

Heritage Statement

Existing Building

The building was built in 1925. It is a simple single storey structure, comprising of red, brindled brick with a pitched tiled roof. It has a timber sub-frame with metal windows.

The building has a footprint of 270 sq.m., an eaves height of 2.5m and as ridge height of 5m.

The building was built as a Single Sergeants Quarters. It was constructed during the period 1924 to 1930 known as 'The Trenchard Years' due to the influence of Sir High Trenchard, the Chief of Air Staff between 1919 and 1930, heavily influenced the strategic selection of bases and to some extent their layout. The expansion of Upper Heyford followed the decision to allocate a permanent RAF bomber station at the airfield in 1923, for three squadrons of 12 twelve aircraft with an additional 50% reserves.

Photographs of the building as it currently exists accompany the Conservation Area Consent application.

Existing Use

Building 459 is vacant and has been since the closure of the airbase in 1994. It has therefore been unoccupied for a period which is now in excess of 16 years.

Previous assessments of heritage significance

Building 459 falls within the designated Upper Heyford Conservation Area. However the Building itself has not been afforded either statutory listed status or Scheduled Monument status, as has occurred in respect of a number of other more significant buildings and structures elsewhere within the Conservation Area.

The site has been subject to considerable study and assessment since in closure in 1994. A resume of previous assessments of the heritage and historical significance of Building 459 are set out below:-

(a) Environmental Assessment, October 2010

The significance of Building 459 has been assessed by Oxford Archaeology within the Environmental Assessment which accompanies the planning application for the redevelopment of the new settlement area (10/01642/O). The building falls within Area 3A and is assessed in the following terms at paragraph 11.137:

'This small open area is dominated by open hard surfaces and built up edges, with Camp Road to the north and the edge of the petrol station tarmac to the east. This Character area is interesting from a social

history point of view, in depicting life on the Airbase and the creation of 'Little America', but the individual structures are not of significance. Key elements are shown in the Table 11.12 below, and all elements are listed in the Gazetteer.'

Table 11.12 of the Environmental Assessment states that Building 459 (single Sergeants Quarters) is assessed as being of **'Low' significance**.

In assessing the significance of the building, regard should also be made to the group value taking into account the Trenchard phase of growth of the airbase in the period 1924 to 1930. The most significant structures from this phase of growth lie to the north of Camp Road, including the A Frame hangars, significant other technical buildings and the officers mess which retains its 1920s character and setting. On the south side of camp Road, the Institute Building (455) and the Sergeants Mess (457) are also of notable value, and are to be retained in the revised masterplan proposals.

Building 459 is noted in the EIA as being 'a **building of minor interest**'¹, in the context of the other more notable 1920s buildings located within the Conservation Area.

(b) Revised Comprehensive Planning Brief (2007)

This document which was adopted as SPD by the District Council and notes the following in respect of an appraisal of Building 459:

*'v. Single Sergeants Quarters (Building 459) occupy the north-eastern corner of the parade ground. This has **some group value** with other 1920s domestic buildings surrounding the parade ground.'*²

The context for this appraisal is that the RCPB indicates that this is one of the buildings that appear capable of reuse due to their nature and scale and could make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

However, the Table on page 18 concludes that in respect of the relevant character area, 'RAF domestic and residential', that 'other buildings worthy of retention' only comprise the Sergeants Mess and The Institute. The Sergeants Mess is understood to refer to Building 457 and is being retained in the latest masterplan proposals, as it was in the consented 'lead appeal' masterplan scheme. The Institute is understood to refer to Building 455 and is also being retained in the latest masterplan proposals, as it was in the consented 'lead appeal' masterplan scheme. In other words, the retention of Building 459 is not identified as being worthy of retention in the relevant Table.

Figure 4 sets out an 'Indicative Settlement Plan' within the RCPB identifies that Building 459 is regarded as a **'Building(s) making a positive contribution for possible retention'**.

In summary, although the RCPB does identify that building 459 makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, it is not

¹ See EIA accompanying outline planning application, paragraph 11.105

² Section 4.4.2 Unlisted buildings, RCPB, March 2007

identified as being a building worthy of retention in the SPD, rather it is identified as being suitable for possible retention.

(c) Landscape Character Assessment of the Airbase South of the Cold War Zone, 2006

This assessment was prepared by ACTA, and concludes the following in terms of Building 459:

*'This is a single-storey building similar to the above [Building 457] and presumably built at the same time, but without the gables. A new door has been inserted, but otherwise it appears to be unaltered, with original windows.'*³

Justification for demolition as a component of masterplan

A full explanation and justification for the proposed masterplan is set out in the comprehensive Design and Access Statement which accompanies the outline planning application for the new settlement (ref: 10/01642/O). It is not appropriate for this statement to attempt to summarise that full design appraisal which addresses the many facets of achieving good design for the proposed new settlement.

However, in terms of providing a rationale for the demolition of this building within the designated consideration, it is submitted that the following are material considerations to take into account in accordance with Policy HE9 of PPS5:-

1. substantial public benefits would outweigh the harm or loss.

Although the previous lead appeal masterplan proposed the retention of this building as part of a different design approach towards this part of the site, the new masterplan which is the subject of the current new outline application has significant heritage benefits which override the proposed loss of this building:

- a. the retention of Building 485, the I block building, which was consented for demolition, but which is now to be retained. This building is of the same period as Building 459, but has a far stronger central and direct relationship to the proposed retained parade ground open space acting as a key building on the southern edge, rather than a more obtuse offset visual relationship as is the case with Building 459;
 - b. the retention of a significantly larger area of open space to the south of Building 457 and to the north of building 485, which more closely correlates to the parade ground and its setting;
 - c. the retention of Building 488, the lamplighters building, which was consented for demolition, but which is now to be retained;
2. the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and no viable use can be found in the medium term; and conservation through grant funding or some other form of charitable or public ownership is not

³ Paragraph 4.14.1, Landscape Character Assessment of the Airbase South of the Cold War Zone, ACTA March 2006

possible; and the harm/loss of the heritage asset is outweighed by bringing the site back into use.

In this regard it should be noted that Building 459 has a gable end relationship to Camp Road, which is at variance with the proposed urban form for this part of Camp Road, whereas other buildings on the south side have strong principal elevations onto Camp Road, such as Building 457.

Further, Building 459 is subdivided internally into a number of small rooms as a result of its original function as a sergeants quarters with a central corridor arrangement, making conversion for a viable use difficult to achieve. The consented use as part of the lead appeal masterplan was for Use Class A1 retail. However, the retail provision in the new masterplan is now to be provided on the north side of Camp Road in an extension to Building 100 providing a more commercially viable sized store. An alternative use for Building 459 is not feasible given its situation in relation to other proposed local centre uses in other key buildings. Its relationship to the central open space area is limited, and servicing the building will be difficult to achieve whilst delivering good place making.

Conclusion

Building 459 has consistently been assessed as having a low value contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area. The building has not been judged as worthy as retention in comprehensive masterplanning terms.

The new masterplan now proposes its demolition. Having regard to advice in PPS5, the demolition is justified having regard to the substantial public benefits which would arise from the redevelopment of the new settlement area in a comprehensive manner and, by enabling a more positive heritage approach towards other more significant heritage assets, is now able to retain additional buildings including Buildings 485, and 488, as well as a substantially enlarged open area where the parade ground was situated.