

Drivers Jonas

**Heyford Park -
Paragon Visual
Assessment**

Visual Assessment: Final Report

June
2008

Entec UK Limited

Report for

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Certificate No. EMS 69090



Certificate No. FS 13881

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Executive Summary

Introduction: Entec UK Ltd was appointed by Drivers Jonas, on behalf of Paragon Fleet Solutions Ltd, who are owned by Paragon Automotive Limited, in May 2008 to prepare a visual assessment of the temporary Paragon automotive facility at Upper Heyford Airfield. This assessment is submitted in support of the 12 planning applications prepared by Drivers Jonas on behalf of Paragon to further extend the time period for their temporary use of land and buildings at Upper Heyford.

The Paragon 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.

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 denuded character along with features such as the River Cherwell Valley and the small, traditional nucleated villages. The Airfield's wider landscape setting is also an important resource in cultural heritage and nature conservation terms. However it is important to note that the landscape of the former Airfield is generally degraded. In particular the eastern end of the site is subject to disturbance by the continuous background traffic noise caused by the traffic on 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 visual effects of Paragon's existing facility which covers a total site of around 61 hectares (150 acres), around 24 hectares (60 acres) of which is hardstanding. The current situation is also briefly compared with the proposed footprint for Paragon shown in the NOC's submitted duplicate application, which at the time of preparing this report was pending determination. This proposed footprint addresses concerns made by English Heritage and shows a permanent footprint for Paragon of 17 hectares (40 acres) for car processing.

Visual Survey: The site survey proves that views of Paragon's existing external operations are generally difficult to obtain and are confined to areas immediately adjacent to the Airfield and to the north and east. Only the following groups of close to middle distance visual receptors of high sensitivity have occasional views of the current external operations:

- users of PRow (Public Right of Way) number 13²;
- users of bridleways 28 and 29; and

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

² The PRow reference numbers refer to those allocated in Figure 1.1 and do not relate to the coding provide on the Definitive Map held by the local authority.

- residents in Troy Farm and Troy Cottages (two number).

In addition users of Somerton Road and the Fritwell section of Water Lane, have views of the external operations but under the adopted methodology these users are considered to have low visual sensitivity and combined with the fact that they are transient receptors, with often only glimpsed views which means that the consequent level of effect that they sustain is only slight.

Views are difficult to obtain principally because visual receptors in cars are at a lower elevation and for other receptors screening is easily provided by different combinations of the characteristic rolling topography, the buildings on the former Airfield, intervening hedgerows and trees, the woodland around Ardley to the north-east of the Airfield, in 'the Heath' and around Middleton Stoney to the south-east. Consequently only a handful of users of local PROWs and residential receptors presently have any views of the cars at the current Paragon facility.

The visual evaluation concludes that no visual receptors currently sustain significant visual effects as a consequence of the present Paragon operation. 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 these receptors, where views are available the cars only make up a small portion of the receptors' overall view and in the visual context provided by the other existing facilities and buildings on the Airfield, has the consequence that these visual effects are not assessed as being significant. Also, the views available from Troy Cottages are 'private' rather than 'public' views.

Comparison of the existing Paragon external operations to that expected from the relocation to a permanent site: The purpose of the renewal applications are to provide a stepping stone to enable the eventual move to a permanent facility to form part of the new settlement proposed for the former airbase. The end result of this relocation process would be a decrease in the magnitude of visual effects currently experienced by visual receptors, particularly those located to the north and east of the Airfield as cars are moved off the main runway and eastern taxiway.

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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 Paragon Fleet Solutions Ltd in May 2008 to prepare a visual assessment of the current Paragon automotive facility at Heyford Park, notably in respect of the areas used for the external processing of vehicles. This assessment is an update of the visual assessment produced by Entec in February 2005 to reflect the changes that have taken place in the past three years.

Paragon's facility has been located on the former military Airfield at Upper Heyford since 1995. Since then, a number of time limited planning permissions have been granted for temporary uses within the Airfield including that of Paragon's current operations (formerly operating under the name of QEK), the former Walon facilities, along with a number of other companies which re-use the buildings and areas of hard standing on the Airfield.

This Visual Assessment is submitted in support of 12 planning applications to further extend the time period for their temporary use of land and buildings at Upper Heyford.

The extant temporary planning permissions expire on 30 June 2008. The current planning applications seek to extend time limiting permissions by a further 5 years. The period for renewal is dictated by the availability of an appropriate permanent facility to be provided as part of a lasting arrangement for the airbase.

The North Oxfordshire Consortium's outline planning application for a new settlement was registered by the Council on 6 November 2007 (application reference 07/02291/OUT). This application was appealed by the NOC on 3 March 2008 (appeal reference 08/00021/NONDET) on the grounds of non determination and this is due to be considered at Public Inquiry. A duplicate planning application has also been submitted by the NOC to the Council which, at the time of preparing these renewal applications, is pending determination.

The NOC's proposed development is described by the Council as:

"Outline planning application for new settlement of 1075 dwellings, together with associated works and facilities including employment uses, community uses, school, playing fields and other physical and social infrastructure at Heyford Park, Camp Road, Upper Heyford."

Section 2 of the supporting planning statement to the NOC's application provides a more detailed description of the proposed development. For the airfield area, paragraph 2.4 includes specific reference to an area of 17 hectares for "... vehicle preparation and car staging". This area, which is also shown indicatively at Appendix 8 to the Base Management Plan submitted with the application, has been proposed to seek to accommodate Paragon's business as a permanent and integral part of the overall proposed settlement. Through the duplicate application, revisions to the permanent footprint proposed for Paragon have been submitted, largely to address comments made by English Heritage.

Paragon's current site covers a total site area of circa 61 hectares (150 acres) comprising office accommodation, technical workshops, ancillary facilities, grassed areas, and around 24 hectares (60 acres) net hardstanding. The NOC's duplicate application shows an area of 17 hectares (40 acres) for Paragon which would remove cars from sensitive areas. It is understood that this 17 hectare footprint could be reached through a number of transitional stages.

The document is divided into the methodology, a landscape baseline and the visual assessment. It includes an assessment of the current visual effects of the Paragon facility and a commentary on the predicted effects of a reduced 17 hectare permanent footprint proposed as part of the NOC's planning application.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 General Approach

The methodology for Heyford Park, Paragon visual assessment is based on "*The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Second Edition*³", (GLVIA) which are widely regarded by the landscape profession as the 'industry standard'.

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

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

Given that Paragon's operations are a temporary use this report does not consider mitigation as there are no feasible solutions given the short timescale although transitional changes to the current operational footprint which could be possible during the proposed further temporary period would impact on the visibility of vehicles to existing receptors.

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 predicted ZTV (zone of theoretical visibility) for Paragon's existing external operations. The study area extends in a radius of 2.5 km around the Paragon site thereby including

The study area boundary includes areas within the predicted ZTV and other surrounding areas that may be considered potentially contentious. It includes the Aston villages in the west, to Lower Heyford and the B4030 in the south, the M40 to the west and Ploughley Hill to the north.

³ *The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Second Edition* The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2002.

1.2.3 Lighting

The previous visual assessment of February 2005 contained a review of the existing lighting conditions and an assessment of the contribution of Paragon to this situation (then known as QEK Global Solutions). However this revision does not seek to re-consider the visual effects of the night-time and security lighting as it is understood that the present Paragon proposal to further extend their temporary occupation would not require any additional lighting and that in the longer term, existing lighting would be removed and security would be provided by an infrared system as part of a permanent footprint.

1.2.4 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 and how these affect the availability of views to receptors. 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 study 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 sensitivity and an indication of particular key views and viewpoints 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;
- Cherwell District Landscape Assessment, Cobham Resource Consultants, November 1995;
- Cherwell District Local Plan, 1996, Cherwell District Council;
- The Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011, Cherwell District Council, 2004;
- The Emerging Cherwell Local Development Framework, Cherwell District Council;
- Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, Oxfordshire County Council, Adopted 2005;
- The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS), Oxfordshire County Council, 2004;
- RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area Appraisal, Cherwell District Council, April 2006;
- RAF Upper Heyford Revised Comprehensive Planning Brief, Cherwell District Council, adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in 2007;
- Heyford Park Environmental Statement, Roger Evans Associates Ltd, September 2007;
- Heyford Park - QEK Global Solutions Ltd Visual Assessment, Entec UK Ltd, 2005;
- Visual Assessment undertaken as part of the NOC's current applications, Cooper Partnership, 2007: and

-
- Ordnance Survey map, Explorer 191 (1:25,000), Banbury, Bicester and Chipping Norton.

1.2.5 Visual Assessment

Visual effects are concerned wholly with the effect of Paragon's existing operations on views, and general visual amenity of people who have views of the operations. 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.

The combined baseline desk top and site survey allows the development of the sketch ZTV. 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 ZTV was not considered a worthwhile exercise, as a computer generated ZTV is of more benefit in areas where the elements assessed are taller. Also the computer generated model we would use only considers the topography's screening influence and takes no account of the screening of woodland, trees or other development.

Views available to identified visual receptors within the ZTV 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 visual effect.

View Distance Categories

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

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

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

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); and
- The extent of the area(s) over which the external operations site 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; and
- The angle of the main direction of the view and whether the external operations area is viewed against the skyline or a background landscape.

In the case of Paragon's facility where views of cars are available, all visual effects are considered negative for the purposes of this assessment. 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 visual receptors, which is divided into four categories:

- High;
- Medium;

- Low; or
- Negligible.

1.2.6 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 the level of visual 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 Paragon site would be all those effects that are considered as a ‘substantial’ or a ‘moderate/ substantial’ effect in terms of the EIA Regulations (England and Wales, 1999).

1.3 Baseline Description

1.3.1 Introduction

The Paragon 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 and ten kilometres south-east of Banbury

1.3.2 Landscape Character

Landscape Character

The former Airfield lies on an exposed, plateau of white limestone east of the Cherwell Valley at elevations of between 110m and 139m AOD (above Ordnance Datum). 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 Paragon’s facility is located in the

Cotswolds Landscape Character Area (LCA 107), as defined in the then Countryside Commission's Countryside Character Volume 7 South East and London.

At a County level the site lies within the Farmland Plateau landscape character type as defined by the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) 2004, which divides the county into 24 generic landscape character types. The distribution of local landscape character types (LCT) across the study area is illustrated by **Figure 1.3**. The site lies within the Farmland Plateau LCT.

Farmland Plateau LCT

The key characteristics of this LCT are as follows:

- Level or gently rolling open ridges dissected by narrow valleys and broader vales;
- Large, regular arable fields enclosed by low thorn hedges and limestone walls;
- Rectilinear plantations and shelterbelts;
- Sparsely settled landscape with a few nucleated settlements; and
- Long, straight roads running along the ridge summits.

At a more localised level a landscape character assessment was carried out for Cherwell District Council in 1995 which divides the district into a number of landscape character areas. The Airfield and hence the Paragon site fall within the Upper Heyford Plateau landscape character area whilst the remainder of the study area is covered by the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands and the Cherwell Valley landscape character areas. As this study is more specific, the Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment is considered more relevant to the assessment.

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 Paragon's external operations are located. It is characterised by extensive areas of rolling arable land with a distinctively denuded character. Combined with the elevated nature of much of this landscape character area, this openness results in some dramatic views across the Cherwell Valley being available. 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 Airfield and Caulcott to the south. In addition there are a number of isolated farmsteads scattered across the landscape character area.

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

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 River Cherwell, 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 there are numerous 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's 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

As it was an important Cold War airbase the whole Airfield was designated as a Conservation Area in 2006. Given its history the key elements within the local context are those associated with the operation of the former Airfield. These include large areas of hard standing, disused runways and scattered military buildings congregated to the north and south of the airstrip, including the characteristic cold war hardened aircraft shelters (HAS). In addition, given the large number of vehicles currently located at the site they provide a key element.

In the wider study area the key landscape elements are:

- An open, gently rolling plateau east of the Cherwell Valley;
- Small villages, typically nucleated and containing traditional vernacular architecture, constructed of honey coloured Cotswold stone (See Photo Viewpoints 3a and 3b, **Figure 1.4**);
- The mainly large fields surrounding the former Airfield are used for intensive arable cultivation. However there is a tendency towards smaller scale pastoral fields around the infrequent rural settlements, which are reinforced by higher levels of tree planting. Most fields are generally bounded by well clipped hedgerows. These are often rigorously maintained and many are now gappy; and
- The limestone plateau is typically treeless however in the wider landscape beyond the Airfield a moderate amount of woodland cover is located in the east, around settlements or on the lower slopes of the Cherwell Valley.

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 Airfield the key landscape 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 there is a discordant pattern of land-use dominated by runways and seemingly randomly located buildings (but which are in fact intentionally positioned to provide protection against air attack). Where the Airfield and associated buildings are sited the former landscape's original traditional field pattern has been eradicated. Around the former Airfield a more coherent larger field pattern is found whilst a smaller field pattern is typically associated with historic settlements.

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- 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 Airfield, around the scattered settlements and along the River Cherwell.

1.3.5 Landscape Planning Designations

A review of the relevant local plans⁴ has been undertaken to determine specifically related landscape policies. To summarise the following describes these relevant landscape policies.

Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV): In the Cherwell Local Plan, 1996, (saved until September 2007) Policy C13 designates the Cherwell Valley as an AHLV (see **Figure 1.1**). This designation covers the Cherwell Valley and extends westwards, wrapping around the north of the Airfield. The AHLV boundary abuts the western-most extent of the former Airfield. 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 Local Development Framework in line with PPS7 and has been removed from the more recent but non-statutory Local Plan 2011. Until the LDF is produced the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan and the Cherwell Local Plan are both to be considered and so the designation has been taken forward in this assessment.

Conservation Areas: These are non-statutory and designated by Cherwell District Council. Conservation Area in the study area include RAF Upper Heyford, Fritwell, North Aston, Rousham, Somerton and Steeple Aston. The Rousham Conservation Area provides protection for the vistas and setting of Rousham Registered Park, including the villages of Upper Heyford and Lower Heyford and extends to the western perimeter of the Airfield.

1.3.6 Other Relevant Designations and Issues

Cultural Heritage Considerations:

The Cold War features and areas at the former RAF Upper Heyford have been identified in a number of studies led by the Council including the Conservation Plan (September 2005), Conservation Area Appraisal (April 2006) and the consequent designation of the entire airbase as a Conservation Area. The conclusions of these studies have also been considered in the revised Comprehensive Planning Brief (“CPB”).

A number of structures across the former airbase are now scheduled as ancient monuments or are statutorily listed.

A number of buildings at the airfield are listed (including the Control Tower, Squadron Headquarters and Nose Docking Sheds). Several additional buildings are also identified as making a positive contribution to the conservation area and are proposed for retention in the CPB.

There are a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) within the study area, for example Ardley Moat, Somerton Manor House and Somerton Village earthworks, in addition EH has scheduled nine HASs amongst other structures within the Airfield. This is a national

⁴ Cherwell Local Plan, 1996, Cherwell District Council and the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011, Cherwell District Council.

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 Garden (Grade 1 listed) is a famous eighteenth century landscape to the south-west of the former Airfield on the western side of the Cherwell Valley. Its main axis is orientated down the valley but its wider setting includes the south-western corner of the former Airfield. Paragon's current external operations cannot be viewed from Rousham Park due to its location in Cherwell Valley.

The retention of Paragon in their current form will '*maintain*' the level of impacts on the Conservation Area and important buildings at the airbase. In addition, the further 5 year temporary period sought will provide an appropriate timeframe for Paragon to consider transitional changes to the operational footprint. Transitional changes (and the ultimate permanent footprint) will provide an opportunity for the phased removal of vehicles from the main runway and taxiways east of the group of hardened Aircraft Shelters. These changes would address the main concerns raised by English Heritage in their letter to the Council of 10 March 2008 discussed in more detail in the Supporting Planning Statement and Design and Access Statement.

Ecological Considerations: Generally the area is ecologically impoverished due to the dominance of arable farming, with few intact 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 Airfield itself supports an extensive area of rough grassland located principally between the runway 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 certain elements immediately around Paragon's facility are often 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 readily audible. However outside the confines of the former Airfield the landscape 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 but 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 study area's topography is one of the key determinants of its landscape character and visual amenity. Specifically Paragon'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 139m AOD in the north-west area of Heyford Park.

The landform surrounding and including the former Airfield 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 Airfield 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 its boundaries with some mature formal tree cover within the main groups of buildings. There are some significant blocks or copses of trees close to the former Airfield particularly to its east. They are located on slightly lower ground and generally associated with watercourses. These include the Heath, the Gorse, Kennel Copse (an ancient semi-natural woodland) and Arley Wood to the north and east thereby providing some screening for receptors located further east and north.

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 slopes of the Cherwell Valley, whilst Upper Heyford, Middleton Stoney and Caulcott are to the south at slightly lower elevations.

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. The most prominent is the M40 motorway running from London to Birmingham, with junction 10 and Cherwell Valley Services lying just east of Ardley. 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 1.1**). Within the immediate confines of the Airfield the sense of movement generated by the major roads is not immediately perceptible. However glimpsed views of the M40 and the continuous hum of this road are noticeable from the external Paragon facility. A network of minor roads links 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 study area has a good, relatively well connected network of public rights of way (PRoWs), traversing the higher land and traversing the Cherwell Valley (see **Figure 1.2** for location). The most important PRoW is the national route; the Oxford Canal Walk, which follows the Cherwell Valley floor. Around Paragon's site the only PRoWs whose users have potential views of the Paragon facility are the users of bridleways 28 and 29 to the south of the Airfield, footpath 13 along the northern perimeter of the Airfield and footpaths 1 and 6 south of Fritwell.

During the site visit in May 2008 it was noted that often the footpaths around the Airfield have been terminated and have no particular destination. One example is bridleway 29 of which there is now no evidence of a PROW on the ground. Despite the relatively high level of public access to open agricultural areas generally from all other routes views of cars on the present Paragon site are very limited. It is concluded that the only possible views of the Paragon site available to receptors using existing PROWs would be some glimpsed views available from some sections of PROWs in the north east of the study area.

1.5 Visual Effects

This section of the assessment considers the existing effects of Paragon'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

The extent of visibility of the existing Paragon external facility is shown by the zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) illustrated in **Figure 1.2**. In summary the ZTV 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 Paragon's facility from areas to the north are in the majority screened by 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 (two properties);
- Users of PROWs 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 are available to the residents at 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 some close distance views are available from some locations immediately adjacent to the Airfield and some partial long distance views are available for

visual receptors using 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, other than vegetation, are sparse but views are affected by atmospheric conditions. From the longer distances the glimpsed views of the cars only make up a small portion of the available views.

Views to the east and south: To the east and south views are only available in locations immediately adjacent to the Airfield where there are no intervening landscape elements. No views are available to residents in Ardley, the properties along the B430 or Caulcot. The topography generally dips in these directions with the consequence that combined with some extensive areas of woodland such as Stoke Wood and the Heath, visual receptors in these areas only have any views from the locations immediately adjacent to the eastern and southern boundaries of the Airfield. Some glimpsed views are available to users of bridleways 28 and 29 and Clingrove Drive to the immediately south of the Airfield. As shown by photo viewpoints 5 and 6, **Figure 1.5**, views of the cars on the present Paragon site make up a very small portion of receptors' views. The cars are largely screened by buildings within the Airfield itself or its perimeter tree cover and hedgerows.

Views to the west: Beyond the confines of the former Airfield there are no views of Paragon's external facility available to visual receptors. Similarly no views are available to potential visual receptors on the western side of Cherwell Valley as demonstrated by photo viewpoints 1 and 4, **Figure 1.4 and 1.5**.

A key determinant of the small fragmented ZTV is that the cars, which are considered to be the principal visual elements within the Paragon facility, are low in height. Cars 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. Consequently it is concluded that the only views available would be for visual receptors in a limited number of settlements, isolated residential properties and PRoW users.

1.6 Evaluation of Visual Effects

1.6.1 Evaluation of Visual Significance

The visual effects upon the receptors identified in section 1.5.1 have been evaluated 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 small number of locations (see Figure 1.5 , Photo viewpoint 6) although these PROW show little evidence of public use.
Users of footpath 13	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 are less prevalent in the summer months as the trees offer more screening.
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 would be more prevalent during the winter than in the summer (see Figure 1.8 , 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 small element in the view. These views are subject to atmospheric conditions although summer tree cover may screen the cars completely. (see Figure 1.9 , Photo viewpoint 11).
Residential and isolated residential Receptors						

Visual Receptor Viewpoints and Routes	Minimum Distance between Development and Visual Receptor	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Existing Effect	Level of Effect	Significance	
					Level	Rationale
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 Paragon facility but are subject to atmospheric and seasonal conditions (see Figure 1.10 , photo viewpoint). Note the photographs are taken at a break in the hedgerow along Somerton Road and is not clearly representative of 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 the Farm of cars on the northern side of the Paragon facility. The views are of moderate sized areas of parked cars and are subject to atmospheric and seasonal 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 Paragon facility. Given the long distance, the cars form a small element within the views and therefore are considered to generate a low magnitude of visual change, which in turn causes a moderate level of effect that is not significant.
Residents of Green Farm	Long	High	Negligible	Slight	Not Significant	Potentially long distance, glimpsed views for these residents located to the north east of the Airfield. These views will be subject to atmospheric and seasonal conditions (see Figure 1.9 Photo viewpoint 11)
Residents in Letchmere Farm	Close	High	Negligible	Slight	Not Significant	Views are unlikely to be available to these residential receptors due to the dense 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 receptors have middle distance views that are not directed towards the Airfield and therefore views will be difficult for users of the road to perceive through breaks in the hedgerow (see Figure 1.10 Photo viewpoint 12).
Users of Water Lane between Fritwell and Ardley	Long	Low	Low	Slight	Not Significant	These transient receptors have longer distance views of the external operations when travelling southwards (see Figure 1.7 Photo viewpoint 9). Given the relatively large number of cars which can be glimpsed from certain locations the magnitude of visual change is low. This combined with a low sensitivity results in an effect that is not significant. These views are subject to atmospheric and seasonal conditions.
Users of the two motorway bridges to the 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 cars located on the north side may be achieved.
Users of the B4100	Long	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	Long distance views that are barely perceptible given the minor element which the cars form in the view. Thus both magnitude of visual change and level of effect for these transient users are 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 brief glimpsed close distance views are available to the users of Camp Road. In general Paragon's external operations can only be glimpsed from the main gate. Further east along Camp Road the external operations are screened by the buildings in the foreground and dip of the landform within which the external operations reside.
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 have 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 Paragon'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 visual 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 have glimpsed views through breaks in the woodland and the redundant Airfield buildings. In the case of the residents in Troy Cottages the magnitude of visual effect is also assessed as low. This is because the views are only available from the Cottages’ upper windows and combined with the fact they are middle distance receptors means that the cars make up a small portion of the view close to the ground level. In addition, the views available from Troy Cottages are ‘private’ rather than ‘public’ views.

The views of other potential visual 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 tree cover along the northern boundary and woodland to the south and east. This means that many of the potential close distance, visual receptors in more sensitive categories e.g. users of bridleway 29 and 28 to the south of the facility, only have glimpsed views of Paragon’s external facilities. In addition, users of two roads to the north-east; Somerton Road and Water Lane currently have some periodic clear views of parts of the external facility but given the lower sensitivity of this type of receptor has the consequence that the effects they sustain are not significant. It is important to note that in the case of the users of Somerton Road their views are not directed into the Airfield resulting in a low magnitude of visual change. Whilst the views of the receptors using Water Lane are directed southwards towards the Airfield, the greater separation distance and the small proportion of these receptors’ views that are occupied by the cars (see photo viewpoint 9, **Figure 1.7**) has the consequence that the magnitude of visual change is still assessed as low, thus resulting in a slight level of visual effect that is not significant.

From the longer, often slightly elevated views of Paragon’s external facility, the cars are viewed as small components in the context of the surrounding landscape. At these longer distances the cars are difficult to discern and views are affected by atmospheric and seasonal conditions. However the summer tree and woodland cover often can screen many potential views of the facility, so receptors are likely to obtain their clearest views on sunny days during the winter months.

1.6.3 Conclusion

Paragon’s facility is located on the former Upper Heyford Airfield in North Oxfordshire. Whilst the plateau and valley landscape of the surrounding area contains some cultural heritage and nature conservation features along with some small, traditional nucleated villages, it was observed that the former Airfield itself possesses a degraded landscape and that there are some visually detractive landscape elements close by such as Ardley Quarry/Landfill. In particular the eastern end of the Airfield is subject to disturbance by the continuous hum of the M40 traffic.

Views of the current site are not widely available to the limited number of potential visual receptors within the study area, and overwhelmingly are confined to areas immediately adjacent to the Airfield and to some receptors 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 tree cover along the northern boundary and areas of woodland to the south and east. The visual evaluation concludes that no visual receptors currently sustain visual effects that are considered as significant. The visual receptors who sustain higher magnitudes of visual impact as a result of at least partial views of the cars are the users of footpath 13 and residents in Troy Cottages (although in the case of Troy Cottages, views are 'private' rather than 'public'). However given the separation distances between these visual receptors and the cars on Paragon's external facility, they only ever make up a small portion of these receptors' views. When combined with the existing intrusion from by the buildings on the Airfield the net result is that any visual effects are assessed as being not significant.

Were Paragon's external facility to be relocated to the southern limits of the Airfield, away from the more open runway and taxiway, the visibility of the cars by existing receptors would be further reduced due to the screening of the existing structures that are located in this part of the Airfield.

Appendix A

Figures

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Appendix B Abbreviations

Ltd	Limited
ZTV	Zone of Theoretical Visibility
MoD	Ministry of Defence
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
RAF	Royal Air Force
GLVIA	Guideline for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
LI	Landscape Institute
IEMA	Institute of Environmental Management and 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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