



The General Aviation Awareness Council

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Rebekah Morgan BSc (Hons), MSc, MA
Principal Planning Officer – Major Projects Planning Team
Place and Growth Directorate
Cherwell District Council

Dear Rebekah

Re: Planning Application 19/02708/OUT - F.A.S.T. Proposal for Bicester Airfield

We are writing to object to this application and to reserve our position in respect of any subsequent proposals by Bicester Motion.

Formed over 24 years ago the GAAC works for the protection of General Aviation (GA) airfields throughout the UK. We currently represent the interests of over 30 Associations including Light Aircraft (LAA), Owners & Pilots (AOPA), Gliding (BGA), Helicopters (BHA), Business GA (BBGA), Microlights (BMAA), Aeromodellers & UAV's (Drones) together comprising in excess of 40,000 active members contributing over £3Bn to the UK economy and supporting the provision of trained aviation specialists for Commercial Aviation.

Our accrued knowledge and experience means we now work in conjunction with the DfT providing advice and data on a range of aviation related matters including surveys and policies to develop the industry. As a 'broad church', we have welcomed the chances to work with complimentary organisations including Local Authorities, Sport England, the RSPB and CPRE.

The GAAC also has close links with the APPG-GA. Two of its five Working Groups are Chaired by GAAC Directors, and six of the Airfield Working Group members are GAAC Directors, it is therefore fully conversant with current issues and Government policies relating to GA. The advice and guidance provided to airfield owners, operators and Local Authorities nationwide largely focuses on environmental, legislative, safety and town planning matters.



Sponsored by the General Aviation movement and Associated industries

Our objection to this application is based of several principle factors:

1. The need to retain this unique and historic flying site for General Aviation uses. Despite the wording of their 'Aviation Statement' Bicester Motion (BM) met with Bicester Gliding Club (BGC) on February 7th 2020 and gave the club Notice to Quit on June 30th 2020, effectively ending the Club's 64 year involvement with the site both as principal user and Airfield Operator for regulatory purposes

BM may claim to have offered an alternative but, as their proposal is based on an advanced booking system it will be self evident that the unpredictability of the UK weather and constricted access makes this completely option impractical. It could not form the basis of continued use of the airfield by any club. It is not an alternative at all.

Bicester Policy 8 in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 supports the continuation of gliding at the site and so the actions of BM are contrary to the spirit of this policy and the strong thrust of the policy to protect the heritage of this important site, of which the gliding activity is a very significant part.

2. The Aviation Consultant's report produced by Alan Stratford Associates (ASA) is generally sound, taking worst case scenarios wherever possible, but it fails in one crucial area thereby negating its conclusions and validity. In researching the report the consultant failed to include any prior consultation with the Airfield's major user, and operator, BGC. Had he done so, or carried out some online investigations, he would have found that his assumption that 24/06 was the most used runway was incorrect.

BGC are obliged to log every movement on the airfield and this information is publicly available online. The movement figures show the usage pattern logged for 900+ over an extended period and these can be summarised as follows:

18/36 (North/South) Most used runway with 54% of movements,

13/31 with about 28%

24/06 (SW/NE) 17%

This clearly demonstrates that ASA's assumption of 80% for 24/06 is totally erroneous and completely undermines the conclusions of their report and the assertions made in BM's Aviation Statement.

The main reason 24 is sparingly used is because Bicester town is immediately beyond it and a prompt steep right hand turn is required to avoid overflying the built up area. This is not ideal for any pilot but particularly those under training. Even with this self- evident constraint ASA persisted in assuming it was the primary runway.



Had the report been offered to BGC for consultation prior to submission of the Application, as recommended by ASA, this mistake could have been avoided. Instead the BGC were only allowed to comment without sight of the report. As BM's Aviation Statement is completely based on ASA's report it is totally misleading.

3. The two aviation documents submitted by BM: ASA's report and BM's 'Aviation Statement', are inconsistent with regard to the proposed building heights. ASA give the max height of the proposed buildings as 10.5m and have based their advice on that figure whereas BM state 11.5m.

If 11.5 is the intended height, the distance required for safe clearance is 290m, reducing the usable runway length of 18/36 by 80-100m to 900-920m. In addition there are noise abatement restrictions affecting Runway 18, these would also restrict its use by powered aircraft. BM comment that existing buildings are higher but these were built to enable the use of the airfield, carefully positioned to avoid safety issues and to meet the operational capacity of the airfield in military use. The proposed buildings are not and we therefore object to buildings of any excessive size in the proposed location

4. A report has already been submitted to the Council regarding the importance of the area outside the perimeter track from an ecology aspect. (An extract of the plan is appended with the sensitive areas in red.) We note that the ecology company "Ecology Solutions", who BM used for the site of the hotel and the new technical site currently being constructed, have tried to dismiss or trivialise this on various grounds. All of this area is recognised by the CDC on their maps and needs to be given equal weight in considering any application on the airfield.
5. The ASA report refers to defective drainage in some locations, mainly close to the perimeter road. BGC have advised that site drainage was in generally good condition at the time of the MoD sale in 2013 and have concluded that, while age has played a part, much of the damage where the drain outflows go under the perimeter track is largely due to its indiscriminate use by large lorries and small tanks with axle weights the track was never designed to carry.

The UK is a world leader in Gliding and Bicester is one of the UK's primary training centres providing a vibrant, community orientated, focus for gliding. The GAAC therefore objects in the strongest terms to this Application and the attempt to remove General Aviation from Bicester.

Yours sincerely

John Gilder MRICS FRAeS
Vice Chairman

General Aviation Awareness Council

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cc: Charles Henry FRAeS - Chairman GAAC

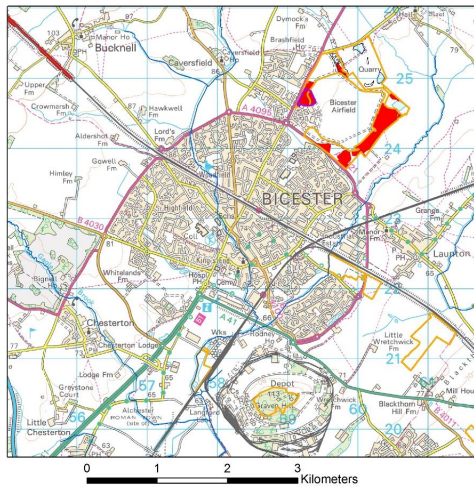
Appendix 1

Planning Application 18/01253/F at Bicester Airfield

The land within this site is within the local wildlife site. It is also unimproved calcareous grassland, which is a Section 41 habitat under the NERC Act, i.e. a Priority Habitat.

Calcareous grassland is a locally distinctive habitat with high cultural and biodiversity value, and is extremely rare across Oxfordshire. The remaining calcareous grassland in Oxfordshire covers only 0.3% of the total area, according to the CEH Land Cover Map 2015. The map below highlights calcareous grassland in red – the only remaining calcareous grassland in Bicester is around the airfield. This forms a high proportion of all the calcareous grassland in Cherwell district – the only other patches of significant size being at Upper Heyford airfield and along the railway embankment between the two areas, with some smaller fragments in the far west.

Figure 1: The proposed site (outlined in purple) comprises a large proportion of the remaining patches of calcareous grassland around Bicester (red areas), and is within the Local Wildlife Site (orange outlines)



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Connectivity

Calcareous grassland is a priority habitat for restoration as part of the two National Character Areas around Bicester: Upper Thames Clay Vale and Cotswolds. The aim of a restoration strategy should be to create connected networks. This block of calcareous grassland on the western side of the airfield forms an important stepping stone between the grassland on the eastern side and the strip along the railway, which connects to the larger block at Upper Heyford. It could be important for allowing movement of species such as butterflies and other invertebrates that depend on calcareous grassland habitats for their survival.