

SUMMARY HERITAGE PROOF OF EVIDENCE

THOMAS COPP

OS Parcel 1570 Adjoining and West of Chilgrove Drive, and Adjoining
and North Of, Camp Road, Heyford Park

PINS Reference: APP/C3105/W/23/3326761

LPA Reference: 21/04289/OUT

Summary Heritage Proof of
Evidence
November 2023

Background and Scope of Evidence

1. My name is Thomas Copp and I am a Director of Built Heritage at RPS, having been at RPS for 9 years. I hold a degree (Bachelor of Arts with Honours) in History from the University of Leicester and a postgraduate degree (Master of Arts with Distinction) in Urban Conservation from the University of Leicester. I am an IHBC Associate, accredited in conservation practice that evaluates change in the built and historic environment, and have experience of acting for various clients in the private, public and charity sectors, alongside experience working in the public sector. In my current position I have appeared as a built heritage expert witness at Examinations in Public, Appeal Hearings, Public Inquiries and in the Magistrates Court. My experience includes advising on numerous residential schemes and the conservation and adaptive re-use of heritage assets. This includes ongoing advice for the redevelopment of the Cold War heritage assets at Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire.
2. The evidence I have prepared for this Inquiry relates to the first reason for refusal and the impacts to the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area and the related heritage assets. This includes the non-designated heritage assets of the seven Hardened Aircraft Shelters to the north of the Site and the Southern Bomb Stores.

Relevant Heritage Assets

3. The relevant heritage assets are shown on my Appendices B and C and comprise:
 - RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area (designated heritage asset)
 - Seven Hardened Aircraft Shelters within south-east extent of RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area, identified as Buildings 3037, 3038, 3039, 3040, 3041, 3042, 3064 (non-designated heritage asset)
 - Southern Bomb Stores within the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area (non-designated heritage asset)

Historic Development of RAF Upper Heyford

4. RAF Upper Heyford has developed from the First World War, with key phases of its development related to its Cold War use and particularly its development as a hardened NATO airbase. Residential development has existed alongside the Flying

Field since the inter-war period, although the quantum of residential development within the Residential and Technical areas has increased in recent years through the implementation of extant planning permissions. The approval of the hybrid application will also introduce additional residential development within the Flying Field, altering the character of this area and leading to the demolition of some structures, including a number of the stores within the Southern Bomb Stores. The construction of the Creative City will also change the form of the Hardened Aircraft Shelters and their settings, further separating them from the Site.

5. Residential development within the setting of the Conservation Area (and immediately west of the Site) has also been approved. These changes demonstrate the shift in the character and use of the Airbase from a military operation to a new settlement, with some commercial uses and significant amounts of residential development.

Heritage Assessment

6. **Hardened Aircraft Shelters** - the significance of the Hardened Aircraft Shelters lies in their historic interest as surviving examples of the hardened phase of Upper Heyford's development, which exemplifies a shift in military strategy. They provide a tangible link to the Cold War era and a physical reminder of the fear that became part of everyday life. The structures also possess architectural interest, with their form directly related to their particular function and they illustrate the evolving technologies that allowed for the construction of well-protected aircraft shelters.
7. The setting of the Shelters relates to their shared group value and association with the wider Flying Field and related structures. There are views of some of the Shelters from within the Site. These views are partial and are focused on the southerly structures, particularly Buildings 3038, 3039 and 3040, with the roof and upper elements of the structures seen rising above the intervening planting. The distinctive form, including roof shape, of these structures means that they are immediately recognisable as aircraft hangars, while their exterior materials are also visible. Their precise construction, as part of the hardened phase of building, is not as easily understood with the internal metal formers which are a distinctive feature of the hardened structures not recognisable.

8. The historic and technological interest of the buildings are not appreciated from the Site, while there is only a limited appreciation of their group value, with most obscured from view. It is also not possible to appreciate their relationship with the wider airfield, neighbouring taxiways or the related structures such as the Avionics Building. The partial experience of the structures from within the Site does not, therefore provide an understanding of their strategic function or their role as part of the shift to a new military strategy.
9. The proposed development will alter some views of the Shelters, but will not diminish the ability to appreciate their significance. The proposals will also not change the character of the buildings' setting, their group value or relationship with the wider airfield.
10. The proposals will conserve the significance of the hardened aircraft shelters as non-designated heritage assets. The proposals comply with Policy ESD15 and the relevant provisions of the NPPF. There is no harm to the significance of the Hardened Aircraft Shelters as non-designated heritage assets and, as noted by the Conservation Officer in their representation, paragraph 203 is not engaged.
11. **Southern Bomb Stores** – the stores are of limited significance, but do possess historic interest in illustrating the ongoing development and evolution of RAF Upper Heyford.
12. The setting of the individual structures is reliant on their close physical relationship with one another and the surrounding roads network which gave access to them. They are separate from much of the airfield, to provide some protection, but are not highly visible from within it due to their scale. Where visible, they are experienced as a series of simple, repeated structures largely covered in earth, presumably to provide camouflage from the air, as an additional layer of defence.
13. The Site does not provide any appreciation of the Southern Stores, their historic function or their significance and makes no contribution to their significance.
14. The proposals will not affect any views to or from the Bomb Stores and will not diminish or affect the ability to appreciate their historic form, function or relationship with the wider airbase. The development will have no impact on their significance.
15. The proposals will conserve the significance of the hardened aircraft shelters as non-designated heritage assets. The proposals comply with Policy ESD15. and the

relevant provisions of the NPPF. There is no harm to the significance of the Bomb Stores as non-designated heritage assets and, as noted by the Conservation Officer in their representation, paragraph 203 is not engaged.

16. **RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area** - the significance of the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area derives from its survival as one of the best preserved Cold War airfield landscapes for fast jets. The different building typologies and phases also illustrate the ongoing changes to military strategy and the need to constantly upgrade the structures and layout of the airfield to support these. The individual buildings, structures and elements of hard landscaping (such as the aprons, taxiways and runways) are of individual significance, but this significance is notably heightened by their interaction with one another.
17. The Conservation Area, and its setting, have undergone changes in recent years to introduce additional residential development within the Conservation Area, with residential development also approved within the Flying Field, the wider Conservation Area and the Conservation Area's setting.
18. The setting of the Conservation Area includes the existing residential development at Upper Heyford, agricultural development at North Ley Farm and agricultural land. The surrounding landscape, including the Site, contributes little to the significance of the Conservation Area. It provides a clear contrast between the military function of the airfield and the wider agricultural land, but the two were never functionally related and the airfield was a deliberately inward-looking and largely self-sustainable military landscape that was imposed on the local area. The Site permits some partial views of limited elements of the airfield (the Hardened Aircraft Shelters and boundary treatment, as discussed above) but does not allow for any appreciation of the historic interest of the wider airfield and does not provide an understanding of the important Cold War heritage and landscape that lies beyond. This experience will also be changed by the consented development within the Flying Field.
19. The proposed development will not diminish the exceptional historic interest that the airfield, and the Flying Field in particular, possesses and will not alter the ability to appreciate and experience this Cold War military landscape. Those views that are afforded from within the Site are fragmentary and provide no detailed understanding of the historic strategic function of the wider airfield. Their loss, or

alteration, will not therefore reduce the ability to appreciate the significance of the airfield.

20. The loss of rural context, or any perceived isolation, will also not diminish the hard, military character of the Flying Field or the ability to understand its historic function. The proposals will therefore have no impact on the high historic interest of the Conservation Area, when considered as a whole, and will have no impact on its significance.
21. The proposals will result in no harm to the significance of the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area and will comply with section 72 of the 1990 Act and Policy ESD15 of the local plan. The finding of no harm means that paragraph 202 of the NPPF is not engaged. However, the Conservation Officer did identify “less than substantial harm” arising from the proposed development, noting that this harm could be reduced at Reserved Matters stage. This has been confirmed by the Council within the Heritage Statement of Common Ground. The Case Officer subsequently assessed that this less than substantial harm would be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposed development (paragraph 9.43 of the Officer’s Report) and that the view of Officers was that heritage matters should not constitute a reason to refuse the planning application. Should less than substantial harm be identified, the planning balance required under paragraph 202 of the NPPF is provided at paragraph 4.112 of Mr Bainbridge’s Proof of Evidence.



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