



# All Party Parliamentary Group on **General Aviation**



Chairs: Lord Davies of Gower & Kelly Tolhurst MP

13 January 2022

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

Dear Rebekah,  
Re: Bicester Airfield Application 21/01224/OUT - APPG-GA Letter of Objection -

Firstly, may I apologise to you and your committee for this very late letter of objection. Somehow the application was missed by everyone. I hope you will be able to give it some consideration.

We object to this application and ask that, as the relevant planning authority, Cherwell District Council give full consideration to the detrimental effects the granting of approval would have on Bicester's significant heritage, continued airfield use, the valuable ecology that has evolved on and around the Airfield and the future of sport Gliding both in the region and nationally.

I am a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and a General Aviation (GA) pilot. I Chair the Airfields Working Group of the All Party Parliamentary Group for General Aviation and, am Vice Chair of the General Aviation Awareness Council, representing the interests of more than 30 GA organisations comprising over 40,000 people currently involved in the industry and the 250,000 in the Remotely Piloted Vehicle (Drone) industry that recently joined us.

We work with the Department of Transport on airfield matters, our principle role is to support the government in achieving its stated objective of making the UK a global leader for General Aviation (GA) and our objection relates to the permanent damage the loss of Bicester would do to this aspiration now and in the long term.

Bicester Airfield is the sole surviving, purpose built inter war RAF Bomber base incorporating an airfield offering a 360 degree capacity for take offs and landings. The view across the airfield and original buildings around the perimeter are listed to preserve its character for future generations, a status recognised in Policy 8 of your own Local Plan and supported by a requirement that it remain a centre for Gliding.

This proposal cuts across all of these policies and preservation measures and creates the potentially dangerous situation of mixing uses on an airfield thereby increasing risks for both aviators and motor sport users. In the recent past the GAAC has been involved with the issues of mixed use on airfields and is well aware of the need to avoid it whenever possible, a view reinforced by those who have tried it and closed the facility within a year.

The applicant has already stated its aspiration to emulate other centres where both aircraft and cars operate such as Goodwood and Thruxton but in both cases the activities take place on separate parts of the estate. Perhaps the only airfield to achieve a successful blend is Turweston where the airfield is closed on certain Friday's to allow the local Formula 1 manufacturers to demonstrate their products to the general public.

The impact of this proposal is likely to be the steady eradication of aviation from Bicester as the demands of the motoring fraternity are given ever increasing precedence. Although the proposal defines two runways, which would be acceptable for modern GA aircraft it is too proscriptive for the vintage aircraft the applicant claims to want on site as they generally require the capacity to land into wind, which is not always in the direction of a runway.

Bicester was the national centre for UK Gliding and hosted major international events and was nominated by Sport England as a Centre for Gliding. Its loss would also contravene the councils policy of maintaining Gliding on the site.

This proposal would prevent Gliding becoming viable both practically and financially. The previously resident gliding club had to achieve 10,000 launches per annum to produce a modest profit. Some 90% of these were done using the cheaper option of winch launching, which allowed more use of runway 24. Winch launching requires strict control to ensure that launch ropes are operated safely, both on take off and return to earth. The proposed arrangement would require air tows substantially reducing the number of possible launches while significantly increasing launching costs. The proposal to put race tracks within the perimeter track will effectively prevent the safe operation of gliders as the safety margins are too small and the hazard of hitting a vehicle too great for clubs, with their strong emphasis on training, to accept the risks.

The applicant may point to the current use by self launching motor gliders but these are a sub group within gliding to enable more flexible use criteria using a self powered take off and flying with or without power. The UK is a World leader in gliding and competes in high performance competition gliders (effectively Formula 1 machines) which cannot self launch and only have a small motor for use in emergency. The existing motor gliding does not refine the necessary competition skills and will soon decline as the operating costs are beyond the next generation.

In terms of the Green Belt, the application is neither compliant or consistent with the prevailing local and National planning policy of retaining Green Belt wherever possible. However, as large Green belt areas to the north and south of the airfield have already been given consent for industrial development it would seem the council has limited concern over the loss of more Green Belt. The report and intrinsic attitude of the Ecology Solutions report is not encouraging. Calcereous grassland is part of the 'pasture' group of flora types that has largely been eradicated from the UK. Estimates from official sources put the loss at 97% of pre war largely due to the use of artificial fertilisers and insecticides. Major initiatives are now in place to improve the situation, something not mentioned in the ES report.

For all of the reasons set out above the APPG objects to the Application, and any others that threaten the future of Bicester Airfield, in the strongest possible manner and asks you to consider the best interests of General Aviation and UK plc in the mid/long term as a priority.

This application is contrary to Government policy on both Aviation and Environmental grounds. It ignores the contribution the airfield can make to the sport of Gliding, at which we are a world leader, our aviation and architectural heritage and we therefore strongly urge you to ignore the officer recommendation, prioritise the long term interests of your region and **REFUSE** this proposal.

Yours sincerely

John Gilder MRICS FRAeS  
Chairman

Airfields Working Group  
All Party Parliamentary Group on General Aviation

House of Commons  
Westminster  
SW1AA 0AA

Temp E:  
Mob:



Membership of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on General Aviation includes 220 parliamentarians across both Houses of Parliament. Our mission is to help make the UK the best country in the world for General Aviation. Find out more about membership and our work at: [www.generalaviationappg.uk](http://www.generalaviationappg.uk)