that the site and setting of the Conservation Area as a whole makes no contribution to its significance due to the view that the airfield was "*not intended to interact with, or be integrated into, its surroundings*", which, with the exception for the airfield's military accommodation, south of Camp Road, this was reflected by the relative isolation of the airfield. The Built Heritage Statement goes on to state that "*additionally, the tall, barbed-wire perimeter fencing serves both as an impenetrable physical barrier between the base and its surroundings and also marks a clear boundary between the two landscapes of vastly differing character: the functional Cold War landscape of the airbase, and the surrounding, mostly farming landscape*" and that this separation was reinforced by "*the maturity of tree planting on the edges surrounding the airbase*".
- 2.6. However, it should be noted that the isolation of the airfield, particularly to the north, east and west, where it was surrounded by an agricultural landscape, is in fact key to reinforcing the significance of the airfield and its distinct, Cold War landscape. As such, any incursion of built form into the direct vicinity of its boundaries, such as is proposed as part of the application proposals, will harmfully dilute the isolated character of the airbase and thus have a harmful impact on its character.
- 2.7. Similarly, whilst the chain-link perimeter boundary fence forms a physical barrier between the Conservation Area and its surrounds, the very nature of the fence is that it is not a hard, impermeable barrier, but rather allows for views both into and out of the Conservation Area clearly demonstrating and reinforcing the differing character of the Conservation Area to its surrounds.
- 2.8. The presence of trees along the boundary of the Conservation Area is also a new intervention which again does not form an impermeable visual barrier.
- 2.9. In addition to the visually permeable nature of the site's boundary fencing, the scale and siting of the buildings within the Conservation Area, and in particular the HASs on the boundary, mean that views of the buildings above the treeline and on the horizon (as demonstrated within the Built Heritage Statement), betray the military character of the site.
- 2.10. Overall, it is incorrect to say that the site does not form part of the setting of the Conservation Area which contributes to its significance, rather it is the clear appreciation of

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<sup>1</sup> Spitfire Bespoke Homes Ltd v Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government and Warwick District Council – Neutral Citation Number: [2020] EWHC 958 (Admin) - Case No: CO/2285/2019 (22 April 2020).

the open, agricultural landscape outside of the boundaries of the Conservation Area which reinforces and strengthens the character and appearance and thus significance of the Conservation Area.

### **3. Impact of the Proposals**

- 3.1. As noted above, contrary to the assessments provided within the application, the application site is considered to contribute to the significance of the Conservation Area by reinforcing the existing military, Cold War character of the Conservation Area which contrasts with its agricultural surrounds to the north, east and west. Additionally, the open nature of the agricultural surrounds of the site and the surrounds creates a sense of isolation to the Conservation Area which positively contributes to its character and thus significance.
- 3.2. The illustrative masterplan shows 2-storey domestic scale housing directly adjacent to the boundary of the Conservation Area, and within direct proximity to the HAS structures which are identified by the Council as being non-designated heritage assets in their own right. A narrow landscape buffer is proposed along the sensitive edge of the Conservation Area in an effort to screen the proposed development from the Conservation Area.
- 3.3. Given that the proposals will see development brought right up to the boundary of the Conservation Area, in a location which is currently characterised as open agricultural land, this will inevitably have an impact on the setting and thus significance of the Conservation Area.
- 3.4. Whilst the detailed design of the houses in closest proximity to the Conservation Area boundary is not known at this stage, the illustrative masterplan shows them as being standard domestic scaled dwellings which do not respond to the prevailing character of the Conservation Area. In other locations where development is proposed to interface directly with the Cold War character of the Conservation Area, the design of new structures has needed to draw on the prevailing military character of the Conservation Area. The proposals fall far short of this and would be entirely incongruous additions to the setting of the Conservation Area.
- 3.5. If additional housing was to be required at Heyford Park, there are less-sensitive locations within the wider vicinity of the Conservation Area, which would have a much less stark impact on the open character of the surrounds of the Conservation Area which should be considered first.