

11/00282/DISC

Heyford Park, Camp Road, Upper Heyford

Discharge of condition 30 of 08/00716/OUT – Aves Ditch and Portway

Understanding the heritage assets affected

Significance

Portway and Aves Ditch, both of which cross RAF Upper Heyford, are the two best examples of prehistoric routes in the district.

Portway was a pre-historic routeway which continued in use throughout the Roman period. It is described in the draft Historic Routes in Cherwell Supplementary Planning Document. .

'The Portway was probably an Iron Age track. It extends from its junction with the Roman road known as Akeman St at Kirtlington to the edge of the plateau at Souldern. It was once thought that in its later function as a Roman road it continued southwards to Kidlington, crossing the river at Hampton Poyle, but the limited archaeological evidence contradicts this. The south part of the route is a minor lane with low hedges and very few trees. There is a short overgrown section adjacent to the south side of RAF Upper Heyford before the route disappears beneath the runway. It follows the northwest edge of the airfield and continues beyond as a farm track with hedges on both sides. North of Portway Farm, the access for large new farm buildings has had a significant impact. Sections of agger are visible, and it has been suggested that it is an agglomeration of several different routes, but this seems unlikely. In the north it may have continued beyond Souldern as Margary's Roman road 161a (Fig 5), but there is no firm evidence'.

Aves Ditch is a pre Saxon ditch and bank structure which is also described in the draft Historic Routes in Cherwell Supplementary Planning Document. .

'Aves Ditch branches off the Portway 1.5km north of Kirtlington and extends north-eastwards towards Fritwell. In the south it consists of 4.2km-long dead straight ditch and bank lying between high hedges. There are some overgrown sections and substantial trees. The bank is much higher than the aggers of Roman roads in the locality. However, the evidence for a bank in the north beyond the Heath is slight, although the line almost certainly continued as a later Roman road. The Upper Heyford section is said to have been pulled down in the 1842 enclosure. There is no firm evidence of its continuation beyond Fritwell in the north, or beyond a short section to the southwest of the Portway at the opposite end.

The bank was constructed at about the time of the Roman invasion, perhaps as a tribal boundary, and is underlain by an Iron Age enclosure. It appears to have been used as a road in the Roman period, but this was probably not its primary purpose. A number of ideas for its purpose as a Roman road have been put forward, including its apparent orientation towards the ford at Tackley. Another is that the Ditch is an association of three Roman roads and a droveway. However, recent studies have largely discounted these'.

Both historic routeways were severed by the construction of the air base and it is understood that the bank and ditch were removed in the 1842 enclosures.

The former RAF Upper Heyford airbase is of national and international significance due to the role it played in the Cold War and has been designated as a conservation area and has a number of listed buildings and scheduled monuments within its boundary.

Proposals

The proposal is to comply with condition 30 of 08/00716/OUT 'Aves Ditch and Portway. *Within 3 months of the date of this permission details for the surface treatment of the linking sections across the runway of Aves Ditch 'optional route' and of Portway as indicated on Plan Ref L10B shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Within 18 months of the date of the approval of those details the Aves Ditch and Portway sections identified on Plan Ref L10B and L10A shall be implemented in accordance with such approved details and thereafter made available for use by the general public'*

It is unclear why this application is being discharged now (10 years after the date of the original application) rather than within 3 months of the granting of condition as stated in the condition.

Appraisal of issues

The principle of the alignment of the two public routeways were established at outline application stage and therefore there are no substantive comments on this element, although it should be noted that in both cases the alignment of the route does cross the airfield. There are no objections to public access across these routes, but the proposal to provide a specific surface material and associated boundary features will inevitably cause harm to the significance of the runway and flying field.

Portway

It is understood that the route of the reinstated Portway is established and agreed and that there is some benefit to re-opening the historic route and providing public access to the area including a viewing point for the RAF Heyford runway.

The proposal to provide a military style fencing constructed of concrete posts and chain link fencing helps to the east of the proposed route to retain the stark character of the RAF Heyford Conservation Area. It is not, however, in keeping with the character of the original Portway which is likely to have comprised of low hedges to either side of the routeway. The proposal is for a timber post and rail fence to the west of the proposed route. Whilst a traditional hedge would be preferable this would be considered a suitable compromise.

The proposal to provide a Coxwell Gravel set within timber edging is not in keeping with either the original character of the Portway (which is likely to have simply been compacted earth) or the stark military character for the RAF Heyford Conservation Area. It is appreciated that this will become a public right of way and that the users requirements need to be considered, but it would be preferable for the surfacing to match the stark military character of the airbase in colour and texture.

Aves Ditch

It is understood that there is some debate about the proposed route of the Aves Ditch right of way. The 08/00716/OUT application put forward an 'optional route' cutting across the very eastern section of the runway, the current Heyford Masterplan suggests a route which goes around the outside of the current airfield boundary and it is understood that a suggestion has been put forward as part of this proposal to place Aves Ditch back onto its original alignment.

The preference would be for the Heyford Masterplan route which goes around the outside of the current airfield boundary. The 'optional route' and the original route would detrimentally impact on the character of the RAF Upper Heyford runway and flying track. It is understood that this is the historically correct route and there would be some merit in restoring this if it were simply a case of allowing public access across this area with the existing surfacing remaining, but given that a new surfacing is required along with additional fencing the benefit of opening up the historically correct route is not considered to outweigh the additional harm to the heritage asset of RAF Heyford.

If the route proposed by the current masterplan is followed there would be a greater degree of flexibility on the proposed materials and design of the fence and surfacing as it would lie outside the historic extent of the airbase, although will inevitably impact on its setting.

Level of harm

Less than Substantial

Policies

Planning Act

NPPF

LP

Recommendation

No objection subject to amendments of details to reflect military character of airbase.

Jenny Ballinger, 16th July 2018