



BICESTER MOTION

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT
ADDENDUM REPORT
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WORLLEDGE ASSOCIATES



Worlledge Associates is an Oxford-based heritage consultancy, committed to the effective management of the historic environment. Established in 2014 by Nicholas and Alison Worlledge, Nicholas came to private practice with over 35 years' experience working in heritage management for local authorities. This intimate knowledge and understanding of council processes, and planning policy and practice, helps us to work collaboratively with owners and decision-makers to manage change to the historic environment.

Our team of dedicated researchers and specialists believe in the capacity of the historic environment to contribute to society's collective economic, social, and cultural well-being. We aim to identify what is significant about places and spaces in order to support their effective management and sustain their heritage value. We have worked with a wide range of property-owners and developers including universities and colleges, museums and libraries, large country estates, manor house, farmsteads, cottages, town houses and new housing sites.

INTRODUCTION



Outline planning permission was granted for new employment units on this site in August 2021 (19/02708/OUT). Ongoing review of this development proposal has explored the opportunities to:

- Enhance the functional and visual relationship with the Technical Site
- Enhance the outlook from the proposed units over the airfield,
- Create more flexible spaces and design in resilience for future uses
- Better resolve the car parking and servicing provision
- Further enhance the setting of the scheduled ancient monuments

Embedded in the design review remains the heritage led approach. As explained in the previous heritage report (WA 2019) For Bicester Motion this means seeking to promote leisure, tourism and business initiatives in a way that sustains what is special about the airbase,

whilst creating something new, innovative and inspiring, as the next chapter in the site's history. The vision is to achieve this in a way that adds to people's understanding and enjoyment of a historic place, demonstrating that 'constructive conservation' is about embracing change for the benefit of the historic environment, the economy and for our health and wellbeing.

This addendum report should be read in conjunction with the earlier Heritage Impact Assessment, which sets out in detail the history of the airfield with analysis of its heritage significance and the contribution that setting makes to that significance.

This report provides a summary of the airfield's significance before discussing how the changes will impact on significance and setting, in particular identifying where the proposed changes will better preserve or enhancement the character or appearance of the conservation area and the setting of the other designated heritage assets (scheduled ancient monuments and listed buildings).

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE



In brief the significance the site holds can be summarised as follows:

- The architecture and design of buildings and other structures is characterised by continued attempts to innovate and refine;
- High historic integrity with a significant number of surviving buildings and structures. In particular, the alignment of the perimeter track survives from its 1939 construction.
- Interrelationships as planned groups helps to explain how the site operated and the interdependence between buildings and spaces;
- The layout and routes connecting surviving structures, are key to our understanding the military logic that underpinned the base's development;
- It is a 'site of memory' evoking particular emotive and sentimental meanings and serving as spatial coordinates of identity, helping people to recall, recognise and localise their memories;
- Certain purpose- built structures within the site also provide a focus of commemoration and remembrance, for example the watch tower;
- The airbase evidences each period of airfield design;
- The spatial relationship within and between the core areas (Technical Site, Domestic Site, Married Quarters and Flying Field) with views across the flying field to the open countryside beyond;
- It is the most complete airbase to have survived from the pre- 1934 period without modification or adaptation;
- The different parts are unified by military purpose – a historically designed interdependence;
- The art and design of dispersal underpins the layout of buildings;
- There is a strong functional relationship between the siting of buildings and between the flying field and the structures that sit adjacent to it;
- The watch tower design and siting evidence its important functional role;
- The openness of the flying field (defined by the perimeter track).

REVISED PROPOSAL



The key changes proposed to the consented scheme are as follows:

- Re-orientation of the developable areas to substantially improve the connection and relationship with the historical context and open airfield,
- Re-positioning of the developable area respects the historical layout to avoid straight line layout,
- Rebalancing of the developable area's proportion to reduce the depth to widths ratio to meet the modern requirements of future tenants,
- Relocation of the car parking area adjacent to the buildings and integration with the landscape,
- Relocation of the servicing access to the Skimmingdish Lane elevation enabling space for soft landscaping and improved visual connectivity through the buildings,
- Reduction of heritage impact from the development on the special ancient monuments by increasing the distance of hardstanding away from the pill boxes and seagull trenches,

Further detail is provided in the Design and Access Statement (3D Reid).

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

In assessing the impact of the amendments to the approved proposals on the site's significance (see 'Summary of Heritage Significance') it can be concluded that:

- *The architecture and design of buildings and other structures is characterised by continued attempts to innovate and refine.* The evidence the existing buildings hold to illustrate this will be unaffected. The proposed new buildings, alterations and extensions will, as will the proposed new uses, exhibit innovation and excellence continuing the history of design that characterises the airfield;
- *High historic integrity with a significant number of surviving buildings and structures. In particular, the alignment of the perimeter track survives from its 1939 construction.* The alignment of the perimeter track will be unaffected, and it will continue to mark the limits of the flying field. The historic integrity of the surviving buildings will be preserved. Indeed, the realignment of the buildings as now proposed, to respond to the alignment of the perimeter track and shape of the flying field will help to better integrate the build form into the topographic framework of the airfield, reflect the form of the 'waterfront' associated with the edge of the Technical Site;
- *Interrelationships as planned groups helps to explain how the site operated and the interdependence between buildings and spaces.* The spatial relationship between existing buildings and the functional interrelationship between buildings and spaces will be preserved. The proposed amendments to the siting and orientation of the building blocks will better continue this principle of interdependence that defines the character of the airfield;
- *The layout and routes connecting surviving structures, are key to our understanding the military logic that underpinned the base's development.* The layout of the airfield and the routes will be preserved. New buildings will be introduced into peripheral areas, but these are areas which lie outside the perimeter track in spaces which have already undergone change (e.g., road realignment, introduction and then loss of panhandle areas, a quarry);
- *It is a 'site of memory' evoking particular emotive and sentimental meanings and serving as spatial coordinates of identity, helping people to recall, recognise and localise their memories;* These memories will remain with the opportunity for the new development to create new experiences and new memories rooted in the site's history of innovation and experiment. The proposed amendments to the siting will add to the opportunities for occupants and visitors of the IQ site to understand and enjoy this history and the memories the site holds. This will be achieved by providing greater opportunities to look over the airfield and engage with the viewing experience over the wide expanse of the grass flying field;
- *Certain purpose-built structures within the site also provide a focus of commemoration and remembrance, for example the watch tower.* The significance and setting of these structures will be preserved;
- *The airbase evidences each period of airfield design.* This evidence will not be lost. Clearly new development will change how we experience them but there is the potential for the changes to add to our experience and understanding of the place;
- *The spatial relationship within and between the core areas (Technical Site, Domestic Site, Married Quarters and Flying Field) with views across the flying field to the open countryside beyond.* The spatial relationship between the core areas will remain and understanding of the underlying design principles unaffected. The proposal will not result in the erosion of the trident layout, the openness of the flying field or the campus qualities of the Technical Site, views out to the countryside and hills beyond will be maintained but the views will be affected by the new buildings to the east and northwest that will form part of the view. The views out have already changed over time with the growth of Bicester and will continue to do so as adjacent industrial estates are built out. This is part of the changing setting and context of the airfield. The proposed IQ buildings provide the opportunity to create buildings forms that will have a strong functional and visual connection with the present use of the airfield, helping to filter views of the surrounding more ordinary industrial and other buildings beyond the current perimeter of the site. The proposed amendments will maintain the value in helping to screen views of the adjacent industrial estate, but the revised siting and layout will mean that there is a degree of permeability introduced so that the built form will sit more loosely within the landscape;
- *It is the most complete airbase to have survived from the pre-1934 period without modification or adaptation.* This is a state that cannot be sustained if the site is to have a viable future. The key components that give the site its significance will not be eroded – the Technical Site, the flying field, and the perimeter track, but the peripheral areas will be modified. That said, as explained earlier, these areas have already undergone modification – as part of the 1940s expansion and then again when the panhandle areas were abandoned, and the quarry area closed;
- *The different parts are unified by military purpose – a historically designed interdependence.* These qualities that the site exhibits and the documentary archive that supports our understanding of the military purpose will be preserved;
- *The art and design of dispersal underpins the layout of buildings;* The underlying design principles that have governed the layout of buildings will be preserved and the physical evidence of that layout preserved. Indeed, the area selected for development – the peripheral areas are those that the MoD promoted for the future development of airfields in general and avoids infilling of the spaces within the Technical Site. The proposed amendments introduce a slightly looser layout, introducing a greater sense of permeability and to a greater degree responding to, though deliberately not copying, the principles of dispersal;
- *There is a strong functional relationship between the siting of buildings and between the flying field and the structures that sit adjacent to it;* This relationship will be preserved;

- *The watch tower design and siting evidence its important functional role.* Understanding and experience of this role and the associations it connotes will be preserved, its isolated setting will be preserved;
- *The openness of the flying field (defined by the perimeter track),* This openness will be preserved with no development proposed within the perimeter track. The nature of the enclosure will change, and the presence of built forms will change how we experience the site boundaries. It should be remembered that the openness of the flying field is a consequence of its function and not of any designed aesthetic. Whilst this results in an aesthetic experience that may hold some landscape value (see AS landscape report) that the proposed new buildings will have a functional relationship with other activities on the site resonates with the underlying historic design principles that influenced the site's layout. That the airfield is being slowly subsumed by the outward growth of Bicester is a historical inevitability and in doing so having buildings that offer some level of screen and camouflage to that growth will help to preserve the sense of isolation and undeveloped character of the flying field.

In relation to matters of setting it can be concluded:

- The setting of the hangars will be preserved;
- The setting of the bomb stores, in terms of their distance from the Technical Site will be preserved and thus their functional relationship. The more immediate setting will be changed which will result in a changed experience – not necessarily harmful, but certainly a new experience and one that will be an improvement on the existing state;
- The views out across the flying field from the watch tower and views back towards the watch tower will be preserved;
- The views over the airfield from the surrounding public road network will change but these have no historical or functional significance;
- The setting of the defensive posts will be enhanced. The proposed amendments will further enhance the setting, creating more space between the scheduled monuments and the proposed development. Furthermore, the pavilion qualities and proposed siting will offer a greater sense of permeability that will help to better illustrate the aesthetic qualities of the group of defensive posts and the designed views out.

In summary, the opportunity to review the approved scheme has resulted in a revised proposal that will reduce the level of any harm to the site's significance and that will better enhance the setting of the defensive posts. The more ephemeral qualities of the panhandle areas have resulted in many being lost to agriculture or reclaimed by nature. What evidence remains of the panhandle area here is respected with a landscaping proposal that suggests a memory of those parts of the airfield's development.

HERITAGE BENEFITS



National policy requires that there should be compensatory public benefits to justify any harm and the revised NPPF makes clear that even a low level of harm should be given considerable importance and weight in terms of delivering the duty to preserve or enhance designated heritage assets. Public benefits include heritage benefits, and it is clear from these proposals that there will be significant heritage benefits that would outweigh any identified harm. The local planning authority has accepted that the public benefits that would be delivered outweigh any harm. This amended scheme reduces the level of harm and introduces amendments to the layout and siting that provide greater opportunities to enhance our understanding and enjoyment of the historic airfield and how it functioned. The heritage benefits that will be delivered include:

- Sustaining the significance of the adjacent scheduled monuments by improving access, and repurposing and maintaining part of the site that is currently neglected and in poor condition;
- Introducing landscaping to enhance the existing setting of the defensive structures;
- Securing a long-term viable future for the site and its constituent elements;
- Ensuring that the heritage assets are not fragmented any further, focusing on the preservation and enhancement of the historical and visual interdependence;
- Improved access to the site (intellectual and physical);
- Opportunities for interpretation and enhancement of the embodied 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;
- Making provision and long-term commitment and financial investment to ensure that present and future generations can learn from and enjoy this component of our historic environment.

Further detail of the public benefits (including heritage benefits) is discussed in the Planning Statement (Edgars).

CONCLUSION



Throughout the design process the importance that the designated heritage assets possess in their own rights and the contribution they make to the sense of place has informed the evolution of the proposals, which are genuinely heritage led. That the approved proposals have been reviewed and this amended proposal submitted is evidence of this and the ambition to capitalise on the site's historic, aesthetic, and communal values to create a vibrant community and sense of place. The masterplan and delivery of the long-term strategy for the site will etch a new chapter into the history of the site, carving a new identity, but without erasing the site's history and the meanings that it holds for the local and wider community.

The approved proposals involve change, repurposing a currently unused area of the airfield and introducing new built forms. This part of the airfield has already been compromised by the loss of the panhandle areas and new development, and that therefore it is considered that the level of harm that would result from the IQ proposals would be less than substantial. The amended proposals will reduce that level of harm further and provide better opportunities to access and experience the site's history and architecture. There will be public benefits (including heritage benefits) that would be delivered by the proposed development to compensate as discussed in the planning statement (Edgars).