

ENVIRONMENT & PLACE INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

From: Senior Economic Growth Officer

To: Principal Planning Officer – Development Management: Major Projects Team (Rebekah Morgan)

Our Ref: 2021-11

Your Ref: 21/01224/OUT

Ask for: Steven Newman

Ext: 1860

Date: 19/11/2021

PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION ECONOMIC GROWTH RESPONSE

This response raises the key local economic issues only.

The response is provided without prejudice to the consideration of applications for planning permission.

Application No: 21/01224/OUT
Address / Location: Land at former RAF Bicester Bicester Oxfordshire OX26 5HA
Proposal: Outline planning application for Automotive Experience Quarter comprising Commercial, Business and Services uses (Class E), Light Industrial (Class B2), Local Community and Learning Uses (Class F) and vehicle circuits (Sui Generis) with all matters reserved aside from that of access).
Key Economic Observations
1.0 Summary
1.1 I provide qualified support to the proposed development. In principle and in outline, this proposal adds further elements and value to this exemplar development; thereby supporting the broad economic development aims of the Council. In terms of detail, however, particularly careful consideration will be required to enable the proposal to avoid/mitigate potential conflicts whilst maximising the benefits that could accrue to the local community, to the environment, to the operator, occupiers and employees, and to the wider economy.
2.0 Background
2.1 The importance of the former RAF Bicester site is recognised in the Council's economic development and planning policies. As a key strategic site 'Policy Bicester 8', it contains not only significant built heritage assets but also huge economic potential to support the development of the engineering and visitor sectors of the economy.
2.2 As custodian of this previously 'at risk' heritage site, the conservation work undertaken by Bicester Heritage Ltd has combined with its vision to attract notable engineering businesses to form the basis of a nationally significant cluster of technical activity.
2.3 The implementation of a masterplan to create the UK's first 'automotive resort' is potentially of considerable value through the development of a 'Centre for Excellence' (for the historic automotive sector). It is indicated that through unique experiences and community involvement, Bicester Heritage will become a component of the broader, people-focused 'Bicester Motion'. By celebrating the past, present and future of automotive culture and technology, Bicester Motion has the potential to combine many of its elements in support of local economic development, including skills, engineering, tourism and employment.
3.0 The Vision
3.1 The vision to promote public access and offer a collection of visitor experiences 'unlike any other

destination in the country' would significantly extend the range of events and activities held on the site.

3.2 The development of buildings on a total footprint of 15,411m² would be formed in two zones contained within 30.95 hectares of land:

- 1) The principal Experience Quarter of 22,338m² (Gross Internal Area – GIA) of development and range in height from 5-10m (1-3 storeys);
- 2) A smaller satellite zone, known as the Automotive and Aviation Pavilions providing 1,692m² GIA with a maximum building height of 5m.

3.3 The indicated 'Commercial, Business and Services' uses, 'Light Industrial' and 'Local Community and Learning' uses would collectively support the realisation of the vision.

3.4 Careful consideration of the location and form of the buildings and tracks is indicated in the design brief. I am reassured that the juxtaposition of activities and intended high quality of buildings suggests that the successful development of the initial stages of Bicester Motion could now continue.

3.5 Of particular importance will be the management and operation of those activities over the long term. Bicester Heritage Ltd has demonstrated an exemplary approach but of course may not always be the operator of the site. As such, I would expect to see all safeguards agreed through the detailed planning application process to ensure that such a fantastic vision is upheld over many decades ahead.

4.0 Economic Value

4.1 According to the supporting documentation (from Edgars), the economic benefits of Bicester Motion have been estimated by Oxford Brookes University.

- Overall, for the period April 2019 – March 2020, the total economic impact of Bicester Motion is estimated to be over £6.7 million with 126 jobs supported in the UK economy. The detailed calculations also indicate considerable value to the locality – directly and indirectly - through local purchasing and job creation.

4.2 Through the development of The Experience Quarter, it is expected to generate value in two main areas:

- 1) Construction expenditure of around £44 million (with around 600 jobs); leading to
- 2) An estimated visitor expenditure of nearly £17 million per annum with 322 jobs supported in the UK economy.

4.3 For the stages of construction and operation, it will be important for the detailed proposal to confirm an effective local skills and employment plan. This should be commenced as soon as possible, drawing on the co-operation of educational institutions, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Council's economic growth service.

4.4 The development would add to Cherwell's total annual tourism value of £495m (2019, *Destination Research*) and assist the recovery of the sector following the difficulties experienced since March 2020. Further context, evidence and commentary in relation to this planning application is offered in the letters of support from Experience Oxfordshire and Visit England.

4.5 The international profile and value of the development is also indicated and endorsed by the Department for International Trade. This indicates not only the value to 'UK plc' but also to the local economy as overseas visits tend to include, for example, higher-spending (overnight) stays.

5.0 Connectivity

5.1 Physical connections both on-site and to-and-from the town will be key to enabling the integration of The Experience Quarter with the town – and therefore the local community and economy.

5.2 To gain access to the site with least impact, it is indicated that cycle and pedestrian routes will be enhanced. I would further suggest that the detailed proposals might consider how innovative transport solutions linking to the town and railway services could also be established now and in future to assist access by visitors in conjunction, for instance, with Chiltern Railways through integrated arrangements. 'Next generation' infrastructure would complement the future technologies on-show within the Experience Quarter and be of practical benefit to employees commuting in, young people

independently visiting and be of benefit to other aspects of the operation.

- 5.3 The interface between automotive activity and people should ensure safety, not only for health benefits but also for economic, environmental and reputational reasons. The quality of 'experience' should therefore not only be exemplary within the site but should also be for the whole journey to and from The Experience Quarter.
- 5.4 Within the site, "The creation of new walkways and cycleways connecting the four Quarters of the site (Heritage, Innovation, Wilderness & Experience) will enable visitors to explore on foot, cycle, scooters or shuttle promoting health and well-being through the enjoyment of open green space filled with vibrant activities for all of the family". This is welcomed and should enhance the experience, increase 'dwell time' and encourage repeat visits; thereby adding economic value.
- 5.5 Close proximity to residential neighbourhoods provides the Experience Quarter with ready access to potential employees and visitors. However, there are also risks of noise and traffic issues which will require close attention in order to avoid conflict arising. I would hope that the benefit of a detailed planning application being approved would lead to effective protection of neighbour and community interests, allowing the business operation to manage itself and to prosper within clearly defined parameters in perpetuity.

6.0 Conclusion

- 1) As indicated through the outline plans, The Experience Quarter would be likely to enhance the integration and viability of the existing exemplary development at Bicester Motion.
- 2) The indicative buildings and tracks suggest careful consideration has been given to reducing any negative impact upon the historic site whilst creating an exciting facility to showcase not only the past but also the present and future of automotive technology.
- 3) The 'experience' aspect of this proposal could form an important part of the engagement and inclusion of a broader audience. In particular, the facility could facilitate engagement with young people and others in various engineering and technology careers.
- 4) Not only would it add to the cluster of science and technology emerging in the area, it could also enhance local facilities available to the public.
- 5) In strengthening the visitor economy, the Experience Quarter would contribute towards the critical mass of activity required to support the development of the adjacent hotel and conference facility.
- 6) The development would be of significant economic value through its construction and operation. A skills and employment plan should be considered well in advance to ensure that skills and labour are readily available.
- 7) The attraction of a significant number of visitors and noise generated by activities are risks to be addressed in a detailed planning application, avoiding the creation of nuisance and maximising the benefits of alternative transport technologies and partnership arrangements.
- 8) Given the experience and commitment of the applicant evident throughout this proposal, I have every confidence that more detailed plans could avoid difficulties arising and realise the full potential of this hugely significant site.