

# Comment for planning application 19/02708/OUT

<b>Application Number</b>	<input type="text" value="19/02708/OUT"/>
<b>Location</b>	<input type="text" value="Bicester Heritage Buckingham Road Bicester"/>
<b>Proposal</b>	<input type="text" value="Outline:- Provide new employment units comprising B1 (Business), B2 (General Industrial), B8 (Storage) and D1 (Education) uses with ancillary offices, storage, display and sales, with all matters reserved except for access"/>
<b>Case Officer</b>	<input type="text" value="Rebekah Morgan"/>
<b>Organisation Name</b>	<input type="text" value="Bicester Gliding Centre"/>
<b>Address</b>	<input type="text" value="Bicester Gliding Club And Windrushers Gliding Club,Part Hangar 113 And Part Hangar 137 Bicester Airfield,Skimmingdish Lane,Launton,Bicester,OX26 5AD"/>
<b>Type of Comment</b>	<input type="text" value="Comment"/>
<b>Type</b>	<input type="text" value="neighbour"/>
<b>Comments</b>	<input type="text" value="Please see attached our comments on the F.A.S.T. proposal. We are unable to draw proper conclusions on the merits of the proposal in the absence of the missing aviation assessment that should have been submitted with the application. We expect the consultation period to be extended once this report is made available and will comment further at that time."/>
<b>Received Date</b>	<input type="text" value="14/01/2020 21:47:35"/>
<b>Attachments</b>	The following files have been uploaded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comment on Planning Application.pdf</li></ul>



## Comment on Planning Application 19/02708/OUT -

### F.A.S.T Development at Bicester Airfield by Bicester Gliding Centre

Please see below for information about Bicester Gliding Centre.

Bicester Gliding Centre could support the F.A.S.T. development from an aviation viewpoint, if the development was within a framework conducive to the long term, sustainable, continuation of aviation from the airfield. Currently, the F.A.S.T. application is within a vision that, in our expert's opinion, is not supportive of continued aviation.

According to the Planning Statement, par 5.33, Cherwell Planning Officers requested an aviation assessment as part of the pre-application planning process to demonstrate that “no adverse impact will result from the proposals” and that “Evidence is provided with the application to demonstrate there are no adverse impacts on aviation”. Par 7.112 of the planning statement submitted with the application states that “A report prepared by Alan Stratford and Associates Limited has been prepared which assesses the proposals with regard to the aviation use”. Par 7.114 states that “The report has assessed the implications of the proposed development on operations at the airfield. The proposed development will not impact aviation use and will not preclude the use of the airfield for flying”.

Despite several requests to Cherwell Planning and the applicant, we have yet to see the aviation assessment. At the time of writing, it is not available on the planning website.

It is our belief that **any** building on the edge of **any** airfield must have some aviation impact on the airfield and so needs to be properly assessed. However, in the case of F.A.S.T., we believe that the impact on both the current and stated future aviation activity at Bicester could be acceptable if it allowed alternative aviation approach, take-off and safety margins to be maintained elsewhere. If the development assisted the financial sustainability of the airfield, whilst allowing continued aviation, we would consider that beneficial too. We note that the application is for the access from Skimmingdish Lane with all other matters reserved. The buildings in the outline application are higher than would seem to be necessary for their stated purpose and thus create an unnecessary hazard to aviation which could be minimised by reducing their height, but given that this may change when a reserved application is submitted, this matter can be addressed at that time or in the period leading up to that application.

The application is set in the context of Bicester Motion's Masterplan, an aspirational vision for development of the airfield as an automotive centre of excellence and a 'Top 20' UK Visitor attraction. We advised Bicester Heritage, as it was then, early in 2019 that the vision that they had published would mean that gliding at Bicester would cease in its current form due to the constraints created by vehicle tracks proposed on the north-east side of the flying field. Further analysis now suggests that these tracks would have an even greater impact on the historic aircraft operations that Bicester Motion has publicly stated that they would like to see at the airfield due to their requirement to operate into wind, or very close to it.

With members having many years of experience of all aspects of aviation, and particularly of the operating constraints of Bicester airfield, the Gliding Club, in association with aviation experts from a number of fields, is developing a proposed revision to the vision which would enable gliding and historic aviation to continue at Bicester in a safe, and environmentally friendly manner whilst still allowing some further development. We trust that our input, based on experience, will be welcomed by Bicester Motion. If development of the airfield is permitted without consideration of the usability of the airfield for aviation, then there is a real risk of sleep walking into a situation where the airfield becomes unsafe or unusable not only for gliding but for the very types of aircraft that Bicester Motion seeks to encourage.

## About Bicester Gliding Centre

Gliding at Bicester airfield began in 1956 when the Windrushers Gliding Club moved from Little Rissington. They were joined in 1963 by the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association, which subsequently merged with the Windrushers Gliding Club and became the operational centre of recreational gliding in the RAF. The RAFGSA Centre provided recreational flying to personnel of HM Forces and their dependants, and they also ran 'Gliding Adventurous Training Courses' for servicemen. In the mid 70s, Oxford University Gliding Club moved to RAF Bicester as well.

The MOD moved the RAFGSA Centre to RAF Halton in June 2004. It was decided to continue the long tradition of gliding at Bicester and the Windrushers Gliding Club was reformed by several RAFGSA and civilian members before the final departure of the RAF. The club was officially re-opened on July 1st 2004 at Bicester Airfield, the day after the RAF moved out. More recently, the Club has been called the Bicester Gliding Centre to better reflect the community within which we operate. Oxford University Gliding Club continues to operate under the umbrella of the Bicester Gliding Centre.

Bicester has been a continuously operational airfield since it was re-opened by the RAF in 1927. The 29 years of RAF powered aviation from 1927 to a 1956 are greatly outweighed by the 64 years of gliding on the airfield from 1956 to 2020.

Today, we are one of the most flourishing Clubs in the country with around 230 glider flying members and a membership which grew by 13% last year. Almost 50% of our members are Juniors, Students or Cadets under 26 who enjoy flying at subsidised rates. We are financially sound and do not rely on external grants for our operation.

We operate a fleet of around 15 club owned gliders and powered tug aircraft. About 50 privately owned gliders are based on the airfield. Over the past 5 years we have invested over £100,000 updating our fleet. In the last two years, we have spent in excess of £50,000 fitting out the new Club premises that we were moved to by our landlords, Bicester Motion.

Since our formation in 2004, we have introduced thousands of new members to the sport of gliding. In 2019, 16 of our members reached solo standard. 12 of them were under 16, some going solo on their 14th birthday, the first day it was legal! We have gliding world champions amongst our members and, each year, we host one of the biggest gliding competitions in the country. We train a steady stream of our members to instructor standard enabling them to pass on their skills to an upcoming generation. Many of those trained at Bicester have gone on to careers in aviation; Club gliding provides an affordable route to flying and inspires many who go on to become professionals.

We also provide air experience flights to 1000 or more members of the public each year. According to British Gliding Association statistics, we provide more of such experiences than any other Club in the country.

We operate year round. For at least 6 months of the summer we operate 7 days a week largely on the basis of volunteer instruction with the assistance of non-flying volunteers from the Bicester community who enjoy the opportunity to contribute to our activity.

Most of our launching is by environmentally friendly and low cost winching. Aerotowed launching is also provided but we are sensitive to the impact of this on our neighbours seeking always to use the safest routes that generate least noise concerns.

There is a limited amount of powered aircraft flying at Bicester, mostly of vintage types. We control all flying from the site in the interests of safety. We also maintain the flying field, provide fuel, insurance, a radio service and so on.

Gliding was recognised as the most appropriate aviation use of the airfield in the RAF Bicester Planning Brief of 2009 and in Policy 8 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 which was adopted in 2015.

We are keen to ensure that Gliding can continue to operate at Bicester as a sporting facility providing the same, or better, opportunities for recreation and personal development as has been available in the past. To this end, we seek to offer our experience as the airfield develops.

Bicester Gliding Centre  
Bicester Airfield  
Skimmingdish Lane  
Bicester  
Oxfordshire  
OX26 5HA

