

I INTRODUCTION

I.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PLANNING APPLICATIONS

- I.1.1** This Environmental Statement (ES) has been prepared on behalf of the landowners, North Oxfordshire Consortium (NOC), to accompany an outline planning application to Cherwell District Council for development at the former RAF Upper Heyford Air Base. The ES also accompanies planning applications for the demolition and change of use of both individual and groups of buildings on the former Air Base, which are made in conjunction with the outline application for the whole of the site. These applications (89 in total) are submitted simultaneously with the outline proposals in order to enable the development and to satisfy the requirements for procuring consents for development in a conservation area.
- I.1.2** The ES should be read as part of the planning application in conjunction with the Design and Access Statement, Base Management Plan, Transport Assessment, Flood Risk Assessment and the following supporting documents, which are also submitted as part of the planning applications:
- Affordable Housing Statement
 - Statement of Community Involvement
 - Waste Minimisation Statement
 - Planning Supporting Statement
 - Base Management Plan
 - Demolition Schedule and Plan
 - Change of Use Schedule and Plan
 - Sustainability Statement
 - Building Appraisal
 - Tree Retention and Removal Schedule and Plan
 - Employment Statement

1.2 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

- 1.2.1** The former RAF Upper Heyford airbase is located within Cherwell District Council, North Oxfordshire, approximately 7 km (4 miles) north-west of Bicester, 13 km (8 miles) south-east of Banbury and circa 3 km (2 miles) to the south-west of junction 10 of the M40 motorway. Oxford is approximately 24 km (15 miles) to the south and the site is about 113 km (70 miles) from London and 89 km (55 miles) from Birmingham.
- 1.2.2** The site lies within the parishes of Upper Heyford, Somerton and Ardley, and is surrounded by a network of villages and hamlets, with the settlement of Upper Heyford being located close to the western boundary.
- 1.2.3** The site extends over 516 ha of land. The main vehicular route into the site is along Camp Road. This public road runs east-west and separates the primarily technical area to the north, containing buildings associated with the flying function, the runway, Hardened Aircraft Shelters, bomb stores, from the primarily domestic site to the south which contains most of the residential buildings and support facilities. Camp Road links Upper Heyford village in the west with the B430 Ardley to Middleton Stoney road in the east which then connects with junction 10 of the M40 motorway at Ardley.
- 1.2.4** Two hectares of land lie outside the base's perimeter fence and are situated south of Camp Road, east of a residential area and are occupied by the site's sewage treatment works and a balancing pond.
- 1.2.5** In total there are some 279,000 square metres of buildings on the site, mostly of a utilitarian military nature. There is almost 10 km of metalled surface comprising a main runway, further runways and taxiways, areas of hardstanding and access roads. In addition to 65 electricity sub-stations, numerous other infrastructure elements are located across the airbase including a gas regulator, water towers, a Hardened Telephone Exchange (Building 129), and over 300 former married quarters and extensive barrack accommodation.
- 1.2.6** The 3.4 km (2.1 mile) main runway is set within an extensive area of grassland. It dips down to the edge of the Cherwell Valley at the western end. To the south, there is a wide area of hard surface with further taxiing areas on either side of the runway. Many parts of these areas have been used for car storage under temporary planning permissions. In the south-west corner there are two groups of Hardened Aircraft Shelters (HASs), an Avionics Maintenance Facility, (Building 299) a large area formerly used for engine testing and three Nose Docking Sheds (Buildings 327, 329, 325) as well as ancillary buildings.
- 1.2.7** The central/south section has a single Nose Docking Shed (Building 335), and three groups of three open aircraft weather shelters (Buildings 2001-2009), with a further group of Hardened Aircraft Shelters (Buildings 3043-3047) and fuel oil storage facilities (Building 274 POL 3). Much of this area is surrounded by security fencing. The final principal area south of the runway is the Southern Conventional Arms Store where a large area is occupied by rectangular, closely-spaced grass-covered 'igloos'.
- 1.2.8** North of the runway, groups of Hardened Aircraft Shelters appear to be in random locations, but actually were carefully set out so that no more than two could be hit on a single bombing run. They lie within grassland and hardstanding. There are large maintenance buildings, an engine-testing area and, on the north

edge, two complexes of squadron headquarters buildings (Buildings 209, 234). In the south-west, nine Hardened Aircraft Shelters and support buildings form the Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) area (Buildings 2010 and 3001-3009). The Northern Bomb Store and Special Weapons Area are located at the eastern end of the site (Buildings 1001-1060).

- 1.2.9** In the primarily domestic area to the south of Camp Road and east of Kidlington Road, there is a now derelict former school comprising a complex of single-storey buildings. A water tower in the north-east corner and one 150 m further east along Camp Road are landmarks. To the east of the former school there are sports fields around a gymnasium and, beyond this, a disused superstore and hospital. The houses that served the airbase in this area have been brought back into use and consist of bungalows on the western side with two-storey semi-detached or short terraces of 1950s houses to the north and east. East of the bungalows are 1920s houses around Carswell Circle with more recent houses around a similar close to the south. A small supermarket has been brought back into use and there is a disused petrol station adjacent. Further east is a complex of former single airmen's accommodation, offices and car parks, all now disused. Many parts of the technical and residential areas appear run-down, dilapidated and in need of renewal.
- 1.2.10** North-east of Camp Road former officer housing is located off Soden Road and Larsen Road. To the west is a substantial disused 1920s RAF officer's mess largely in its original setting. The principal entrance to the airbase is to the west of this, off a roundabout on Camp Road. Heyford Park House and the guardhouse, which are also 1920s buildings, lie to either side and three partially tree-lined avenues (known as the 'trident') radiate into the site. This area is dominated by large 1930s aeroplane hangars and other buildings of the 1930s and World War II, but there has been infilling in a variety of styles and for a variety of functions, creating a confusing mixture of buildings. Most buildings are currently in office or commercial use. Two important Cold War buildings lie in the western part of this area: the Battle Command Centre (Building 126) and the Hardened Telephone Exchange (Building 129).
- 1.2.11** The majority of the base's vegetation consists of grassland. There are a number of mature and semi-mature trees within the residential and technical core of the airbase, part of which includes alien coniferous species, albeit the overriding character of the Flying Field Area remains one of openness. There is some semi-mature woodland planting within the Flying Field along parts of the north-west and south-east boundaries and off site tree planting outside the site fence along the northern boundary (further detail is set out within the 'Landscape and Visual Impacts' Chapter).
- 1.2.12** An area of species rich limestone grassland on the eastern third of the site, either side of the main runway, is designated as a County Wildlife Site (CWS). In addition, the central area of grassland alongside the main runway and the Northern and Southern Bomb Stores has been identified by Oxfordshire County Council as an Ecologically Important Landscape (EIL), principally for its breeding bird interest. (further detail is set out within the Ecology and Nature Conservation Chapter and Landscape and Visual Impacts Chapter respectively).
- 1.2.13** Since the airbase closed in 1994, temporary planning permissions have been granted for the re-use of a number of the buildings on the site. Those used for employment purposes now provide around 1,000 jobs.

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The largest employer is the car storage and logistics operator QEK, a company that employs approximately 550 people on the site. This involves the outdoor storage of many thousands of cars and commercial vehicles on the hard-standings, disused runway and taxiways.

- 1.2.14** Noteworthy among the other uses now accommodated on the site are the Cherwell Innovation Centre, the use of the secure former weapons stores to stockpile fireworks, the use of several Hardened Aircraft Shelters to provide archive storage facilities for paper and computer files, and the use of parts of the site for police training purposes.
- 1.2.15** At present there are just over 300 dwellings available for residential occupation, the majority of which are currently let. As a result the site is now home for around 800 residents. Facilities such as the former airbase's convenience store (the "shopette") and the chapel serve the community living on the base. The chapel annex is used for community activities. A number of clubs currently use it for their meetings and interests.
- 1.2.16** The entire airbase site was designated as a Conservation Area in April 2006. In addition, a number of the structures have been recognised as being of international and national importance as Scheduled Monuments (further detail is set out within the Cultural Heritage Chapter).

1.3 SITE CONTEXT

- 1.3.1** The site lies above the 120m contour on a gently domed plateau to the east of the Cherwell Valley. The surrounding landform is incised by the River Cherwell and a series of dry valleys. The area surrounding the airbase is rural in nature and dotted with hamlets and villages. The plateau has a mostly open landscape character.
- 1.3.2** The site is generally open to views and visually exposed in nature with grassland between the areas of the hard-standing on the base and little tree cover.
- 1.3.3** There are some areas of woodland vegetation near to the former airbase, such as the ancient woodlands of The Gorse and The Heath to the south and Kennel Copse to the north. More wooded areas are situated on the lower slopes of the Cherwell Valley. Fields surrounding the base are generally large, enclosed by hedgerows, and used for intensive arable cultivation.
- 1.3.4** There are five conservation areas close to the airbase within the villages of North Aston, Steeple Aston, Somerton, Fritwell and Rousham. Rousham Conservation Area includes Upper and Lower Heyford and abuts the western boundary of the airfield. Rousham Park is a famous 18th Century landscape park in a largely complete condition situated on the lower western slopes of the valley to the south-west of the site. It is Grade I on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens.
- 1.3.5** The Birmingham to Oxford railway line passes through the valley to the west of the site, as does the Oxford Canal. Further west is the A4260 road which runs south from Banbury towards Oxford. A few miles to the east run both the M40 motorway and the Birmingham - Marylebone railway line. Minor roads also run to the north, west and south of the site.

I.3.6 There is an extensive network of public rights of way in the surrounding area. Some of these used to run across the land now occupied by the former airbase and were closed as the base developed over time.

I.4 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

I.4.1 This ES accompanies an outline planning application for a sustainable settlement - to be called Heyford Park - with associated amenities, facilities and infrastructure, at the former RAF Air Base at Upper Heyford. In the proposed new settlement area, the application seeks permission for residential accommodation of up to 1075 dwellings, public open space, a new mixed-use neighbourhood centre, a primary school, community, recreational, amenity and employment opportunities and associated physical infrastructure. On the Flying Field Area, permission is sought for environmental enhancements and further employment opportunities, together with associated infrastructure.

I.4.2 The accompanying demolition applications seek permission for the removal of some existing structures (418 in total) to enable development of the land on which they currently stand and/or enable environmental enhancements to the site generally. In addition, the change of use applications seek permission for the conversion and/or re-use of existing buildings to enable them to contribute more effectively to the proposed development.

I.4.3 A full description of the proposed development is given in the Planning Support Statement and Chapter 3 of the ES.

I.5 REQUIREMENT FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

I.5.1 The requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment is identified in the EIA Regulations (The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999, Part II, Regulation 5) which classify proposed developments as either Schedule 1 or Schedule 2. The proposed Heyford Park development falls under Schedule 2, 'development likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location'.

I.5.2 Cherwell District Council stipulate in their 'RAF Upper Heyford Revised Comprehensive Planning Brief 2007' that an Environmental Statement should accompany any planning application for the site and that the Statement should be produced in accordance with an agreed scoping opinion. The formal scoping opinion under Regulation 10 of the EIA Regulations, identifying the issues that should be covered by the EIA, was agreed in liaison with the Council and issued by them on 20 September 2006. The issues to be covered include:

- The proposed development and alternatives
- Planning policy context
- Socio-economic assessment
- Traffic, access and movement
- Utility services and waste
- Construction waste
- Noise
- Air quality

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- Water quality
- Geology, soils and contamination
- Surface water drainage, hydrology and hydro-geology
- Landscape and visual impacts
- Ecology and nature conservation
- Cultural heritage

1.6 PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

1.6.1 The purpose of this document is to make available to the Local Authority and the public the findings of the EIA as undertaken by the landowners (NOC) and their consultants. The document provides a description of the development, its likely significant environmental effects, the measures to be put in place to mitigate those effects and a description of any remaining (residual) effects. A non-technical summary of the ES is also provided as a stand-alone document to make the information as accessible as possible.

1.6.2 The assessments completed within this ES have been based on the consideration of the Proposed Development which forms this application as demonstrated by the Assessment Plans (Volume I, drawing numbers I135_060-064). The parameters for development are as detailed in Chapter 3 of this ES and include the proposed new development and proposals including employment and residential within the New Settlement Area, together with the demolition, change of use and continued use of buildings and structures within the Flying Field Area. All assessments have had due regard to the Conservation Area status and for the heritage conservation requirements for this unique development opportunity.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

1.7.1 This ES includes information, as detailed in Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations, as reasonably required, to assess the environmental effects of the development for Part I and at least the information referred to in Part II of Schedule 4. This ES provides data to identify and assess any environmental effects of likely significance in relation to the Proposed Development and provides a description of the measures envisaged in order to avoid, reduce or remedy, if possible, significant adverse effects.

1.7.2 In accordance with the EIA Regulations, this ES comprises the following information:

- A description of the development proposed comprising information about the site including the nature, size and scale of the Proposed Development;
- The data necessary to identify and assess the main effects which the development is likely to have on the environment;
- A description of the likely significant effects, direct and indirect, on the environment proposed for the development, explained by reference to its possible impacts on: human beings, flora, fauna, soil, water, air, climate, cultural heritage, landscape and the interaction between any of the foregoing material assets;
- Where significant adverse effects are identified with respect to any of the foregoing, mitigation measures will be proposed in order to avoid, reduce or remedy those effects;
- Consideration of the main alternatives; and

- Summary, in non-technical language, of the information specified above.

1.7.3 This ES has three main parts: a separate non-technical summary in leaflet form (Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary); this document, which includes the main detailed text; tables, diagrams and A3 illustrations and plans (Environmental Statement Main Report); a further four separate documents that include technical appendices and large scale drawings (Environmental Statement Appendices 1, Environmental Statement Appendices 2, Transport Assessment, Flood Risk Assessment) The content of the ES is organised according to the areas and issues identified in the scoping opinion and set out in paragraph 1.5 above.

1.8 THE EIA TEAM

1.8.1 The EIA was carried out by a team comprising the following:

Roger Evans Associates Ltd

- EIA scoping and co-ordination
- Masterplanning, design and co-ordination
- The proposed development and alternatives

Pegasus Planning Group

- Planning policy context

Arup

- Socio-economic assessment
- Traffic, access and movement
- Utility services and waste
- Construction waste and contamination
- Noise
- Air quality
- Water quality
- Geology, soils and contamination
- Surface water drainage, hydrology and hydro-geology

Cooper Partnership

- Landscape and visual impacts

Ecological Planning and Research

- Ecology and nature conservation

Oxford Archaeology

- Cultural heritage