

Drivers Jonas

**Heyford Park - QEK
Global Solutions Ltd
Visual Assessment**

Visual Assessment : Final Report

February 2005

Entec UK Limited

Report for

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Executive Summary

Introduction: Entec UK Ltd was appointed by Drivers Jonas, on behalf of QEK Global Solutions (UK) Ltd in December 2004 to prepare a visual assessment of the current QEK automotive facility at Upper Heyford Airfield. QEK currently occupies 62.5 acres (net) of the east side of the airfield. The assessment is to form part of the revised planning application to extend the temporary use of QEK's facility from May 2005 until May 2008.

The QEK facility is located on the former RAF Upper Heyford Airfield, within North Oxfordshire. The former airbase is located on an exposed, plateau of white limestone between the Cherwell River Valley and the M40 motorway, seven kilometres north west of Bicester. Overall the Upper Heyford Plateau is described as a distinctive elevated landform which dips gently to the south east. It is characterised by extensive areas of rolling arable land with a distinctively denuded character. The wider landscape is of some significant landscape resource in terms of cultural heritage, nature conservation, the River Cherwell Valley and the small, traditional nucleated villages. However it is important to note that the former airfield itself is one of a degraded landscape. In particular the eastern end of the site is subject to disturbance by the continuous hum of the M40 and the unsightly influence of Ardley Quarry.

Methodology: The methodology for the visual assessment is based on "*The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Second Edition*¹", (GLVIA) which are widely regarded by the landscape profession as the 'industry standard'. In summary the assessment process has been divided into two stages, a description of existing landscape resource and the visual assessment. The assessment considers the existing visual effects of QEK's facility. The current situation is briefly compared with the following two variables:

- The existing permitted area of use: 87.5 acres (net); and
- that aspired to and defined in the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on the Temporary Uses of Land and Buildings at Upper Heyford, September 2004².

In addition the report studies the effects of the security lighting at the site. It is based upon the "Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice" published by the Countryside Commission in 1997, which in turn was derived from the former LI/ IEA guidelines. To clearly illustrate the effects of the current light spill caused by QEK's external operations an exercise was undertaken where photographs of the existing situation were taken with the lights on, followed by a photograph two hours later with the lighting switched off. To ensure the photographs were a reliable record of the two situations presented, they were taken on the same evening with the same settings.

Visual Survey: The site survey proves that views of QEK's existing external operations are generally difficult to obtain and are confined to areas immediately adjacent to the site and to the

¹ *The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Second Edition* The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2002.

² *Supplementary Planning Guidance, RAF Upper Heyford: Temporary Use of Land and Buildings*, Cherwell District Council, September 2004,

north and east. Only the following groups of close to middle distance receptors of high sensitivity achieve occasional views of the current external operations:

- users of public rights of way number 13;
- users of bridleways 28 and 29; and
- residents in Troy Farm and Troy Cottages (two number).

In addition users of Somerton Road and the Fritwell section of Water Lane, view the external operations but these users are considered of low sensitivity and combined with the fact that they are transient receptors, with often glimpsed views, means their level of effect is only slight.

Views are difficult to obtain principally because the cars are low elements and that screening is easily provided by the characteristic rolling topography, the buildings on the former airfield, hedgerows, the woodland along the northern boundary and large areas of woodland to the south and east. This results in only a handful of users of PROWs and residential receptors being able to achieve views of the cars at the QEK facility.

The night survey of QEK's external operations lighting proves that the lighting effects can be perceived from close areas to the south, east and north of the site but the light does not trespass into residents i.e. residents in Ardley, in both Troy Cottages and Troy Farm. Further the comparison of the lights on -v- light off exercise proves that the majority of the glare is caused by that of the orange street lighting and that all lighting on the airfield site is confined to the immediate area.

The visual evaluation concludes that no receptors currently sustain significant visual effects. The visual receptors who are most greatly affected are the users of footpath 13 and residents in Troy Cottages. However, given the distance of the cars from the receptors, where views are achieved the cars only make up a small portion of the view and this, combined with the existing intrusion posed by the buildings on the airfield, means the effects are not considered significant.

Comparison of the existing QEK external facility to that permitted by current temporary planning permissions: QEK currently has planning permission to use approximately 87.5 acres at Heyford Park. On the ground the situation is different in that QEK have already reduced the external operations to 62.5 acres (net), a reduction of 25 acres to that currently permitted. This current reduction results in a substantial decrease of visual effects sustained, particularly to the north and east. In particular a number of visual receptors now cannot view the external operations as a result of the 25 acre (net) reduction, i.e. residents in Ardley, Cross Roads Farm, Ashgrove Farm, Ashgrove Cottages, users of PROW 3, 4, 1 and 10.

Comparison of the existing QEK external facility to that proposed by the SPG: The SPG would ideally like to reduce current external operation areas substantially. Comparison with the aspirations of the SPG show that if the external facility were reduced to the requirements of the SPG, views to the south would principally remain the same in both situations but views to the north would be reduced. However given that the evaluation of the current situation concluded that none of the receptors incur significant effects it is questionable as to whether a further reduction to that of the SPG would improve visual amenity for the small handful of identified receptors. The argument for continuing the existing situation is further strengthened by the fact that the cars only make up a small portion of current views and the airfield buildings form the major part of the visual intrusion.

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1. Visual Assessment

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Appointment

Entec UK Ltd was appointed by Drivers Jonas, on behalf of QEK Global Solutions (UK) Ltd in December 2004 to prepare a visual assessment of the current QEK automotive facility at Heyford Park, notably in respect of the areas used for the parking / staging of vehicles. This assessment is to form part of the revised planning application to extend the use of QEK's facility from May 2005 until May 2008. QEK's facility has been located on the former military airfield at Upper Heyford since 1995. Since that time, a number of time limited planning permissions have been granted for temporary uses within the base including that of QEK's operations.

This redundant airfield is being utilised by a number of companies of which the two largest users are QEK and Walon. QEK currently occupies the east side of the airfield whilst Walon occupies the western portion of the site.

The document is divided into the methodology, a landscape baseline and the visual assessment. It includes an assessment of the current impacts and effects of the security lighting at QEK's facility and a comparison of the existing permitted external facility and the aspiration of the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on the Temporary Uses of Land and Buildings at Upper Heyford, September 2004³.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 General Approach

The methodology for Heyford Park, QEK visual assessment is based on "*The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Second Edition*"⁴, (GLVIA) which are widely regarded by the landscape profession as the 'industry standard'. This report considers the existing visual effects of QEK's current external operations at Heyford Park. The current situation is briefly compared with that aspired to and defined in the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on the Temporary Uses of Land and Buildings at Upper Heyford, September

³ *Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance with Revisions, RAF Upper Heyford: Temporary Use of Land and Buildings*, Cherwell District Council, September 2004,

⁴ *The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Second Edition* The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2002.

2004⁵. In addition the report studies the impacts and effects of the current security lighting at QEK's facility.

In summary the assessment process has been divided into the following stages:

- Description of existing landscape resource - the baseline; and
- Visual assessment.

Given that QEK's operations are a temporary use, this report does not consider mitigation, as there are no feasible solutions given the short timescale.

1.2.2 Definition of the Study Area

The location of the site and the study area are illustrated in Figure 1.1, the Landscape Context and Figure 1.2, the Visual Context. Figure 1.2 illustrates the theoretical ZVI (zone of visual influence) for QEK's existing external operations.

The study area boundary includes the ZVI and other surrounding areas that may be considered potentially contentious. It extends from the Aston villages in the west, to Lower Heyford and Middleton Stoney in the south, the B4100 to the west and Ploughley Hill to the north.

1.2.3 Baseline Information

A description of the existing (baseline) landscape resource and visual amenity within the study area forms the basis for establishing the sensitivity and character of the landscape. The existing landscape character and elements occurring on the site and the existing landscape condition of the study area are reviewed as well as prevalent and predicted trends in landscape change.

A brief description of the existing land use of the area is provided. This includes reference to existing settlements, transport routes and vegetation cover as well as local landscape planning policies, landscape designations and elements of cultural and heritage value and local landmarks. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape value and sensitivity and an indication of particular key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors and therefore are to be included in the visual assessment.

Information on the existing landscape resource has been collected by reference to the following documents and sources of information:

- The Countryside Commission Countryside Character, Volume 7, South East and London;
- Restoration of Upper Heyford Airbase, A Landscape Impact Assessment, Landscape Design Associates, 1997;
- Landscape and Visual impact and masterplan report, Former RAF Upper Heyford, Cherwell District Local Plan 2001, Landscape Design Associates, 2004;

⁵ *Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance with Revisions, RAF Upper Heyford: Temporary Use of Land and Buildings*, Cherwell District Council, September 2004,

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- Comprehensive Planning Brief, RAF Upper Heyford, adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance, Cherwell District Council, August 1999;
 - Supplementary Planning Guidance, RAF Upper Heyford, Temporary use of land and buildings, Cherwell District Council, September 2004;
 - Planning and Design Guide, Former RAF Upper Heyford, which formed part of the appeal from the North Oxfordshire Consortium;
 - Inspector Burden's report conclusions from the Former RAF Upper Heyford Report, in respect of the Appeal Inquiry held in June / July 2002 App/C3015/A 02/1082800;
 - Cherwell Local plan, adopted November 1996.
 - Revisions to the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft July 2002;
 - Cherwell District Local Plan, Pre Inquiry changes(issued June 2004);
 - Upper Heyford – Land and buildings at Former RAF Base Heyford Park, Walon's planning approval, South Area Planning Committee, Cherwell District Council, October 2004;
 - Ordnance Survey map, Explorer 191 (1:25,000), Banbury, Bicester and Chipping Norton; and
 - Consultations with Cherwell District Council on viewpoint selection.

1.2.4 Visual Assessment

Visual effects are concerned wholly with the effect of the development on views, and general visual amenity of people who have views of the development. Visual effects may include the following:

- **Visual obstruction:** physical blocking of a view;
- **Visual intrusion:** the visual intrusion of the development into a view;
- **Cumulative visual effects:** the cumulative or incremental visibility of similar types of development may combine to have a cumulative visual effect. This may concern intervisibility where more than one development may be viewed simultaneously from a viewpoint, or occur sequentially where developments may be viewed from a number of differing locations, most commonly from a road, rail route or long distance path. This would be applicable in this study if both QEK's and Walon's external operations areas were to be considered in this assessment. However it is important to note that unless you are standing in the redundant airfield strip at Heyford Park or indeed are in the air (see Figure 1.3, Aerial Photograph) is virtually impossible to view both QEK's and Walon's external operations areas simultaneously.

The combined baseline desk top and site survey allows the development of the theoretical ZVI. This is illustrated on the visual context Figure 1.2. Given the low height of the cars (average height is 1.55 metres) combined with the predominantly flat landscape a computer generated

ZVI was not considered a worthwhile exercise. A computer generated model only considers the topography's screening influence and takes no account of the screening of woodland, trees or other development. A computer generated ZVI is of benefit in areas where the elements assessed are taller.

Views achieved by the identified visual receptors within the theoretical ZVI are then assessed by the following methodology. The visual effects of the existing development are dependent upon the following criteria:

- The distance from receptors to the source;
- The sensitivity of the receptor; and
- The existing magnitude of the effect.

Distance of the Receptor

With specific respect to QEK's external automotive operations and the local settlement pattern (see Section 1.4.3), the distance from the boundary of the proposed development is sub-divided as follows:

- Close distance - less than 500m;
- Middle distance - 500- 1500m;
- Long distance - over 1500m.

Sensitivity of the Receptor

Based on the GLVIA, the different receptor categories are ranked in order of their sensitivity to visual effects as set out in Table 1.1. It should be stressed that this table is indicative only.

Table 1.1 Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Visual Receptor Categories	Sensitivity
Public Rights of Way	High
Settlements	High
Isolated Residential Properties	High
Public and Private Recreational Areas (where landscape appreciation is not prime purpose)	Medium
Motorists	Low
Industry, Business and their Employees	Low

Magnitude of Effects

Magnitude of visual effect is primarily a function of the following factors:

- The distance from receptors to the source(s);

-
- The extent of the area(s) over which the current situation is visible;

Other factors that can have an influence include:

- The degree of contrast or integration of the existing features that make up the external operations area in the landscape with the existing landscape elements and characteristics in terms of mass, scale, colour and texture.
- The frequency and ease with which the external operations area may be viewed from a particular viewpoint taking into account seasonal factors such as leaf loss and weather conditions.
- The angle of the main direction of the view and whether the external operations area is viewed against the skyline or a background landscape.
- Seasonal and atmospheric effects.

In the case of QEK's facility where views of cars are achieved all views effects are considered negative for the purposes of this study. The level of the intrusion the facility currently poses is assessed and these levels are graded according to the following thresholds:

- Substantial element within the views;
- Moderate element within the views;
- Small element within the views; and
- Negligible element within the views.

These factors combine to produce a magnitude of visual effect for each individual or group of receptors, which is divided into four categories:

- High;
- Medium;
- Low; or
- Negligible.

1.2.5 Significance

The means of evaluating visual effects is illustrated in Table 1.2. This evaluation determines the level of effect resulting from the combination of sensitivity against existing magnitude. The range of significance of the visual effects has been divided into seven broad classifications of level of effect. These are defined in this assessment as 'substantial', 'moderate/substantial', 'moderate', 'moderate/slight', 'slight', 'slight/negligible' or 'negligible'.

Table 1.2 Evaluation of Significance for Visual Assessment

Magnitude of Effect	Sensitivity		
	High	Medium	Low
High	Substantial	Moderate/Substantial	Moderate
Medium	Moderate/Substantial	Moderate	Slight/Moderate
Low	Moderate	Slight/Moderate	Slight
Negligible	Slight	Slight/Negligible	Negligible
Key:	Significant		Not Significant

For this assessment significant visual effects existing from the QEK site would be all those effects that are considered as a ‘substantial’ or a ‘moderate/substantial’ effect.

1.2.6 Lighting

The lighting assessment is based upon the “Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice” published by the Countryside Commission in 1997, which in turn was derived from the former LI/ IEA guidelines. An overview of the existing lighting in the locality is provided and was determined during a night time survey of the site and surrounding area. This allowed identification of receptors who currently view the lit facility.

To determine the effects, if any, of the current light pollution caused by QEK’s external operations an exercise was undertaken where photographs of the existing situation was taken with the lights on, followed by photographs two hours later with the lighting switched off. Three viewpoints were chosen from key, safe and close locations, where visual impacts and effects associated with lighting were considered the greatest. To ensure the photographs were a reliable record of the two situations presented, the photographs were taken on the same evening (14 December 2004) with the minimum time between the individual shots. In addition they were taken from the same location, the same height and at the same settings (exposure and shutter speeds). The six photographs, two at each location, are shown on Figures 1.8 to 1.10.

1.3 Baseline Description

1.3.1 Introduction

The QEK facility is located on the former RAF Upper Heyford Airfield, within North Oxfordshire. The former airbase is located between the Cherwell River Valley and the M40 motorway, some seven kilometres north west of Bicester, Oxfordshire.

The redundant military residential properties, predominantly the former residential married quarters and the support service buildings to the south of Camp Road are subject to future new settlement development. At the time of writing, North Oxfordshire Consortium’s appeal was dismissed and a revised planning application is being prepared, to be submitted in 2005

1.3.2 Landscape Character

Landscape Character

The former airbase lies on an exposed, plateau of white limestone east of the Cherwell Valley. Overall the plateau is of an open and exposed setting, whilst outside the airfield the agricultural landscape is of open character but with a less urbanised feel. At a national level QEK's facility is located in the Cotswolds, Landscape Character Area (LCA 107), as defined in the Countryside Commission Countryside Character, Volume 7, South East and London. At a more localised level a landscape character assessment was carried out for Cherwell District Council in 1995 and divided the district into a number of character areas. The site itself falls within the Upper Heyford Plateau character area whilst the remainder of the study area is covered by the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands and the Cherwell Valley character areas.

The Upper Heyford Plateau is described as a distinctive elevated landform which dips gently away to the south east. This is where the majority of QEK's external operations reside. It is characterised by extensive areas of rolling arable land with a distinctively denuded character. The agricultural land is predominantly intensive arable land with large, open fields and thus has a weak enclosure pattern. However around the airfield and villages smaller pastoral fields are located. The settlements on the plateau are nucleated, associated with minor streams and include Fritwell and Ardley north and east of the site and Caulcott to the south. In addition there are a number of isolated farmsteads scattered across the character area.

Within the character area itself woodland cover is generally lacking however in more easterly parts there are some significant blocks and woods e.g. Kennel Copse and Ardley Wood.

Note the elevated nature of this area, results in some dramatic views across the Cherwell Valley. Within these views the far western end of Walons external operations can be seen on a small portion of the horizon of the valley side. No views of QEK's external operations can be achieved from the Cherwell Valley and the Aston Villages.

The Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands is similar to the Upper Heyford Plateau but is characterised by a more rolling landform and a distinctive woodland and mixed farmland. Many of these farmlands are associated with parkland estates and are linked to extensive areas of remnant eighteenth century parkland.

The Cherwell Valley is a clearly defined linear v-shaped valley, which contains the Cherwell River, the Oxford Canal and the Oxford to Birmingham railway. The valley retains an open feel with long vistas afforded across, down and up the valley. The valley sides vary in steepness, some extending into the floodplain as small spurs. On the valley floor resides riparian landscape features such as water meadows, pollarded willows and old mill buildings, providing a peaceful and isolated feel.

Settlements are typically located on the valley sides, linked by narrow winding roads that are often hedge lined. On the steepest slopes networks of small fields and mixed farming survive. Some of the smaller field pattern has been replaced by a larger field pattern that supports intensive agriculture resulting in some longer views across and out of the valley.

1.3.3 Local Landscape Context

Key Elements

Given this is a former airfield the key elements within the local context are those associated with the former workings of the site. These include large areas of hard standing and scattered industrial buildings congregated to the north and south of the airstrip. Many of the redundant buildings are in a considerable state of disrepair. In addition, given the large number of vehicles currently located at the site they now provide a key element (See Aerial Photograph, Figure 1.3).

In the wider study area the key elements are:

- an open, gently rolling plateau;
- small villages, typically nucleated and containing traditional vernacular architecture, constructed of honey coloured Cotswold stone (See Photo Viewpoints 3a and 3b, Figure 1.4);
- a predominantly intensive arable agricultural landuse. However there is a tendency towards smaller scale pastoral fields around the infrequent settlements, which are reinforced by higher levels of tree planting. The principally large fields surrounding the former airfield are used for intensive arable cultivation. Most fields are generally bounded by well clipped hedgerows. These are often rigorously maintained and many are now gappy; and
- on the plateau itself the area is typically treeless however in the wider landscape outside the confines of the airfield a reasonable cover of woodland resides in the east and around settlements.

1.3.4 Landscape Pattern

The landscape elements briefly described in the previous section combine to generate landscape patterns or characteristics. For the main portion of the study area around the site the key patterns that have been identified are:

- Flat topography and open views with only occasional rising ground and low levels of landcover. The sky forms a significant proportion of these views and as such the reactions of the viewer can be strongly influenced by weather conditions. The topography and open views give emphasis to vertical elements such as woodlands, isolated trees and the well treed settlements.
- Within the airfield complex is a discordant pattern of land-use dominated by the sporadic buildings and hard standing of the former airfield. Where the airfield and associated building were developed the former landscape's original traditional field pattern was eradicated. Around the former airfield a more coherent larger field pattern is found whilst a smaller field pattern is typically associated with historic settlements.
- There is generally a low level of woodland and hedgerow cover in and around the former airfield whose pattern can be divided into three components, boundary hedgerows, screen planting and copse woodlands. Whereas in the wider

environment more woodland is found to the east of the site and around settlements and rivers

1.3.5 Landscape Planning Designations

A review of the relevant local plan has been undertaken to determine specifically related landscape policies. To summarise the following describes these relevant landscape policies.

Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV): The adopted Cherwell Local Plan includes an AHLV (see Figure 1). This designation covers the Cherwell Valley and extends westwards, wrapping around the north of the airbase. The boundary abuts the most western extent of the former airbase. This is a non-statutory designation which recognises landscape of particular environmental quality and aims to protect the landscape character of the area. It is understood that this designation is proposed to be removed in the latest revised deposit of the Local Plan.

Conservation Areas: These are non-statutory designations in the Cherwell Local plan. Areas designated include Fritwell, North Aston, Rousham, Somerton and Steeple Aston. The Conservation Area provides protection for the vistas and setting of Rousham Park, including the villages of Upper Heyford and Lower Heyford and extends to the western perimeter of the airbase.

1.3.6 Other Relevant Designations and Issues

Cultural Heritage Considerations: None of the buildings at the site are listed, however English Heritage (EH), as part of a thematic study of the airfield has assessed the site and found the Officers Mess and an example Nose Docking Shed to be possibly worthy of listing.

There are a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM's) within the study area, for example Ardley Moat, Somerton Manor House and Somerton Village earthworks. In addition EH is considering whether to designate the second world war bomb stores as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). This is a national designation that protects artefacts of varying size and importance that contribute to the historical inheritance of the area. Any changes upon the settings of SAMs are a material planning consideration.

Rousham Park historic house and garden (Grade 1 listed) is a famous eighteenth century landscape to the south west of the former airbase on the western side of the Cherwell Valley. Its main axis is orientated down the valley but its wider setting includes the south west corner of the former airbase. QEK's external operations cannot be viewed from Rousham Park

Ecological Considerations: Generally the area is ecologically impoverished due to the dominance of arable farming, with few hedges and woodlands. However Cherwell Valley contains the flood meadow, Somerton Meadow SSSI and to the east of the site, the Ardley Railway cutting and quarry is also designated as a geological SSSI and nature reserve.

In addition the former airbase itself supports an extensive area of rough grassland located principally between the hardstandings. These are predominantly species poor but there are areas of herb-rich calcareous grassland in the eastern portion of the airfield which provide habitats for some less common birds including Skylark and Meadow Pipit.

1.3.7 Landscape Condition

The field survey indicated that the landscape elements within and around QEK's facility are generally in a degraded condition. There are areas of under-used land, derelict buildings and unsightly land-uses, including that of Ardley Quarry/landfill, in and around the redundant airfield itself. In addition on the eastern side of the former airfield the noise associated with the M40 is perceived. However outside the confines of the former airfield the condition generally improves particularly around the settlements where fields are smaller and larger areas of woodland are located. The landscape importance of the field boundaries means that their condition is especially important. Generally hedgerows are rigorously maintained and as a result of the over trimming some have become gappy.

1.4 Baseline Description of the Existing Visual Amenity

1.4.1 Topography and Drainage

The area's topography is one of the key determinants of its landscape character and visual amenity. Specifically QEK's facility is located on the lower side of the plateau at approximately 129m AoD (Above Ordnance Datum). The majority of the plateau is at 130 to 133m AoD and reaches its highest point of 138m AoD in the north west area of Heyford Park.

The landform surrounding and including the former airbase comprises of a gently domed plateau, incised by the River Cherwell and a series of dry valleys. The former airfield itself is located on the gently south-facing slopes, mostly within the 130m contour and forms the approximate edge of the plateau.

Immediately adjacent to the former airfields are two small streams, which arise just beyond the boundary and have eroded localised valleys in two locations. One is on the northern boundary whilst the other is on the south by Letchmere Farm. The Cherwell Valley also contains the Oxford Canal flowing on a north to south axis.

1.4.2 Woodland

Tree cover in the landscape immediately surrounding the airfield is limited. Generally it is confined to the boundaries of the site and some mature formal tree cover within the built complexes of the former airfield site. There are some significant blocks or copses of trees close to the former airfield particularly to the east of the site. They are located on slightly lower ground and generally associated with watercourses thus taking advantage of the thicker and moister soil conditions. These include the Heath, the Gorse, Kennel Copse and Arley wood to the north and east (thus providing some screening from areas further east and north). Note Kennel Copse is an ancient semi-natural woodland.

1.4.3 Settlement Pattern

RAF Upper Heyford airfield is surrounded by small, typically nucleated villages and hamlets, the nearest of which are Ardley and Fritwell to the north and north east. They are located on the top of the plateau. Somerton and the Upper and Lower Heyfords are to the west on the valley slopes of the Cherwell Valley, whilst Upper Heyford, Middleton Stoney and Caulcott are to the south.

The settlements are generally located either off the immediate plateau on the flanks of the river Cherwell or in slightly lower areas on the periphery of the plateau, often associated with streams, such as Fritwell and Ardley. The regular settlement pattern has a strong historical continuity with only a small number of recent residential developments.

1.4.4 Road Network

The road network has two distinct components: the trunk road and motorway and the local road network. Of greatest significance is the M40 motorway running from London to Birmingham, with junction 10 and Cherwell Valley Services lying just east of Ardley Village. The A4260, running north/south is located to the west of the Cherwell Valley connecting Banbury to Kidlington and the A43 (T) trunk is located just east of the motorway services (See Landscape Context Figure 1.2). Within the immediate confines of the site the sense of movement generated by the major roads is not immediately perceptible. However glimpsed views of the M40 and the continuous howl of this road are achieved in the QEK external facility. A network of minor roads link the surrounding villages and many of these lanes are enclosed on both sides by low hedges. These local roads are infrequently used with the associated low levels of movement and noise.

In addition, to the east is the Birmingham to Marylebone railway and to the west the Birmingham to Oxford railway line runs along the Cherwell Valley.

1.4.5 Public Rights of Way (PRoWs)

Overall the surrounding area has a good, relatively well connected network of public rights of way (PRoW), traversing the higher land and running along the Cherwell Valley bottom, sides and slopes (see Figure 1.2 for location). The most important PRoW is the national route, the Oxford Canal Walk that follows the Cherwell Valley floor. Around QEK's site the only routes with potential views of the facility are bridleways 28 and 29 to the south of the site, footpath 13 along the northern perimeter of the site and footpaths one and six south of Fritwell. Despite the relatively high level of public access to open agricultural areas generally from all other routes views of cars are very limited, with only possible glimpsed views from the far north east.

The development of the former airbase severed two PRoWs. There is the potential to once again provide footpath links across the former airfield from Portway and Ave's Ditch across the far east and west of the former airfield. It is our understanding that such routes will likely be reinstated as part of new settlement proposals and following the expiration of the renewal period being sought by QEK.

1.5 Existing Visual Effects

This section of the assessment considers the existing effects of QEK's external operations upon identified visual receptors within the estimated zone of theoretical visual influence (see Figure 1.2).

1.5.1 Extent of Visibility and Effect during the day time

The extent of visibility of the existing QEK external facility is shown by the theoretical zone of visual influence (ZVI) illustrated in Figure 1.2. In summary the ZVI clearly shows that views

are confined to the areas immediately adjacent to the facility and some areas of higher ground to the north east.

Views from the north: Views of QEK's facility from areas to the north are in the majority screened and thus cannot be achieved because of the existing built development within the airfield complex combined with the screen planting. However from a number of specific locations to the north some views can be achieved. These are;

- residents on the southern side of Fritwell;
- residents in Troy Farm and Troy Cottages (2 properties);
- users of public rights of way numbers 13 and 6;
- users of the Fritwell section of Water Lane; and
- users of Somerton Road. Note views can only be achieved from Troy cottages and Troy Farm section of road. No views can be achieved from Cross Roads Farm.

The northern boundary planting comprises mainly pine, beech and ash and at the time of writing is approximately five metres high and therefore users of PRoW 13 will only achieve glimpsed views through breaks in the vegetation.

Moving round to the north east both some close distance views from areas immediately adjacent to the site and long distance views are achieved, for example glimpsed views from the B4100 at Ploughley Hill by Green Farm and the motorway bridges leading into Fritwell. These are limited to glimpsed views from elevated locations where intervening landscape elements are sparse and are very much subject to atmospheric conditions. During the summer the cars may be more apparent at certain times of the day, due to the sun reflecting off the windscreens. From the longer distances the glimpsed views of the cars only make up a small portion of the view achieved.

Views to the east and south: To the east and south views are only achieved in areas immediately adjacent to the site where there are no intervening landscape elements. No views are achieved from Ardley, the properties along the B430 or Caulcot. The topography generally dips and combined with some extensive areas of woodland such as Stoke Wood and the Heath means no views can be achieved from areas that are not immediately adjacent to the site. Some glimpsed views can be achieved from bridleways 28 and 29 and Clingrove Drive immediately south of the facility. As photo viewpoints 5 and 6, Figure 1.4 and 1.5 illustrate views of the cars make up a very small portion of the view and in the majority are screened by buildings within the airfield itself, woodland and hedgerows.

Views to the west: Once beyond the confines of the former airfield views to the west of QEK's external facility cannot be achieved. The views of the external facility achieved from the western side of Cherwell Valley are those of the Walon external facility area. See photo viewpoints 1 and 4, Figure 1.4. The cars on the top of the ridgeline make up a small portion of the view and are not easily discernible. Only the vehicles closest to Walon's western boundary can be seen.

The principal reason for the small ZVI is that the cars, which are considered as the elements of intrusion, are low in height. These low level elements are thus easily screened by the combined influences of the gently undulating landform that does not allow elevated views over large areas and low existing intervening landscape elements such as hedgerows. This results in only a handful of residential receptors, settlements or isolated properties and users of PRoW being able

to achieve views of the cars at the QEK facility. The far west end of Walon external facility can be viewed from residents to the west of Cherwell Valley.

1.5.2 Consideration of the effects of lighting of QEK's external operations during the night

The three night time photographs were taken on Tuesday 14 December 2004, on a crisp, clear night between 6.00pm and 9.45pm. The three close locations are shown on Figure 1.2. Given the lighting intrusion is minimal and combined with the influence of the topography views from longer distances, such as from the Aston Villages on the west side of the Cherwell Valley, were not considered a worthwhile exercise. By using the close locations the worst case scenarios are illustrated. The three sets of photographs are illustrated in Figures 1.8 – 1.10. Viewpoint one was taken from the dead end road by Lazy Acre farm to the north east of the site. The second viewpoint was from a break in the hedgerow along the B430 where a large verge allowed a photograph to be safely taken whilst the third was taken from Clingrove Drive immediately south of the facility. Note a night time photograph was not taken at Troy Cottages for safety reasons.

Overview of sources of lighting in the study area. Generally the source of light pollution in the study area is confined to the following;

- major roads i.e. the M40;
- built development such as the settlements in the study area; and
- the former buildings within the airfield.

Generally all other roads such as the B roads and country lanes are not lit. QEK's lighting can be perceived from areas to the south, east and north of the site but the light does not trespass to residents i.e. residents in, Ardley, Troy Cottages and Troy Farm.

The current effect of lighting at QEK's external operations. All three viewpoints illustrate some difference when the lights are on and off. The photographs show that QEK's lighting is the white, dipped, lower level flood lighting. However when the lights were switched off the glare of the other lighting remained i.e. the orange street type lighting and thus the light pollution remained similar. The photographs clearly show that the majority of the glare is caused by that of the orange street lighting and that all lighting on the airfield site is confined to the immediate area. There is not one situation where the lighting impedes bedroom windows and therefore no situation where light trespass effects residents.

The lighting does not affect any residential areas and as PRoW are generally not used during the night the lighting therefore does not affect the daytime users.

1.6 Evaluation of Visual Effects

1.6.1 Evaluation of Visual Significance

The receptors identified in section 1.5.1 have been subjected to an evaluation, the methodology of which is described previously.

The results of the evaluation are set out in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Visual Effects and Evaluation of Significance

Visual Receptor Viewpoints and Routes	Minimum Distance between Development and Visual Receptor	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Existing Effect	Level of Effect	Significance	
					Level	Rationale
Public Rights of Way						
Users of bridleway 29 and 28	Close	High	Negligible	Slight	Not Significant	Close distance, glimpsed views of the cars through breaks in the hedgerows and the buildings on the southern side of the airfield. These views are only achieved in a very small handful of locations. (see Figure 1.5, Photo viewpoint 6)
Users of footpath13	Middle	High	Low	Moderate	Not Significant	Middle distance glimpsed views of a moderate number of cars through breaks in the structure planting and where existing buildings on the airfield do not impede views. Views will be less prevalent in the summer months.
Users of footpath 6 by Fritwell	Long	High	Low	Moderate	Not Significant	Long distance views from the eastern end of this footpath south of Fritwell, of a moderate numbers of cars. Views may be more prevalent during the winter. (see Figure 1.6, Photo viewpoint 10)
Users of bridleway 2 and footpath 1	Long	High	Low / Negligible	Slight	Not Significant	Very long distance views from the bridleway over the motorway and by Green Farm, where the cars make up a very small element in the view. These views are subject to atmospheric conditions and may be more prevalent during the summer. (see Figure 1.6, Photo viewpoint 11)

Visual Receptor Viewpoints and Routes	Minimum Distance between Development and Visual Receptor	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Existing Effect	Level of Effect	Significance	
					Level	Rationale
Residential and isolated residential Receptors						
Residents of Troy Cottages	Middle	High	Low	Moderate	Not Significant	Middle distance views from the upper windows of these properties. Views from ground level are restricted by intervening hedgerows along Somerton Road. Generally the views are of some larger areas of car parking on the northern side of the facility but are subject to atmospheric conditions. (see Figure 1.7, photo viewpoint 12). Note this is taken at a break in the hedgerow along Somerton Road and does not clearly represent the view from Troy Cottage as the ground level views are screened by hedgerow.
Residents of Troy Farm	Middle	High	Low	Moderate	Not Significant	Middle distance views from the upper windows of cars on the northern side of the facility. The views are of moderate areas of parked cars and are subject to atmospheric conditions.
Residents on the south side of Fritwell	Long	High	Low	Moderate	Not Significant	Some long distance glimpsed views of the northern areas of the external operations. Given the long distance the cars form a small element within the views and therefore are considered of low magnitude of effect, which causes a moderate level of effect that is not significant.
Residents of Green Farm	Long	High	Negligible	Slight	Not Significant	Potentially very long distance, glimpsed views for these residents to the north east of the site. These views will be subject to atmospheric conditions (see Figure 1.6 Photo viewpoint 11)
Residents in Letchmere Farm	Close	High	Negligible	Slight	Not Significant	Views from this residence are unlikely given the thick planting around the northern perimeter of the property.

Visual Receptor Viewpoints and Routes	Minimum Distance between Development and Visual Receptor	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Existing Effect	Level of Effect	Significance	
					Level	Rationale
Public Recreational Users						
Users of Ardley Wood	Middle	Medium	Low	Slight/ Moderate	Not Significant	Potential middle distance, glimpsed views for the users of this informal recreational area through breaks in the woodland along the railway line.
Vehicular Receptors (Motorists and Passengers)						
Users of Somerton Road, between Troy Cottages and Cross Roads Farm	Middle	Low	Low	Slight	Not Significant	These transient, middle distance receptors views are not directed towards the site and therefore views will be difficult for users of the road to perceive through breaks in the hedgerow (see Figure 1.7 Photo viewpoint 12).
Users of Water Lane between Fritwell and Ardley	Long	Low	Low	Slight	Not Significant	These transient, longer distance receptors have some directed views of the external operations when travelling southwards (see Figure 1.6 Photo viewpoint 9). Given a relatively large number of cars can be glimpsed from certain locations magnitude of effect is low. This, combined with a low sensitivity results in an effect that is not significant. These views are subject to atmospheric conditions.
Users of the two motorway bridges by north of Fritwell	Long	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	These long distance views during the winter are difficult to perceive but during the summer some glimpsed views of the external operations on the north side may be achieved
Users of the B4100	Long	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	Very long distance views that are barely perceptible given the very minor element, which the cars form in the view. Thus both magnitude of effect and level of effect for these transient users is negligible, resulting in an effect that is not significant.

Visual Receptor Viewpoints and Routes	Minimum Distance between Development and Visual Receptor	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Existing Effect	Level of Effect	Significance	
					Level	Rationale
Users of Camp Road	Close	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	Only very quick glimpsed, close distance views can be achieved from Camp Road. In general QEK's external operations can only be glimpsed from the main gate. Further east along Camp Road it is screened by the buildings in the foreground and dip of the landform within which the external operations reside. Glimpsed views of Walon's facility can be achieved through breaks in the intervening buildings in the foreground from the western end of the road.
Business and Commercial Receptors						
Users of Upper Heyford Airfield business units	Close	Low	High	Moderate	Not Significant	A limited number of current users of the business units at Heyford Park achieve views of large areas of parked cars. These users are confined to the north side of Camp Road. However given that many of the workers are associated with QEK's or Walon's car operations their views are not significant.
Key	Close: under 500 metres Middle: between 500 and 1500 metres Long: over 1500 metres	High Medium Low	High Medium Low Negligible	Substantial Moderate/ Substantial Moderate Slight/ Moderate Slight Slight/ Negligible Negligible	Significant Not Significant	

1.6.2 Summary of Key Visual Effects

The results of the visual assessment set out in preceding Table 1.3 facilitate identification of a number of key visual effects. The evaluation concludes that no receptors currently sustain “significant” effects. Out of the receptors identified the two most affected are:

- Users of footpath 13; and
- Residents in Troy Cottages.

In the case of footpath 13 users, the magnitude of effect is considered as low as these are middle distance receptors who achieve glimpsed views through breaks in the woodland and the redundant airfield buildings. In the case of the residents in Troy Cottages the magnitude of effect is also considered low. This is because the views are only achieved from upper windows and combined with the fact they are middle distance receptors means the views of the cars still only make up a small portion of the view close to the ground (average height of a vehicle is 1.55 metres).

The views of other potential receptors in the more sensitive categories are generally restricted by a combination of the screening provided by the characteristic rolling topography, the buildings on the former airfield, the woodland along the northern boundary and large areas of woodland to the south and east. This means that many of the potential close distance, sensitive receptors only achieve glimpsed views e.g. users of bridleway 29 and 28 to the south or the facility. In addition, users of two roads to the north east, Somerton Road and Water Lane currently sustain some clear views of moderate areas of the external facility but given their lower sensitivity means the effects sustained are not significant. It is important to note that in the case of Somerton Road views are not directed onto the site resulting in a low level of magnitude. However the receptors using Water Lane views are directed southwards towards the site. Given the longer distance and that the cars make up a smaller portion of the view from Water Lane, (see photo viewpoint 9, figure 1.6) the magnitude of effect is also considered low, thus resulting in a level of effect that is slight and not significant.

From the longer, often slightly elevated views of the facility, the cars are viewed as very small components in the entirety of the context of the surrounding landscape. At these longer distances the cars are difficult to perceive and views are very much subject to atmospheric conditions. In the summer the views may be more prevalent given the “glint” that can occur from the sun on the windscreens.

1.6.3 Comparison of the existing QEK external operations to that permitted by current temporary planning permissions

QEK currently has planning permission to use approximately 87.5 acres (net) at Heyford Park. On the ground the situation is different in that QEK have already reduced the external operations to 62.5 acres (net), a reduction of 25 acres (net) to that currently permitted. Removal of the external operations out of the far north eastern end of Heyford Park has resulted in a reduction in the visual envelope. This has already considerably improved the visual amenity in the area and substantially decreased negative visual impacts sustained. In particular the following sensitive receptors have sustained a visual improvement:

- Residents in Ardley;
- Residents in Fritwell;

- Residents along Somerton Road, Cross Roads Farm;
- Residents of Green Farm;
- Residents of Ashgrove Farm and Cottages;
- Users of bridleway 28 and 29;
- Users of footpaths 14, 11, 1, 3, 4 and 6; and
- User of bridleway 2 and footpath 1

Some of the above no longer sustain any views of the external operations and these include residents in Ardley, many residents in Fritwell, residents of Cross Roads Farm, residents of Ashgrove Farm and Cottages and users of footpaths 11, 3 and 4. In addition the non sensitive receptors using Water Lane, Raghouse Lane and Somerton Road have also sustained improvements in their views and in particular users of Raghouse Lane can no longer view QEK's external car operations.

1.6.4 Comparison of the existing QEK external operations and that proposed by the SPG

The SPG would ideally like to reduce the current external operations area substantially to that shown on both the landscape and visual context figures (1.1 and 1.2).

Overall a hypothetical reduction of the external operations to that of the SPG would confine the visual influence to the redundant airfield strip and areas immediately south where breaks in intervening buildings allow glimpsed views through to the site e.g. from the main gate house on Camp Road. From the south the views would remain principally the same in both situations, with the exception of bridleway 28 and 29 users (see Figure 1.5, Photo viewpoint 6) whereas views from the north and east would be greatly reduced principally confining the visual influence to the redundant air strip. However this visual assessment only determined that a handful of visual receptors in this north and eastern area view the existing situation. The evaluation of these receptors concluded that none incur a significant detrimental visual effect and therefore it is questionable as to whether the reduction of the external operations and the "removal of the sunlight glinting on the parked cars" would greatly improve the visual amenity for these receptors. Indeed if the cars are removed from this area the visual intrusion of the redundant airfield buildings would still remain and as the photographs prove (for example Photo viewpoint 12, Figure 1.7) it is the derelict airfield buildings, not the glint of the cars, that are the main source of visual intrusion. Removal of the cars will not result in a significant improvement to the visual amenity. This is due to the a number of combined factors;

- the long distances of the receptors from the source;
- the existing redundant buildings in the foreground; and
- that the cars make up a very small component of the view.

Photo viewpoints 6 and 12 (Figures 1.5 and 1.7 respectively) clearly illustrate these issues and thus when evaluated in the assessment the cars intrusion in the views were considered as not significant. In addition it is questionable as to whether the reduction of the external operations to that of the SPG at night would greatly improve the intrusion of security lighting. The night time exercise of lights on -v- lights off proved the levels of light intrusion currently is not

significant and not affecting any residents and therefore a reduction in QEK's operations area to the SPGs aspirations would not be of benefit.

Comparison with the SPG policies: It appears that the SPG is based on the cumulative effects of all external operating facilities.

Policy TU2 2 of the SPG is of particular relevance to the assessment and is principally concerned with the temporary users "visual intrusion, including the effects of security lighting". This policy is derived from the First Secretary of States and Inspectors comments of the "undesirable visual impacts.....night-time glare of the security lights.....and the visual intrusion of sunlight glinting on the parked cars on the runway". The night and day visual assessment of QEK's current external facility at 62.5 acres (net) shows that the level of visual intrusion presented by both the glinting of the sunlight and the glare of the security lighting is not of significance. Firstly, during the day the glinting cars can only be viewed within a very small visual envelope containing a small number of receptors. Secondly, where the views are achieved the cars only make up a small element in the view and the bulk of the visual intrusion is from the redundant airfield buildings. Thirdly, at night a reduction in the QEK's security lighting would not effect any public residents.

Policy TU2 3 is concerned with protecting "the appearance and character of north Oxfordshire countryside". The assessment shows that QEK's external car operations do not harm the visual amenity of publicly accessible areas. In particular QEK's facility is located predominantly in a natural hollow in the eastern end of Heyford Park whose landscape character is denuded, with the unsightly redundant airfield buildings and is subject to unsightly and noisy influences of Ardley Quarry landfill and the M40.

Finally policy TU2 4 is concerned with "the settings of buildings, structures and complexes identified by English Heritage as being of national importance". QEK do not operate within the immediate vicinity of these sites currently under review by English Heritage. The only area where one can publicly view both the cars and proposed buildings in the same views are from the north, around Troy Cottages (2 nos.) off Somerton Road. (See Figure 1.7, photographic viewpoint 12). Given that the QEK's external operations can only be viewed publicly from one area it is debatable as to whether removing the cars from this area would improve the overall visual amenity of the view for the setting of the buildings. This is backed by the fact that the evaluation concluded that views from this area were not significant.

1.6.5 Conclusion

QEK's facility is located on the former Upper Heyford Airfield in North Oxfordshire. This is a landscape of some significant landscape resource in terms of cultural heritage, nature conservation, the River Cherwell Valley and the small, traditional nucleated villages. However it is important to note that the former airfield itself is one of a degraded landscape and some of the surrounding areas include unsightly land uses such as Ardley Quarry / landfill. In particular the eastern end of the site is subject to disturbance by the continuous hum of the M40.

Views of the site are generally difficult to obtain and are confined to areas immediately adjacent to the site and to the north and east. This is principally because the cars are low elements and that screening is easily provided by the characteristic rolling topography, the buildings on the former airfield, hedgerows, the woodland along the northern boundary and large areas of woodland to the south and east. The visual evaluation concludes that no receptors currently sustain visual effects that are considered as significant. The visual receptors who are most

greatly affected are the users of footpath 13 and residents in Troy Cottages. However given the distance of the cars from the receptor means that where views are achieved the cars only make up a small portion of the view and this combined with the existing intrusion posed by the buildings on the airfield means the effects are not considered significant.

Appendix A

Figures

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Appendix B

Abbreviations

X Pages

Ltd	Limited
ZVI	Zone of Visual Influence
MoD	Ministry of Defence
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
RAF	Royal Air Force
GLVIA	Guideline for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
LI	Landscape Institute
IEA	Institute of Environmental Assessment
LCA	Landscape Character Area
SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument
AHLV	Area of High Landscape Value
EH	English Heritage
SSSI	Special Site of Scientific Interest
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
ProW	Public Rights of Way
M40	Motorway 40

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