

Comments on Aviation Assessment submitted with Planning Application 19/02708/OUT



Introduction

Bicester Gliding Centre has carefully reviewed outline planning application 19/02708/OUT and the associated aviation assessment. Please see our initial response for further information on Bicester Gliding Centre. Several subject matter experts have provided input for the following comments.

Bicester's historic airfield is an 'omni-directional' grass airfield that is suitable for the operation of most types of light and historic aircraft. For the past 64 years, the airfield has been in continuous use for gliding.

The aviation assessment has been developed without consulting airfield users. As a result, the assessment has drawn several erroneous conclusions which are highlighted in comments below.

Comment 1.

The Planning Statement in paragraph 5.33 entitled 'Aviation' states:

"Officers requested the application to be accompanied by an Aviation Assessment which demonstrates that no such adverse impact will result from the proposals. Evidence is provided with the application to demonstrate there are no adverse impacts on aviation and this is considered later in this planning statement."

And in paragraph 7.114 of the planning statement it is stated;

"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."

In fact, those statements differ from those made in the aviation assessment provided in the consultant's report of November 2019, which concludes in paragraph 6.3 *"...the F.A.S.T. zone as proposed would have little impact on current airfield operations at Bicester. ...Whilst there would theoretically be small reduction of around 60m-80m in the take-off distance available (TODA) on the R18 runway and a corresponding reduction in the landing distance available (LDA) on the R36 runway if 'gold standard' licensed aerodrome standards were to be applied – the overall length available would be sufficient for the types of powered aircraft currently using the airfield and for glider operations by winch or aerotow in a R18 direction. We acknowledge that there may be some loss of a possible safe landing area (eg following an abortive take off in a R18 direction), although the overall level of risk from this is minimal, given the level of usage of this runway."*

Comment 2.

The aviation assessment states in paragraph 2 that;

“The bulk of the airfield’s movements are by gliders. Some of these flights are launched by a (powered) tug, although the majority are launched by winch operations parallel to each runway with a separation of between 100-150 feet.”

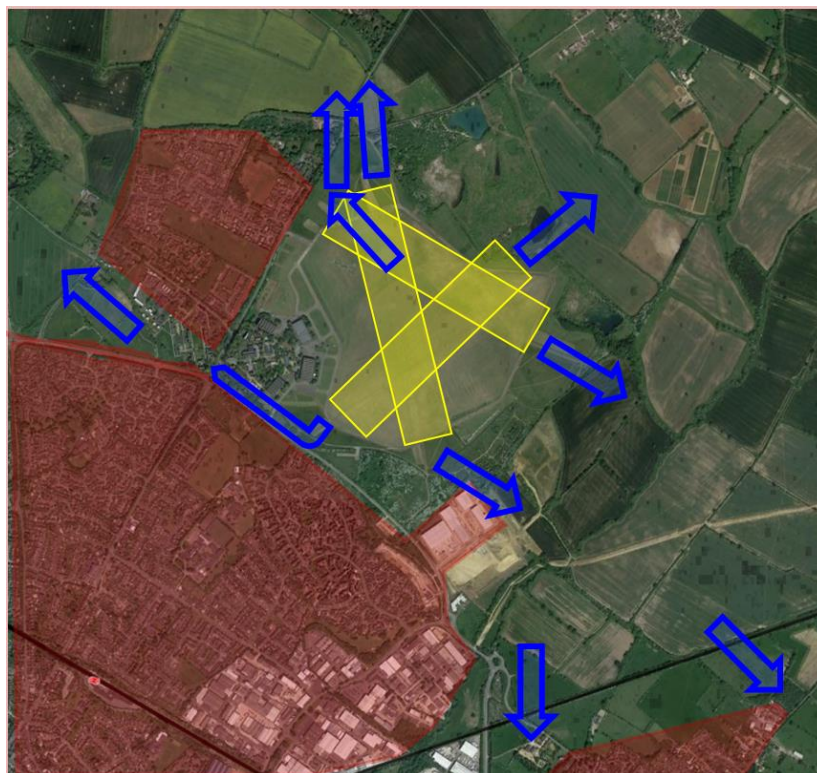
While it is true that the bulk of the airfield’s movements are by gliders, in fact, during 2019 in what was a typical year of operations, there were 7595 winch-launched and 1214 aerotow-launched glider flights. ‘Some’ should be 14% (2019). A minimum separation distance of 150 feet is in place to mitigate the hazard of a powered aircraft tangling with a winch cable on the ground.

Comment 3.

The aviation assessment states in paragraph 4 that;

“The orientation chosen [for take-off and landing] will depend on the wind conditions. At Bicester, as at most UK airfields, the prevailing wind direction is from the southwest.” The assessment then presumes, *“Given these conditions, it is clear that the majority (probably around 80 percent) of take-offs and landings, including glider launches by winch, will be in the R06/24 direction into wind”*.

In fact, wind direction is only one factor. Risk management of launching at Bicester, which is partly surrounded by development, results in careful selection of take-off directions and climb out routes to avoid in so far as possible the overflight of buildings. See diagram below. An analysis of the 871 flight logs available for 2018 and 2019 shows just 17% of aero-tows from run 24, with that run used on 18% of days that aero-tow records are available. The new technical site development by Bicester Motion will make the run 24 departure route even less attractive, so this proportion is likely to reduce in future.



Comment 4.

We note that the analysis has misplaced the position of the southern end of run 18/36. This may be because although the run was historically designated 18/36, over time it has become 17/35, as can be observed on Google Earth. The southern end of the run is approximately 100m to the east of the position shown in figure 6.1 of the assessment and is thus more affected by the highest of the F.A.S.T. buildings than allowed for. This will impact on the type of vintage aircraft that might fly at Bicester in future but should have little impact on glider operations. The runs 18 and 36 (or 17 and 35!) are the most used for aero-tow launching with 52% of launches and 48% of days. If the height of the F.A.S.T. buildings was to be reduced to that necessary for their intended use, the impact on run 18/36 would be minimised. The drawing in Paragraph 4, Part 3 of the design and access statement shows a building that is far higher than required for a vehicle workshop.

Comment 5.

The proposals envisage a public access route along the line of a former railway line. A fence will be required on the airfield side of the route to prevent casual trespass and maintain public safety. Its proximity to the flying field and therefore its impact on aviation should be considered.

Conclusion

It is recognised that this application relates to an element of the airfield 'Masterplan'. It is clear from the comments above that Bicester Gliding Centre is a stakeholder and should be consulted to ensure accuracy in matters relating to aviation at Bicester airfield. The Bicester Gliding Centre recognises that when viewed in isolation, the proposed F.A.S.T development would have a limited impact on current flying operations but we object to the application pending full consideration and response to the comments above.

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