

# Planning and Development

David Peckford, Assistant Director – Planning and Development



## Cherwell

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Your Ref: **19/02757/SO**

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21<sup>st</sup> January 2020

Dear Sir,

### TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

**Application No.:** 19/02757/SO

**Applicant's Name:** Bicester Motion

**Proposal:** Outline:- Provide new employment units comprising B1 (Business), B2 (General Industrial), B8 (Storage) and DI (Education) uses with ancillary offices, storage, display and sales, with all matters reserved except for access

**Location:** Bicester Heritage  
Buckingham Road  
Bicester

**Parish(es):** Launton

I write with regard to the above application, received on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019, which represents a formal request for a Screening Opinion under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, as to whether the proposal set out in your submission requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This letter constitutes a Screening Opinion of the Local Planning Authority of the proposed development under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

### Summary of Determination

The Local Planning Authority agrees with your assessment that the proposal falls under Schedule 2, Section 10 (a) "Industrial estate development projects". The site area would exceed the applicable threshold (0.5ha) in column 2 of Schedule 2. A Scheduled Monument lies within the development site and Stratton Audley Quarries SSSI is approximately 1.1km to the north; both of these characteristics fall within the definition of 'sensitive area'.

For the development to be considered an EIA development, it would be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location. In determining whether the proposals are likely to constitute EIA development, regard has been had to the criteria set out in

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations 2017. Government guidance relating to EIA as set out in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is also material and has been taken into account. The Local Planning Authority considers that the proposal **is unlikely** to have significant environmental effects for the purposes of the EIA Regulations when the cumulative impact of this development is considered in the context of other significant development surrounding the site and that the proposal **is not therefore EIA Development**. An Environmental Statement **is not required** to be submitted with a future application for the reasons set out below.

## Reasons for Determination

### Site

The site covers an area of 10.076ha and occupies an area in the south-eastern corner of the airfield of the Bicester Heritage site adjacent to the Skimmingdish Lane. It is part of the former RAF Bicester technical site and airfield which extends some 140hectares to the north and west of the proposal site.

### Constraints

The site itself is not within a sensitive area as defined by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 but it has a number of site constraints as follows:

- The site is located within the Conservation Area of RAF Bicester.

Adjacent to the proposed site, within or adjacent to the wider Bicester Heritage site are a number of other constraints as follows:

- All the buildings within the wider site are either Grade 2 listed or locally listed;
- There are a number of Scheduled Monuments located within the main technical site area and around the flying field;
- There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within 2km of the site (the quarry to the north);
- There is a proposed District Wildlife Site to the south of the site on the opposite side of Skimmingdish Lane;
- The site is adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site (which also extends to the outer edges of the rest of the flying field);
- The site is bordered to the south by the A4421 Skimmingdish Lane and to the east by existing commercial development;
- There are residential properties to the south of the site (opposite sides of the road).

The site is allocated in the Cherwell Local Plan for 'Tourism Development' (Policy Bicester 8) and there is a site adjacent to the east which is allocated for 'New Employment Development' (Policy Bicester 11).

### Proposal

The proposal to which this screening opinion relates is for the erection of new employment units comprising B1 (Business), B2 (General Industrial), B8 (Storage) and D1 (Education) uses with ancillary offices, storage, display and sales. The new buildings will provide a total GIA of 21,994sq m with a maximum ridge height of 11.5m.

### Appraisal

The proposed development does not fall under **Schedule 1** but is considered to fall under **Section 10(a) of Schedule 2** of the Regulations which relates to 'industrial estate development projects' and it does exceed the associated threshold of 0.5ha in column 2 for this type of development. Furthermore, the site is considered to be within a 'sensitive area'.

In considering proposals for EIA development, an assessment as to whether the proposal will be 'likely to have significant effects on the environment' needs to be made having regard to the indicative criteria and thresholds set out in the PPG. The development is within a 'sensitive area' as defined in the regulations (Scheduled Monument and proximity to SSSI), but does not exceed the indicative threshold of 20 hectares in Column 3 of the Annex to the PPG. However this on its own does not mean that the proposal is or is not EIA development and it should still be assessed in relation to Schedule 3 of the Regulations.

Schedule 3 of the Regulations requires the proposal to have regard to the 1) characteristics of the development, 2) the location of the development and 3) the type and characteristics of the potential impact.

Whilst the proposal will be a large new build, it is nonetheless considered to be of an appropriate scale in relation to the adjacent buildings (on the neighbouring site) and has the potential to be sensitively designed with appropriate materials. It is not considered to give rise to any issues relating to the use of natural resources, production of waste, pollution or risk of accidents or risks to human health.

There are a number of constraints affecting the site as set out above raising issues such as impacts on heritage assets, ecological impacts, landscaping and visual impacts. The proposal will also generate its own impacts such as traffic, noise and air quality. However, these impacts can all be addressed through the submission and assessment of specific reports through the normal planning and consultation process and are not considered to give rise to significant environmental impacts warranting the submission of an Environmental Statement. The location of a Scheduled Monument within the site can be considered to ensure any 'developable areas' respond to consultee comments and respect the setting of the Scheduled Monument.

Schedule 3 makes it clear that the size of the proposed development and its consequent potential impact needs to be considered cumulatively with other development. In this respect the PPG states in ID: 4-024-20140306 that "*local planning authorities should always have regard to the possible cumulative effects arising from any existing or approved development. There could also be circumstances where two or more applications for development should be considered together.....where the overall combined environmental impact of the proposals might be greater or have different effects than the sum of their separate parts*".

This proposal for new industrial units has been formally submitted as a planning application (19/02708/OUT). A 'vision' document for the wider site has been published (in the public domain) by the applicants, but this has not been formally submitted to the Local Planning Authority for comment/determination.

Consent has been granted for an extension to the New Technical Site (18/01333/F) for the erection of industrial units comprising approximately 6,500 sq m GIA. Planning Committee have resolved to approve (subject to s106) an application (18/01253/F) for a hotel and conference centre to be located to the north of the existing technical site. These applications and the current proposal need to be considered concurrently and cumulatively.

Screening Opinions were carried out for the New Technical Site (18/00061/SO) and hotel (18/00044/SO) on their own merits and both deemed not to be EIA development. This proposal for commercial units now needs to be considered cumulatively with the hotel and new technical site proposals. The hotel and New Technical Site proposals will be significant new buildings located within the Bicester Heritage site and airfield. They will be affected by similar constraints to this proposal (ecology, heritage, landscaping and visual impacts) as well as generating their own impacts such as traffic, noise and air quality. However, the cumulative impacts of all of these issues when considering all the proposals together, is not considered to be so significant as to consider the proposals EIA development. This proposal, as with the other developments, can propose mitigation measures in the form of on/off site mitigation secured via the imposition of conditions and in some cases (such as highways issues) via a S106 legal agreement. As such it is not deemed that the cumulative impact of this proposal when considered with the hotel proposal would give rise to significant environmental effects.

As the site is allocated in the Local Plan (Policy Bicester 8) for "heritage tourism uses, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses", there could still be other proposals that come forward at a later date. However, this allocation is non-specific and could include proposals that range in size, scale and intensity from very small proposals to much larger proposals (especially given the site area).

The 'vision' document released by the applicants, highlights aspirations for a wider range of leisure uses on the northern and eastern edges of the airfield, but these do not appear to be intrinsically linked to the current proposal for commercial development. At this time, it is considered there are currently no other existing or approved proposals across the wider site or adjacent to the site that this proposal needs to be considered alongside. Furthermore, in terms of proposed development that may come forward later to deliver the aspirations of the 'vision' document, it would be difficult at this stage to quantify the cumulative impacts as proposals are not fully developed and could change significantly.

Whilst the development will be large scale within the site, it will still be contained within the Bicester Heritage site area which extends to some 140ha which will therefore lessen the impact on its surroundings and enable plenty of scope for mitigation of any likely impacts.

The most significant impacts are likely to relate to the impact on the heritage assets, ecology and landscape and visual impacts, traffic, emissions and noise amongst others for which specific reports can be submitted and as such all matters can be dealt with through the normal planning application process and consultation procedures as mentioned above.

In conclusion, the development is listed in Schedule 2 of the Regulations but having considered the known possible cumulative impacts, I am of the opinion that due to the scale of development, the site characteristics, its location and context and the nature of the development, the proposal is **unlikely** to give rise to significant environmental effects and hence an **EIA is not required** in this instance.

In reaching this opinion the Local Planning Authority has considered the factors above, the criteria to Schedule 3 to the EIA Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Planning Practice Guidance together with the thresholds and criteria set out in the Annex.

This opinion has been made by an appropriately authorised officer at the Local Planning Authority. In accordance with the 2017 Regulations, a copy of this screening opinion has been placed on the Planning Register.

If you have any questions or queries regarding the above please contact the Case Officer using the details provided above.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D.P.', is positioned above the name David Peckford.

David Peckford