

08 AUG 2005

05/01563/011T

**LAND TO THE NORTH OF SKIMMINGDISH LANE, BICESTER**

**PLANNING AND DESIGN STATEMENT**

**To accompany an outline planning application for  
employment generating development**

**Prepared on behalf of  
The Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance**

Hives Planning,  
43 South Street,  
Reading,  
Berkshire.  
RG1 4QU

Tel: 0118 958 7331  
Fax: 0118 938 4119  
Email: [sfb@hivesplanning.co.uk](mailto:sfb@hivesplanning.co.uk)

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning and Design Statement has been prepared in support of the accompanying planning application for employment generating development on land to the north of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester. It is submitted on behalf of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance and has been prepared in the context of Policies EMP1 and EMP2 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan (1996) and Policy EMP1 of both the First Deposit Draft (February 2001) and Revised Deposit Draft (September 2002) of the Review of the Local Plan; all of which allocate the site for employment generating development.
- 1.2 The application is submitted in outline, with access to be determined at this stage. The scheme proposals comprise the development of 5857 sq.m. of B1 employment use, with associated parking, turning areas and landscaping. Access is to be provided from the existing roundabout spur on Skimmingdish Lane - this follows the sale of land by the applicant to Oxfordshire County Council for the off-line upgrading and improvement of Skimmingdish Lane.
- 1.3 The application is submitted following discussions with Officers of Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council as Highway and Drainage Authority. This Statement has been prepared by Hives Planning and Hives Architects with input from Stuart Michael Associates (highways and drainage).



## **2.0 SITE CONTEXT**

- 2.1** The application site is shown on the location plan attached as Appendix 1. It comprises 2.3 hectares and adjoins the north-eastern edge of the built up area of Bicester immediately to the north of Skimmingdish Lane.
- 2.2** The site is bounded to the north and west by open agricultural land with the airfield at RAF Bicester set approximately 1.5 km to the northwest. To the south and east the site is bounded by the now improved Skimmingdish Lane (A4421), with the existing Telford Industrial Estate beyond (characterised by a mixture of two storey industrial units constructed of brick, metal cladding and glazing). The roundabout on Skimmingdish Lane, located on the western boundary of the application site, provides access along Launton Road to the Telford Industrial Estate; to the Launton Road Retail Park, to residential development to the west and to the primary shopping area of Bicester town centre, less than 2 km away.
- 2.3** The site itself has been previously used as private allotment land on a voluntary basis at the discretion of the applicant as landowner. No legal tenants occupy the site at this time. The site is enclosed by mature trees and vegetation to the east and by timber fencing and hedgerow planting to the south. The land along the frontage to the site forms a section of highway verge planted with immature trees.
- 2.4** Whilst the application site has direct access onto the A4421 and from thereon the wider highway network, it is also accessible by public transport. There is a bus route along Skimmingdish Lane, (served by bus numbers 16, 18, 28 and 28A linking Bicester and nearby Launton to Oxford, Aylesbury and Buckingham). In addition, Bicester North train station is located some 1.5 km to the southwest of the site. The service at this station is operated by Chiltern Railways with a half hourly service to London Marylebone during the peak hours (Monday to Friday). In addition Bicester Town Centre railway station is also located approximately 2 km to the southwest of the site. This station provides links to Oxford to the south.
- 2.5** The site is accessible by foot or cycle with a dedicated cycleway along the southern side of Skimmingdish Lane and a public footpath along the north-eastern boundary of the site.



### 3.0 THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

- 3.1 Outline permission is sought for 5657 sq m of B1 office development. Siting is not sought to be determined at this stage. However an illustrative site layout and 3D image to demonstrate how the differing elements of the scheme can be accommodated within the site is attached as Appendix 2. The illustrative layout comprises eight units to be utilised for B1 office use. A breakdown of floorspace per unit is provided. Further information on the possible architectural design of the proposals is set out below

#### Access and Layout

- 3.2 The access into the application site is from the existing roundabout spur on Skimmingdish Lane. In this position the access road naturally divides the site into two sections or areas. Secondary accesses are proposed to each sub-area, with an internal spur toward the north-eastern boundary of the site retaining potential future access onto adjoining land, should this be required for development at a later date. Details of the access arrangement can be found within the Transport Assessment that accompanies the planning application
- 3.3 Within each section of the site, the built density and space between the buildings is determined by site area, respective parking and circulation requirements. Parking and service bays are laid out to face one another as much as possible so that circulation areas are shared to optimise site use. A parking standard of 1 space/ 30 sq m g/a (the requirement for B1 use) has been provided.

#### Scale and Form

- 3.4 Given the existing position of the access road and the non-rectangular shape of the site, it is considered that development in the form of individual blocks is appropriate, providing the opportunity for smaller and less monolithic buildings than those which currently exist on the opposite side of Skimmingdish Lane at the Telford Industrial Estate
- 3.5 A mix of architectural styles for individual units has been demonstrated. This is considered to generate architectural variation and interest as well as offering wider opportunities for local employment. A design could also incorporate larger buildings capable of sub-division depending on market conditions.
- 3.6 The siting of the units allows each block to be viewed individually from outside the application site. Each building could, in its own way, be a "feature building", although



not located at the front of the site. The overall heights of the units are approximately 7.2 meters to eaves level which allows for two storeys of office (B1) use. The form of the units vary considerably to create interest and to reduce the apparent scale of the whole development, and could be united by careful use of materials and colour

#### Landscaping

- 3.7 The scheme proposals have also taken into account the need to integrate the development in the context of the surrounding area. As such a substantial strip of land around the perimeter of the site has been identified for the planting of trees and shrubs. Adjacent to the boundaries that do not abut the A4421 the landscaping scheme would screen and break up the development as well as provide differentiation between on site open space and adjacent land.
- 3.8 As seen from Skimmingdish Lane, the trees and shrubs are intended to provide a complimentary setting for the buildings. Planting would be extensive within the site, positioned adjacent to individual proposed units and within the parking areas. Careful consideration would also be given to hard landscaping features in the form of boundary treatments and surfacing materials.

#### Drainage

- 3.9 A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Statement accompanies the planning application. As shown on the Environment Agency's Flood Map (Fig 5 in accompanying statement) the southern and eastern corners of the site may be situated within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The proposed buildings on the illustrative layout are therefore located outside of these Flood Zones. Where appropriate proposed buildings could be designed and constructed to minimise the impacts of flooding on the fabric and stability of the buildings. In relation to the disposal of foul effluent and surface water run off there exist foul and surface water sewers in the vicinity of the site which can be utilised. Sustainable urban drainage systems will also be used for disposal of surface water from the development.

#### 4.0 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 This section examines national, regional, strategic and local planning policies of relevance to the consideration of the proposed scheme.

##### National Planning Guidance

- 4.2 Relevant National Planning Guidance is to be found in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and under the reformed planning system their replacement Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)

##### PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development

- 4.3 This document describes the government's objectives for the planning system and maintains at paragraph 3 that sustainable development is the core principle which underpins the planning process. The guidance continues by advising that planning should facilitate and promote sustainable development and inclusive patterns of urban and rural development. This can be achieved by "ensuring development supports existing communities and contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and key services for all members of the community" (paragraph 5). There is also a requirement for sustainable economic development in that planning authorities should ensure suitable locations are available for the industrial and commercial sector and provide improved productivity choice and competition (Paragraph 23 (iii) and (iv)).

##### PPS12: Local Development Frameworks

- 4.4 PPS12 reiterates the well-established principle (previously embodied within PPG1) of a plan-led system. Paragraph 1.6 maintains that the statutory development plan will continue to be the starting point in the consideration of planning applications for the development of land. Decisions have to be taken in accordance with the development plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

##### PPG4: Industrial and Commercial Development

- 4.5 PPG4 provides guidance on the location of proposed business development, maintaining that development plans provide the opportunity "to encourage new development in locations that can be served by more energy efficient modes of transport (this is particularly important for offices...) (paragraph 10). Paragraph 24 also states that planning applications for speculative development should be considered on their land use planning merits. Whether the developer already has



particular prospective purchasers or tenants will seldom be a material consideration

#### PPG13: Transport

- 4.6 PPG13 identifies accessibility to jobs via public transport, walking and cycling as a key objective. It also seeks to reduce the need to travel especially by private car. At paragraph 21 the guidance states that the Local Planning Authority should seek to make maximum use of the most accessible sites

#### PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment

- 4.7 PPG15 provides guidance on the protection of historic buildings, conservation areas and other elements of the historic environment. The guidance states that the objective of planning processes should be to reconcile the need for economic growth with the need to protect the historic environment. Conservation and sustainable economic growth are seen as complementary objectives
- 4.8 With regard to conservation areas the guidance seeks to preserve or enhance the special architectural or historic interest of the area. Paragraph 4.14 confirms that the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area is also a consideration in determining proposals outside the Conservation Area itself where they would affect settings or views into or out of it. This document does not seek to prohibit new development but to ensure it is in keeping with the character of the area.

#### The Regional Planning Framework

- 4.9 Under the new planning system the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA), as the Regional Planning Body for the South East, will be responsible for the revision of current regional guidance RPG9 and the production of a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South East (2006-2026).
- 4.10 The draft 'South East Plan Core Document' of the RSS was issued for public consultation in January 2005. Within this document Bicester falls within the Central Oxfordshire Sub Region. Policy CO1 'Core Strategy' maintains that the main locations for development will be Bicester and Didcot. This is reiterated in Policy CO5 'Economy' that states 'The main location for the provision of additional land for employment will be at Bicester and Didcot, in particular for the expansion and relocation of existing firms.'

## The Strategic Planning Framework

### The Adopted Oxfordshire Structure Plan (1998 - 2011)

- 4.11 The Structure Plan, adopted in 1988, provides that the role of the development plan in supporting the local economy is to ensure that sufficient land is available in appropriate locations to meet the needs of small businesses, existing firms and firms which need to be in Oxfordshire. The Plan also seeks to encourage new employment generating development in locations which contribute to reducing the need to travel (paragraph 8.5). Accordingly, Policy E2 provides that in the main towns (including Bicester) the provision of land for employment generating development will be made to:
- i) accommodate firms which need to be located in the area for the expansion and relocation of existing local firms;
  - ii) so as to achieve an appropriate balance between the number and type of jobs and the size and the skill of the local workforce;
  - iii) to provide jobs accessible from residential areas by walking, cycling and public transport. ...
- 4.12 In relation to Transport matters Policy T1 encourages measures which reduce dependence on private motorised transport and give greater priority to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. Policy T18 specifies criteria for development proposals which include the impact of generated traffic on existing settlements and roads, highway access and servicing arrangements and the safety of all highway users.
- 4.13 In relation to drainage water quality and environment, floodplains and water resources are protected by policies EN11 to EN14.

**The Emerging Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016**

- 4.14** The County Council is in the process of reviewing the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. Following the Examination in Public in October 2004 and the resulting consultation on the Proposed Modifications to the policies, the Plan is currently scheduled to be adopted Winter 2005-2006.
- 4.15** In terms of an economic strategy the emerging Structure Plan reiterates the adopted policy position which seeks to support the local economy and the provision of sufficient land in appropriate locations to meet identified needs. In relation to policies



on transportation and drainage their content has not been materially altered

#### The Local Planning Framework

- 4.16 The statutory local planning framework is provided by the Cherwell Local Plan 1996-2001, adopted in November 1996. In February 2001 a First Deposit Draft of the Review of the Local Plan was published and in September 2002 a Revised Deposit Draft was produced, with Pre-Inquiry Changes to the Revised Plan published in June 2004. In December 2004, following the introduction of the new planning system, the District Council resolved to discontinue work on the remaining stages towards adoption of the Local Plan and switch to the preparation of Development Plan Documents (DPDs). The Council resolved that the Draft Plan (including Pre-Inquiry Changes) be approved as Interim Policy for development control purposes.
- 4.17 Detailed policies in relation to highway and drainage matters are considered within the separately bound Transport Assessment and Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Statement.

#### Cherwell Local Plan Adopted November 1996

- 4.18 The application site is identified on the Proposals Map as a proposed site for employment generating development (Policies EMP1 and EMP2). This allocation forms part of the allocation of the larger adjoining area at Bicester Airfield. In order to ensure a comprehensive approach to development of this larger area the Council in Policy EMP2 envisaged that the A421 diversion would be required to serve the development. Paragraph 3.29 refers to the Council's intention to prepare a development brief for the area, seeking phasing of the development with development to commence in the south and to progress northwards.

#### Cherwell Local Plan Deposit Draft February 2001

- 4.19 In February 2001 the Council published the First Deposit Draft of the Review of the Local Plan. This continued the allocation of employment generating development at the application site north of Skimmingdish Lane (Policy EMP1 and paragraphs 4.55 to 4.57). Indeed, paragraph 4.55 states:

*"The land is considered suitable for B1 employment generating development... B2 employment may also be acceptable provided it does not adversely affect residential amenities in North Bicester or Launton."*



And paragraph 4.56 acknowledges that:

*"Commercial buildings need not be incompatible with the airfield conservation objectives .....*

4.20 In allocating land for employment generating development, the strategic objective is to achieve a broad balance between the number of local jobs and the size of the local working population (the overall aim behind this objective being to reduce the need to travel). Paragraph 4.38 refers to the fact that in 1991 68% of Bicester's resident workforce travelled out of town to find work.

4.21 Paragraph 3.85 confirms that the improvements to Skimmingdish Lane were required as a consequence of existing development that had already taken place, with committed and proposed employment sites within and to the south east of the airfield adding further justification for its implementation. The improvements to Skimmingdish Lane were therefore seen as a pre-requisite to any employment development on or to the south east of the airfield. The improvements took place during 2002.

**Cherwell Local Plan Revised Deposit Draft, September 2002**

4.22 Following consideration of objections to the first Deposit Draft Plan, fundamental changes were proposed to the content of the Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan (September 2002) so far as it related to the accommodation of development at Bicester. However, in relation to the application site the land remained designated as an employment allocation. Paragraph 3.96 relates specifically to land in the east of the airfield as being suitable for an early phase of employment generating development accessed from an improved Skimmingdish Lane

4.23 The Revised Deposit Draft also referred to the newly designated Conservation Area at Bicester Airfield. The historic importance of the airfield, including its established character and opportunities for preservation and enhancement are described in the Conservation Area Appraisal prepared by the Council – this document is to be used as a guide in considering all development proposals. Paragraph 3.93 accepted that there is scope for some development and that the land allocated for development on the Proposals Map is a product of a reasoned balance and would safeguard the airfield's open character and its relationship with the countryside beyond.

Cherwell Local Plan Revised Deposit Draft: Pre-Inquiry Changes, June 2004

- 4.24 The Council commissioned external consultants to advise on the suitability of land at RAF Bicester to accommodate the large scale of development proposed. The advice was that development would be harmful to the Conservation Area. This advice formed the basis of the Pre-Inquiry Changes reported to Executive in March 2004
- 4.25 The District Council proposed substantial changes to the allocations in the emerging Local Plan, and proposed to abandon the proposals for the urban extension at RAF Bicester and the employment allocation of land to the south-east (including the application site). The reasons for the Pre-Inquiry Changes are set out in the Report to Executive on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004. Paragraphs 9.45 to 9.47 deal specifically with the land to the south east of the airfield and states:

*" 9.45 The proposals in the revised deposit draft policy H12 also included the allocation of land for employment development on privately owned land to the south of the Airfield. If the Council accepts the recommendation and abandons the deposit draft Plan proposal for residential development on the airfield, this land then becomes a comparatively unsustainable location for employment. The potential to encourage work related trips by walking, cycling and public transport would be reduced and Skimmingdish Lane would continue to function as the outer distributor road, reinforcing its severing effect in relation to housing to the south.*

*9.46 ..... The proposed employment allocation, which would introduce built development within the rural setting of the airfield and radically change the rural backcloth against which the former bomb stores are viewed from the technical site, would thus be unacceptable in the context of the setting of the conservation area and the importance of the airfield in the national context.*

*9.47 Moreover, with the abandonment of the airfield perimeter road on the grounds of harm to the appearance and character of the conservation area, access from such development would need to be taken from an unrelieved Skimmingdish Lane. This would be to detriment of the highway safety and convenience on what will remain...an important outer distributor road. ...."*

- 4.26 The following planning analysis considers the adopted Development Plan allocation for the site and demonstrates that the development proposals comply with all relevant

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planning policy, in particular with regard to sustainability, the impact on the Conservation Area and highway safety.

## 5.0 PLANNING ANALYSIS

5.1 In accordance with Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act all applications are required to be determined in accordance with the development plan (taking into account national guidance) unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. The principal issue is therefore whether the proposed development would comply with relevant planning policy, and in particular whether the proposals are sustainable; whether they would impact on the setting of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area; and whether they would compromise highway safety and convenience on Skimmingdish Lane.

5.2 The Adopted Cherwell Local Plan (1996) is the relevant part of the Development Plan and therefore the application should be determined in accordance with Policy EMP1 and Policy EMP2 which expressly provide for employment generating uses on the application site. EMP1 states "Employment generating development will be permitted on sites shown on the proposals map subject to other relevant policies in the plan" (our emphasis)

5.3 In relation to the emerging replacement Local Plan, this is a material consideration. The first two versions of the Review of the Local Plan (the First and Revised Deposit Versions) continue the allocation of application site for employment uses. Although the Pre-Inquiry Changes, which abandon this allocation, have been adopted for development control purposes they have not been the subject of adjudicated consultation (not having been tested by an independent Inspector at Public Inquiry). These policies therefore must be considered to carry little weight. On this basis the proposed development of the site for employment purposes is in accordance with the publicly scrutinised policies in the Adopted Local Plan and subject to other considerations, should be granted planning permission.

5.4 In relation to other material considerations these are set out in the following paragraphs

### Sustainability

5.5 The application site is proposed to be developed in isolation from the 'comprehensive development' as envisaged in Policy EMP 2 of the Adopted Local Plan. As such the site is required to be assessed in the context of the existing situation.

- 5.6 'Journey to Work' data for residents living in Bicester, obtained from the 2001 Census, identified a level of 40 % out commuting from Bicester to other towns and cities in the surrounding area. Providing employment land on the application site, due to its proximity to existing residential areas in a location well served by public transport, pedestrian and cycle links, has the potential to contribute towards reducing this level of out commuting.
- 5.7 In relation to public transport links the site is serviced by four bus routes linking Bicester to Aylesbury, Buckingham, Launton and Oxford. Each of these routes operate services Monday to Friday during working hours. To further increase the sustainability of the site additional Bus Stops could be located within the vicinity of the application site in agreement with the bus operator. There are two main line railway stations within 1.5 - 2.0 km of the site with regular services to major towns. This would provide adequate provision to allow residents of Bicester access to the site via public transport. There is a good standard of lit footway provision on both sides of Stimmingdish Lane linking the site to residential areas and the town centre. Dedicated cycle routes along Stimmingdish Lane also provide access to many local facilities. On this basis the location of the site provides an opportunity to reduce reliance on the private car and is therefore sustainable.
- 5.8 Indeed the advice provided to the Council by the consultant firm Hephner Owen Limited, (set out in the Report to Executive on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004 paragraph 9.21) confirmed that "The site is well located to the existing built up area. The location of the employment land to the south is realistic and sustainable." In addition to the existing facilities within close proximity to the site further measures could be implemented by future occupants including a Green Travel Plan (an example of which is appended to the Transport Assessment) and the provision of facilities for cyclists.
- 5.9 Therefore the development of the application site is considered to be sustainable and would not prejudice the remainder of the comprehensive development of the wider area designated by Policy EMP2 being delivered at a later date.

#### Conservation Area

- 5.9 The application site lies outside the boundary of the designated RAF Bicester Conservation Area but does lie to the southeast of the airfield. In relation to the impact of the development on the setting of this Conservation Area it is considered that the scheme proposals will have no detrimental impact on the historic importance

of the airfield, views from within the Conservation Area or its rural setting. It is considered that the sympathetically designed scheme with effective hard and soft landscaping will be seen in the context of the existing built-up edge of the settlement containing existing employment, housing and road links. The proposed development will therefore not change the rural setting of the Conservation Area. A detailed analysis of the visual impact of the proposed development is set out within a Conservation Area Statement, found at Appendix 3 of this report.

#### Highway Issues

- 5.10 As set out in the accompanying Transport Assessment (Appendix 1) it has been confirmed by the Highway Authority that the capacity of the local highway network is sufficient to cater for development (with up to 300 additional vehicles movements per peak hour) served off Skimmingdish Lane without the need for the Eastern Perimeter Road. The proposed development will generate a total of 170 movements in the morning peak and 137 in the afternoon peak. This threshold is therefore well below the acceptable level of 300 movements. Access to the application site can be achieved directly from the existing improved Skimmingdish Lane, via an existing access off the Launton Road roundabout. The operational capacity of this junction and an upgraded site access is considered to be acceptable to serve the development.
- 5.11 In relation to the issue of road safety the Personal Injury Accidents record show only four slight causality accidents, in the vicinity of the site, during the last three years. It is therefore considered that the roads and junctions in the vicinity of the site have experienced a good safety record. It is considered that traffic generation from the proposed development will not have a detrimental impact on highway safety. On this basis with regard to highway safety and convenience the application site is capable of being independently developed for the proposed B1 floorspace.

#### Former Use of the Site

- 5.12 With regard to the former use of the site for allotments, the Adopted Local Plan provides no policy position in relation to the loss of allotments. The site is allocated for employment use within the Adopted Local Plan and has no designation within the Pre-Inquiry Changes. The application site when occupied by allotment holders was a non-statutory allotment used at the discretion of the land owner. During the Skimmingdish Lane Offline Improvement Scheme the number of allotment holders reduced from 18 in 1991 to none in 2001. A single occupant returned to the site in



the period 2002 to 2004 and on the cessation of this license no further licenses have been issued at the site.

- 5.13 The site has none of the facilities that would be required for a statutory allotment site as there is no mains water supply, the site is not secure and there is no parking provision or access arrangements that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. On this basis the site has previously provided sub-standard allotment facilities, this coupled with the disruption caused by the road works and the new location of the realigned Skimmingdish Lane resulted in diminished and eventually no demand for allotment use of the site. The use of the site for allotment purposes is not commercially viable for the landowner and therefore it is not proposed to resurvey the use at a future date.

#### **Requirement for Employment Land**

- 5.14 It is understood that the Council are seeking new employment land to provide for the needs of the increasing population of the town and to help improve the employment balance and reduce the function of Bicester as a dormitory town. This is demonstrated by the original and consequent allocation of the application site for employment use. There is currently 40 % (2001 census) out commuting from Bicester to Oxford and other towns. Therefore the proposal has the potential to reduce out commuting from the town by providing much needed employment opportunities within Bicester.
- 5.15 It has also recently been acknowledged by the District Council (23<sup>rd</sup> June 2005, in consideration of application 04/02797/OUT for residential development at Gevray Drive, Bicester, an allocated employment site), that employment land is required to maintain an adequate supply of employment provision in the town which is readily available. The application site at Skimmingdish Lane is also readily available and in close proximity to existing residential areas accessible by means other than the private car. The application site will therefore contribute to the recognised need for available employment land which offers the potential to provide greater employment opportunities for residents of Bicester, thereby reducing the need to travel to employment locations elsewhere.



## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 In summary the application submitted on behalf of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance should be approved for the following reasons:

- i. The proposed employment development of the application site is in accordance with Development Plan policies and specifically Policies EMP1 and EMP2 of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996. These policies specifically allocate the site for employment generating development. The Pre-Inquiry Changes, adopted for development control purposes, have not been tested at an independent inquiry and therefore carry limited weight.
- ii. There are no other material considerations that outweigh the provisions of the adopted development plan as set out below:

- a) Employment use of the site in isolation of the wider RAF Bicester designation would be a sustainable form of development.

Employment use of the site will contribute to the provision of jobs within Bicester area, creating the potential to reduce out commuting. The site is well linked to public transport and pedestrian and cycle routes, enabling the promotion of methods of transport other than the private car. The Council has been advised (paragraph 9.21 of the Report to Executive 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004) that the location of the site is sustainable for employment use. Also there is nothing unacceptable in principle in the site coming forward in isolation of (or indeed with) the development at RAF Bicester.

- b) The development would have no detrimental impact on the character of the Conservation Area.

The proposed development is sufficiently distant and screened from the Conservation Area to avoid any adverse impact or discordant effect on its character and appearance. Equally, the distance, screening, scale and location of the proposed development and views to and from the airfield will ensure that there is no adverse impact on the wider setting of the Conservation Area. With regard to the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area and its wider setting, it is considered that the application proposals would have no wider impact.

- c) The development would have no detrimental impact on highway safety and convenience

The level of traffic generation from the proposed development is significantly below the threshold specified by Oxford County Council as the Highway Authority. The roads and junctions in the vicinity of the site have experienced a good safety record. It is considered that the traffic generation from the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact on highway safety.

- d) The private use of the site for non-statutory allotments formally ceased in 2004. The use of the site for allotment purposes is not commercially viable for the landowner and therefore it is not proposed to resurrect the use at a future date.

- e) There is a recognised need for additional employment land within the District. Employment land at the application site at Skimmingdish Lane will contribute to readily available, accessible employment land located close to residential areas that has the potential to reduce out commuting from Bicester.

- f) Finally there are no other site specific reasons including those relating to flooding and drainage that would prevent development on the site. An illustrative layout accompanies the submission (Appendix 2) which demonstrates how development can be accommodated on the site.



ILLUSTRATIVE SITE LAYOUT

Accommodation		
Unit A	Office B1	678 sq M GEA
Unit B	Office B1	792 sq M GEA
Unit C	Office B1	715 sq M GEA
Unit D	Office B1	882 sq M GEA
Unit E	Office B1	835 sq M GEA
Unit F	Office B1	830 sq M GEA
Unit G	Office B1	883 sq M GEA
Unit H	Office B1	942 sq M GEA
TOTAL		5857 sq M GEA

Parking @ 1 space/ 30 sq M

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NB: This drawing is for illustrative purposes only

Client  
OXFORD DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE

Job title  
PROPOSED COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT SKIMMINGDISH LANE BICESTER

Drawing title  
ILLUSTRATIVE SITE LAYOUT

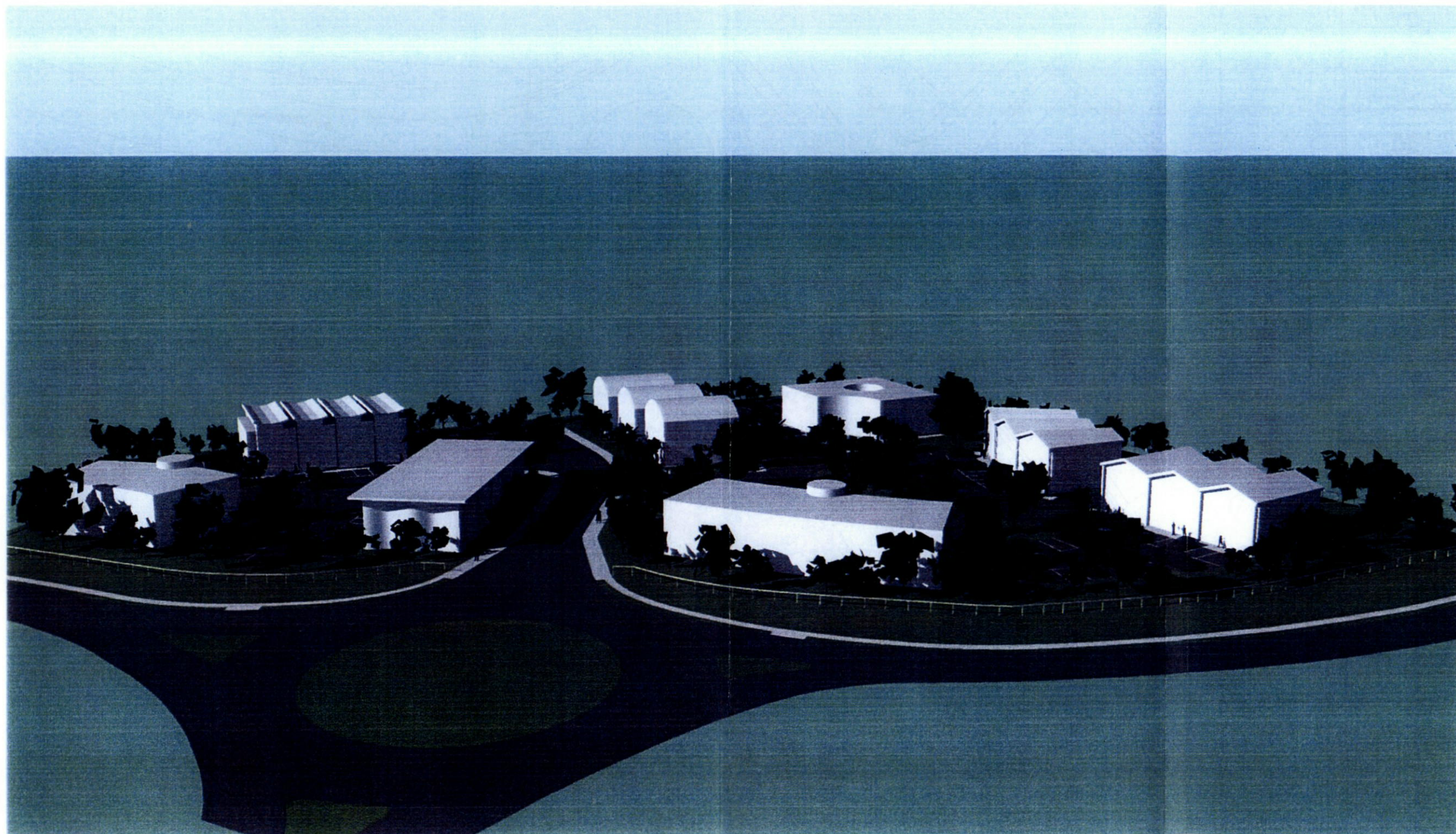
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**hives architects**  
 43 South Street, Reading RG1 4QU  
 telephone 0118 958 7331  
 fax 0118 938 4119  
 email admin@hivesarchitects.co.uk

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Client  
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BOARD OF FINANCE

Job title  
PROPOSED COMMERCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT AT  
SKIMMINGDISH LANE  
BICESTER

Drawing title  
ILLUSTRATIVE AERIAL  
VIEW FROM SOUTH

Scale	Date	Drawn
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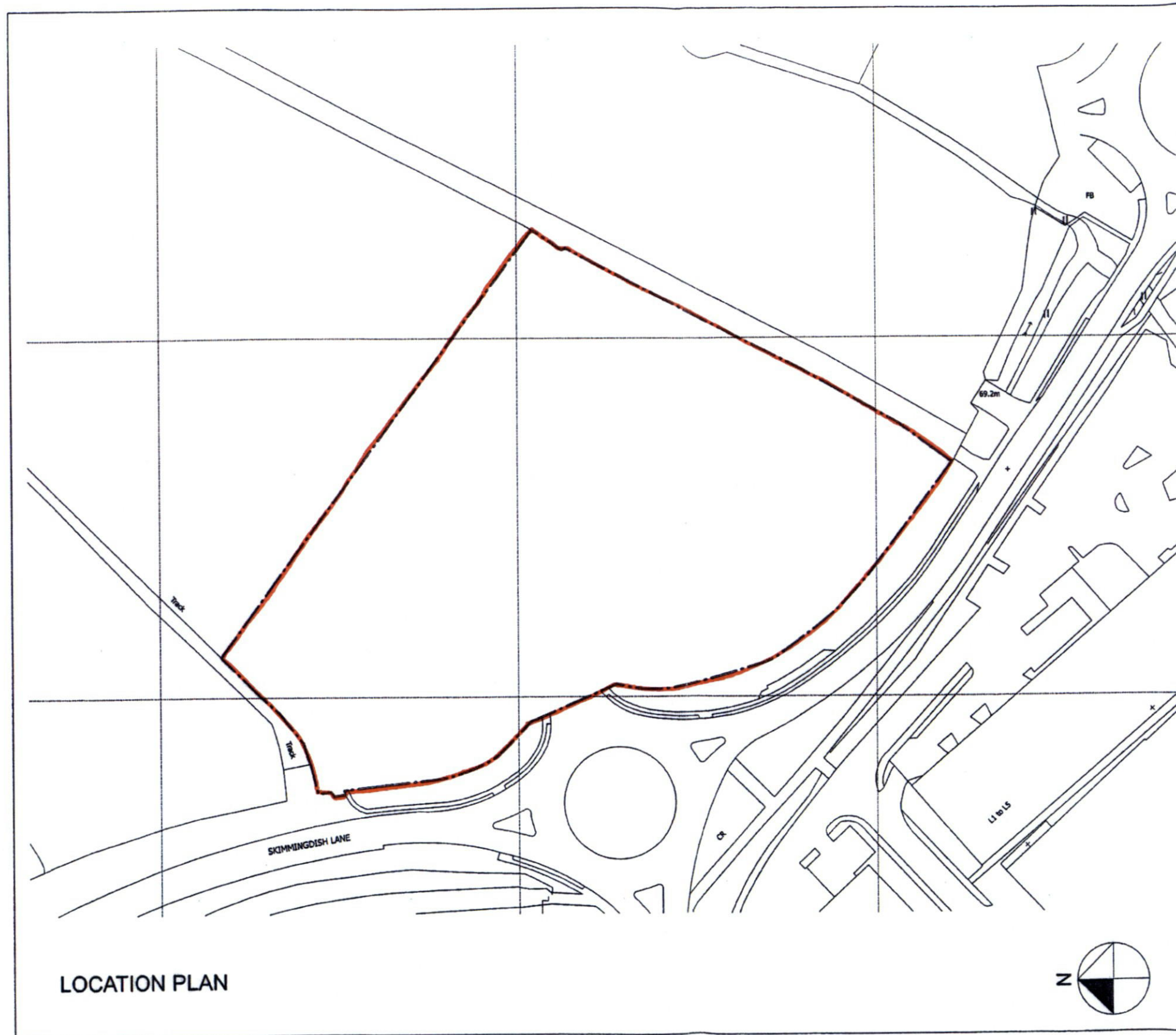


**hives architects**

43 South Street, Reading RG1 4QU  
telephone 0118 958 7331  
fax 0118 958 7331  
email admin@hivesarchitects.co.uk

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Client  
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Job title  
**PROPOSED COMMERCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT AT  
SKIMMINGDISH LANE  
BICESTER**

Drawing title  
**LOCATION PLAN**

Scale	Date	Drawn
1:1250	05/05	JBC

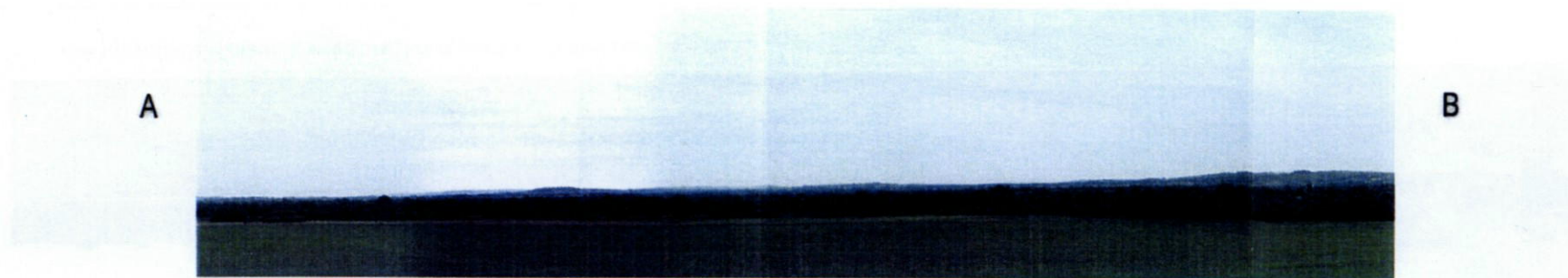
**hives architects**  
43 South Street, Reading RG1 4QU  
telephone 0118 958 7331  
fax 0118 939 4119  
email admin@hivesarchitects.co.uk

2354	04
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08 AUG 2005

05/01563/0117

# PHOTOGRAPH 1



## PHOTOGRAPH 2



View from roof level of RAF Bicester Airfield control tower, looking over flying field toward application site.

08 AUG 2005

05/01563/OUT

PHOTOGRAPH 3



View from ground level, looking north from application site, to show boundary screening along the airfield perimeter.

PHOTOGRAPH 4



View from ground level, taken at the northern boundary of the application site, looking toward hedgeline prior to the airfield perimeter.

08 AUG 2005  
05/01563/OUT  
Transport Assessment

Land at  
Skimmingdish Lane  
Bicester  
Oxfordshire

**Stuart Michael Associates**  
Consulting Engineers

Coombe House  
Coombe Square  
Thatcham  
Berkshire  
RG19 4JF

T: 01635 867711  
F: 01635 861715  
E: [mail@stuartmichael.co.uk](mailto:mail@stuartmichael.co.uk)

On behalf of  
Oxford Diocesan  
Board of Finance

Report Ref: 2281.R1.Transport Assessment

Prepared by: David L Wiseman  
Principal transport Planner

Checked by: Stuart Atkinson  
Director

July 2005

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Report Ref: 2281.R1

Report Revision: - A

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Stuart Michael Associates (SMA) has been commissioned by Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance (the Applicant) to provide advice upon the traffic, highway and transportation considerations associated with its proposals for a Commercial development (approximately 5857sq.m GFA) on land at Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester (**Figure SMA 1** refers).
- 1.2 SMA has visited the site and local environs on a number of occasions and has noted the general conditions of traffic flow and local highway characteristics. SMA has visited and examined the local facilities and existing infrastructure. In addition, a manual classified counts (MCC) has been procured for the A4421 Skimmingdish Lane junction with Launton Road.

### Consultations

- 1.3 Hives Planning on behalf of the Applicant met with District Council Officers in March 2005 to discuss prospects for development of land for employment generating purposes at Skimmingdish Lane. The Officer confirmed that although the site was allocated in the adopted Local Plan the Council decided to de-allocate the site in the Review of the Local Plan
- 1.4 With regard to highways, in 2001 SMA met with Oxford County Council the local Highway Authority to consider and ensure that the proposed improvement to Skimmingdish Lane did not compromise potential access into the Applicants Site. Discussions between SMA and the local Highway Authority took place which lead to agreement being reached that the site was capable of being accessed off the improved roundabout onto Skimmingdish Lane with or without the proposed Airfield Link Road. The proviso to this agreement was that the local Highway Authority required a Transport assessment demonstrating that the development site would not generate more than 300 additional movements during the peak hours. A letter dated 13 December 2001 attached as **Appendix 1** confirms this.
- 1.5 In addition to the above, the local Highway Authority has requested that a Green Travel Plan be prepared aimed at reducing single occupancy car trip generation and maximising accessibility by foot, cycle and public transport. A draft Company Travel Plan is therefore proposed in this report for further discussions between the Applicant and the local planning and highway authorities. A draft Head of Terms for a company travel plan has been prepared by SMA and is attached as **Appendix 2** under separate cover.

### Scope of the Report

- 1.6 This report has been prepared in support of an outline Planning Application submission by Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance. The proposed site lies within the administrative boundary of Cherwell District Council and is located on the edge of the urban area of Bicester. The proposed Commercial development would consist of a B1 use class.
- 1.7 This report provides a summary of the assessment of development generated traffic and an assessment of off-site junction capacity and road safety. The assessment quantifies and considers the volume of existing and development generated traffic movements on the highway network and into the site. The accessibility of the site to local facilities by means other than the car is similarly examined.
- 1.8 Personal Injury Accident statistics (PIAs) have been procured from Oxfordshire County Council. These have been examined and are reported upon later.
- 1.9 Information on the existing level of public transport provision has been established and is also detailed later.

1.10 Due account has been taken of the following reference documents:

- Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 – Transport (March 2001)
- DETR Guidance for Junction Assessment (ARCADY6)
- Oxfordshire County Council Design Guide
- Cherwell District Local Plan
- RPG9 (Regional Planning Guidance for the South East)
- National Travel Survey 2003 (DETR, 2004)
- IHT Guidelines for Providing For Journeys on Foot

Principal Findings and Conclusions

1.11 The **principal findings** of the Transport Assessment are as follows:

- i) The site is identified in the adopted Cherwell District Local Plan as being suitable for employment use. The site is located adjacent to an existing Industrial estate. It is therefore considered that it would, in locational and policy terms, be appropriate for commercial development.
- ii) The site has been found to be well located in terms of sustainability. The location provides sufficiently for modal choice. The location of the proposed development offers a range of transport choices. There is scope for trips generated by the development to be made by foot and bicycle and public transport. Various measures could be implemented to enhance walking and cycling. These could be considered in more detail at the development control stage.
- iii) The site is capable of accommodating circa 5857sq.m GFA of B1 use class. The additional traffic from the proposed development can be safely accommodated onto the surrounding local roads.
- iv) The proposed development would generate additional trips onto the highway network. The capacity and operation of the proposed access has been tested using DETR approved software. The tests indicate that the existing local highway network would continue to operate within its practical capacity.
- v) The proposed development site would provide the local planning authority with a sustainable commercial opportunity in line with the respective aims and objectives of the local and national planning policy guidance.

## 2.0 EXISTING SITUATION

### Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The proposed development site comprises of 2.3 hectares and adjoins the north-eastern edge of the built up area of Bicester immediately north of A4421 Skimmingdish Lane. The proposed site would adjoin existing commercial and residential area. The site is bounded to the north and east by agricultural land with the airfield set approximately 1.5 km to the north-east. The proposed development site is shown on the location plan **Figure SMA1**.

### Local Characteristics and the Adjoining Highway Network

- 2.2 The site is located adjacent to Launton Industrial estate to the south and the built up edge of the residential area to Bicester to the West.
- 2.3 Skimmingdish Lane functions as a local distributor road and is typically 7.3m wide. The speed limit is 40mph. There is a good standard of footway provision on both sides of Skimmingdish Lane adjacent to the site. In addition sections of Skimmingdish Lane have a verge (circa 1 to 1.5m) in addition to the footways. Street lighting is present.
- 2.4 To the northwest the A4421 Skimmingdish Lane connects to the B4030 Buckingham Road and the A4095 via a roundabout. A designated cycle route runs parallel to Skimmingdish Lane to the north of the site.
- 2.5 Launton Road also functions as a local distributor road and is typically 7.3m wide. There is a good standard of footway provision. Street lighting is present.
- 2.6 Skimmingdish Lane and Launton Road connect in the form of a roundabout. There is a stub to the northeast that serves as field gate access and links into the proposed site boundary. This effectively would form a fourth arm to the roundabout (as agreed with the local Highway Authority). There are drop kerb pedestrian crossing points on all arms of the junction.

### Traffic Survey Data

- 2.7 Traffic count data has been procured from Oxfordshire County Council. The count was carried out at the junction of Skimmingdish Lane with Launton Road on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003 between 0700 and 1900 hours, **Appendix 3** refers.
- 2.8 To test year 2005 baseline traffic conditions a growth factor (low growth predications) for the local highway network has been derived using the National Road Traffic Forecasts (NRTF). A 2 year traffic flow forecast has been examined. A low growth factor of 3% has therefore been derived and applied.
- 2.9 **Figure SMA2** summarises and illustrates the existing year 2005 AM (0800 to 0900 hours) and PM (1700 to 1800 hours) peak hour traffic flows at the junction of Skimmingdish Lane with Launton Road.

### Baseline Junction Capacity Tests

- 2.10 The junction of Skimmingdish Lane with Launton Road has been modelled using ARCADY6 approved software. This has provided a 'bench mark' test for comparing the affects of the proposed development upon the existing situation. **Table 1** presents the ARCADY6 results. The resultant maximum RFC is 0.643. This is well below 0.85, which is generally regarded as the desirable target RFC.

- 3.10 The operational capacity of the junction of Skimmingdish Lane with Launton Road and the proposed site access (**drawing number 2005.2281.001**) has been reassessed using ARCADY6 software. Details of the results are shown on **Table 2**. The results of the ARCADY6 analysis demonstrate that the junction would continue to work well within its reserve capacity (computed RFC values of less than 0.755). The full printouts are attached as **Appendix 5**

Company Travel Plan

- 3.11 Whilst providing for some flexibility in parking demand at the outset, the aim should be to monitor the demand for travel (and parking) by staff by introducing a Company Travel Plan for the proposed commercial units. The Plan would seek to encourage, where practicable, car sharing, walking, cycling and the use of public transport. The buildings are proposed and have no end user at present. Therefore the Companies that intend to occupy the proposed units must be willing to commit to a company travel plan. SMA has prepared "The Heads of Terms" for a Green Travel Plan which is attached as **Appendix 2** to this report.

#### 4.0 TRANSPORT CONSIDERATIONS

##### National & Regional Planning Guidance

- 4.1 Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 (PPG13) Transport (March 2001) sets out the Government's policy and provides advice on how local authorities should integrate transport and land use planning. The key aim of the guidance is to steer local policies on land use to:

- promote more sustainable transport choices
- promote accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling, and
- reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

- 4.2 Paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of PPG 13 provide guidance to local authorities on the locational policies they should adopt in order to reduce the need to travel. Development should generally be located so as to provide a choice of means of travel in locations that offer a range of local facilities.

Paragraph 75 of PPG13 states that, "*walking is the most important mode of travel at the local level and offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly under 2 kilometres*". Paragraph 78 of PPG13 states that, "*Cycling also has potential to substitute for short car trips, particularly those under 5km, and to form part of a longer journey by public transport*".

- 4.3 PPG 13 – A Guide to Better Practice (October 1995) provides practical users' manual for implementing PPG 13. It is recognised that circa 80 per cent of all journeys under 1.6km (1 mile) are made on foot and that cycling is an effective mode for trips between 5 and 8km (3 to 5 miles). To encourage more people to walk and cycle it recommends that conditions need to be improved for pedestrians (safer routes) and facilities should be included in all new developments. For trips over 3km (1.8 miles) public transport is the main alternative mode of travel to the private car. New developments should therefore be sited at locations well served, or potentially well served by public transport.

- 4.4 The most recently published DETR transport statistics, the National Travel Survey 2003 (October 2004) highlights a number of personal travel trends:

- More than four in five journeys under 1 mile were on foot (average journey time 16 minutes)
- The average journey distance by foot was 0.7 miles)
- The average journey length by pedal cycle was 2.3 miles)
- The average journey time by cycle was 20 minutes
- Car journeys averaged less than 9 miles
- Most local bus journeys were between 2 and 5 miles

- 4.5 The above statistics provide a useful reference for assessing the potential for modal shift trip making and the relative proximity of higher order facilities within reasonable journey distances (walk, cycle, public transport or car borne trips).

##### Local Planning Policy Guidance

- 4.6 Transport policy guidance, at a strategic level is set out in the Oxford Structure Plan 2011 and at a local level in the Cherwell District Local Plan 2011.

Oxford Structure Plan 2011

- 4.7 Due regard has been taken of policies T1 and T18 set out in the Structure Plan. The objective of **Policy T1** is to minimise the use of the car, in so doing so, encouraging walking and cycling.
- 4.8 **Policy T18** is related to development proposals setting out the criteria required before development is permitted.

Cherwell District Local Plan 2011

- 4.9 At the local level due regard has been taken of policies TR1, TR3, TR4 and TR5. **Policy TR1** relates to the objectives of the Local Transport Plan.
- 4.10 **Policy TR3** sets out the need for a travel plan where development is likely to generate significant levels of traffic.
- 4.11 **Policy TR4** relates to the need to satisfy the local Highway Authority that all mitigation measures have been identified before development will be permitted.
- 4.12 **Policy TR5** relates to the need to maintain road safety.

Comparison with National and Local Planning Policy Guidance

- 4.13 The site is accessible to a wide range of local facilities as shown on the accessibility plan (**Figure SMA7** refers).

Pedestrian Accessibility

- 4.14 The National Travel Survey 1999-2001 (DETR, 2002) indicates that the average walking distance for all trips under a mile was 0.7 miles. Paragraph 75 of PPG13 identifies 2km as a distance for encouraging walking trips instead of short car trips.
- 4.15 A good standard of illuminated footways are provided along Skimmingdish Lane.
- 4.16 With regard to the National Travel Survey, the site is located within average walking distance of many residential areas and Bicester North railway station (reference: National Travel Survey Data). The town centre is within 2km distance of the site. A target identified in paragraph 75 of PPG13 for encouraging walking trips.
- 4.17 With regard to distance, and high standard of footways, it is reasonable to conclude that the proposed development site can be regarded as being highly accessible by foot to many local facilities.

Accessibility by Cycle

- 4.18 With reference to the National Travel Survey data (para 4.4 above) and PPG13 (paragraph 78), the proposed site is within potential cycling distance (5km) to all residents living in Bicester.
- 4.19 There is a designated cycle route parallel to Skimmingdish Lane. This links to the broader national cycle network to the south of the site. It is considered that the site offers considerable scope for a variety of trips to be made by cycling. It is proposed that the site will provide secure on site cycle parking facilities.

- 4.20 It is reasonable to conclude that the proposed development site is highly accessible by cycle to local facilities.

Public Transport Accessibility

- 4.21 Guidance given in Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice (DETR, 1998) makes reference to a walking distance of 400m (approximately 5 minutes walking time) as being the appropriate design target for the location of bus stops.
- 4.22 Although there are no bus stops located close to the site, Service No's 16,18, 28, 28A all pass within the 400 metres of the proposed site. New bus stops and shelters could be funded by the developer so that the site accords with the recommended 400 metre walking distance to a bus stop. However, this would need to be agreed with the Passenger Transport Group of the local Highway Authority. Such an improvement would encourage potential bus trips to/from the proposed site.
- 4.23 The local existing bus services in the vicinity of the site represent a relatively good level of service. The site can therefore be regarded as being accessible by public transport.

Comparison of the Site with National and Local Planning Policy Guidance

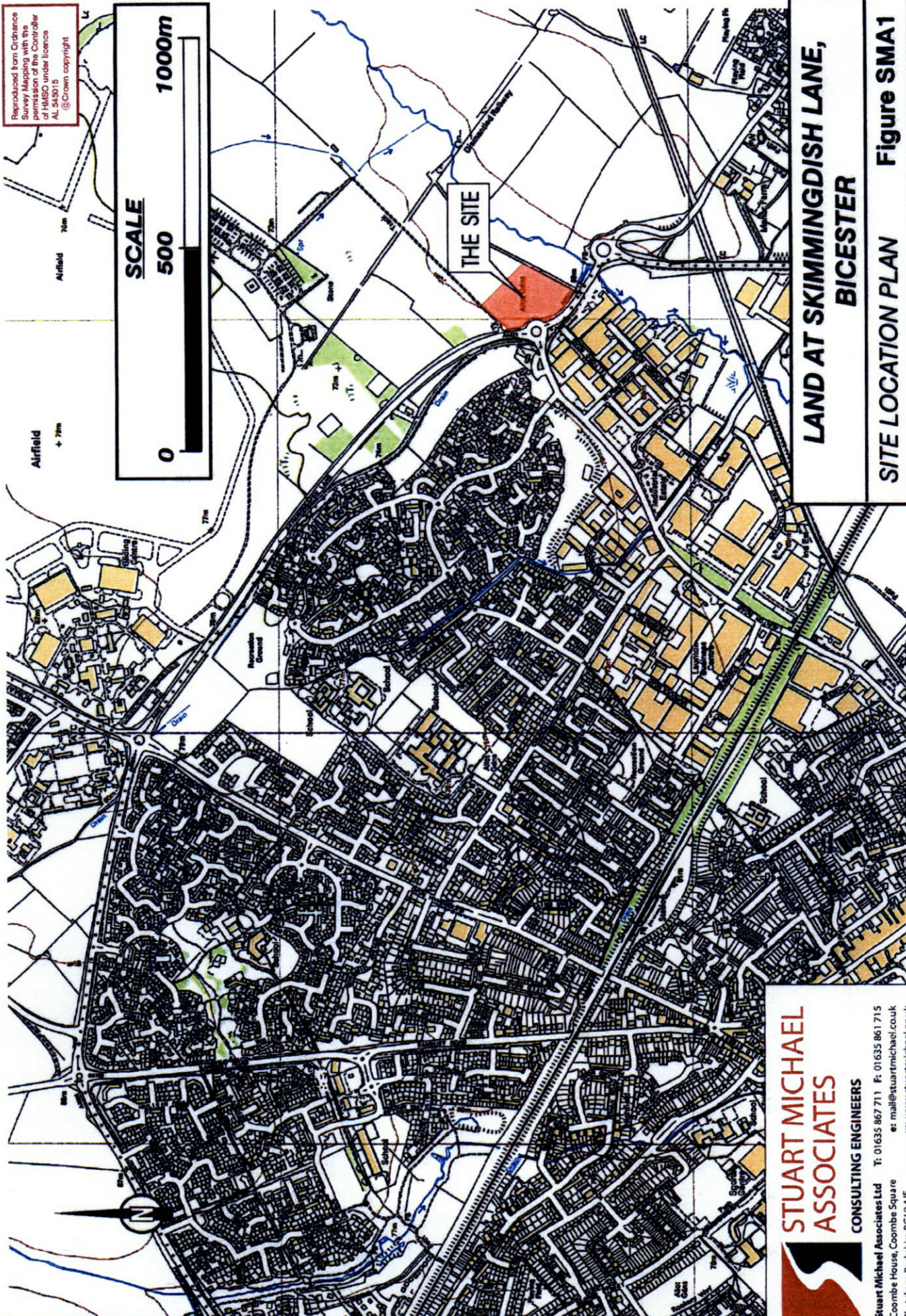
- 4.24 The site is accessible to public transport permitting many trips to be made to the proposed site by bus. The development proposals are therefore in accordance with the aims and objectives of PPG13: Transport.
- 4.25 In line with Structure Plan Policies and adopted Local Plan Policies, the proposed development is well located in terms of an integrated transport strategy. It is effectively served by public transport. The access to the site has been designed with regard to facilitating pedestrian and cyclist movements.
- 4.26 In summary, it is considered that the proposed development complies with national policy guidance and policies within the Structure Plan and emerging Local Plan aimed at ensuring that new development can be satisfactorily accessed by non-car modes. It compares favourably with the integrated land use and transportation strategies.

Compliance with Relevant Transport Planning Policies

- 4.27 For the reasons given above, it is concluded that the proposed site would fully comply with National and Local guidance and policies.

**FIGURES**

Reproduced from Ordnance  
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# LAND AT SKIMMINGDISH LANE, BICESTER

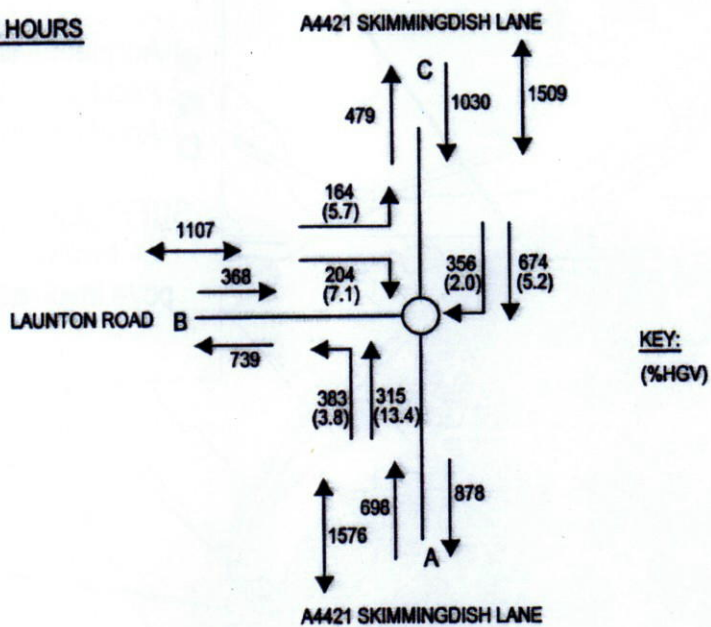
SITE LOCATION PLAN Figure SMA1

**STUART MICHAEL  
ASSOCIATES**  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS

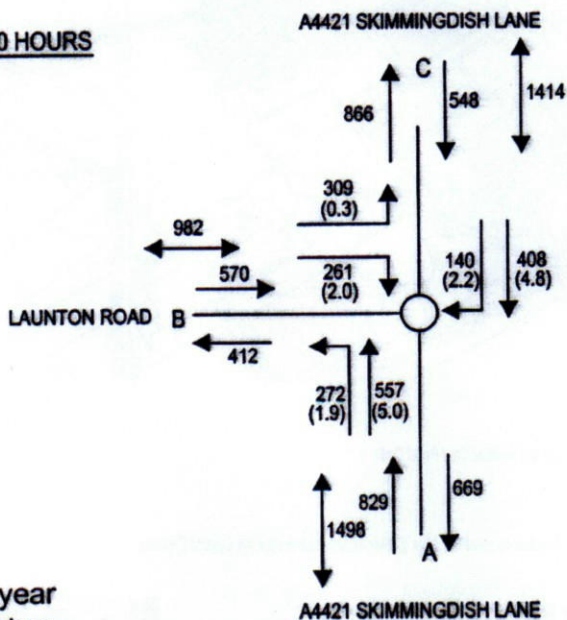
Stuart Michael Associates Ltd T: 01635 867 711 F: 01635 861 715  
Coombe House, Coombe Square  
Thitcham, Berkshire RG19 4JF  
e: mail@stuartmichael.co.uk  
w: www.stuartmichael.co.uk

## EXISTING TRAFFIC FLOWS 2005

AM PEAK 0800-0900 HOURS

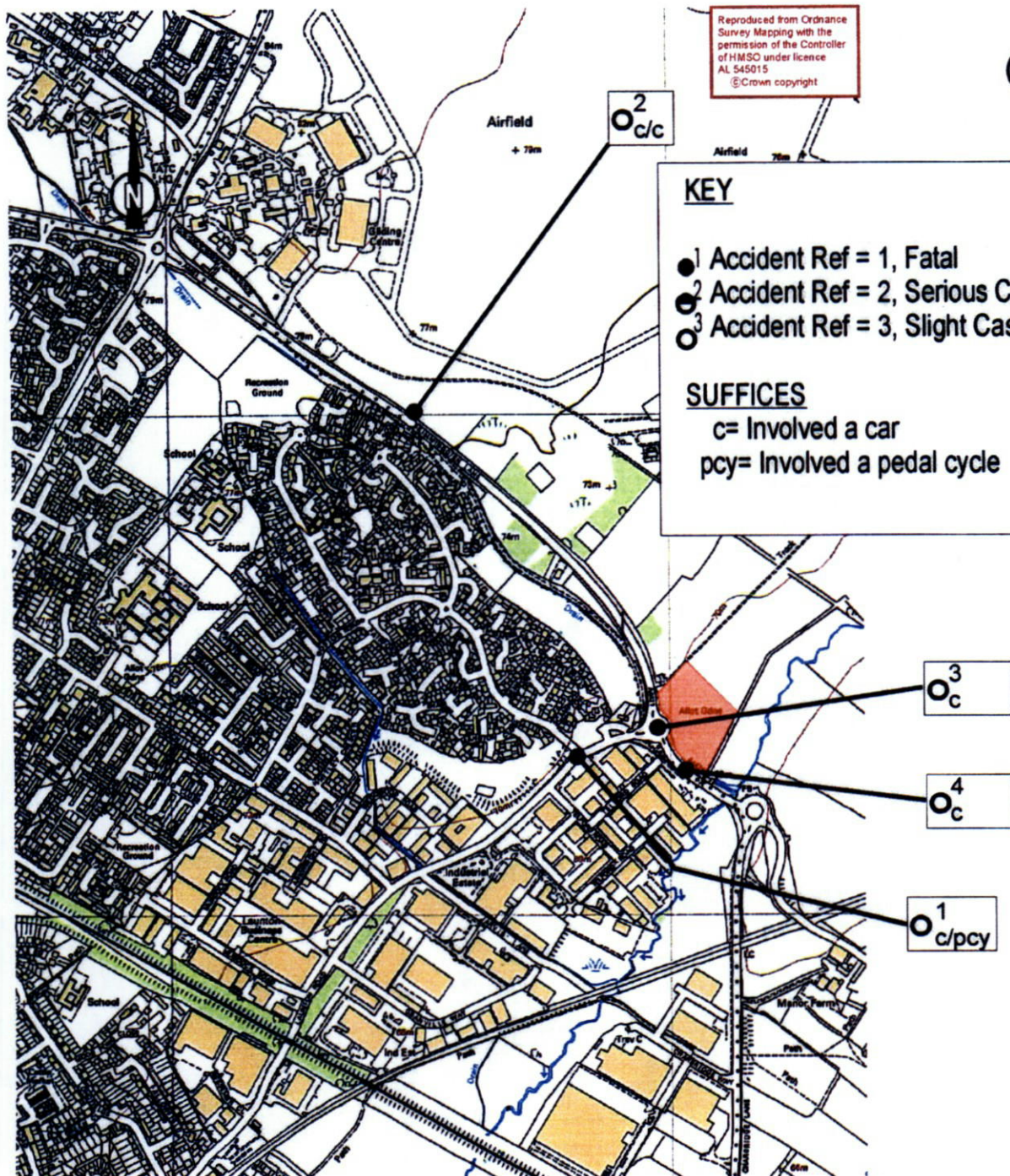


PM PEAK 1700-1800 HOURS



\* Traffic flow year  
2003 to 2005 low  
growth factor 3%

**FIGURE SMA 2**



#### ACCIDENT REFERENCE:

1. SLIGHT CASUALTY 22/03/2002 @ 1530 Road surface Dry Slight - Accident Involved Car / Pedal Cycle  
@ Launton Rd J/W Boston Rd  
Car collided with Pedal Cycle when turning left into junction
2. SLIGHT CASUALTY 18/12/2002 @ 1840 Road surface Wet/Damp Slight - Accident Involved Car / Car @ Skimmingdish Lane opposite Costford Gardens  
Rear end Shunt
3. SLIGHT CASUALTY 16/04/2004 @ 0213 Road surface Dry Street light lit Slight - Accident Involved car  
@ A4421 Skimmingdish Lane @ RBT J/W Launton Rd  
Driver lost control of vehicle
4. SLIGHT CASUALTY 21/12/2004 @ 2151 Road surface Dry Slight - Accident Involved Car  
@ A4421 Skimmingdish Lane approx 240m North of Rbt J/W Launton Rd  
Driver lost control

**STUART MICHAEL ASSOCIATES**  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS

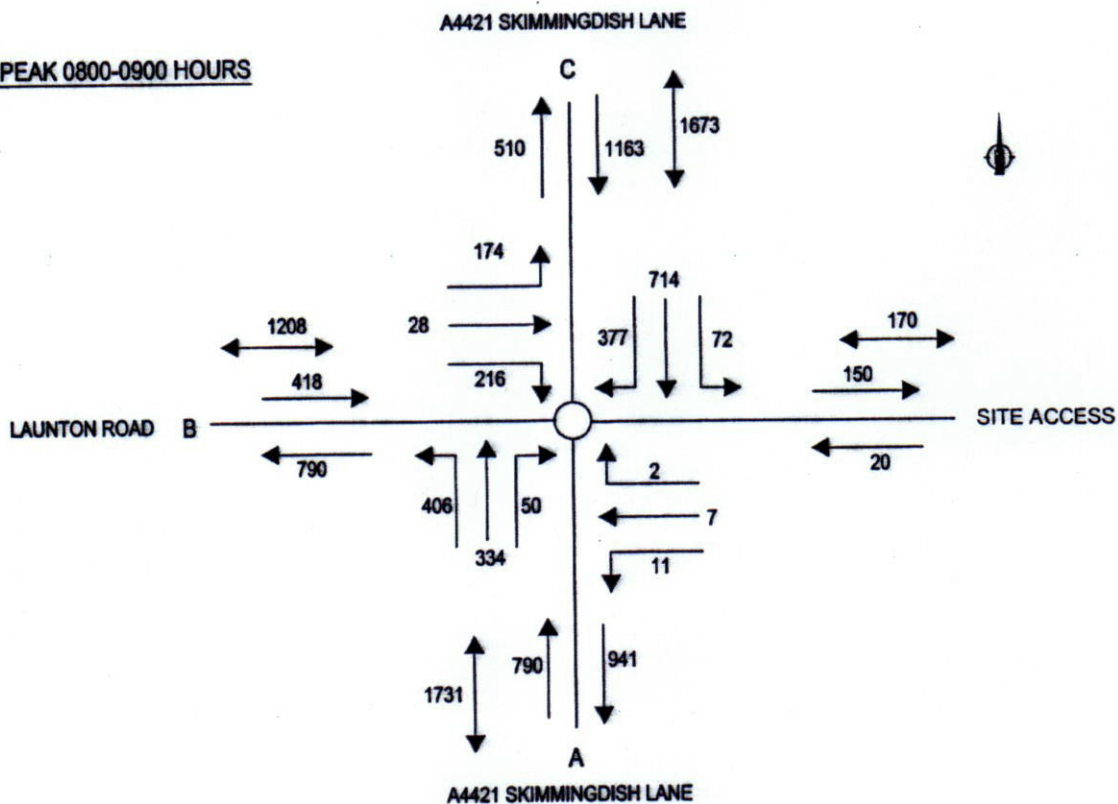
Stuart Michael Associates Ltd T: 01635 867 711 F: 01635 861 715  
Coombe House, Coombe Square e: mail@stuartmichael.co.uk  
Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 4JF w: www.stuartmichael.co.uk

**PLOT OF PERSONAL INJURY ACCIDENT DATA  
FOR THE PERIOD 1/1/2002 TO 31/12/2004**

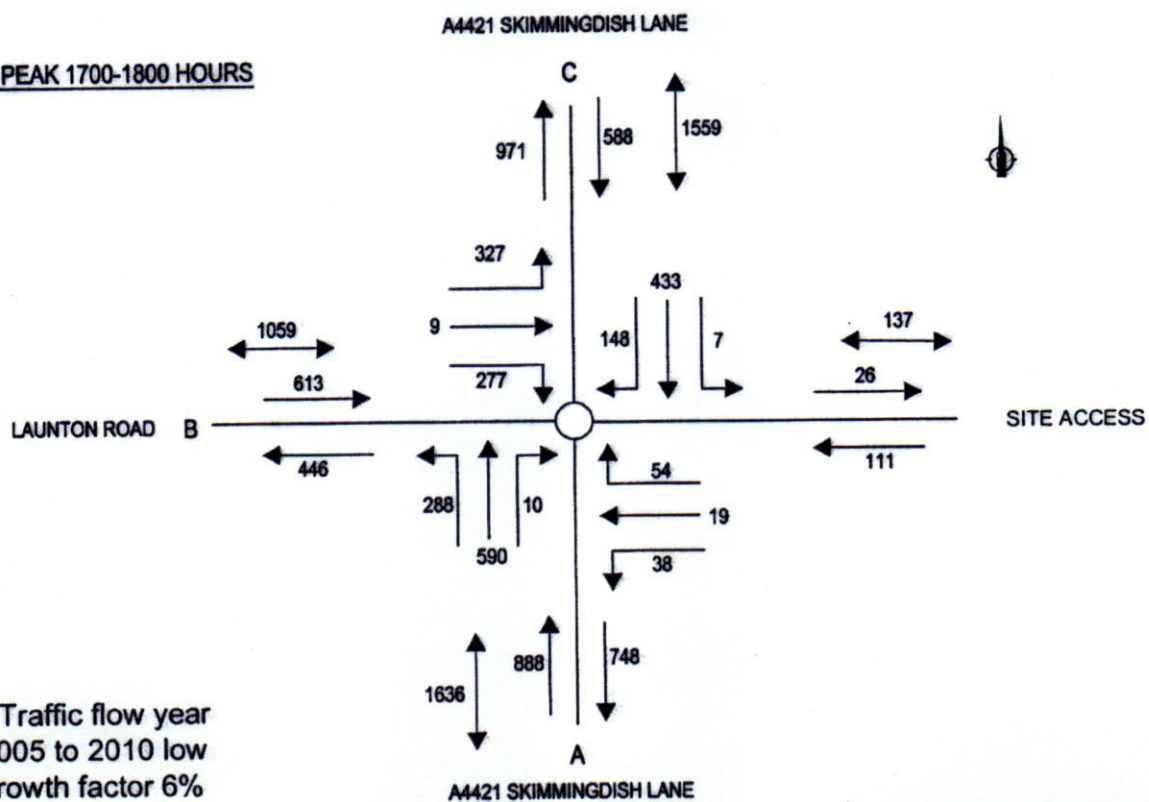
**Figure SMA3**

# EXISTING TRAFFIC FLOWS GROWTHED TO 2010 + DEVELOPMENT TRAFFIC

AM PEAK 0800-0900 HOURS



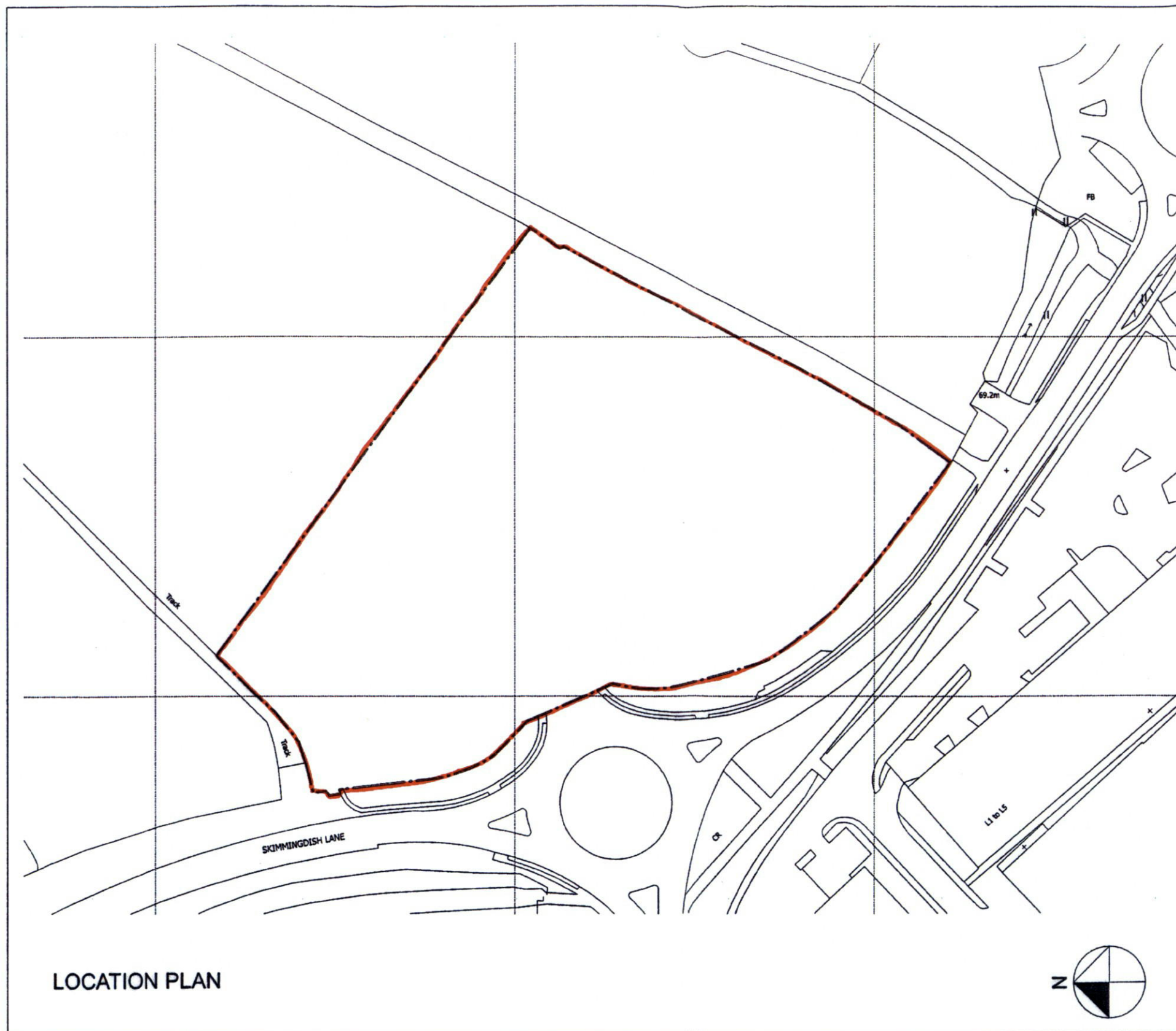
PM PEAK 1700-1800 HOURS



\* Traffic flow year 2005 to 2010 low growth factor 6%

FIGURE SMA 6





Client  
**OXFORD DIOCESAN  
BOARD OF FINANCE**

Job title  
**PROPOSED COMMERCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT AT  
SKIMMINGDISH LANE  
BICESTER**

Drawing title  
**LOCATION PLAN**

Scale	Date	Drawn
1:1250	05/05	JBC

**hives architects**  
43 South Street, Reading RG1 4QU  
telephone 0118 958 7331  
fax 0118 939 4119  
email admin@hivesarchitects.co.uk

2354	04
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