

EDGARS

Planning Statement

Location: Land at Former RAF Bicester, Buckingham Road,
Bicester OX27 8AL

Proposal: Change of use of land to allow for aviation, vehicle
exercising and other uses/events

Prepared for: Bicester Motion

Date: April 2023

Prepared by: Sam Biles
Alex Edge BSc (Hons) MA
MRTPI

Project Ref: 689/3412

Checked by: Jon Westerman BA (Hons)
DipTP MRTPI

Issue: V2

Authorised by: Bicester Motion

LPA: Cherwell District Council





Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Site Context.....	4
3	Proposed Development	7
4	Planning History	11
5	Planning Policy.....	13
6	Planning Assessment	17
7	Conclusions.....	27

Appendices

Appendix 1.	Images of the Site and its Context.....	29
-------------	---	----



1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Edgars on behalf of Bicester Motion (henceforth referred to as 'the applicant'), in support of an application seeking full planning permission for the *change of use of land to allow for aviation, vehicle exercising and other uses/events* at land at former RAF Bicester, Buckingham Road, Bicester OX27 8AL.
- 1.2 This application seeks to regularise the ongoing use of the airfield perimeter track and associated land at the former RAF Bicester airfield (now the 'Bicester Motion site') for various aviation, vehicle exercising and other event functions which have been occurring on the site since 2013 (when Bicester Motion acquired the site). These functions have helped establish and maintain Bicester Motion as one of the most successful and diverse leisure and tourism offers in Oxfordshire.

Document Structure

- 1.3 This document is structured as follows:
- Section 2 introduces the site context (in relation to the character and planning designations of the site and its surroundings);
 - Section 3 describes the proposed development;
 - Section 4 establishes the relevant planning history;
 - Section 5 lists the relevant planning policy;
 - Section 6 assesses the key planning matters; and
 - Section 7 concludes the statement and demonstrates how the proposal accords with the development plan and relevant material considerations.

Supporting Information

- 1.4 The following documents are provided as part of this application:
- Location Plan (Ridge)
 - Application Forms
 - Planning Statement (Edgars Limited)
 - Ecological Briefing Note: Track Activity Regularisation (Ecology Solutions)
 - Transport Statement (Mode Transport)
 - Environmental Noise Impact Assessment (Hydrock)
- 1.5 These documents should be read in conjunction with this statement and are referenced where relevant in this statement.



2 Site Context

Site Location

- 2.1 The Bicester Motion site occupies the former RAF Bicester airfield that forms the northeast periphery of Bicester and lies 1½ miles northeast of the town centre. The site is outlined at **Figure 1**.



Figure 1: Site Location (outlined in red).

Settlement and Wider Area Context

- 2.2 Bicester is a market town and is one of two main towns in the District. It is identified in the 2021 Census as having a population of 37,020 (up from 32,642 recorded in the 2011 Census), showing the town's sustained growth. Bicester is identified as being less sensitive in landscape terms than other towns in the district and has a focus for housing supply and economic growth.
- 2.3 The adopted Local Plan states that Bicester's economy is focused on storage and distribution, retail, food processing, technology and automotive engineering. Most of the employment in Bicester is in the distribution and manufacturing sectors. Previously, before closure, MoD activities at former RAF Bicester also contributed to the economy of the town.
- 2.4 The town is well-connected by road and rail. It has good infrastructure and significant investment is either being delivered or planned to enhance this infrastructure. Bicester is approximately 14 miles of Oxford. The good connectivity, close-proximity and relationship with Oxford helps Bicester by creating opportunities for economic development. Bicester is also well-connected to and influenced by the M25 corridor and London markets.



- 2.5 The Local Plan identifies opportunities for Bicester to develop a knowledge economy around existing and new employers, sectors, and clusters to create a centre of expertise and competitive advantage.
- 2.6 Cherwell District Council (CDC) have been in consultation and are developing their Industrial Strategy, they have identified Bicester Motion as a key delivery site for leisure, tourism and employment that support economic recovery and growth and prosperity in the region as well as social, health and well-being benefits.

Bicester Motion

- 2.7 Bicester Motion operates the land at former RAF Bicester which is centrally located in the heart of the 'Motorsport Valley' as well as the Oxfordshire Tourism Cluster. The former is a triangular concentration of automotive technology and research enterprises that stretches between Cambridge, Oxford and Silverstone whilst the latter include attractions such as Blenheim Palace, Bicester Village, Waddesdon Manor and the Cotswolds receiving around 30 million tourism visits each year. It is situated on the outskirts of the market town of Bicester in the Cherwell district of North Oxfordshire, about halfway between London and Birmingham.
- 2.8 Experience Oxfordshire recognise the opportunity for Bicester Motion to become the most diverse leisure and tourism offer in Oxfordshire, this is essential to supporting recovery in the leisure and tourism sector.

The Site

- 2.9 The application site covers the 141-hectare Bicester Motion site, however the proposed aviation, vehicle exercising and other uses/event functions proposed primarily relate to the experience track and its associated/adjoining land, particularly the land adjacent to the eastern aspect of the Technical Site where the larger events are concentrated. The site has been used for various aviation, automotive and other related purposes over the previous ten years.
- 2.10 The experience track is formed of the circa 3.3km Flying Field perimeter track and some of its dispersal tracks (particularly those adjacent to the Technical Site). The track is ~12-15m wide and is constructed of concrete hardstanding. The track is surrounded by grassland.
- 2.11 The majority of built form at Bicester Motion lies outside of the experience track. However, there are a couple of structures within the confines of the perimeter track and dispersal tracks and these include the following structures adjacent to the Technical Site:
- Building 109 (the Watch Office with Tower – grade II listed)
 - Building 111 (the Fire Tender House – Building making a positive contribution to the Conservation Area)
 - Four Defence Structures (including two pillboxes which are also Schedule Monuments)
- 2.12 The proposed track uses and events are typically concentrated on the land adjacent to the Technical Site which contains multiple listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets. The most notable assets in this area of the Technical Site include Buildings 108 and 113 (Type C Hangers – grade II listed) and, slightly further away, Buildings 79 and 137 (Type A Hangers – grade II listed). In addition, the Conservation Area Appraisal appears to show four Defence Buildings (which are also Scheduled Monuments), plus a further four Scheduled Monuments between the track and these buildings.



2.13 Images of the track and its context are attached at **Appendix 1**.

Access

2.14 There are multiple access points to the Bicester Motion site which provide a connection to the experience track. These are detailed in the Transport Statement and in summary include the main entrance to the Technical Site (c.50m north of the A4421 Buckingham Road / A4421 Skimmingdish Lane roundabout), the South Gate (c.250m southeast of the roundabout) and the North Gate on Buckingham Road (c.650m north of the roundabout).

Immediate Surroundings

2.15 The wider Bicester Motion site is bordered to the north by Stratton Audley Quarry and to the east by agricultural fields and a distribution site to the southeast. It is bound to the south by Skimmingdish Lane and to the west by Buckingham Road. There are residential properties to the south, southwest and west of the Bicester Motion site (on the opposite sides of the bordering roads).

Planning Designations

2.16 **Historic environment:** The site falls within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, which was originally designated in July 2002 and reviewed in November 2008. The site lies within the Flying Field character area and adjoins the Technical Site character area.

2.17 It is outlined within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal that, at the outbreak of World War II, the Flying Field was considerably enlarged to the north and south with tracks, and 41 panhandle standings to enable the dispersed parking of aircraft. The part of the airfield to which the application relates was likely constructed during this period.

2.18 The wider Bicester Motion site contains 22 grade II Listed Buildings, with many of the remaining structures being labelled as 'Buildings making a positive contribution' or 'Defence Structures'. These structures are understood to be non-designated heritage assets. The wider site also contains multiple Scheduled Monuments, most of which are concentrated in the Technical Site. Those assets within the notable proximity of the track are listed above.

2.19 The site lies within an area of archaeological interest.

2.20 **Ecology:** There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within 2km of the site, the Stratton Audley Quarry to the northeast. The track is adjoined by and the wider airfield is largely surrounded by a Local Wildlife Site. In addition, the Cherwell Policy Map shows that the track is adjoined by and contains an area of NERC ACT S41 Habitat. It is understood this relates to the Calcareous Grassland identified in the submitted ecological reporting.

2.21 **Flooding:** For the avoidance of doubt, the site falls within Flood Zone 1 and is at very low risk of flooding from surface water and all other sources.



3 Proposed Development

- 3.1 This application seeks planning permission for the *change of use of land to allow for aviation, vehicle exercising and other uses/events*.
- 3.2 For the avoidance of doubt, this application seeks to regularise the ongoing usage of the experience track and associated airfield land for the uses outlined below. These uses have been occurring on the site since 2013, when Bicester Motion acquired the site.
- 3.3 The spatial arrangement of the experience track and airfield use is shown at figure 4.1 of the Transport Statement, copied at **Figure 2** below:

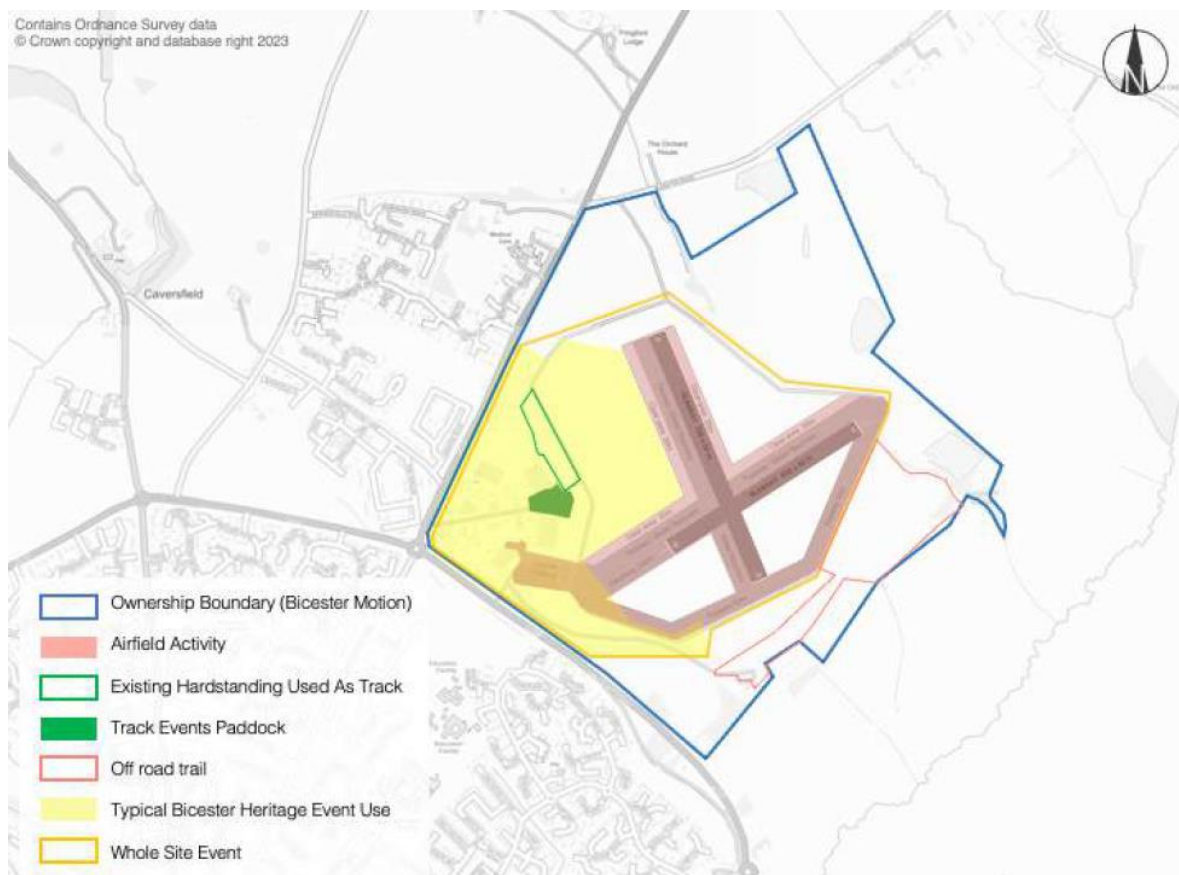


Figure 2: Spatial arrangement of the experience track and airfield use. Source: Transport Statement.

- 3.4 The figures below outline the existing functions and characteristics of each function.

Typical Uses

- 3.5 The typical uses for site are highlighted below:

- Airfield flying operations:-
 - The site is to remain in its primary use as an airfield providing flight experiences and training. Bicester Aerodrome Company oversees aviation operations at the airfield in association with specialists, for example Finest Hour Experiences.



- Typically c.5-20 attendees.
- Typically c.355 occurrences in a year.
- Vehicles include single and multi-engine planes and helicopters, plus light aircraft (e.g. microlights and gliders).
- Promotional (including film and photoshoot):-
 - Typically private events.
 - Clients who are looking to gain imagery of the vehicles via static photography or slow tracking shots for media outlets.
 - Typically 1-5 attendees.
 - Typically c.20 occurrences in a year.
 - Vehicles are road legal vehicles.
 - Examples include Car Magazine, Haymarket et al.
- Bicester Heritage tenant users:-
 - Specialists based at Bicester Heritage, who are looking to familiarise their customers with their car brand / teach them how to use their vehicle.
 - Typically hour slots.
 - Typically 1-5 attendees.
 - Typically c.200 occurrences in a year.
 - Vehicles are road legal and classic vehicles.
 - Examples include Morgan, Sports Purpose, Little Car Co., Electrogenics etc.
- External Experience:-
 - External clients who hire the track and lay out 'experiences / training days' as retail experiences. Using the track to drive cars in a safe environment.
 - Typically ~100 attendees.
 - Typically c.10 occurrences in a year.
 - Examples include young driver training, car chase heroes etc.
 - Vehicles are road legal vehicles.
- Vehicle Exercising:-
 - Visiting clients who are seeking to run out the vehicles to ensure that they are fit for purpose and gain reading for any further improvements.
 - Typically hour slots or half days.
 - Typically 6-20 attendees.
 - Typically c. 60 occurrences in a year.
 - Examples includes Oxbotica and BTC.
 - Vehicles are road legal vehicles and some race vehicles (silencers required).
- Community and leisure use (external users):-
 - Used for non-vehicle / motorised use related activities, such as bike club training and triathlon training grounds for the local community.
 - These uses often take place during the evening (pre-dusk) or on a weekend.



- Typically between 21-50 attendees.
- Typically c. 30 occurrences in a year.
- Examples include Bicester Triathlon Club and VCRT Bike Team et al.
- Vehicles include bicycles.

Event Uses

3.6 This could be Bicester Heritage, external hire or other events that use the track as part of the wider event content. Participants are able to take their cars onto the track to drive in a safe environment, the hirer may have demonstration cars with tutorials for drivers to use or the track could be used as a car display area.

3.7 The typical Bicester Heritage, external hire and other event uses are set out below.

- Bicester Heritage Events:-
 - Organised by Bicester Heritage, ticketed events to allow public access to the venue to view car displays and explore Bicester Heritage.
 - Typically between 7,000 to 12,000 attendees per event.
 - Typically c. 5 occurrences a year, each a day in length.
 - Examples include Scrambles, Super Scrambles and Flywheel.
 - Vehicles are road legal vehicles.
- External Events:-
 - External events, using the track and airfield as part of the wider event content and displays (some motor vehicle orientated, but not all). Participants are able to take their cars onto the track to drive in a safe environment or the hirer may have demonstration cars with tutorials for the drivers to use. The track can also be used as a car display area, for parking or as a catering area.
 - Typically between 7,000-12,000 attendees per event.
 - Typically c. 25 occurrences a year.
 - Examples include RADwood, Collecting Cars, Historic Auctions, Built it Live etc.
 - Vehicles are road legal vehicles.
- Car Club Meets:-
 - Typically private events, where external clients have hired part of the site, but the event is closed to their club members. Clients who are looking to gain imagery of the vehicles via static photography or slow tracking shots for media outlets.
 - Typically 2,000 attendees.
 - Typically c. 10 occurrences in a year.
 - Examples include the Jaguar Enthusiast Club.
- Promotional videos / films airfield / Hangar 113 (including film and photo shoot):-
 - Typically private events for the clients who are looking to use Bicester Heritage as a film or photography background for films, fashion shoots or car filming.
 - Typically 50 attendees.



- Typically c.20 occurrences in a year.
- Examples include Loewe and Urban Automotive.

Summary

3.8 A summary of the uses, estimated annual occurrences for each use and estimated maximum number of attendees for each use is contained in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Existing Site Operation		
Site Utilisation	Estimated Annual Occurrences	Estimated Maximum Number of Attendees
Airfield Flying Operations	355	20
Promotional Shoots	20	5
BH Tenant Users	200	5
External Experiences	10	100
Vehicle Exercising	60	20
BH Events (e.g. Scramble / Flywheel)	5	12,000
External Events (e.g. RADwood)	25	12,000
Car Club Meets	10	2,000
Film / Photography Venue	20	50
Other	30	50



4 Planning History

4.1 The planning records of relevance to this application include those relating to the experience track and its immediate surroundings. The relevant records are set out at **Table 2**.

Table 2: Planning History				
Location	Reference	Description	Decision	Date
Hotel	22/01643/F	Variation of Conditions 10 (access), 11 (revised energy strategy) & 12 (training and employment plan) of 18/0153/F	Approved	20/02/2023
Experience Quarter	21/01224/OUT	<i>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).</i>	Approved	31/03/2023
Experience Quarter and Airfield	21/01374/SO	<i>Request for Screening Opinion under Part 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 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).</i>	Screening Opinion not requesting EIA	05/05/2021
Innovation Quarter	19/02708/OUT	<i>Outline:- Provide new employment units comprising B1 (Business), B2 (General Industrial), B8 (Storage) and D1 (Education) uses with ancillary offices, storage, display and sales, with all matters reserved except for access.</i>	Approved	27/08/2021



Command Works	18/01333/F	<i>Extension to existing Technical Site to provide new employment units comprising flexible B1(c) light industrial, B2 (general industrial), B8 (storage or distribution) uses with ancillary offices, storage, display and sales, together with associated access, parking and landscaping</i>	Approved	03/09/2019
Hotel	18/01253/F	<i>Erection of hotel and conference facility with associated access, parking, and landscaping.</i>	Approved	11/03/2020
Technical Site	16/01805/F	<i>Change of use of buildings from sui generis MOD use to various commercial uses as detailed in accompanying Planning Statement with associated physical works and demolition of buildings 101 and 104 and erection of replacement structures.</i>	Approved	25/09/2017

- 4.2 Of particular note is the Experience Quarter, as one of the elements approved under application 21/01224/OUT was the 3.1km vehicle circuit (comprising 1.5km and 1.3km loops that could operate independently and a 600m mini loop and low-friction training surface area). This approval demonstrates that the principle and associated impacts of using the track for this purpose is acceptable and in accordance with all other development plan policies and material considerations.
- 4.3 In addition and as summarised in the Committee Report of application 21/01224/OUT, the above history shows that the general approach taken by the Council has been to allow changes of use that fit with the commercial nature of the site to ensure its long-term use and viability with an aim of conserving the heritage assets on site.



5 Planning Policy

- 5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is echoed in paragraph 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in July 2021, which is itself a material consideration.
- 5.2 Section 66 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 directs that in considering a proposal, special regard is given to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting.
- 5.3 Section 72 (of the same Act) directs that special regard is given to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of Conservation Areas.
- 5.4 The following development plan documents are relevant to this application:
- The Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (adopted July 2015)
 - The saved policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 (adopted November 1996)
- 5.5 The following documents are identified as material considerations:
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (published July 2021)
 - National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) (published July 2019)
 - Cherwell Local Plan 2040 (emerging)
 - Bicester Heritage – Heritage Partnership Agreement
 - RAF Bicester Planning Brief and Draft Development Principles (2009)
 - RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal (November 2008)
- 5.6 The relevant sections and policies of the development plan documents and relevant material considerations are listed below and set out as necessary in Planning Assessment section of this statement.

National Planning Policy Framework

Table 3: National Planning Policy Framework	
Section	Paragraph
2. Achieving sustainable development	8 and 11
6. Building a strong, competitive economy	81 and 83
9. Promoting sustainable transport	110, 111 and 112
15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment	174, 185, 187 and 188
16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment	194, 199, 202 and 203



Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031: Part 1

Table 4: Local Plan Policies	
Number	Title
PSD 1	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
Bicester 8	Former RAF Bicester
SLE 1	Employment Development
SLE 3	Supporting Tourism Growth
SLE 4	Improved Transport Connections
BSC 8	Securing Health and Well-Being
ESD 1	Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change
ESD 10	Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment
ESD 13	Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement
ESD 15	The Character of the Built and Historic Environment

- 5.7 Of particular note is Policy Bicester 8 which states that the Council will encourage conservation-led proposals to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for the Former RAF Bicester Technical Site and Flying Field. The policy supports heritage, tourism, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses. The development of hotel and conference facilities will also be supported as part of a wider package of employment uses. The continuation of gliding use will be supported. All proposals will be required to accord with the approved Planning Brief for the site and take into account the Bicester Masterplan.
- 5.8 Furthermore, proposals must maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, protect listed, scheduled and other important buildings, their setting, and protect the sensitive historic fabric of the buildings and preserve the openness of the airfield. The biodiversity of the site should be protected and enhanced. Opportunities for improving access to the countryside will be encouraged. Proposals should have due regard to the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and should be considered against Policy ESD 15.
- 5.9 The Committee Report of application 21/01224/OUT advised that "*The Council's five year review of Local Plan policies (approved January 2021) concluded that policy Bicester 8 was '...a site-specific policy that is generally consistent with the NPPF and local circumstances do not indicate that the policy needs updating at this time'*".



Cherwell Local Plan 1996

Table 5: Saved Local Plan Policies	
Number	Title
C1	Protection of Sites of Nature Conservation Value
C2	Development Affecting Protected Species
C7	Landscape Conservation
C23	Retention of Features Contributing to the Character or Appearance of a Conservation Area
C25	Development Affecting the Site or Setting of a Scheduled Ancient Monument

Cherwell Local Plan 2040

- 5.10 The Council is currently undertaking a review of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031, with a regulation 18 consultation of the draft Cherwell Local Plan 2040 reported to the Council's Executive in January 2023.
- 5.11 Policy Bicester 8, the allocation which the site falls within, is being updated to Core Policy 20: Former RAF Bicester. The draft wording of this policy (from the draft regulation 18 consultation version) is outlined below:

“States that conservation-led proposals for the former RAF Bicester site will be encouraged that help to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for the technical site and flying field.

Proposals for heritage tourism uses, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses will be particularly encouraged. The development of hotel and conference facilities will also be supported as part of a wider package of employment uses.

All proposals will be required to accord with the latest Conservation Area Appraisal for the site.

Any proposals for the former RAF Bicester site should demonstrate how they will maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, protect listed, scheduled and other important buildings, their setting, and protect the sensitive historic fabric of the buildings and preserve the openness of the airfield. The biodiversity of the site should be protected and enhanced and habitats and species surveys (including a Great Crested Newt survey) should be undertaken.

The continuation of flying use will be supported at the site and opportunities for improving access to the countryside will also be encouraged.

Proposals for the restoration and use of Stratton Audley Quarry will be supported for informal outdoor recreation uses provided that the proposals are compatible with the uses of the wider RAF Bicester site and the quarry site's designation as a Local Wildlife Site and partial SSSI.



Proposals should be in accordance with the Development Plan taken as a whole.”

RAF Bicester Planning Brief and Draft Development Principles (2009)

- 5.12 Notwithstanding that the brief is not a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), the document is identified as a material planning consideration. The Planning Brief contains informal development principles drafted prior to disposal of the site by the MOD. The site was considered to be in a poor state of repair and the planning brief was drafted within that context. Having regard to the above and the planning history of the site, the planning brief is of limited weight in the consideration of this application.

RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal

- 5.13 The RAF Bicester Conservation Area was designated in 2002 and reviewed in 2008. The 2008 review led to the boundary being extended. The Conservation Area Appraisal has been considered as part of this application.



6 Planning Assessment

6.1 Having regard to the established planning context and the nature of the proposed development, the following planning matters are of relevance to the assessment of this application and are addressed in turn:

- Principle of development
- Historic environment
- Natural environment
- Transport
- Ecology
- Noise

Principle of Development

6.2 Policy PSD 1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development) outlines that when considering development proposals the Council will take a proactive approach to reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.3 Policy SLE 1 (Employment Development) supports employment development on allocated sites within the plan, including RAF Bicester. The policy further states that existing employment sites should be retained for employment uses, employment development will be focused on existing employment sites and employment development, including intensification will be permitted subject to compliance with other policies in the development plan and material considerations.

6.4 Policy SLE 3 (Supporting Tourism Growth) supports proposals for new or improved tourism facilities in sustainable locations, where they accord with other policies in the plan, to increase overnight stays and visitor numbers within the District.

6.5 Policy Bicester 8 (Former RAF Bicester) supports conservation-led proposals to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for the Former RAF Bicester technical site and flying field. It will support heritage tourism uses, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses. Core Policy 20 (Former RAF Bicester) of the emerging Cherwell Local Plan 2040 echoes this.

6.6 This application seeks to regularise the use of the experience track and associated land through the change of use of the airfield to allow for aviation, vehicle exercising and other uses/events. These uses have been ongoing since Bicester Motion acquired the site in 2013.

6.7 Having regard to the uses typical and event uses of the experience track listed at section 3 of this statement, it is considered that the use of the site falls within the parameters of Policy Bicester 8 as the track is used for tourism, leisure, recreation, employment and community purposes. Indeed, the track forms a vital component to the many aviation and automotive businesses established within the Technical Site which use the track for vehicle testing and operating purposes.

6.8 Additionally and as noted in section 4 of this statement, the site area of the Experience Quarter (approved under application 21/01224/OUT) partially covers the application site. As part of the Experience Quarter application, planning permission was granted for the construction of vehicle demonstration circuits which utilise a significant proportion of the experience track and wider airfield.



As such, the principle of using the airfield for the vehicle exercising in associated with Bicester Motion and the businesses which occupy the wider site has previously been found to be acceptable.

- 6.9 With regard to the RAF Bicester Planning Brief and Draft Development Principles (2009), an objective of this document is to maintain the openness of the Flying Field. As demonstrated in the Natural Environment subsection below, the proposed development maintains the openness of the Flying Field and therefore the principle of development complies with the brief in this respect.
- 6.10 Having regard to the above, it is considered that proposed development complies with the provisions of Policies PSD 1, SLE 1, SLE 3 and Bicester 8 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) and NPPF section 2 (the presumption in favour of sustainable development). As such, the principle of development is considered to be acceptable subject to the development complying with the other relevant policy tests of development plan and material considerations.

Historic Environment

- 6.11 Policy ESD 15 (The Character of the Built and Historic Environment) requires that development complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. Where development is in the vicinity of any of the District's distinctive natural or historic assets, delivering high quality design that complements the asset will be essential. It further states that development should conserve, sustain and enhance designated and non-designated heritage assets including buildings, features, archaeology, conservation areas and their setting.
- 6.12 This policy broadly reflects the provisions of Saved Policies C23 (Retention of Features Contributing to the Character or Appearance of a Conservation Area) and C25 (Development Affecting the Site or Setting of a Scheduled Ancient Monument).
- 6.13 Additionally, Policy Bicester 8 (Former RAF Bicester) states that conservation-led proposals to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for the wider site will be encouraged by the Council. Proposals must maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, protect listed, scheduled and other important buildings, their setting, and protect the sensitive historic fabric of the buildings and preserve the openness of the airfield.
- 6.14 Paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that heritage assets be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.
- 6.15 Paragraph 199 of the NPPF requires that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of the level of any potential harm. Paragraph 200 states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.
- 6.16 As set out in section 2, the site lies within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area (CA). The experience track is within notable proximity of multiple grade II listed buildings, most notably Buildings 108 and 113 (Type C Hangers), Building 109 (the Watch Office with Tower) and, slightly further away, Buildings 79 and 137 (Type A Hangers). The track also contains/is within notable proximity of Building 111 (the Fire Tender House – a building making a positive contribution to the CA) and four Defence Structures, including two pillboxes which are also Schedule Monuments.



- 6.17 As set out in the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal, the track was historically used to allow vehicles and their loads to access aircraft parked on the soft verges and within panhandle areas. The development outlined within this application involves the use of part of the airfield perimeter track for aviation and automotive purposes.
- 6.18 It is considered that the proposed development will not have any direct, adverse impacts on any listed buildings, buildings making a positive contribution to the CA, Defence Structures, Scheduled Monuments or the wider CA as the development does not involve the erection of any additional hardstanding or structures, and any structures that may be used for events hosted at Bicester Heritage would only be temporary in nature and erected for the short duration of each event.
- 6.19 With respect to the pillbox Defence Structure and Scheduled Monument (located in the Flying Field grassland where the central division adjoins the western aspect of the track), this structure is appropriately safeguarded given its location. As such, the structure and its historic relationship with the perimeter track and wider CA has been and continues to be conserved.
- 6.20 Resultantly, it is considered that the continued use of the track does not result in any harm to the historic environment. Nonetheless, should officers consider that the use of the track has any potential to generate less than substantial harm, this harm should be weighed against the substantial public benefits of the proposal and a balanced judgement should be made with due regard to these benefits (set out below) in accordance with paragraphs 202 and 203 of the NPPF.
- 6.21 The public benefits associated with the proposal are as follows:
- The proposal will contribute to the delivery of the Council's objectives including sustainable economic growth;
 - Contribute to achieving a long-term commercially successful future for the wider site;
 - Contribute to repurposing the perimeter track and finding a new and long-term sustainable use for the airfield;
 - Deliver substantial economic benefits to the town of Bicester and the wider District, in addition to the Motorsport Valley and Oxfordshire Tourism Cluster;
 - Facilitate economic stimulation into the post-Covid recovery;
 - Provide public access to an otherwise closed and inaccessible site enabling understanding of this historic area; and
 - Utilising a part of the site that would otherwise remain unused.
- 6.22 The heritage benefits arising from the development are as follows:
- Offering new ways of experiencing the airfield via diverse automotive activity offerings;
 - Giving the whole site a unified purpose that secures a long-term future for the site;
 - Improving public access to the site, both physical and intellectual;



- Preserving the significance of the adjacent listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments by improving access through holding events at the site;
- Providing new opportunities for the interpretation and enhancement of the memories associated with the site;
- Creating new experiences that derive from the site's history of innovation and experiment, with the potential to add new chapters to the history of the place, which in turn will be valued by society; and
- Ensuring that present and future generations can learn from and enjoy this component of our historic environment.

6.23 Having regard to the above, it is considered that the numerous public and heritage benefits arising from the proposed development would outweigh any potential harm associated with the proposed typical and event aviation and automotive uses of the track. As such the proposal accords with the provisions of NPPF paragraphs 202 and 203.

6.24 Moreover, Bicester Motion and the specialist businesses on site represent the optimum viable use of the former RAF Bicester site. The use of the experience track and airfield is critical to the operation of these entities and as such, ensuring their continued use of the track not only puts the track to its optimum viable use, but also supports the optimum viable use of the wider site.

6.25 In summary the proposal helps to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for the wider site by supporting Bicester Motion and the specialist businesses in a manner that maintains and enhances the special interest, character, appearance and setting of the Former RAF Bicester CA, its listed buildings, Scheduled Monuments and other important buildings. Resultantly, the proposed continued use of the track would complement and enhance the historic environment in accordance with Policies ESD 15 and Bicester 8, Saved Policies C23 and C25 and NPPF section 16.

Natural Environment

6.26 Policy ESD 13 (Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement) states that opportunities will be sought to secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape, particularly in urban fringe locations, through the restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscapes, features or habitats and, where appropriate, the creation of new ones. Development will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character. The policy wording of Policy C7 broadly reflects part of Policy ESD 13 which states that development will not normally be permitted where it would cause demonstrable harm to the local landscape.

6.27 As stated in the Committee Report of application 21/01224/OUT (relating to the Experience Quarter), there are no statutory landscape designations at the site. The report highlights that the openness of the Flying Field is a distinctive feature of the site.

6.28 The proposed development relates to the ongoing uses of the experience track and associated land which, by their temporary nature, have to date maintained the characteristic openness of the airfield and the associated views into, across and out of the Flying Field and the adjoining Technical Site.



- 6.29 All uses listed at **Table 2** only result in temporary negligible-minimal impacts to the landscape given their nature. The majority of uses listed are particularly low-key with limited attendees. Resultantly, the landscape impact of these uses barely registers from the public realm.
- 6.30 The larger events (e.g. Scramble and Flywheel – depicted at **Figure 3**) are considered to generate some level of landscape impact as viewed from the public realm. However, these events are temporary and, as shown at **Table 2**, are limited to just a few events a year. Furthermore, most such events run for only one to two days and therefore any landscape impact is commensurately limited.
- 6.31 Moreover, these events primarily utilise the facilities within the Technical Site and as such, the need to construct temporary structures in the Flying Field is limited. Rather the visual changes to this area associated with these events is minimised to the introduction of vehicles, small-scale tents and other structures and means of enclosure (e.g. flags and track fencing) which are generally gathered on the southwest portion of the track adjacent to the Technical Site.



Figure 3: Images of previous Scramble and Flywheel events. Source: Bicester Heritage website.

- 6.32 In addition, the Committee Report of application 21/01224/OUT also acknowledged that the wider Bicester Motion site does have some capacity to absorb some change and this is reflected in its allocation under Policy Bicester 8.



6.33 Having regard to the temporary nature of the proposed typical and event uses, the appropriate scale, frequency and timescale of events (notably the low frequency and short timescale of larger events), the spatial siting of events close to the Technical Site and the absence of significant structures during such events, it is considered that the proposed continuance of the typical and event uses maintains the characteristic openness of the site and therefore respects the local landscape character. As such, the proposal complies with Policy ESD 13 of the Local Plan 2011-2031, Saved Policy C7 of the Local Plan 1996 and NPPF section 15.

Transport

6.34 Policy SLE 4 (Improved Transport Connections) outlines that all development, where reasonable to do so, should facilitate the use of sustainable modes of transport to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. Encouragement will be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion.

6.35 Furthermore, the National Planning Policy Framework sets out in paragraph 111 that development should be refused where it results in severe impacts on road safety and function.

6.36 This application is supported by a Transport Statement prepared by Mode Transport Planning, and should be read in conjunction with this report.

6.37 The statement includes a detailed review of the existing transport infrastructure. This review found that that the site has good links with the strategic road and public transport network.

6.38 With respect to promoting sustainable modes of transport, the statement concludes that the site is accessible by sustainable modes of travel; with existing bus routes along Buckingham Road offering frequent services, within a short walk of the site (for example the X5 which stops c.50m from the main site access). Pedestrian and cycle links surround the site and provide good connections with neighbouring residential areas and links to Bicester Town Centre (where the Bicester North Railway Station is located).

6.39 A review of accident data on the local surrounding highway network suggests that there is no strong correlation in how incidents occurred, or were distributed, throughout the study area. Resultantly, the analysis of the local highway network demonstrates that there are no existing safety concerns and therefore no highway safety risks that are likely to be exacerbated by the continuance of the typical track uses and events.

6.40 Section 5 of the statement assesses the existing traffic generation of the proposed typical track uses and events and is summarised below:

- In order to calculate the number of trips that are made to the site by car, indicative multi-modal percentages have been sourced from the 2021 NTS Average Number of Trips by Main Purpose and Mode (Table NTS0409) – using the modal splits for the combined journey purposes including ‘Leisure’, ‘Personal Business’, ‘Other Escort’ and ‘Shopping’.
- The multi-modal split... forecasts that of all trips to the site, that 84% are made by car (either as a driver (57%) or passenger (27%)). This proportion has been applied to the overall estimated attendees to each of the events to calculate the number of estimated vehicle trips associated with the existing operation of the site.



- The majority of events take place on weekends (in particular Sundays, for the largest event days, such as Scrambles, when baseline vehicle flow/traffic on the local highway network is typically significantly lower, than that during the weekdays. It should also be noted that the larger events tend to take place on separate days and therefore the 5,628 vehicles associated with the Bicester Heritage Events is approximately the highest level of traffic that the site generates on a given weekend day.
- It is estimated that the majority of vehicle arrivals to the site on the largest event days, take place between 09:00 to 11:00 hours, with 2,245 vehicles (i.e., 40% of all arrivals) arriving between 09:00-10:00 hours and 1,737 vehicles (i.e., 31% of all arrivals) between 10:00-11:00 hours. The proportion of arrivals during the hours outside of these times is significantly reduced (i.e. c.<700 vehicles combined from 07:00-09:00 and from 11:00-14:00).
- The existing operation of events have already been occurring for some time (i.e., the past 10 years) and there are not considered to be any existing highway safety concerns as a result of the development traffic associated with the existing events at the site.
- The vast majority of events (and associated vehicle trips) also take place on weekends; and as aforementioned above, the weekend traffic profiles and volumes are considerably lower than those during the typical weekday.
- Furthermore, the larger events taking place at the site have been (and will continue to be) subject to Event Day Traffic Management Plans, which are prepared, and typically submitted to and agreed with Cherwell District Council Safety Advisory Group, who consult with Thames Valley Police.
- Therefore, again, there are not considered to be any adverse impacts associated with existing highway operations, and as such, no further traffic impact assessments are considered necessary / required.

6.41 Having regard to the above, it is therefore considered that the continued use of the experience track and wider airfield for aviation, vehicle exercising and other use/event purposes does not result in any adverse impacts arising from the existing highway operations. Additionally, the applicant has measures in place and consults with local groups in order to manage transport impacts.

6.42 In summary, it is considered that the proposed regularisation of the typical track uses and events promotes sustainable transport, provides safe, suitable and convenient access and has an acceptable impact on the local highway network. Resultantly, the proposed development accords with Policy SLE 4 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) and NPPF section 9.

Ecology

6.43 Policy ESD 10 (Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment) outlines that the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the natural environment will be achieved by a variety of criteria.

6.44 Paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework outlines that planning policies and decisions should contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment.



6.45 An Ecological Briefing Note, prepared by Ecology Solutions, has been submitted in support of this application, and should be read in conjunction with this report. This Ecological Briefing Note comments that:

- Ecology Solutions has a thorough understanding of the site, not least with the undertaking of various botanical and species surveys since 2018 to date. The ecological baseline for the site has been reported in multiple previous submissions to Cherwell District Council (CDC).
- It is important to note that each of these activities have been on-going for several years... It is further relevant to note that these activities were ongoing throughout the period during which the site has been subject to ecological assessment by Ecology Solutions. The activities themselves can therefore be viewed as a component of the baseline situation.
- Reflecting the above, and that use of the site is proposed to remain unchanged in real terms, the proposals for the continued use of the land to allow for aviation, vehicle exercising and other uses/events are not assessed to result in any impacts of ecological significance. For clarity, and relative to the ecological baseline, the proposals would not give rise to any additional impacts on existing habitats, nor any additional impacts on protected or notable faunal species. The future land use (and any associated impacts) would be comparable to the baseline situation.
- Whilst no additional biodiversity impacts are anticipated to arise, it is acknowledged that the completion of certain activities could, in the absence of sensitive management, give rise to potential adverse impacts on faunal species... In order to support this regularisation application, appropriate safeguards have been identified, to ensure ongoing use of the Application Site can proceed in accordance with planning policy and legislation of relevance to biodiversity.

6.46 These proposed ecological safeguards and sensitive working methodologies cover the aerodrome use, the off-road trail, external user track events and whole site event use. It identifies a suite of precautionary working methodologies which will ensure the continued use of the site can avoid potentially adverse impacts on biodiversity.

6.47 The Ecological Briefing Note concludes that, given the current use of the site for event uses, and with the adoption of the safeguards and sensitive working methodologies outlined within the note, no impacts are considered to arise to designated statutory and non-statutory sites, Flora or Fauna from the proposal.

6.48 Having regard to the above, it is considered that the development, through the use of ecological safeguards and sensitive working methodologies, will protect and manage the ecology present on the site. As such, it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy ESD 10 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan.

Noise

6.49 Policy ESD 15 (The Character of the Built and Historic Environment) identifies that development proposals should consider the amenity of both existing and future development, including matters of privacy, outlook, natural lighting, ventilation, and indoor and outdoor space.



6.50 Policy BSC 8 (Securing Health and Well-Being) seeks to promote and health and well-being. Whilst the policy does not specifically refer to noise, the explanatory identifies that planning decisions can have an effect noise which contributes to health and well-being.

6.51 An Environmental Noise Impact Assessment has been prepared by Hydrock in support of this application, and should be read in conjunction with this report. It finds that:

- For the baseline noise survey, measurements were obtained at two locations, Fulmar Court and Blencowe Close, to establish the existing prevailing noise environment and measure the diurnal variation in noise levels over weekday, and weekend periods.
- Noise predictions have been carried out using the ADA modelling software which uses calculation methodology found in BS 4142:2014, and for certain types of noise, information and principles contained within BS 5228.
- To assess the noise emissions associated with the use of the experience track at Bicester Heritage, the following venue noise sources have been considered:
 - Category A (Unlimited) Days on which the ambient noise level at the residential monitors is increased by no more than 6 dBLAeq,1hr due to circuit activity
 - Category B (50 days per year) Days on which the ambient noise level at the residential monitors is increased by no more than 12 dBLAeq,1hr due to circuit activity
 - Category C (12 days per year, 90 minutes per day) Days on where the ambient noise level at the residential monitors is increased by 12dB LAeq,1hr due to circuit activity, but activity is no more than 90 minutes in a day
- For unrestricted use, the noise modelling indicates that the residential area to the west of the site is most likely to be impacted by the unrestricted activities at the experience track, however, it should be noted by restricting the amount of time to 90 minutes within a day, the equivalent noise exposure over 7-hour operating day will be low. All other receptor's locations indicate very low impact under the unrestricted scenario considered. Operational compliance will be determined by boundary monitoring.
- For restricted use, the noise modelling indicates low impact under the restricted use scenario considered. Operational compliance will be determined by boundary monitoring.
- Mitigation of the potential impact could be achieved by restricting the amount of time in each hour or day during which noisy activity was permitted (e.g. by restricting the number of laps per hour that a noisy vehicle could operate).

6.52 A complete description of agreed mitigation and logging procedures will be set out in the Noise Management Plan that will be agreed with Cherwell District Council and will remain a "live" document for regular review.



6.53 Having regard to other applications at Bicester Motion, the Experience Quarter (application ref. 21/01224/OUT) included vehicle circuits as part of the application. The Environmental Health Officer who commented upon that application made the following comments:

- The noise report does indicate that for the older noisier vehicles there would be a low to moderate impact on the nearby residential properties, with the correct mitigation this can be reduced to a low impact as defined by the NPPF.
- They also agreed to similar conditions being proposed here, mainly that a noise management plan should be agreed with LPA prior to the first use of the development and this should be such that it can be continually reviewed and updated with Environmental Health Officers as the need arises.

6.54 With these comments in mind, it is considered that the noise mitigation measures being proposed as part of this application are adequate and appropriate for ensuring that any impacts arising from the proposed use are dealt with accordingly.

6.55 Having regard to the above, it is considered that the development is in compliances with policies ESD 15 and BSC 8 of the adopted Local Plan, and the wider Development Plan as a whole.



7 Conclusion

- 7.1 This Planning Statement is submitted on behalf of Bicester Heritage in support of the *change of use of land to allow for aviation, vehicle exercising and other uses/events* at land at former RAF Bicester, Buckingham Road, Bicester OX27 8AL.
- 7.2 For the avoidance of doubt, this application seeks to regularise the ongoing use of the experience track and associated land for various aviation, vehicle exercising and other event functions. These uses have been occurring on the site since 2013, when Bicester Motion acquired the site.
- 7.3 Having regard to the principle of the development, it is considered that the ongoing site use complies with the provisions of the Policy Bicester 8 allocation as the typical track uses and events fall within the tourism, leisure, recreation, employment and community functions supported by the policy. Furthermore, the continued use of the experience track and airfield is fundamental to the business model of Bicester Motion and the other specialist businesses established on the site. In this respect the proposed development also complies with Policies SLE 1 and SLE 3 and helps to maintain Bicester Motion as a key component of the Motorsport Valley and Oxfordshire Tourism Cluster.
- 7.4 Having regard to the impact upon the historic environment, it is considered that, by virtue of the temporary nature of the typical track uses and events (which do not involve any notable or intrusive construction works) and the absence of any impact upon the identified heritage assets to date, the proposed development does not result in any harm to the historic environment. Should officers identify any degree of harm, it is considered that this harm would be at the lowest end of less than substantial and would be outweighed by the substantial public and heritage benefits realised through the proposed development.
- 7.5 For similar reasons, the impact on the natural environment is similarly considered to be negligible and as demonstrated, the proposed development continues to maintain the characteristic openness of the Flying Field and thereby conserves the local landscape character.
- 7.6 With regards to the highways impacts, it is considered that the use that this permission seeks to regularise does not result in any adverse impacts arising from the existing highway operations. Additionally, the site is accessible by several different sustainable modes of travel.
- 7.7 Having regard to ecology, it is found that, given the current use of the site for event uses, and with the adoption of the safeguards and sensitive working methodologies outlined within the submitted ecological reporting, no harmful impacts are considered to arise to designated statutory and non-statutory sites, Flora or Fauna from the proposal.
- 7.8 With regards to noise impacts arising from the development, it has been found that a Noise Management Plan, which will be agreed with Cherwell District Council and will remain a “live” document for regular review, will be able to mitigate any impacts arising from the development.
- 7.9 As such, the development is considered to be in accordance with the Development Plan and other material planning considerations. It is therefore respectfully requested that the application be considered favourably.



Appendices



Appendix 1. Images of the Site and its Context













Copyright

Copyright in all drawings, reports, opinions, calculations and other documents and information prepared by or for Edgars Limited will remain vested in Edgars Limited. The client, subject to payment of all fees and disbursements due under the Agreement, shall have a licence to copy and use all such documents for any purpose related to the project (but not to reproduce any drawings, reports, specifications, bills of quantities, calculations and other documents and information for any extension of the project).