



# RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal

6 October 08

Planning, Housing and Economy



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The military airbase at RAF Bicester is the quintessential airfield of its age; almost better than any other site it typifies the public perception of the World War II airfield.

The site began life as a Flying Corps aerodrome towards the end of the Great War. The clearance of the site in 1920 was a short-lived interlude in the history of aviation at the site and construction of a reincarnated Royal Air Force Station began in earnest in 1925. Construction continued through the inter-war years and was still underway at the out-break of hostilities in 1939.

The site retains:

*“... better than any other military airbase in Britain, the layout and fabric relating to pre-1930s military aviation..... it comprises the best-preserved bomber airfield dating from the period up to 1945..... It also comprises the best preserved and most strongly representative of the bomber stations built as part of Sir Hugh Trenchard’s 1920s Home Defence Expansion Scheme”.* (English Heritage).

This document is an appraisal of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area; it describes the established character and appearance of the site and identifies those aspects and features which make a significant contribution to its historic and architectural importance.

Conservation area legislation seeks to secure the preservation and enhancement of the area designated. Designation ensures that consideration is given to the special qualities of the area when proposals for new development are being considered; it should not be seen as a means of preventing development, but rather of ensuring that these areas remain responsive to change, balancing demands for new development with the need to preserve or enhance the special character of the area.

## 2. Planning Policy Context

### 2.1 National, Regional and Local Context

#### 2.1.1 National Context

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and Local Development Frameworks (LDF) into the English planning system. On adoption, these will together form the statutory development plan for local planning authorities and will replace the existing system of Structure Plans and Local Plans.

#### 2.1.2 Regional Context

The RSS for the South East England Region entitled the ‘South East Plan’ is currently being prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and has been submitted to the Government in draft. At present it is unlikely to reach adoption until late 2008. In the meantime, under the Transitional Arrangements, Regional Planning Guidance Note 9 is the RSS for the South East until the ‘South East Plan’ is approved.

#### 2.1.3 Local Context

On adoption the emerging South East Plan will also eventually replace the existing Oxfordshire County Structure Plan; however, until this point the policies contained within the existing Oxfordshire County Structure Plan 2016 are saved for a period of three years from the Structure Plan’s adoption on 21st October 2005. In this context, the existing Structure Plan 2016 currently comprises part of the development plan for Cherwell until adoption of the ‘South East Plan’.

In the context of Cherwell District Council, the statutory development plan is the Cherwell Local Plan adopted in 1996. Most of the policies in the existing adopted Cherwell Local Plan have been saved under the Town and Country Planning Act until the Local Development Framework is adopted. The saved policies are included in the Council's Local Development Scheme approved by the Government Office for the South East in December 2007. The Council's emerging Local Development Framework will replace the policies contained within the adopted Cherwell Local Plan in due course. At present the LDF has not reached the stage where any of the Council's saved policies have been replaced.

The Council was in the process of producing a revised local plan to replace the adopted Cherwell Local Plan. However, following the consideration of pre inquiry changes the plan was withdrawn to enable resources to be used to produce the LDF. In December 2004 this revised local plan was adopted by the Council for development control purposes and is now known as the Non Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011; however, only limited weight can be attached to the policies of the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011 as it has not been tested through the statutory planning process. In the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011, the RAF Bicester site is covered by Policies EN49a.

*EN49a in seeking the preservation and enhancement of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area permission will be granted for:*

*(i) Proposals for the re-use of the buildings within the technical area shown on the proposals map INSET2, including proposals for adaptation or conversion, provided that they are set in the context of an agreed comprehensive plan and are sympathetic to the appearance and character of those buildings, their settings, the trident layout and the wider Conservation Area;*

*(ii) Proposals for the use of the open airfield for recreational purposes provided that such use would not conflict with or change its open, flat and treeless landscape character and its visual relationship with the technical area and adjoining countryside;*

*(iii) Proposals that would be compatible with the ecological value present on the site.*

### **3. Conservation Area Designation**

**3.1** The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides legislation for the protection of the nation's heritage of buildings and places of architectural and historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Conservation areas were introduced in the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. However, it is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (Section 69) which requires local planning authorities to identify areas, as opposed to individual buildings, of special architectural or historic interest and to designate them as conservation areas. Since 1967 some 8,000 conservation areas have been designated in England, including 54 in Cherwell District.

This document is a review of the existing appraisal of the former RAF Bicester airfield. The document is based on a standard recording format derived from advice contained in documents published by English Heritage (2005) and Government Guidance (PPG15). Designation acknowledges the special architectural and national, historic interest of the airfield and thereby acknowledges the requirement (as set out in PPG15) to preserve or enhance the special character and appearance of the conservation area. The contents of this document are a material consideration in the determination of planning applications within the conservation area and its setting.

### 3.2 Justification for Conservation Area Designation

A Conservation Area is *an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.*

The development of airfield design can be clearly traced in the layout of the flying field and buildings at RAF Bicester. Each of the periods of development is represented, from Sir Hugh Trenchard's Air Defence of Great Britain in the 1920s, through the RAF Expansion Period in the 1930s to the readiness for war. It is this that provides the greatest value in terms of historic conservation. The layout has not been affected by later infilling, as at Upper Heyford for example, nor have the structures been altered significantly. A number of the buildings and structures are the only remaining examples of their type in the country, whilst others are the best-preserved examples.

English Heritage advised that a conservation area at RAF Bicester should encompass all those parts of the RAF Station that were developed by the start of World War II. Although the airfield expanded considerably during the war, to accommodate the dispersal of parked aircraft, almost all this extension has been lost to subsequent development. The vast majority of the residential accommodation was constructed north of the married airmen's housing after World War II; this stock, whilst it reproduces the style of earlier housing and is constructed in similar materials, is of less

historic value and therefore has not been included within the conservation area.

The Conservation Area covers;

- the technical site;
- the domestic site, including the pre-war married airmen's housing and the former Officers' Mess (now Cherwood House) and former WRAF officers' mess (now Brashfield House) on Buckingham Road
- the remaining flying field including the remaining defensive structures on and adjacent to the flying field, which equates to the 1939 boundary of RAF Bicester.

The spatial relationships within and between these areas, together with the views across the flying field to open countryside beyond are also important aspects of the character of the area worthy of conservation.

## 4. Location and Topography

4.1 RAF Bicester lies approximately 2.4km (1½ miles) north/north east of the centre of the market town of Bicester, astride the A421 Oxford to Buckingham Road. The land is flat and low-lying and is located between the 75m (250') and 85m (275') contours.

## 5. Background

5.1 In 1996 Cherwell District Council commissioned *Airfield Research Publishing* to undertake a study to assess the extent and quality of the buildings and structures at RAF Bicester. The study (Francis, 1996) comprises a comprehensive gazetteer of all the surviving structures within the current Ministry of Defence boundary.

In April 2000 English Heritage's Listing Team completed a thematic study of over 700 military aviation sites and structures dating from the first decade of the twentieth century to 1945. The report (Lake, 2000) concluded that :

*"RAF Bicester retains, better than any other military airbase in Britain, the layout and fabric relating to pre-1930s military aviation..... With West Rainham in Norfolk it comprises the best-preserved bomber airfield dating from the period up to 1945..... It also comprises the best preserved and most strongly representative of the bomber stations built as part of Sir High Trenchard's 1920s Home Defence Expansion Scheme".*

The District Council is greatly indebted to the authors of both documents for permission to substantially draw upon their findings.

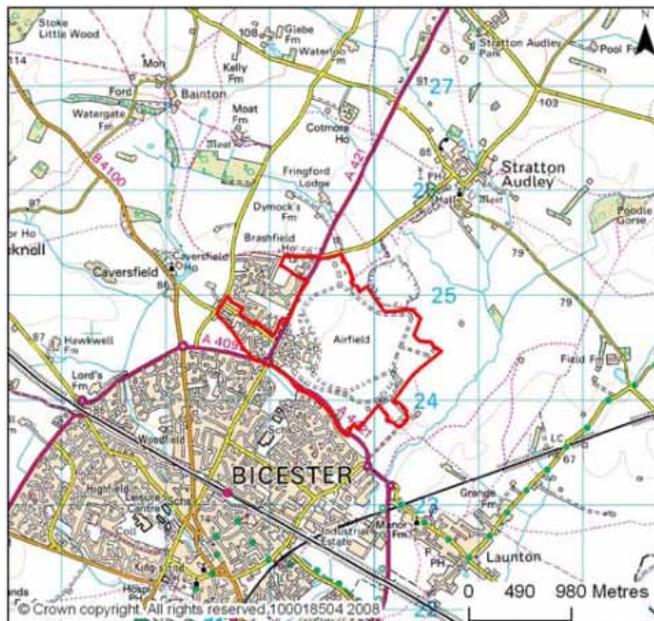


Figure 1: Site Location plan

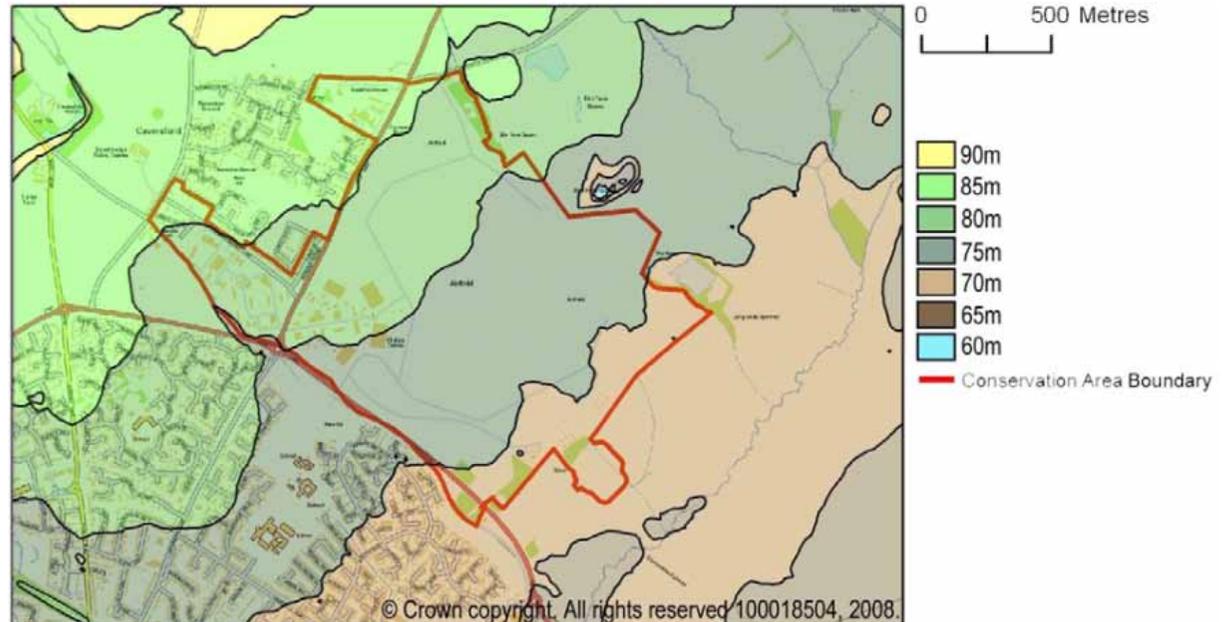


Figure 2: Topology Map

## 6. History and Development

### 6.1 Historical Context:

Air power had been initially conceived as an adjunct of the army and the navy, and the first military airfields were built for the army around Salisbury Plain and for the navy's Royal Naval Air Service around the coast. After the first German bomber raids on London in 1917, it became apparent that the distribution of airfields away from the coast to form a defensive arc around the capital would be required. This marked a fundamental shift in the conduct and logistics of warfare.

When the RAF was formed as the world's first independent force in April 1918, General Sir Hugh Trenchard, its founding father and Chief of Defence Staff, concentrated on the concept of offensive deterrence, a principle that guided the siting and layout of stations until the Second World War. Offensive deterrence saw fleets of self-defending bomber formations as the instrument of war most likely to ensure a swift victory in any future conflict. The geographical position of these bomber stations was a response to the considered need to deter aggression from France, in line with the then national defence policy aimed at providing an airforce capable of meeting the strongest opponent within striking distance of Britain. The sites were selected by Air Commodore (later Air Chief Marshall Sir) Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt in East Anglia and Oxfordshire. They created an aircraft fighting zone some fifteen miles deep and extending round London from

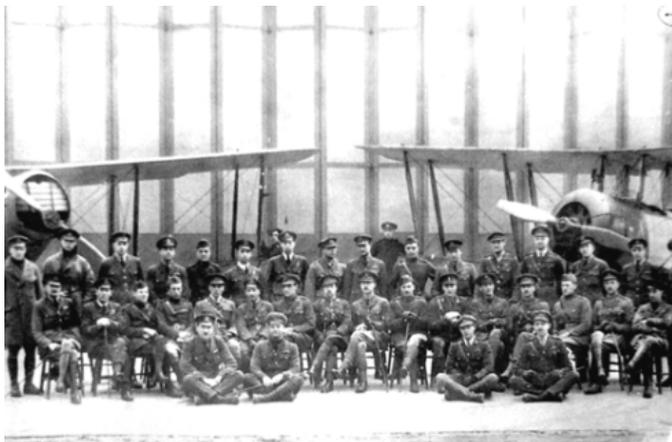
Duxford in Cambridgeshire to Salisbury Plain. Outline plans for the sites were produced by Ludlow-Hewitt and developed in detail by the staff of the Director of Works and Buildings. All the air stations were planned in accordance with Trenchard's requirements that the fabric must be dispersed against attack. In all cases the technical site, comprising hangars and workshops, with the guard room and station headquarters placed at the site entrance, was separated from the domestic site with its barracks, institute and mess. This generated a particular layout and, whilst RAF Upper Heyford was the test bed for this template, RAF Bicester is the most structurally representative site in the country and the most complete airfield to have survived from the pre-1934 period.

## 6.2 Major phases of development of the airfield.

### 6.2.1 1918-1919

Bicester was planned as a training station by the Royal Flying Corps, but the first flying unit to be stationed here was disbanded after only a month. Instead Bicester opened on 1 October 1918 as the home of 44 Training Depot Station for the training of 120 officers and 60 NCOs, preparing pilots for service with front line units in France. The aerodrome had a landing area of 1,150 yards by 1,000 yards and covered an area of 180 acres, including 30 acres occupied by the station buildings. With only six weeks of the Great War remaining however, it was not long before cut backs started. In February 1919 two squadrons returned from Flanders and disbanded in September. The 44 training Depot Squadron also disbanded and the final squadron returned from Germany in September, disbanded in January 1920 and

the station closed down in March 1920. As Bicester did not feature in the list of permanent RAF Stations, the complete camp was demolished after closure of the base.



118 Squadron in 1918

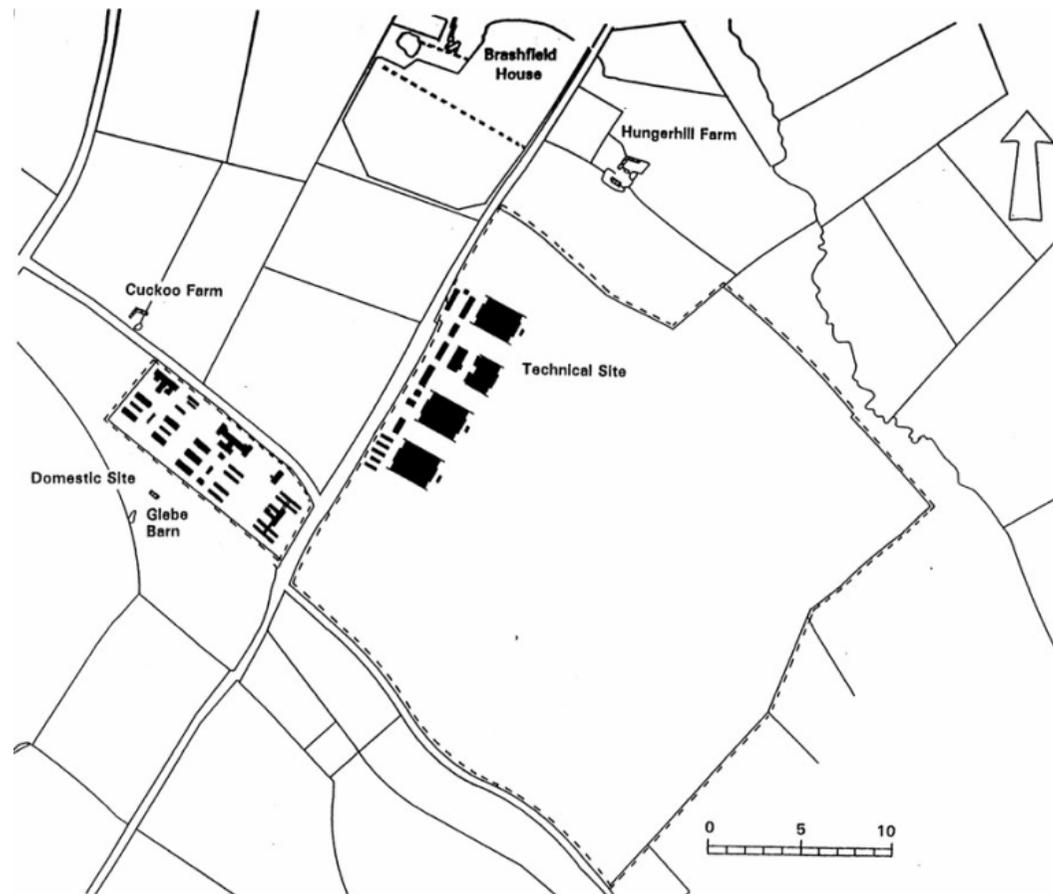


Figure 3: RAF Training Depot site plan 1918 (P Francis)

### 6.2.2 1924-1934

A change in the country's defensive structure was introduced in 1925, known as the Air Defence of Great Britain. Under Sir Hugh Trenchard's expansion of the RAF, two new permanent three-squadron bomber airfields were planned for Bicester and Upper Heyford as part of the Wessex Bombing Area of the Air Defence of Great Britain Scheme. An immediate start was made on the reconstruction of the abandoned bases. Whilst Upper Heyford was fully developed, a change took place while building was still underway at Bicester. In 1925 the Birkenhead Committee had recommended deceleration of military development and the Ramsey Macdonald government undertook a review of Trenchard's proposals in 1931. It was decided to limit the number of aircraft in a squadron from eighteen to twelve. This culminated in only two of the proposed six A-type aircraft hangars being built in contrast to the full quota at Upper Heyford. Military flying resumed in January 1928 as a one-squadron bomber station for 100 Squadron. In November 1930 this was replaced by 33 Squadron which in turn, when it transferred to Upper Heyford in 1933, was replaced by 101 Squadron. Sir Hugh Trenchard retired in 1930.

The planning of the new station was completely different to that of the earlier one. Further land was acquired to the north including the requisition of Hungerhill Farm. The aerodrome boundary was slightly extended south to give maximum take-off run of 1,390 yards. Land north of

Skimmingdish lane and west of Buckingham Road was acquired for the construction of married quarters (detached and semi-detached for officers and terraced houses for airmen) and recreational facilities.

On the domestic site, two storey barrack blocks, each with its own sanitation, were built for the first time. The Barrack Blocks, Dining Room and Cookhouse, Institute, Station Sick Quarters and Sergeants' Mess were arranged in a grid pattern facing a parade ground.

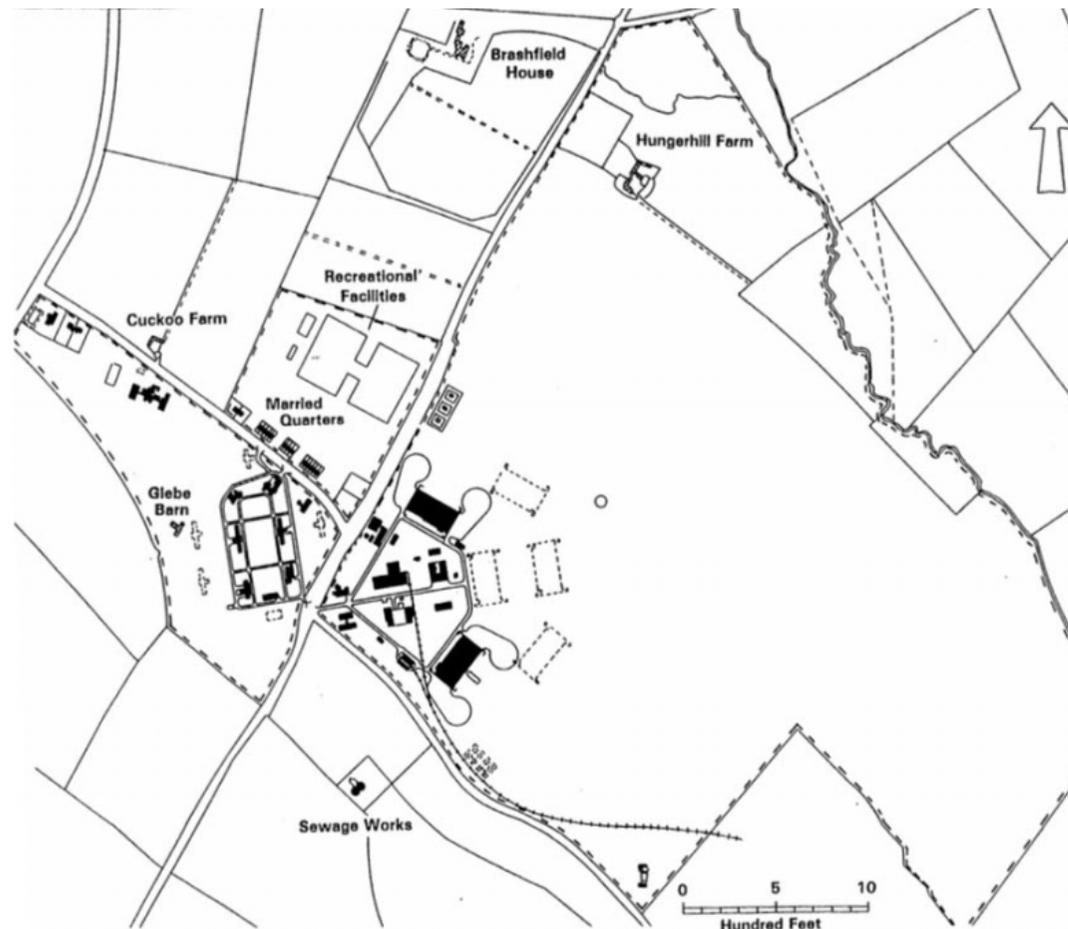
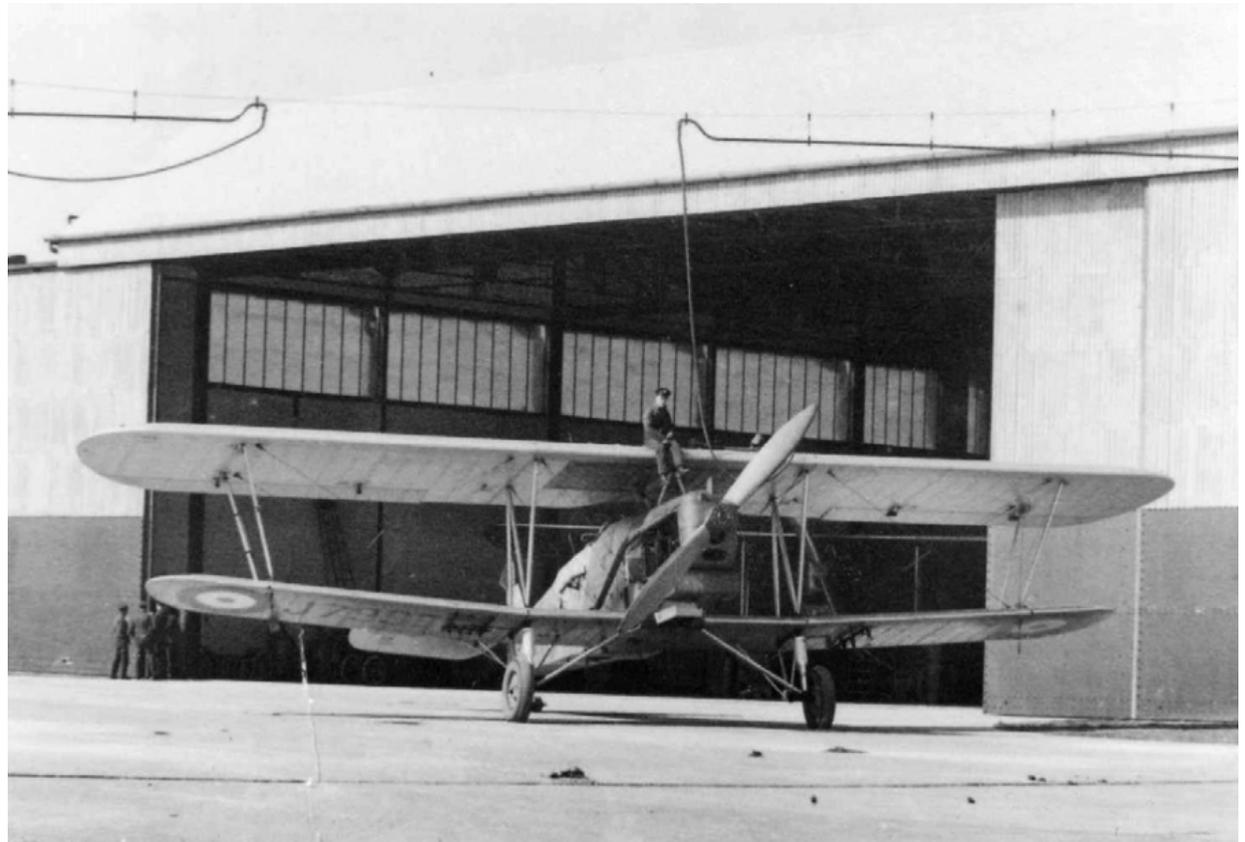


Figure 4: Proposed layout August 1926 (P Francis)

The layout of the technical site consisted of an Air Ministry road leading from the public highway to the main entrance where the Guardhouse and the Station Offices were built on either side of the road facing each other. The road then branched into three. The central road gave access to buildings associated with aeroplanes and motor transport vehicles. The left branch connected with buildings and structures essential to the day to day running of the station. The right branch served non-essential buildings used for the maintenance and running of the station. All three roads were connected by another running alongside the hangars. This radial pattern was characteristic of Trenchard's station template. A range of single and two storey permanent buildings were erected, including some types that had not been seen before such as the Operations Block, Parachute Store and Watch Office. A special feature was a railway link leading to the coal yard and the main stores and later to the bomb stores. The rails can be seen at the coal yard and in some other locations; it is believed that they remain below tar macadam elsewhere.



Hawker Horsley being refuelled 1928

### 6.2.3 RAF Expansion Period 1934-1939

In 1933 the Geneva disarmament talks collapsed and from 1934 onwards the RAF Expansion Scheme was underway. A significant number of buildings were altered and erected on the base in the 1930s.

In the first contract in 1934 further Barrack Blocks and Officers' and Airmen's' Married Quarters, together with Petrol Tanker Sheds, an Ambulance Garage, and other technical buildings were constructed and other buildings were extended and altered. Throughout this period 101 Squadron continued to serve as Bicester's principal resident unit. The second contract dated around 1936 involved the construction of two of the latest type-C aircraft hangars, more than doubling the hangar space. This enabled the creation of a new 90 Squadron as the second permanent resident. A further contract in 1938 resulted in the erection of Aviation Petrol Installations a Fire Tender Shelter, the Watch Office with Tower, Bomb Stores and connecting road and new hangar aprons.



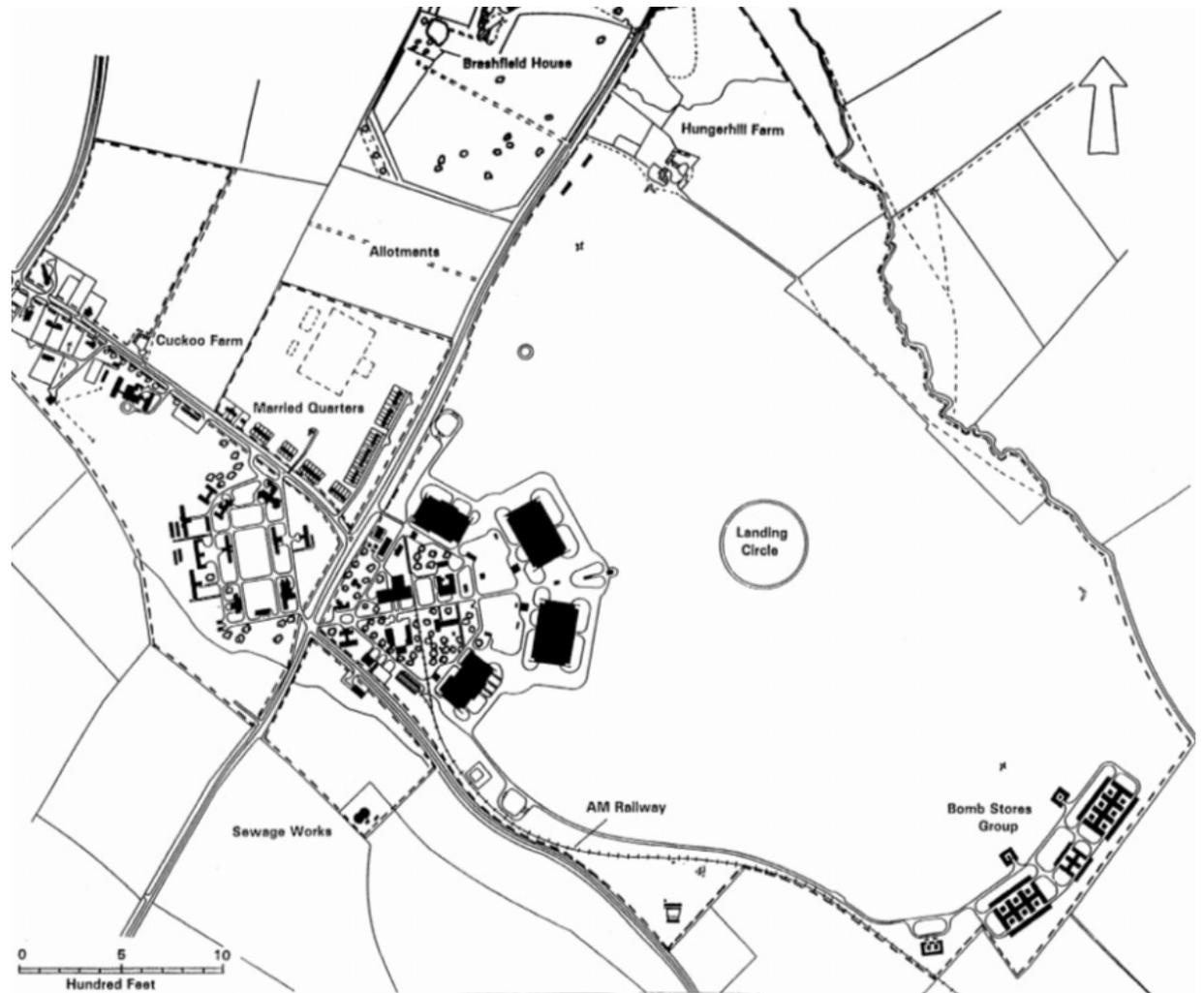
Aerial view, facing west 1935



Blenheim Bomber 1936

In 1938 new contracts were placed for a major building programme to bring the station in line with the new Expansion Period RAF Stations, including further technical accommodation, Type H Barrack Blocks, a new Institute and Dining Room, the Decontamination Centre and a Central Heating Station. Brashfield House was requisitioned and additional Officers' Mess and single Officers Quarters were built on the site some distance from the rest of the domestic site, north up Buckingham Road. Construction work was still underway at the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. As both 90 and 101 Squadrons departed for their operational stations in 1939 their place was taken by 12 and 142 squadrons until their preparations for front line service were complete and they departed for France. The bombing regime was punishing and it was Bicester crews who were to win the first Victoria Crosses for the RAF.

RAF Bicester was also involved with aircraft innovation and on 25 October 1939 the Halifax prototype L7244 flew its maiden trail flights from Bicester.



Control Tower and Blenheim Mk1s 1939

Figure 5: Site Plan 1939 (P Francis)

#### 6.2.4 1940-1945

At the outbreak of World War II the role of the station changed to that of training; both of crews from home and the commonwealth. This change in role reflected the fact that from the mid 1930s the siting of new airfields had anticipated the logistical challenges of another war, with training and operational bases placed behind the eastern front facing Germany. The outset of the conflict saw the construction of a larger number than average pillboxes and trenches for the close defence of the airfield. The flying field was considerably enlarged to the north and south with tracks and 41 panhandle standings to enable the dispersed parking of aircraft. So dispersed was this, in line with Trenchard's philosophy, the length of the perimeter track and dispersal tracks totalled nearly six miles.

The Battle Instruction School was set up in 1940. An important structure, Battle Headquarters for the co-ordination of airfield defence during an invasion, was located between the north dispersal track and the north section of perimeter track. This was surrounded by a ring of five pill boxes. By now the buildings at Bicester had been camouflaged and blackouts were enforced.

In 1940, 104 and 108 Squadrons were amalgamated to form 13 Operational Training Unit, (OTU), as one of the two principal wartime medium bomber training units in Britain. From October 1940 an increasing emphasis was being placed on night flying. Bicester was unsuitable due to its compact layout, the large number of trees on the approaches and its vulnerability to

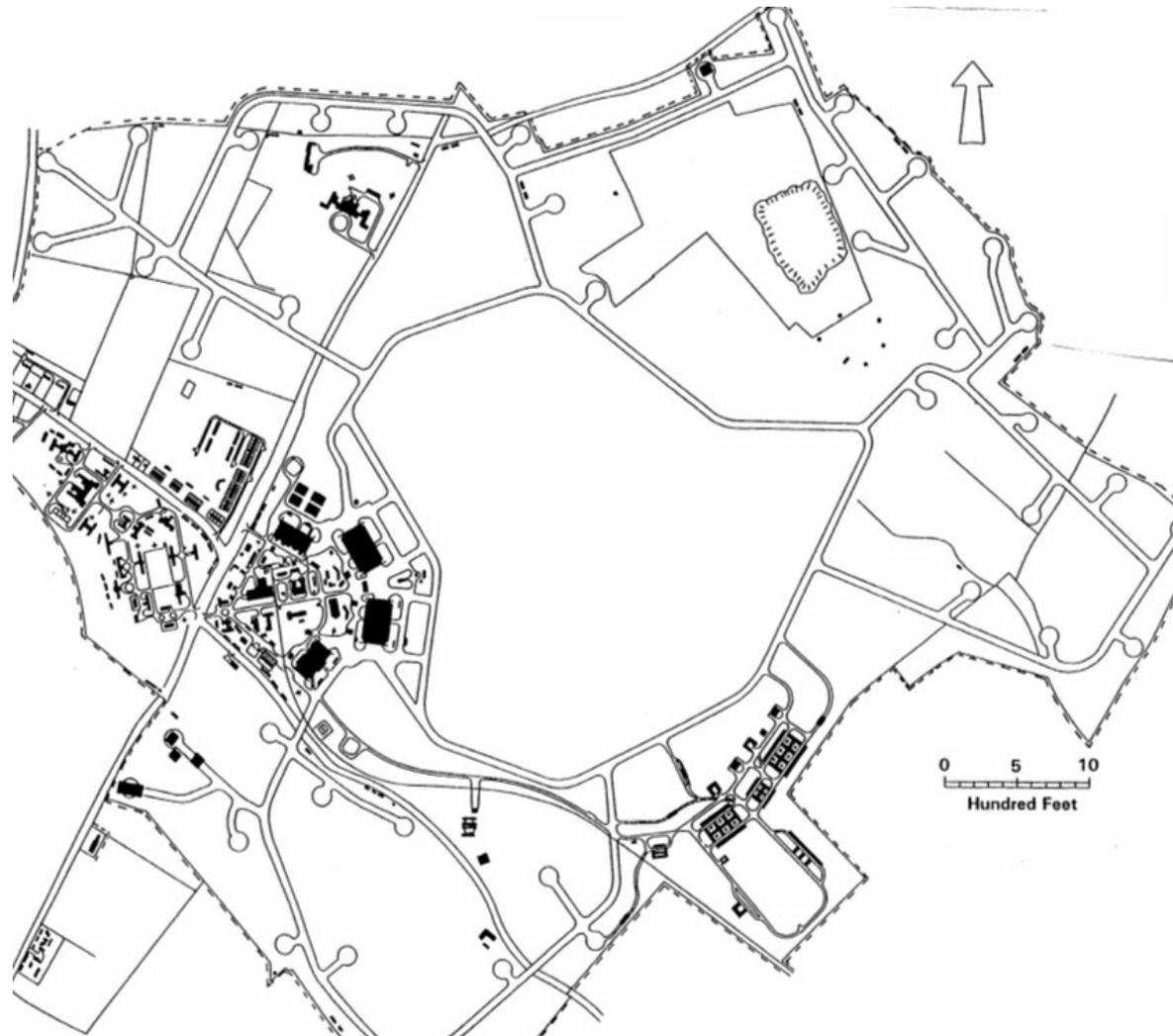


Figure 6: Site Plan 1945 (P Francis)

bombing if lights were shown. Lacking concrete runways, Bicester was also subject to spells of unserviceability. Therefore a satellite landing ground was brought into use at Hinton-in-the-Hedges, although it quickly became unserviceable due to severe winter conditions. The landing ground at Brackley, later known as Croughton, was shared with 16 OTU from Upper Heyford. During 1942 practically all the crews trained at Bicester were going out to the Middle East.

The Operational Training Unit continued until October 1944, flying Mosquitoes on what by now had become a very small airfield by comparison with standards elsewhere and the size of the aircraft highlighted the limitations of the rough grass landing ground. Once better stations became available following the mass departure of tactical flying units to the Continent after D-Day this enabled 13 OTU to be transferred.

In the autumn of 1943, Bicester became a Forward Equipment Unit and the airfield was used to store vital equipment necessary for the invasion of north-west Europe. By the autumn of 1944 the unit had grown in size and was manned by over 1,000 personnel with equipment stored in ten canvas hangars. Most of the equipment was transported by road. On 1 January 1945 the unit was re-titled 246 Maintenance Unit (MU) and the station was effectively relegated to the status of a storage centre. The end of the war saw little reduction in the activities of the unit, although visiting aircraft now became fewer.



King George VI in front of the Station Office, 1940



Pilots in front of Cherwell House, 1944

### 6.2.5 1945-1994

After 1945, 246 MU continued to function together with the Parachute Packing and Servicing Flight and the headquarters of 40 Group, Maintenance Command, which was also based at Bicester. 71 Maintenance Unit was formed here in 1953 with responsibility for crash investigation. A Bomb Disposal Flight was also transferred here. The RAF Gliding and Soaring Association was formed here on 1 November 1963. By the mid 1970s the strength of the RAF was much reduced and RAF Bicester was managed on a care and maintenance basis.

After a short period under the control of the Army the station once again became RAF Bicester in November 1978. Authority had been given for the site to be made available to United States Airforce in Europe and some of the technical buildings were converted into offices and a medical storage facility. The domestic site was converted into a USAFE Military Hospital and this was eventually closed when RAF Upper Heyford closed in 1994, although some of the married servicemen's housing is still occupied by USAF personnel based at Croughton.

These uses, administration, storage and glider training, have ensured the preservation of the inter-war character of the site and the rare and consistent preservation of exterior detail and fittings. Post war residential development and quarrying has encroached onto the site, effectively removing the Second World War extensions to the flying field.



Modern use of aircraft hangars

## 7. Established Character

### 7.1 Introduction

The character of RAF Bicester is unified by its function as a military station. There were principles underpinning the planning of airfields in the first half of the 20th century and these are key determinants of the character that remains today.

Under Trenchard's template, the built fabric was dispersed in order to minimise damage from potential airborne attack so that the layout is spacious and therefore differs from the earlier formal layouts of naval or army barracks. In all stations of this period, the technical site, comprising hangars and workshops, with the guardroom and station headquarters placed at the site entrance was separated from the domestic site with its barracks, institute and mess.

Personnel were also dispersed across the station, in that airmen's accommodation was provided in relatively small buildings set within spacious layouts and the internal planning of the buildings themselves separated recreational use from accommodation wings to avoid concentrating the entire live-in senior staff in one structure.

With the exception of the hangars, the height of buildings was restricted to one and two storeys in order to minimise obstruction to aircraft.

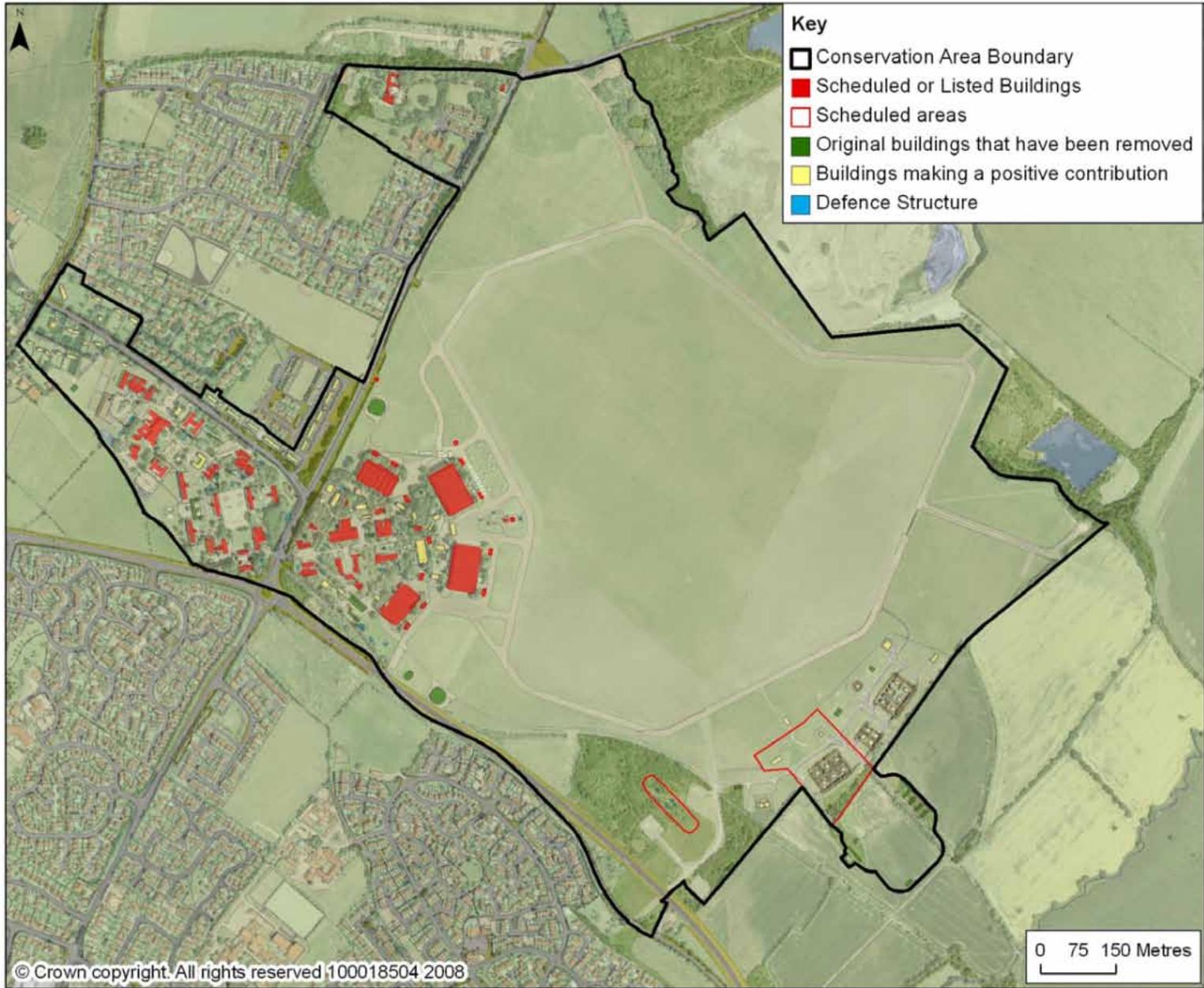
Building materials chosen by the Air Ministry were permanent, in preference to the temporary fabric that had characterised sites of the First World War, so brick, concrete and slate dominate.

Significant tree cover was required as camouflage, so that there is extensive tree planting of mixed species, now fully mature, within both the technical and domestic sites and this contrasts with the flying field, which by its nature is of course devoid of trees.

### 7.2 Layout

The flying field and associated technical site lie to the east of Buckingham Road and the domestic site lies to the west, with the majority of the married quarters housing to the north of Skimmingdish Lane. Furthermore, by the end of World War II, the dispersal tracks had expanded not only south of Skimmingdish Lane but west of Buckingham Road to the north of the married quarters. It is known that the Air Ministry was not happy about the station being dissected by public highways but the roads were not closed, except briefly for operational reasons in times of hostilities, for reasons of economy. Although the 1945 airfield extensions have been replaced by residential development and quarrying, the three functions of the station are still clearly split by the routes of these highways.

Trenchard's principle of dispersal underpins the layout of both the domestic and the technical sites and both display elements of formality in the layout of roads and buildings. Additionally there is a strong functional relationship between the siting of particular buildings and also between the flying field and many of the structures adjacent to it.



**Figure 7: Site Plan**  
**Conservation Area Appraisal for RAF Bicester**

### 7.2.1 The domestic site.

The layout of the domestic site is dominated by the former parade ground, which is oriented almost due north south. The parade ground which measures 80 by 50 metres and sits within a larger space 170 by 60 metres, is framed by the key domestic buildings. Identical E-Type Barrack Blocks (35,36) contain the east and west sides in a symmetrical manner. These are supported by the Dining Room (48) and Station Sick Quarters (46) (and adjacent mortuary (45) and ambulance station (44)) respectively. The southern side is contained by the Ration Store (47), a relatively small single storey building. The northern side is partly open to Skimmingdish Lane but has the Institute (32) and the Sergeants' Mess (31) angled obliquely on the east and west corners respectively. Additional accommodation blocks are located behind these space-framing buildings. An Air Ministry road encircles all these buildings linking their rear elevations and also Buckingham Road and Skimmingdish Lane.

In 1939 open land to the west of the Sergeants' Mess (31), and the adjacent Quarters Block for Sergeant Pilots (28), was developed for the new Dining Room and Institute (20). This was flanked by two H-Type barrack Blocks (23,25), continuing the principle of symmetry but at an angle to the parade ground. The Dining Room and Institute (20) has the greatest bulk of all the buildings on the domestic site and, being located close to the current functioning entrance off Skimmingdish Lane, pulls the focus away from the Parade Ground,

Officers' Mess and Quarters (16) predated the 1939 buildings and fronted onto Skimmingdish Lane close to the Officers married quarters and the squash and tennis courts.

Each of these buildings is placed in a spacious informal landscaped setting of grass and trees that are now mature. Despite later additions, buildings of differing scales and the informality of the tree planting, the formality in the layout remains evident.

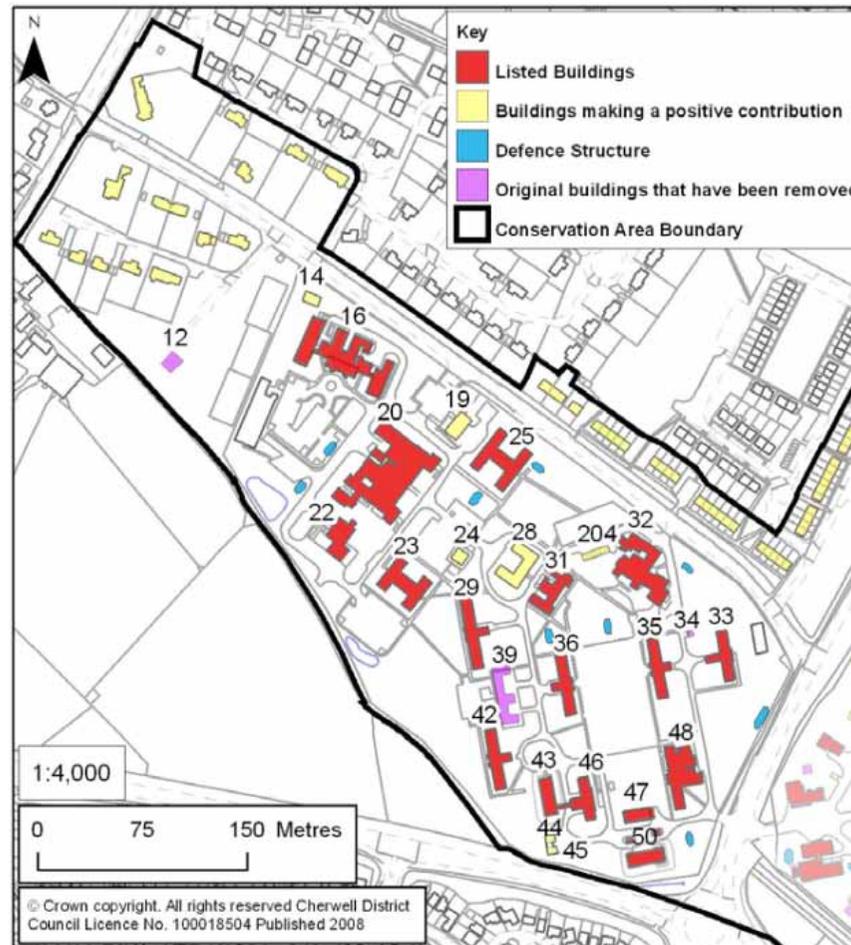


Figure 8: Domestic Site - with Building numbers

### 7.2.2 The technical site

The layout of the technical site is also formal, but this is created principally by the road layout, with only the aircraft hangars responding to the symmetry and thereby enhancing the formality. The layout of the technical site is defined by the 'trident' of the three Air Ministry roads which branch out from the Gatehouse (89) and Station Offices (147) that face each other at the entrance in the south west corner of the site at the junction of Buckingham Road and Skimmingdish Lane; each road give access to buildings of specific functions and there is a wide range of building types along each one (see paragraph 6.2.2). Extensive tree planting was again undertaken for camouflage purposes and the two lateral roads are flanked by avenue planting, which further enhances the formality and symmetry. The first A-type hangars were built at the northern (79) and eastern (137) extremities of the technical site. When the Type-C hangars (108,113) were added in front of these, with the Watch Tower (109) centrally placed between and forward of them, the axis of the central road was extended out into the flying field.

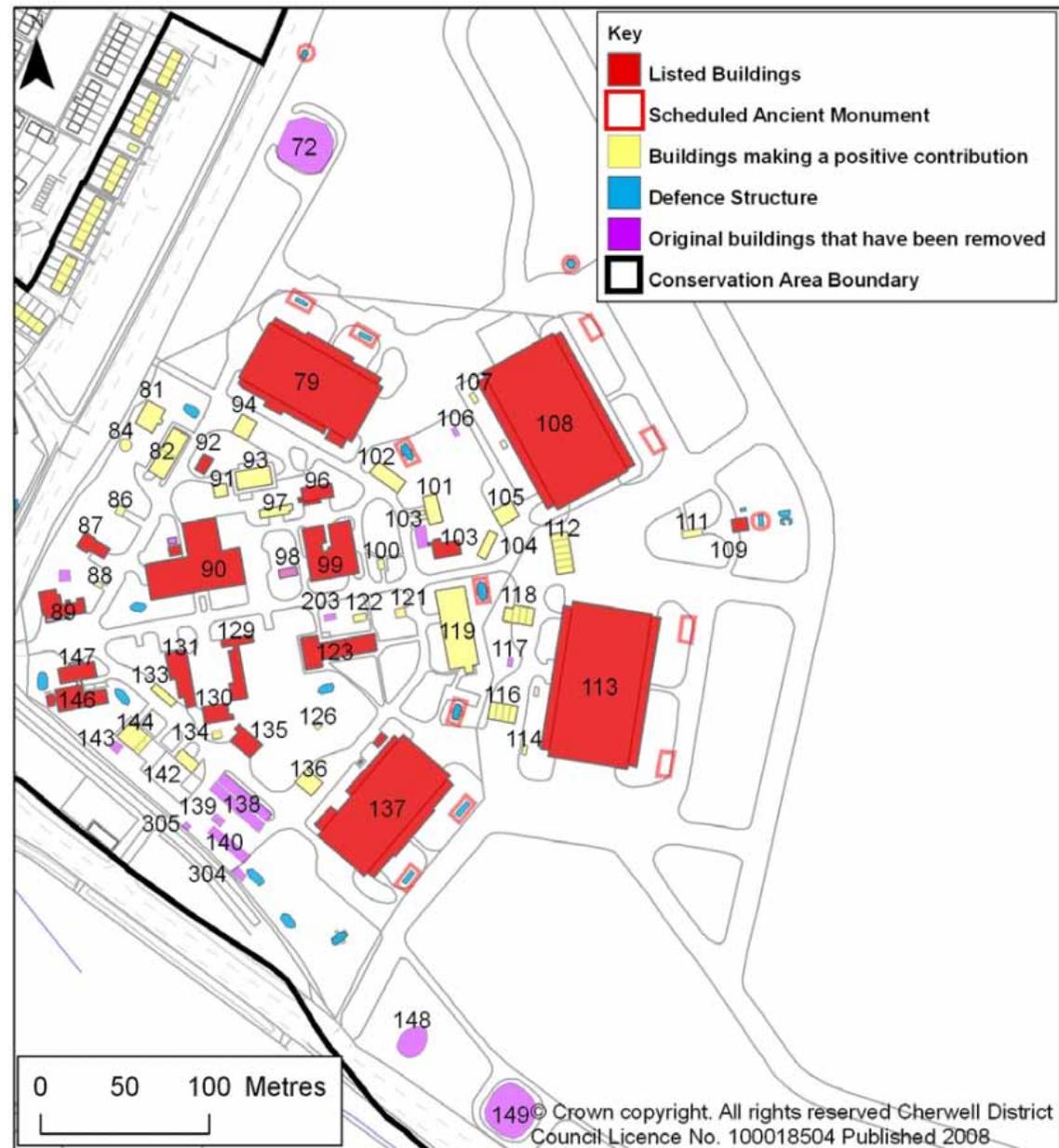


Figure 9: Technical Site - with Building numbers

### 7.2.3 The flying field

The location of structures and their relationship with the flying field determines the layout of this part of the station. From the Watch Tower (109) a wide and open vista is, by necessity, afforded over the whole of the flying field and also to the open countryside beyond (see Fig. 11). From the Watch Tower a direct view is also obtained of the Bomb Stores beyond the perimeter track, which are set against scrub and tree planting for camouflage purposes. From each of the gates giving access to the flying field from the adjacent highways again the expanse of the flying field is evident. There are also extensive vistas across the flying field from the Pill-Boxes located in an arc around the technical site and west of the bomb stores. These were designed and located to enable the station to be defended. The taxi-ways and part of the perimeter track reinforce the edge of the flying field functionally and visually.

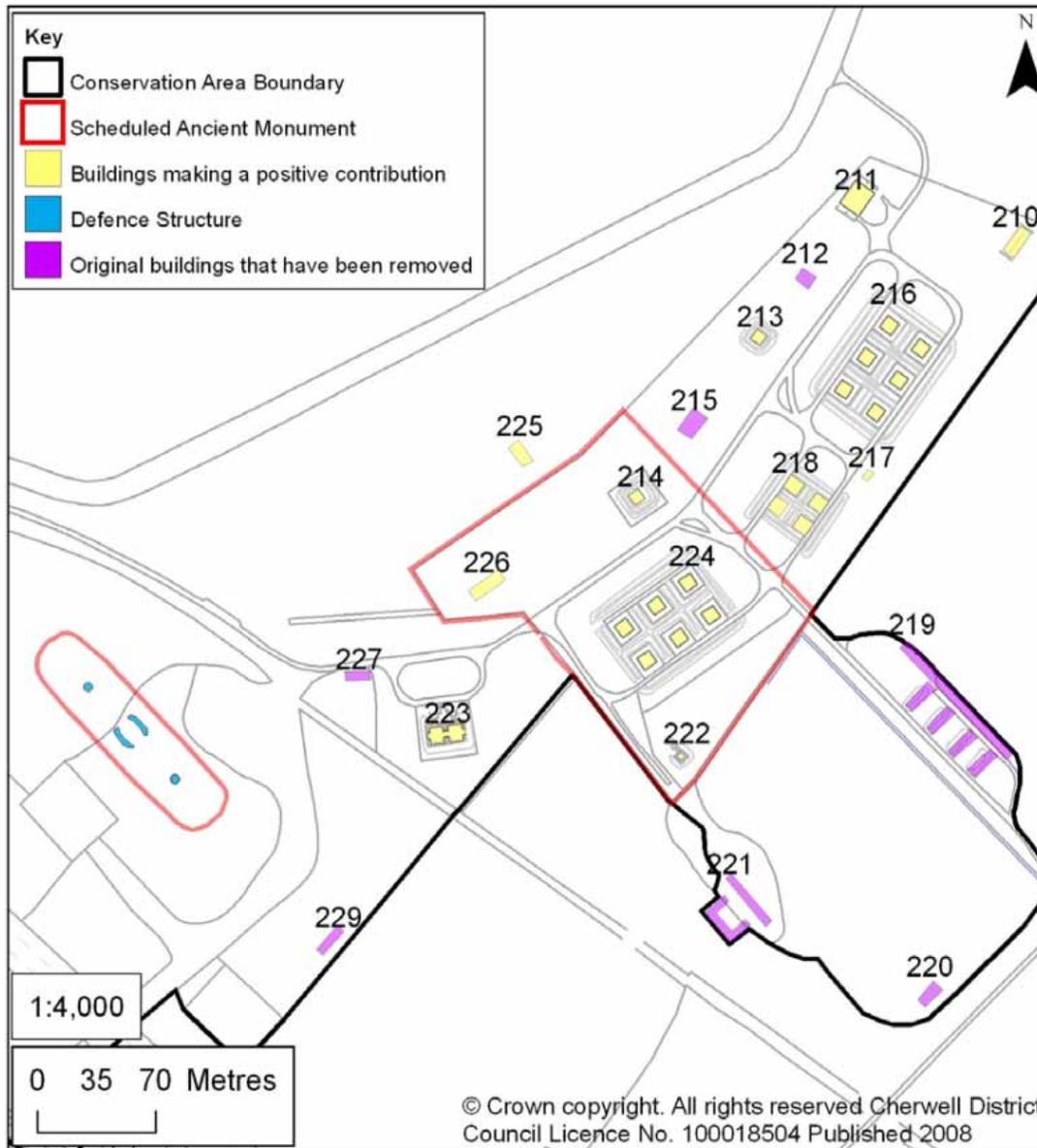


Figure 10: Flying Field- Bomb Stores - with Building numbers

## 8. Building Type and Architectural Style

### 8.1 Introduction

There are 114 buildings and structures surviving at RAF Bicester (excluding married quarters), 90 on the technical site and 24 on the domestic site. Of these 114, 34 were designed before 1930. Over 90% of the fabric associated with the bomber base survives.

Clearly, by the function of the site, there is are very specific building types that are not found outside military bases, but also building types that are very specific to the era of development. There are, importantly and unusually, a large number of buildings surviving from the 1925-1928 RAF Expansion and also a large number from the 1930s Expansion. Those from the earlier date are examples of the first Air Ministry permanent Standard Type designs for operational RAF stations and so are important to the history of the Royal Air Force in a national context. Within the domestic site the preservation of most of the structures is excellent, with all in an externally complete state of preservation with doors and windows intact. However, on the technical site prolonged disuse and an almost a total lack of maintenance, together with vandalism, have taken their toll and this part of the site now looks down-at-heel with 19 buildings in a state of such disrepair that they are identified as being 'at risk'.

Despite subsequent development during the 1934-1939 RAF Expansion Period, the fabric of the station retains an identifiable 1920s character. This is because most of the

1930s development continued in the style of the 1920s scheme. However the last group, started in 1938, show Art Deco characteristics that are shared by buildings on other, but less significant, sites. It also includes a group of airfield defence structures on the east side of the flying field, which has retained its inter-war character. The married quarters to the north of Skimmingdish Lane, like other sites of this type, drew its influences from the Garden

City Movement of the same period. The later buildings are intermingled within the layout pattern set by the earlier buildings.

In acknowledgement of the national importance of the site a significant number of buildings and structures are listed or scheduled.



Building 147: Station HQ - Grade II Listed

## 8.2 The 1920s Buildings.

The most prominent technical buildings, most notably the **Guardroom (89)** and **Station HQ (147)**, and the buildings on the domestic site, were designed in a simple, astylar neo-Georgian style (i.e. classical without columns or pilasters), sometimes known as British Military. This is consistent with the standard inter-war choice for most government architecture from Labour Exchanges to retirement homes. It is also in part, no doubt, a reflection of the fact that most uniformed staff of the Directorate of Works and Buildings had worked for the army; the similarity between the design of the airmen's barracks and barracks architecture dating from the 1870s is striking. However most of the technical buildings, such as stores, workshops and vehicle sheds, have no identifiable architectural quality, but are of interest for their group or historical value.

Examples of buildings of this period on the technical site include:

The **Station Offices (147)** (Grade II) occupied a prominent position (reflecting its importance) opposite the Guardhouse (**89**) at the entrance to the technical site. It is an excellent example of the first permanent RAF Station Offices. The floor plan is on classical lines, with central entrance lobby joining a hallway, stairs and central corridor with rooms on either side. Built of red brick with pointing of grey mortar, the elevations follow symmetrical lines with a central entrance recessed back slightly to create the impression of projecting wings on either

side, which are further enhanced by hipped gables over the projections. A hipped veranda is supported by four reinforced concrete pillars and this is mirrored in the design of the Guardhouse (**89**) opposite. The building used to house a camera obscura and, although this is no longer present, the hole on the reinforced concrete flat roof is still visible and the lens may still be present. The camera obscura on RAF stations was an early method of checking a

pilot's ability to fly straight courses, find wind speed and direction and for the simulation of bombing. The image of the aircraft approaching was projected through a lens in the roof of the building onto a special table. As it approached, the trainee pilot simulated the release of bombs (the station offices being the dummy target) by way of a series of flash bulbs carried in the aircraft and the camera obscura assessed the wind speed and direction from the release of stannic



Building 79: 'A' Type Hangar - Grade II Listed

chloride into the atmosphere over the building. This is probably the only remaining building in the country (apart from Upper Heyford) that housed this early training aid. This building is in extremely poor condition at present and is identified as being 'at risk' Category A.

The **Guard House (89)** (Grade II) is directly opposite the Station Office at the entrance to the technical base; the visual relationship between the two is formal and designed. The Guard House is built of dark red brick in Flemish bond, with some stretcher bond, and pointing of grey mortar. Its most significant architectural feature is the gambrel roof. Clad in slate, the roof slope projects forward to form a covered veranda, similar to the Station Office, supported by four square chamfered reinforced concrete posts on stone pads. At the centre of the ridge line is a wooden bell tower which originally housed an air raid siren. A date stone of 1926 remains. This is a very impressive building and is the best surviving example of its type in the country and the only one of its size.

The **Type A aeroplane sheds (137, 79)** (Grade II) were designed in 1924 and were the first permanent end opening hangars of the interwar period for RAF stations at home and abroad. They were the largest aeroplane sheds until replaced by the Type C hangars (**108, 113**) during the 1930s Expansion Period. Two of the projected six Type A hangars were completed in 1926-7. Their dimensions were based on the need to accommodate the RAF's largest projected twin-engined bomber, the De Havilland

DH9A, which measured 249 feet (75.9m) span by 122 feet 5 inches (37.3m) length. Each hangar was envisaged to accommodate 12 aircraft. With all their features still present these Bicester hangars are perhaps the best examples of their type in the country.

On the domestic site buildings of this period include:

The **Sergeants Mess (31)** (Grade II) was of the first permanent RAF Sergeants Mess design, built as a single storey structure in

asymmetrical form with two projecting gable ends, clearly influenced by the garden City movement. Construction is in cavity brickwork supporting king post trusses carrying slates. Above the three-light windows to the billiard room and to the mess room is a decorative semi-circular arch with herringbone bond brick infill. Despite enlargement around 1935, which resulted in a symmetrical building, it was superseded by a new mess building in 1939 and became an additional barrack block. It is in excellent condition today.



Building 16: Officer's Mess and Quarters - Grade II Listed

The **Officer's Mess and Quarters (16)** (Grade II) was constructed in 1926 and is a unique design pre-dating the standard design. It features a central single storey main entrance block with two storey single officers' quarters established in two wings and connected to the mess by corridors. Built of red brick, the mess, billiard room and connecting corridors have pitched roofs of slate while above the main entrance block is a hipped roof in keeping with the quarters blocks. In 1939 a new Officers Mess and Quarters was constructed in the grounds of Brashfield House and the old one became the Sergeants Mess and Quarters. The structure has undergone extensive renovation.

### 8.3 The 1930s Buildings

These comprise two principal groups; The design of the first group, is clearly rooted in the previous decade. Examples include:

The **Fire Party House (87)** (Grade II) was constructed in 1938 as part of the RAF Expansion Period specifically to house the duty fire crew, who had previously been located within the Guardhouse. It is a permanent dark brick structure in Flemish bond with a hipped asbestos cement slate roof and consists of a garage at the front and a rest room to the rear. It is a very attractive building, whose architectural treatment is consistent with the 1920s designs, including the brickwork bonding and the closures to the window and door openings.

The **Type E Barrack Blocks (29, 42)** (Grade II) were built in 1937 and 1939 respectively, but their designs followed those of two earlier blocks (**35, 36**) that had been completed over ten years previously. It was an unusual feature of Bicester and Upper Heyford that barrack design with a central architectural feature that was considered obsolete in 1932 should be built as late as 1937 and 1939 and may be explained by the desire to maintain a designed architectural character around the parade ground, the main functional and symbolic space.

The other buildings on the site reflect the distinct change in the aesthetic quality and design of RAF stations. In November 1931 Ramsey MacDonald, the then Prime Minister, in the face of public and professional concern at the extent and pace of rearmament and the impact on the environment, instructed the Royal Fine Arts Commission to be involved in airfield design. This process included consultation with three distinguished architects of the day: Sir Edwin Lutyens, Sir Reginald Blomfield and Giles Gilbert Scott. The summary report produced



Building 36: Type E Barracks Blocks - Grade II Listed

in February 1932 resulted in improvements to both individual and standard designs between 1932 and 1934. Accordingly, in October 1934, A Bullock was appointed as the first architectural advisor to the Directorate of Works and Buildings and his remit was to provide, *inter alia*, advice to the Air Ministry over the planning and design of new sites. The buildings erected for much of the 1930s Expansion Period were, as a consequence, more carefully proportioned than their predecessors with a clear distinction made between neo-Georgian for domestic and more stridently modern styles for technical buildings. They were based upon a range of type designs, characterised by homogeneity of materials and careful control of proportions. From 1938 PM Stratton replaced Bullock and increasing use was made of flat roofs and Art Deco characteristics. JM Binge, an architect in Stratton's team, was responsible for the most architecturally advanced designs from this period up to 1945. At Bicester, most of the buildings associated with this phase fall into the latter category, and make an important contribution to the character of the site. These are characterised by flat protected concrete roofs, to counter the effects of incendiary bombs and also to speed up the building process, and a use of glazing detail and string courses to give a much more streamlined horizontal design. These buildings now provide exceptionally well preserved examples of this important phase of the RAF Expansion Period. On the technical site these include:

The most significant building of this period is the **Watch Office with Tower (109)** (Grade II). The watch office is on the ground floor facing the aerodrome with toilet and rest room to the rear. A circular stairway leads up to the watch tower from which a vertical ladder lead to the roof upon which were meteorological instruments. It is a 1934 design that represents a significant step in the evolution of air traffic control in that it reflected the need to control movement with defined zoning of serviceable landing and take-off areas. This became the standard

design for aerodromes, with 41 built between 1935 and 1937. Although after 1936 these were constructed in concrete, which offered better protection against bomb blast, the Bicester version, which was one of the later buildings, was constructed in red brick for consistency with the other buildings, believed to be at the recommendation of the Royal Fine Art Commission. The watch office with tower is only one of five remaining complete and of the original design (Action Stations 6, p79); it is currently 'at risk' Category C.



Building 20: Dining Room and Institute - Grade II Listed

Two eleven bay **Type-C Aircraft sheds (108, 113)** (Grade II) were constructed in 1936-1937 in front of the existing aeroplane sheds. The steel structure has brick side walls and a roof of timber purlins and timber boarding with asbestos slates. Normally hangars built after 1936 had walls of reinforced concrete but here brick was used to complement the existing technical buildings. Hangar 108 was extensively refurbished by the USAF when it was converted into a hospital store. Hangar 113 is more original and is still used for housing aircraft.

Bicester was instrumental in the development of aerodrome defence and camouflage; this included the use of camouflage paint on the hangars.

On the domestic site buildings of this period include:

The **Dining Room and Institute (20)** (Grade II) was built in 1938. In the interests of economy, convenience and architectural design, the dining room and institute were combined into one building with supper rooms/function room with stage and kitchens on the ground floor and games, reading and writing rooms above. There were, for the first time, also large underground refuges and an escape tunnel. Elevations are in dark red brick with concrete floors and a reinforced concrete roof. Art Deco style influence can be seen in the horizontality of the design and in details such as the circular lights in the first floor cloakrooms and the multi-rail staircase railings. This building has undergone extensive renovation.

The **Type H Barrack Blocks (23, 25)** (Grade II) were built in 1939 in response to the demand for better standards of accommodation on military airfields including the provision of sitting rooms.

The **Decontamination Centre and Annexe to the Station Sick Quarters (50)** (Grade II) represents a typical building of this type built during the RAF Expansion Period. Uninjured personnel would use the Decontamination Centre and injured personnel would use the annexe to the Station Sick Quarters. The floor plan comprises a series of rooms that demonstrate the procedure that airmen followed to decontaminate themselves following contact with tear gas, nose irritant gas, lung irritant gas or blister gas. Both structures are single storey, built of 18" solid



Building 109: Watch Office with Tower - Grade II Listed

brick walls and are completely devoid of windows. The walls support four 2' thick cased steel beams which in turn support a complicated roof structure of a reinforced concrete lower roof and a reinforced concrete upper roof with, between, a hipped water tank house containing four 500 gallon water tanks for the latrines and showers below. This building is of value because of the completeness of the group that still contains the Station Sick Quarters, Ambulance Shed and Mortuary. This building has undergone significant restoration.

**Station Sick Quarters (46)** (Grade II) has much character and is thought to be one of the oldest surviving structures of its type. The small single story hospital was built here in a similar style to the Sergeants Mess. It is a permanent brick building with a central projecting block forming a T shaped floor plan. It contained three hospital wards, an observation ward and an officers ward.



#### 8.4 Defensive Structures

In 1939 the airfield was prepared for the impending hostilities. Bomb stores were erected to the south east of the flying field, away from the other technical buildings for safety reasons. Trenches and pill-boxes were constructed to the south of the flying field to defend it. Air raid shelters were built amongst the technical and domestic buildings. Although some of these structures have been demolished, all those remaining are in reasonable condition. The Secretary of State has scheduled as ancient monuments part of remaining group of bomb stores, pill-boxes, trenches and air raid shelters (see Fig. 15).

The **bomb stores** were designed to accommodate specific types of ammunitions, for example.

The **small arms ammunitions stores (211)** consist of four store rooms built in pairs back to back of brick and concrete.

The **component stores (213, 214)** were divided into two compartments to separately store detonators and fuses, exploders and delay pistols. They are in brick with a heavy concrete roof and surrounded by an earth bank.

The **Ultra Heavy Fusing Point buildings (210, 226)** date from 1942. The bomb trolley train brought bombs into the structures where the bombs were fused and then taken again by train to be loaded on to the aircraft. They consist of ten-bay all-steel structures built of curved RSJs clad with ribbed steel sheeting completely covered with earth and turf.

The **Seagull Trenches and Mushroom Pillboxes**. The purpose of these four structures was to contain, until reinforcements arrived, an invasion by German paratroopers within the boundary of the airfield. Two Seagull Trenches were built back to back and separated by approximately 50ft on an artificially raised piece of land. At a distance from them were two Mushroom Pillboxes, one either side, and an anti aircraft gun site in the centre. These were narrow brick lined trenches arranged in a zigzag form. An earth bank hid the external walls, but the internal walls supported a concrete slab roof, covered with earth and turf for camouflage. Although these are not unique structures, they are valuable as part of a group despite being overgrown at present.

The **air raid shelters** are constructed semi-underground of brick and concrete and covered with earth and turf. Eight remain. Two defended air raid shelters were positioned in front of each of the four hangars, built of either brick or concrete and protected by an earth bank and a covering of earth and turf. Each had ten loop holes facing the airfield and one in each end wall. Only two brick and one concrete versions survive.

Six blast shelters were constructed on the technical site and seven on the main domestic site, although only four remain and these are all on the technical site. Their purpose was to offer protection to anyone caught in the open during an air-raid and each one could accommodate up to 50 people.



Mushroom Pillboxes - Scheduled ancient monument



Seagull Trench - Scheduled ancient monument



Building 224: Bomb Store - Scheduled ancient monument

## 8.5 Married Quarters

The earliest married airmen's housing was built between 1926 and 1929 in four groups of predominantly two storey terraced houses to the north of Skimmingish Lane and two storey detached houses for officers to the west of the domestic site. Further terraces were built adjacent to the others west of Buckingham Road in the first half of the 1930s and additional officers housing built adjacent to the existing in the second half of the 1930s. Although extensive housing was constructed to the north of this after 1939 this is excluded from the conservation area. The design of the terraces shows evidence of inspiration by the Garden City movement, built of brick with roughcast rendered external elevations, hipped roofs that returned with a gable over the end dwellings in plain tile, slate and diamond asbestos slate. Most of the fenestration has been replaced in a variety of styles although a few examples of the original metal windows remain. The officer's houses were of brick and tile and set in spacious well-treed grounds with the Station Commander's house in particular being an imposing building at the western end of Skimmingish Lane.

## 9. Scale, Construction and Materials

### 9.1 Scale

The need to restrict the height of buildings so as not to provide an obstruction to aircraft results in all buildings being single storey or two-storey and this contributes greatly to the character and appearance of the site. The earliest barrack blocks were adapted from an earlier three-storey design.

### 9.2 Construction and materials

First World War military buildings were of a temporary nature. Development of the 1925–1928 RAF Expansion Period was the first to be permanent.

These buildings were predominantly constructed in 9" solid brickwork of Flemish bond with lime mortar. Later buildings were of cavity brickwork in stretcher bond.

Roofs were pitched, usually hipped, swept to boxed eaves with deep soffits and were of Welsh slate with blue terracotta ridge tiles and tile kneelers. The original Welsh slates have been replaced in some cases with asbestos slates or other artificial slates.

Fenestration was 12-pane timber sashes, with some 8-pane sashes, usually classically proportioned and spaced. Lintels were either brick soldier arches or flush, chamfered and stopped concrete and sills were stooled. The Sergeants Mess (31) has some architectural pretension, for example in the wide semi-circular arched openings with herring-bone brickwork spandrels.



Officer's housing



Airmen's housing



Originally the rainwater goods, including gutters, down-pipes, soil and vent pipes, would have been of cast iron, although many have been replaced with plastic.

Examples of various construction methods of this period include:

The **Type E Barrack Blocks (29, 35, 36 and 42)** (Grade II) were designed in 1921 but built between then and 1939 of cavity sand-faced brickwork, concrete floors with timber boarding and timber-framed roof clad with slate.

The **married airmen's quarters** were constructed of brick and render with plain tiled pitched roofs.

The **Type-A Aeroplane Sheds (79, 137)** (Grade II) were designed in 1924. Main stanchions at 38ft centres support steel framed roof girders with cantilever gable trusses running longitudinally. Wall infilling is of reinforced concrete. Natural light is achieved through rows of wall and roof patent wired glazing panels. Steel doors in four leaves open full width along door guides supported by braced trestles at either end of the shed. To each long side there is a series of seven gables in brickwork.

The **Motor Transport Sheds (134)** were constructed in 1927 of a steel framework clad with brick and roof cladding in diamond shaped asbestos slate tiles.

Some of the early phases of development during the second RAF Expansion Period followed the brick and slate construction,

with the exception of steel beams replacing timber and reinforced concrete replacing brick piers. It is considered that this was in a deliberate attempt to be sympathetic to the existing character, possibly at the recommendation of the Fine Arts Commission. A notable example is the Watch Office and Tower, the design of which had already been amended to reinforced concrete to offer increased resistance to attack. However the construction at Bicester reverted to the earlier design of brick to match the existing buildings.

However, development from the second RAF Expansion Scheme generally followed a more modernist approach. The difference is quite marked. Facing brick was replaced by concrete; pitched roofs were replaced by flat reinforced concrete roofs; timber vertical sliding sash windows were replaced by metal framed windows, often with more horizontal emphasis, and circular windows were also in evidence. The Crittal windows are of particular importance in defining the Modern Movement inspired character of these buildings. The crisp profile of the roofline is a characteristic feature. Leadwork flashing at abutments generally remain. Examples include:

The **Dining Room and Institute (20)** (Grade II) is a characterful example from this period, designed by Air Ministry architect J.H. Binge. The front elevation is very formal, with a central pair of glazed doors set to recessed and modulated jambs under a flat Art Deco canopy. Most windows are steel casements with large horizontal panes to a continuous lintel band with the exception of the upper

middle three that have projecting window jambs. There is a deep plinth of concrete block brought to lower sill level with Flemish bond brickwork above. The flat roof is asphalted.

The adjacent **Type H Barrack Blocks (23, 25)** (Grade II) are also of Flemish bond brickwork with flat asphalt roof. Steel 10 pane vertical casement windows and some horizontal units are set to continuous thin concrete lintel and sill bands.

### 9.3 Camouflage paintwork

There is some evidence of painting undertaken under The General Camouflage Policy, developed in 1938 and discontinued in 1944. This aimed to break up the regularity and conspicuousness of the buildings and to break up the airfield into a pattern more closely resembling the surrounding countryside. Irregular, differently coloured patches were painted on the elevations of buildings and some evidence of green paint remains, for example on the south end around the door of Type H Barrack Block (23) and the inner return on the west side of Type H Barrack Block (25). Camouflage paint is also evident on the hangars in the Technical Site. The reflection of light from roofs and hard surfaces was reduced through the application of matt paint and paint mixed with brick dust. Even the open grass areas were painted to imitate hedgelines and black, brown and yellow powders were scattered to imitate crops, but clearly there is no evidence remaining at Bicester. However the mortar in brickwork elevations was also



Building 22: Central Heating Plant - Grade II Listed



Building 25: Type H Barrack Block - Grade II Listed



Building 89: Guard and Fire Party House - Grade II Listed



artificially darkened in patches and the use of different brick colours can still be seen on certain buildings, particularly barrack blocks.

Camouflage colours were also used on paintwork during World War II. Research (Baty 2000) indicates that a bituminous emulsion in green was used in the first few years of World War II before Government Approved Shades were introduced in 1942. White and off-white, was used primarily on the domestic site, with buildings on the technical site and lower order buildings on the domestic site having windows painted green. All doors were generally green. The metalwork on the pre-war buildings appears to have originally all been painted a grey / lead colour. During the war years this was covered by black bitumen, a cheap and easily applied preservative. It appears that the bright yellow/greens also date from the war period, but that the red and blue are post war.

Aerial photograph of RAF Bicester taken February 1941 - note camouflage of flying field  
**Conservation Area Appraisal for RAF Bicester**

## 9.4 Features of Special Interest

It is the campus dominated nature of the site, together with the planned layout of functionally related groups of buildings and the spaces in between which characterise RAF Bicester. Individual features of interest play a less prominent role, but some buildings more than others make a distinctive visual contribution. As with many functional sites, the importance of the site as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

There are many buildings of special interest relating to their military function especially where this influences the external appearance or unusual internal features.



Building 48 - *The Astra* public entrance - Grade II Listed

The Parachute Store (**92**), for example, offered sufficient height for the parachutes to be suspended from their apices for airing and drying and provided a controlled atmosphere. The Watch Office and Tower (**109**), the Station Offices with the camera obscura (**147**), the Pill Boxes (**N**), Air Raid Shelters (**H,I**) and Bomb Stores (**216, 223, 224**) are other obvious examples. Additionally, the use of a specific range of paint that was associated with military sites is still in evidence. Please refer to Section 8.3.

Buildings of particular visual interest include the tall Water Tower of 1926 (**84**), the Central Heating Plant with tall chimney (**22**) of 1939, the Watch Office and Tower (**109**) dated 1938, the Guard and Fire Party House (**89**) and Station Offices (**147**) of 1926, Type A hangars (**79, 137**) of 1926/7 and Type C hangars (**108, 113**) post 1934. These buildings are prominent at various points from within and outside the site. Other buildings have date-stones, which assist in tracing the development of the station.

There is one building (**48**) of social interest which post the war years was converted to a public access cinema, *The Astra*.

The stylistic differences between Type Buildings of different RAF Expansion Periods, for example, the use of pitched or flat roofs, use of metal Crittall windows with horizontal emphasis or painted timber sashes create an interesting contrast.

Further visual interest is derived from the use of camouflage techniques, for example, the tree planting and the use of deliberately darkened mortar and different coloured brickwork on buildings such as barrack blocks.

## 9.5 Means of Enclosure

By virtue of the campus style layout, the curtilage of individual buildings is not enclosed.

The airfield is only partially enclosed by hedgerows and scrub vegetation, which assists in enabling a visual relationship with the countryside beyond.

The technical base is enclosed by security fencing and largely screened from view from the highway by the mature planting within the site and by the hedgerows alongside the original, now closed, alignment of Skimmingdish Lane.

The entire domestic site is enclosed by security fencing with a dense hedgerow along the boundaries with Skimmingdish Lane and Buckingham Road, mature trees along the eastern boundary that allow some glimpses in to the site from Buckingham Road. Along the southern boundary however, there is no enclosure and open views are available of recent residential development at Bicester. The wedge of farm land is thus critical in preserving the setting of the conservation area in views from the south and south west.

The married airmen's quarters have front gardens enclosed by picket fencing and a variety of fencing to the rear. The officers' housing is noticeably more security conscious in that the current means of enclosure is close-boarded fencing.

## 9.6 Trees, Hedges and Open Spaces

The open flying field is the major feature on the site. Clearly it is the *raison d'être* of the entire development and its open aspect, the vistas across it from key vantage points and the functional relationship between the flying field and specific buildings are all critical to an appreciation of the character and appearance of the site.

The open grassed areas between buildings are one of the key factors contributing to the character and appearance of the site, particularly of the domestic site where it is well maintained due to the current use by the Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S). The technical site has a higher proportion of roads and hard-standings and the grassed areas are less well maintained as the site is not in use at present.

The trees planted on the domestic and technical sites to assist with camouflage are also important contributors to the special character and appearance of those areas and contrast with the open nature of the flying field. The predominant species are Birch, Horse Chestnut and Maple. An arboriculture survey (Unicorn Consultancy Ltd 1999) revealed that all the birch trees are over-mature and declining rapidly; the majority of the Horse Chestnuts are mature to over-mature and crown reduction has been carried out to a number of old specimens located along the main routes. Several trees are reported to have suffered root damage as a result of recent site works. The trees located at the perimeter of the sites effectively screen views in.



View north-west across the flying field from the Bomb Stores to the Technical Site



**Figure 11: Spatial Analysis**  
**Conservation Area Appraisal for RAF Bicester**

## 9.7 Character Zones

There are four main identifiable character zones within the site that largely reflect the division of function between the technical and domestic operations as well as seniority between officers and men. These are the flying field, the technical site, the domestic site and the married quarters.

### 9.7.1 The Flying Field

The flying field is bounded by Buckingham Road in the west, Stratton Audley Quarry in the north, open countryside in the east and Skimmingdish Lane in the south. The technical site abuts the south west corner and visually projects out into the open grassed area.

The grass flying field is a remarkable survival of its type, and particularly of the various phases of RAF Bicester up to 1939. Although the World War II expansion of the airfield with the perimeter dispersal system is now largely gone, extremely important fabric of the 1920s–1930s, bounded by a perimeter track of the World War 2 period, survives, together with early World War 2 defences and bomb stores. It is this inter-relationship, taken with the preservation of RAF Bicester as a whole which attaches a national, if not international significance to the flying field and its wider context.

There is little visual containment to the flying field, except for small areas of scrub woodland adjacent to the quarry in the north, around the bomb stores in the east and adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane in the south. The flying field therefore has a strong



Figure 12: Character Zones

relationship with the open countryside beyond in an arc from the north east through east to south east. Long distance views are afforded to Muswell Hill in the south east and there are middle distance views of large scale warehousing off Launton Road, Bicester. The perimeter track effectively defines the extent of the flying field on the ground

The key characteristics of the flying field are its open aspect, the vistas across it from key vantage points and the functional relationship between the flying field and specific buildings.

### 9.7.2 The Technical Site

The technical site is bounded by Buckingham Road and Skimmingdish Lane and projects into the flying field in a symmetrical manner.

This zone contains key buildings for operational use such as the hangars, guard room and parachute store.

The key characteristics of the technical site are the trident layout to the roadways, reinforced on the outer routes by avenue planting and the formality and symmetry afforded by the placing of the Aircraft Hangars and the Watch Office and Tower in particular. The central avenue of the trident road pattern creates a strong east – west axis from the western entrance to the flying field, the location of which is indicated by the Watch Office Tower, although the direct line of vision is partially interrupted by a six-bay Petrol Tanker Sheds (112).

The most prominent structures are the Aircraft Hangars (79,108, 113 and 137) because of their bulk and position in an arc against the flying field, the Water Tower (84) and the Watch Room and Tower (109) because of their height.

### 9.7.3 The Domestic Site

The domestic site is bounded by Skimmingdish Lane in the north, Buckingham Road in the east, farm land in the south west and married officers' quarters in the west.

The key characteristics of the domestic site are the open plan campus style layout of a formal manner, in particular the arrangement of the principal buildings around the parade ground. Each building sits in its own landscaped grounds and relates to others in a symmetrical manner. The tree planting is a major factor in contributing to the character and appearance of the area. In terms of detail, the homogeneity of each of the neo-classical architecture and the Modern Movement inspired architecture is clear and the contrast between the two styles adds interest.



Parade ground with the spacious layout of buildings around the perimeter

The south west boundary lacks tree planting and medium range views into the domestic site are available over the farmland from the Southwold Lane.

#### 9.7.4 The married airmen's quarters

The first two phases of married airmen's quarters were constructed to the west of the domestic site, for officers and their families, and to the north of Skimmingdish Lane.

The Married Quarters Housing includes nos. 1-23 Turnpike Road, Nos. 11-49 Skimmingdish Lane, Officers housing at Barnsfield Close and Paynes End and the Officers Mess (now Cherwood House Nursing Home) Buckingham Road. The boundaries to the zones are defined by main and subsidiary roads. With the exception of Cherwood House, which is secluded by vegetation, the main contribution these blocks of housing make, apart from stylistic differences, mentioned elsewhere, are the visual links to and from the main domestic and technical sites. The L-shape block of housing at the junction of Skimmingdish Lane and the Buckingham Road inspired by the Garden City Movements provide a strong visual presence and are prominent from the technical site and airfield.

The key characteristics of the officers' housing are the spaciousness and enclosure, whereas the terraces are arranged in simple groups of up to six with little enclosure. Further airmen's housing has been built to the north and west but is excluded from the potential Conservation Area as it post dates the period of specific interest.

## 10. Problems, pressures and capacity to change

### 10.1 Problems/pressures

1. The Technical Site and Flying Field are surplus to the requirements of the Ministry of Defence and the site is to be sold in the foreseeable future.
2. The future of the Domestic Site is uncertain at the time of writing due to the possible relocation of DE&S.
3. The challenge of devising a new non-military use for the site should not be under-estimated. Any reuse scheme will need to deliver heritage conservation of the site.
4. There is potential tension between preserving the essential military character of the site (highly functional, uniformity and order) and conversion to a civilian site where diversity, domesticity and decoration are often desired.
5. Due to the poor state of repair of buildings within the Technical Site, the complexity of the reuse and restoration issues and the anticipated cost of successfully achieving these goals, a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the site is very much needed. This should be a comprehensive document which covers the issues of funding, reuse, restoration and maintenance. To ensure that the LPA can successfully fulfil its duty of care to the built heritage, the production of a CMP will be an absolute requirement integral to the granting of any consents to develop or restore the site.



Building 224 - Bomb Stores - Scheduled Ancient Monument

6. The integrity, appearance and setting of the listed buildings and SAMs within the site may be compromised; any reuse of the existing buildings must safeguard the identified character and appearance of these historic structures whilst simultaneously preserving the underlying character of the site.

## 10.2 Capacity for Change

7. The heritage interest of the site is a product of its layout and the visual and functional relations between the different sectors. The significance of the flying field would be fundamentally compromised if it were to be developed.
  8. The siting of any development outside the conservation area but visible from it should respect the open visual relationships with the adjacent countryside, the setting of the conservation area.
1. Conservation area designation is about identifying an area, 'the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' (PPG15). The holistic character of RAF Bicester is contributed to by the 'mix' of buildings, layout and function within different areas within the site. The character of these areas is composed of the contributions made by the buildings and structures, their disposition and the spaces between buildings. Reuse, restoration and development within the site should be guided by the principles set out in PPG15. There should be a general presumption in favour of retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area.
  2. The history of the RAF and World War II are now subjects that arouse public interest. The location, nature and layout of the site means that there is potential for sensitive re-use.
  3. The site contains an extended area of unimproved grassland. There is an opportunity to ensure both ecological and historic conservation with minimal intervention and to mutual benefits.
  4. Many of the important buildings are domestic in scale and architectural style and therefore may lend themselves as suitable for sensitive re-use.
  5. Many of the buildings and structures within the site are listed. In order to preserve the setting and significance of these buildings, reuse or development should be judged against the tests set out in PPG15. In the case of RAF Bicester the campus nature of the site, the dispersal and utilitarian nature the buildings are all integral to the historic significance of the site.
6. The views across the site are integral to the historic function as a military airfield. The capacity of the site to absorb development without significant visual impact within the site as well as on the surrounding landscape must be measured against government guidance, PPG15, as well as the Urban Capacity Report (2003), the conclusions of which are presented in Appendix 3.
  7. The Domestic and Technical Sites both have a campus-style layout which is integral to their historic and functional significance. The capacity of these areas to absorb additional development without compromising the historic and architectural integrity of the site needs to be measured against government guidance, PPG15, as well as the Urban Capacity Report (2003), the conclusions of which are presented in Appendix 3.
  8. There is significant pressure for housing development within Oxfordshire; although not a pressure specific to RAF Bicester alone, this is a real pressure which needs to be acknowledged. In a recent paper to the Council Executive on 4 August 2008 on the potential directions of growth and strategic sites, the site at RAF Bicester was not identified as a potential site. There will be a consultation paper issued on 29 September 2008.

### 10.3 Preservation

#### Aspects of the site identified as essential and requiring preservation:

1. Scheduled structures and buildings (identified on Figures 9 & 10 and listed in Annex 1).
2. Listed buildings of architectural or historic interest (identified on Figures 8 & 9 and listed in Annex 1).
3. Non-listed buildings of regional/local significance that have been identified as making a positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (identified on Figures 8,9 & 10 and listed at Annex 1).
4. The trident layout of roads within the technical site, including the key views along the main axis and over the flying field as identified on Figures 9 & 11.
5. The open campus layout and spacious setting for individual buildings and the parade ground within the domestic site.
6. The open nature of the flying field, free of structures or trees and shrubs.
7. The views across the flying field particularly from the control tower, the hangars and the pill boxes.
8. The bomb stores, pill boxes and seagull trenches.
9. The views of the bomb stores and the defence site in the south from the technical base and vice-versa.
10. The inter-visibility of the pill boxes and the seagull trenches.
11. The perimeter track.

12. The relationship of the flying field and the open countryside to the east.

13. The trees that are identified in the Arboriculture Survey (Unicorn Consultancy Services 1999) as suitable for retention.

### 10.4 Enhancement

There are a number of opportunities for enhancement within the site:

1. A comprehensive approach to the future use and management of the technical site is seen as essential to the preservation of the integrity of the site.
2. Uses that ensure the preservation and good maintenance of structures without compromising their integrity or special architectural or historic character will be encouraged. The ability to appreciate the original purpose of the building and its functional relationship with other structures must remain evident. Signage, servicing, storage and lighting etc. would need to be very carefully handled, the details of which should be covered by the management plan. Car parking should be grouped on the periphery of the site so as not to intrude into the setting of the buildings. There is likely to be more flexibility as to the uses appropriate for unlisted buildings. However, the impact of the development on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area would still be a material consideration in assessing their suitability. The aircraft hangars could be used for a mix of uses including employment, light

manufacturing, storage, theatre, gallery art workshops and sports purposes subject to management criteria.

3. A Conservation Management Plan including requirements for repair and maintenance would create the right context that encouraged owners and occupiers in preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the buildings. So far, draft guidelines have been produced, in consultation with the Council by English Heritage, the DE&S Caversfield and the Ministry of Defence for the Domestic site only. The document should give details of interior and exterior paintwork, camouflage, mortar mixes, window and door styles etc so that present and future maintenance programmes may work towards achieving architectural and historic integrity of design concepts. The guidance should also encompass site layout and roads, important views, open areas, tree planting, signage, lighting, parking, external storage, servicing. Historic documentation/archive research and historic paint analysis should provide a basis for the Management Guidelines. Alterations and extensions would only be acceptable if they were in accordance with the Conservation Management Plan.
4. The repair of the built fabric and reinstatement of lost features, such as the camera obscura.
5. The Technical and Domestic Sites have been closed to the general public for their entire existence. There is significant local

interest and pride in the site that gave Bicester its one-time name as a garrison town. Any future use of the Domestic and Technical Sites should make public access an option. Access to the Flying Field should be a priority.

6. Good maintenance of the flying field could be secured through, ideally, either its continued use for gliding or its use for casual recreation, although the erection of permanent structures, including lighting would be inappropriate.
7. Aviation use and public access currently happily co-exist; however extending access to the site should not prejudice aviation use nor aviation be used as an excuse to unduly limit public access. Access should be facilitated by suitable site interpretation, such as a visitor trail and a visitor centre; this would assist in the public's appreciation of the historic and architectural importance of the Conservation Area.
8. The acceptability of demolition of buildings and structures within the Conservation Area should be measured against the tests set out in government guidance, PPG15.
9. The acceptability of any new buildings within the Conservation Area needs be measured against government guidance PPG15 as well as the Urban Capacity Report (2003), the conclusions of which are presented in Appendix 3.
10. Tree surgery and selective felling of trees should be in accordance with the recommendations of an up-to-date arboriculture survey.



Building 137 - Failure of rainwater goods, water penetration - Grade II Listed



Building 82 - Holed roof, water damage, vegetation - Building of local importance



Building 144 - The subject of an arson attack Building of local importance

11. New tree and shrub planting should be undertaken within the domestic and technical site to supplement species mix and replace over-mature or dying species. This should not, however, interrupt key views or vistas.

### 10.5 General condition including buildings at risk.

Today the site is split into the Airfield site, including Building 113, the Technical site and the Domestic site, now known as DE&S Caversfield.

#### 10.5.1 The Airfield Site

The Airfield site is currently occupied by Windrushers Gliding Club for active flying. The club uses Building 113, the Watch Tower (109) and various other minor buildings for the storage of gliders and other equipment. Minimal maintenance has ensured that the hangar remains in a serviceable state, however this cannot be said for other structures on the airfield. The Control Tower (**109**) is identified as 'at risk', Category C and the flank walls of the revetments and other walls, which are part of the main bomb stores, are in serious and near danger of collapse due to the undermining activities of rabbits, soil erosion resulting in lack of support.

#### 10.5.2 The Technical Site

The Technical site generally has a rather down-at-heel appearance; an impression not assisted by the boarding up of the majority of the buildings. The majority of the buildings on the Technical site can be described as 'at risk' due to vandalism and a lack of maintenance. Water ingress has been a

major problem; rainwater drainage systems have not been maintained leading to blockage, water over-flow and brick erosion; broken windows and slipped roof slates have let in both weather and wildlife. The following buildings have been identified as 'at risk':

Buildings 79 and 137 (Type A hangars)  
Category A

Building 87 (Fire Party House) Category C

Building 89 (Guard and Fire Party House)  
Category C

Building 90 (Main Stores) Category A

Building 92 (Parachute Store) Category A

Building 96 (Lubricant Store) Category A

Building 99 (Main Workshops) Category A

Building 103 (Link Trainer) Category A

Building 108 (Type C hangar) Category E

Building 109 (Watch Office and Tower)  
Category C

Building 123 (Lecture Rooms and Armoury)  
Category C

Buildings 129, 130 and 131 (Motor  
Transport Sheds) Category A

Building 135 (Special Repair Bay Shed)  
Category C

Building 144 (Works Service) which has  
been gutted by fire due to acts of  
vandalism and therefore should also be  
identified as Category A.

Buildings 146 and 147 (Station Offices and  
Operations Block) Category A

### 10.5.3 The Domestic Site

Within the Domestic site the majority of buildings have been renovated. This work whilst undertaken with good intention, unfortunately has not always been done to an historically accurate standard - pointing of brickwork being a particular issue - however, for the most part the condition of the buildings could be described as excellent. There has also been some additions to the outsides of buildings, replacement of window casements and alteration to the original interiors which have affected their historic interest to some degree.

## 11. Management Proposals

### 11.1 Policy context

The 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas. In line with English Heritage guidance (2005) Conservation Management Proposals are to be published as part of the process of area designation or review. They aim is to provide guidance through policy statements to assist in the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area.

The main threat to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is its redundancy; finding a suitable use for the Technical site soon so that the cumulative impact of neglect and disrepair can be addressed is a matter of some urgency. Similarly, should the Domestic site become vacant then a new use which retains the open layout of the site and reuses the buildings without major alteration becomes imperative. Given the acknowledged national significance of the RAF Bicester station, Cherwell District Council will resist any proposed development for the site which may compromise the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of the listed buildings.

The aim of management proposals is not to petrify the site at some given point in history but to ensure that any changes that may be proposed, commensurate with reuse, are (1) sympathetic to the individual buildings, sympathetic to the layout and landscaping of the site and (2) overall enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The principal policies covering alterations and development of the historic built environment are given in Appendix 2.

### 11.2 Management Plan

Any consent for new use will require a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan to be drawn up for the relevant sections of the site; this is to ensure its successful restoration and reuse.

A comprehensive plan would cover:

- Purpose and context
- Funding
- Re-use
- Restoration and maintenance
- Implementation

And once agreed with the LPA would be attached to any planning consents by legal agreement.

### 11.3 Generic Guidance

The Council will:

1. Encourage a new use for the site that is commensurate with Government guidance (PPG15) and the findings of consultant reports for the site.
2. Development within the conservation area, should be in line with Government guidance (PPG15) and the findings of consultants' reports. However, should a proposal for individual building replacement be presented then it is anticipated that the scale, massing, proportions and height of any new building will reflect those of the existing built environment of the immediate context or of the wider conservation area context.
3. Promote a policy of repair rather than replacement of traditional architectural details. Where repairs are not feasible then the promotion of bespoke sympathetic replacement should be encouraged. This is particularly the case for windows when sympathetic refenestration is important in preserving the appearance of the building in the design and materials.
4. Actively promote the use of appropriate building and roofing materials (i.e. red brick and Welsh slate) in all construction, extension or repair work.
5. Actively promote the retention of buildings identified as being of local historic or architectural interest both within and outside the conservation area.
6. Acknowledge the importance of unlisted buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. This identification (see Appendix 1) is to be used as a material consideration to be taken into account with other considerations when determining planning applications that would affect such buildings. All other things being equal, the conversion of old buildings of local interest is preferable to the demolition and redevelopment of sites.
7. Strive to ensure that the conversion of redundant buildings to alternative uses should be achieved with minimal intervention and without the destruction of original character. Features and equipment pertinent to the building's original function (e.g. camera obscura, parachute hangings, wall art) where they exist should be retained as part of any conversion (English Heritage (2006)).

#### **11.4 Strategies for the enhancement and management of buildings**

The Council will:

1. Encourage appropriate re-use of empty buildings.
2. Encourage a general level of good maintenance of properties.
3. Actively promote the retention of the traditional appearance of the officers' and airmen's housing associated with the defence station and included within the conservation area boundary.
4. Encourage sympathetic refenestration where this is necessary.
5. Promote tradition styles of pointing. The type of pointing in brickwork is integral to the appearance of the wall or structure. It is therefore of great importance that only appropriate pointing is used in this work; repointing work should be discrete to the point of being inseparable from the original. 'Ribbon' pointing and similar is considered a totally inappropriate style of pointing for this site.
6. Require satellite dishes to be located to minimise their visual impact.
7. Require solar panels and other 'bolt-on' new technologies to be located to minimise their visual impact.
8. Discourage the use of uPVC in the construction of windows, doors and conservatories of unlisted buildings within the conservation area.
9. Discourage disfiguring alterations such as unsympathetic extensions, altering the dimensions of window openings and the removal of chimneys.
10. Promote a design solution that enables service areas to be discretely screened for dwellings and commercial buildings.
11. Promote the accommodation of ramps within the building for wheelchair users, rather than on the exterior within the public realm.
12. Encourage the sympathetic location of both amenity and private security lighting to limit light 'pollution'. The material and design of the fitting should also be considered.

#### **11.5 Strategies for the management and protection of important green spaces**

The Council will:

1. Promote the retention of significant open spaces such as the flying field and parade ground, free of inappropriate tree and shrub-planting and buildings.
2. Promote the retention of the 'campus' character of the Domestic and Technical Sites.
3. Promote the retention of the open character of the trident layout within the Technical Site, loosely framed by trees and buildings well set back.
4. Promote positive management of vegetation. Camouflage planting is now mature or over-mature and a strategy for replacement is required. Planting of exotic imports or inappropriate varieties, such as Leylandii, will not be acceptable,
5. Promote the retention of overfly areas adjacent to the conservation area, where over-development would prejudice the continued use of the Flying Field for aviation use.
6. Encourage the retention of front gardens and walls in the airmen's housing area.

## Appendix 1: Glossary of Buildings

### A1.1 Summary of key buildings at RAF Bicester

#### A1.1.1 Domestic site, now occupied by Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S)

*Building 16 (Officers' Mess and Quarters)*  
1926, planned according to the principles of dispersal and sited at the north end of the site. It became the Sergeants' Mess and Quarters after the construction of a new mess (Cherwood House, Buckingham Road) in 1939. Grade II listed.

*Building 20 (Dining Room and Institute)*  
1939, one of a group built as part of Scheme M and designed by Air Ministry architect J.H. Binge in a consciously modern style. Grade II listed.

*Building 22 (Central Heating Plant)*  
1939, one of a group built as part of Scheme M and designed by Air Ministry architect J.H. Binge in a consciously modern style. Grade II listed.

*Buildings 23 and 25 (Type H Barracks Blocks)*  
1939, one of a group built as part of Scheme M and designed by Air Ministry architect J.H. Binge in a consciously modern style. Grade II listed.

*Buildings 29, 42, 35 and 36 (Barracks Blocks)*  
Neo-Georgian group, Buildings 35 and 36 built around the parade ground in 1927 and Buildings 29 and 42 - set parallel and to rear of each block - unusually built in matching style in 1937. Grade II listed.

*Building 28 (Sergeant Pilots' Quarters)*  
1933, extended 1935. Built in association with Building 31.

*Building 31 (Sergeants' Mess)*  
1926 recreation and mess facilities, extended 1935 and sited to NE corner of the parade ground. Became WRAF mess after construction of new Dining Room and Institute (Building 20) in 1939. Grade II listed.

*Building 33 (Barrack block)*  
1934, a single-storey block conforming in style and plan to the 1920s barracks on the site. Grade II listed.

*Building 47 (Ration and Adjutant Stores)*  
1926, a simple gabled block with an open verandah sited at the south end of the parade ground. Grade II listed.

*Building 48 (Dining Room and Cookhouse)*  
1926, sited at the SE corner of the parade ground and extended in 1938 so that the cookhouse could serve 3 dining areas for 192 airmen. Grade II listed.

*Cherwood House, Buckingham Road*  
Built 1939, this is a substantially complete example of a typical officers' mess and quarters design of the post-1934 Expansion Period.

#### A1.1.2 Technical Site

*Buildings 79 and 137 (Type A hangars)*  
Two of the projected six were completed in 1926/7. The dimensions of the A-type shed, the standard hangar type for Trenchard's Home Defence Expansion Scheme, designed in 1924 and of which 34 examples were built on 17 sites, were based on the need to accommodate the RAF's largest projected twin-engined bomber - the De Havilland DH9A. Its length of 249 feet (75.9m) and span of 122 feet 5 inches (37.3 m), the result of discussion in November 1923 between the Aerodrome Board and the Directorate of Works and Buildings in which each hangar was envisaged to accommodate 12 machines. Grade II listed.

*Buildings 108 and 113 (Type C hangars)*  
The Type C, of which 146 sheds were built on 72 sites, was the standard hangar of the post-1934 expansion scheme: it was designed with a span of 150 feet (45.7m) and a length of 300 feet (91.4m). Although subjected to some loss of original detail, these form a prominent part of the site as viewed from the flying field. Grade II listed.

*Building 109 (Watch Office and Tower)*  
1938, to 1934 type design and replacing an earlier watch office of 1927. Located at the end of the main axis through the site from the guardhouse its construction reflected Air Ministry policy on controlled movement on the flying field in the second half of the 1930s. The building is listed next to the Signals Square. Grade II listed.

*Building 82 (Power House)*

1926, for the supply of electric power to the site and sited close to the water tower. This building together with the borehole and Building 86 form a cluster.

*Building 84 (Water Tower)*

1926, built of reinforced concrete and 50-foot high, for the supply of water to the entire site. A prominent feature.

*Building 87 (Fire Party House)*

1938. This replaced the fire-party house attached to the Guardhouse of 1926. The architectural treatment is consistent with the 1920s buildings on the base. Grade II listed.

*Building 89 (Guard and Fire Party House)*

1926. A long rectangular building containing guardhouse and office, with a bell turret centred over the unenclosed veranda to the front and with cells and a walled exercise yard to the rear. It is prominently sited at the main gate, facing the Station Offices (147) across a main avenue bisecting the site, and leading to the hangars and flying field. Grade II listed.

*Building 90 (Main Stores)*

1926, prominently sited on the main avenue bisecting the site. Grade II listed.

*Building 92 (Parachute Store)*

1926, built with an open louvred space for drying fabric separated by an isolating lobby in order to reduce dust travelling in from outside. Grade II listed.

*Building 96 (Lubricant Store)*

1926, for oil and liquids sited close to one of the A-type hangars (79) and accessed by a loading platform to the front. Grade II listed.

*Building 99 (Main Workshops)*

1926, prominently sited on the main avenue bisecting the site. Workshop for airframe and engine repairs, welders' bay and fabric-workers' shop. Grade II listed.

*Building 101 (Spotlight (Turret) Trainer)*

This accommodated a target trainer with dummy guns and screen onto which an image of enemy aircraft was projected. Although only a simple steel frame clad in corrugated asbestos, this survives as the clearest surviving evidence of Bicester's wartime use as an Operational Training Unit - of which gunnery training was a key element. It only merits statutory protection within the context of a key site such as Bicester, and no other examples of WWII temporary fabric of nature have been identified elsewhere.

*Building 102 (Engine Test House)*

1926, built with three cells for testing aircraft engines and clearly relating to the projected 3-squadron for which Bicester was originally intended.

*Building 103 (Link Trainer)*

1939, built for the training of pilots in instrument flying and anticipating the site's wartime use. Grade II listed.

*Building 123 (Lecture Rooms and Armoury)*

1926, prominently sited on the main avenue bisecting the site. A cross-wing added 1936 for a new photographic laboratory above lecture rooms and workshops. Grade II listed.

*Buildings 129, 130 and 131 (Motor Transport Sheds)*

Two ranges of 1927 facing a wide manoeuvring apron, complemented by an additional range of 1936/7 to provide a 3-sided yard. Grade II listed.

*Building 135 (Special Repair Bay Shed)*

1938, built to augment the MT section and articulated by concrete columns with original half-glazed folding doors. Grade II listed.

*Buildings 146 and 147 (Station Offices and Operations Block)*

1926. Sited at the main gate, facing the guardhouse across the main avenue, this is a well-preserved example of a configuration typical of bomber stations in the inter-war period. Grade II listed.

**A1.2 The following buildings are not listed but make a positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the conservation area.**

**A1.2.1 Domestic Site**

*Building 19 (Guardhouse)*

Much altered, but still remains as a key component at the entrance to the domestic site

*Building 24 (Intake Sub-Station)*

1939, transformed the incoming electrical supply into an Air Ministry supply for the base

*Buildings 44 and 45 (Ambulance Shed and Mortuary)*

*Building 14 (Squash Court)*

Built c1930, and typically sited close to the officers' mess (Building 16)

**A1.2.2 Technical Site**

*Building 93 (Power House)*

1938 design, completed 1940, surrounded by brick blast wall. Built as a Stand-by Set House in case the main supply should fail.

*Buildings 94, 105, 112, 116 and 118 (Petrol Tanker Sheds)*

Prior to the post-1934 Expansion Period, the method of refuelling aircraft was to taxi aircraft to the Aviation Petrol Installation where they were refuelled. After 1934, the the RAF's mobile tanker system of refuelling aircraft became the standard practice. To house the many petrol tankers required, a range of Petrol Tanker Sheds were designed for all Expansion Period stations, sited close to the hangar aprons. These are brick-walled buildings with flat concrete roofs.

*Buildings 100 and 203 (Technical Latrines)*

1926, of which Building 203 is the most complete with its slate roof and lantern light..

*Building 104 (Meteorological Section Offices)*

A 1939 design, built of 'temporary brick' characteristic of WWII airfield architecture.

*Buildings 107 and 114 (Latrines)*

1937, brick and flat-roofed structures sited next to the C hangars.

*Building 97 (Inflammable Store)*

1926, sited close to Building 96 and for the storage of paint and other inflammables.

*Building 81 (Reservoir)*

1924 design, part of a group with the water tower and power house (Buildings 82 and 84)

*Building 119 (FFMT Shed)*

1940 garage for fire-fighting vehicles, of steel-frame construction with brick at the gable ends.

*Building 143 (Gas Detention Centre)*

1938, for the storage of gas detection and decontamination equipment. Brick with flat concrete roof.

*Building 144 (Works Services Building)*

1927 offices, fitters' shop and stores for the station's Clerk of Works.

*Building 202 (Hucks Starter Shelter)*

1929, a small weatherboarded building for the station's fire tender and aero-engine starter vehicles.

**A1.3 Scheduled structures**

**Airfield Defences and Bomb Stores**

A small number of these buildings and structures have been scheduled within the Monuments Protection Programme (see p53).

## A1.4 List of building numbers

### A1.4.1 Domestic site

- 14. Squash racquets court
- 16. Officers' mess and quarters
- 19. Ration store
- 20. Dining room and institute
- 22. Central heating Station
- 23. Type H Barrack Block
- 24. Intake Sub-station
- 25. Type H Barrack Block
- 28. Sergeant Pilot's Mess
- 29. Type E Barrack Block
- 31 Sergeants' Mess
- 32. Institute
- 33. Barrack Block
- 34. Fire Pool Hut
- 35. Type E Barrack Block
- 36. Type E Barrack Block
- 42. Type E Barrack Block
- 43. Annex to Station Sick Quarters
- 44. Mortuary
- 45. Ambulance Garage
- 46. Station Sick Quarters
- 47. Ration Store
- 48. Dining Room and Cookhouse
- 50. Decontamination Centre
- 204. Garages

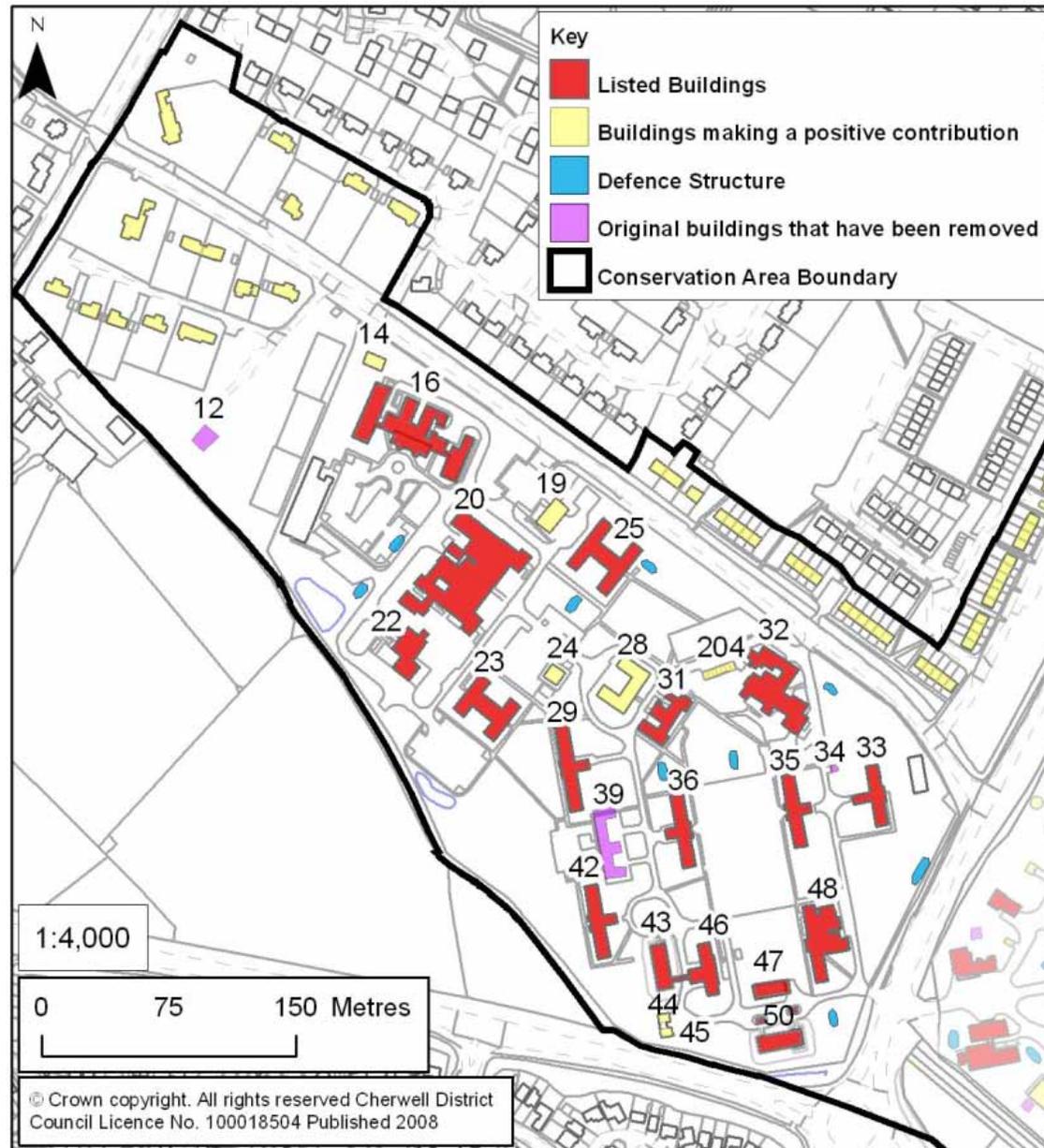


Figure 13: Domestic site

#### **A1.4.2 The technical site (P Francis)**

79. Type A Aeroplane Shed  
81. Reservoir  
82. Power House  
84. High Level Water Tank  
86. Bore Hole Pump House  
87. Fire Party House  
88. Fire Party Hut  
89. Guard and Fire Party House  
90. Main Stores  
92. Parachute Store  
93. Power House  
94. Petrol Tanker Shed  
96. Lubricant Store  
97. Inflammable Store  
99. Main Workshops  
100. Technical Latrine  
101. Spotlight (Turret) Trainer  
102. Engine Test House  
103. Link Trainer  
104. Meteorological section  
105. Petrol Tanker Shed  
106. Pyrotechnic Store  
107. Technical Latrine  
108. Type C Aircraft Shed  
109. Watch Office with Tower  
111. Fire Tender House  
112. Fuel Tanker Shed  
113. Type C Aircraft Shed  
114. Technical Latrine~  
116. Petrol Tanker Shed

118. Petrol Tanker Shed with Compressor  
119. FFMT Shed  
121. Fire tender and Hucks Starter Shelter  
122. Small Arms Ammunition Store  
123. Station Armoury and Lecture Rooms  
126. Pyrotechnic Store  
129. Protected Long Bay  
130. Motor transport Shed  
131. Motor transport Shed  
133. Articulated Trailer Shed  
134. Motor Transport Sheds  
135. Special Repair Shed  
136. Petrol Tanker Shed  
137. Type A Aeroplane Shed  
138. Coal Yard  
139 & 304. Nissan Huts  
140. Works Squadron Hut  
142. Works Service Building  
143. Gas Defence Centre  
144. Works Services Building  
146. Operations Block  
147. Station Offices  
203. Technical Latrine  
305. Timber Hut

#### **Defence Structures**

A Air-Raid Shelter  
B Air-Raid Shelter  
C Air-Raid Shelter  
D Air-Raid Shelter  
E Blast Shelter  
F Air-Raid Shelter  
G Air-Raid Shelter  
H Defended Air-Raid Shelter  
I Defended Air-Raid Shelter  
J Pill Box  
K Signals Square  
L Airfield Code Letters

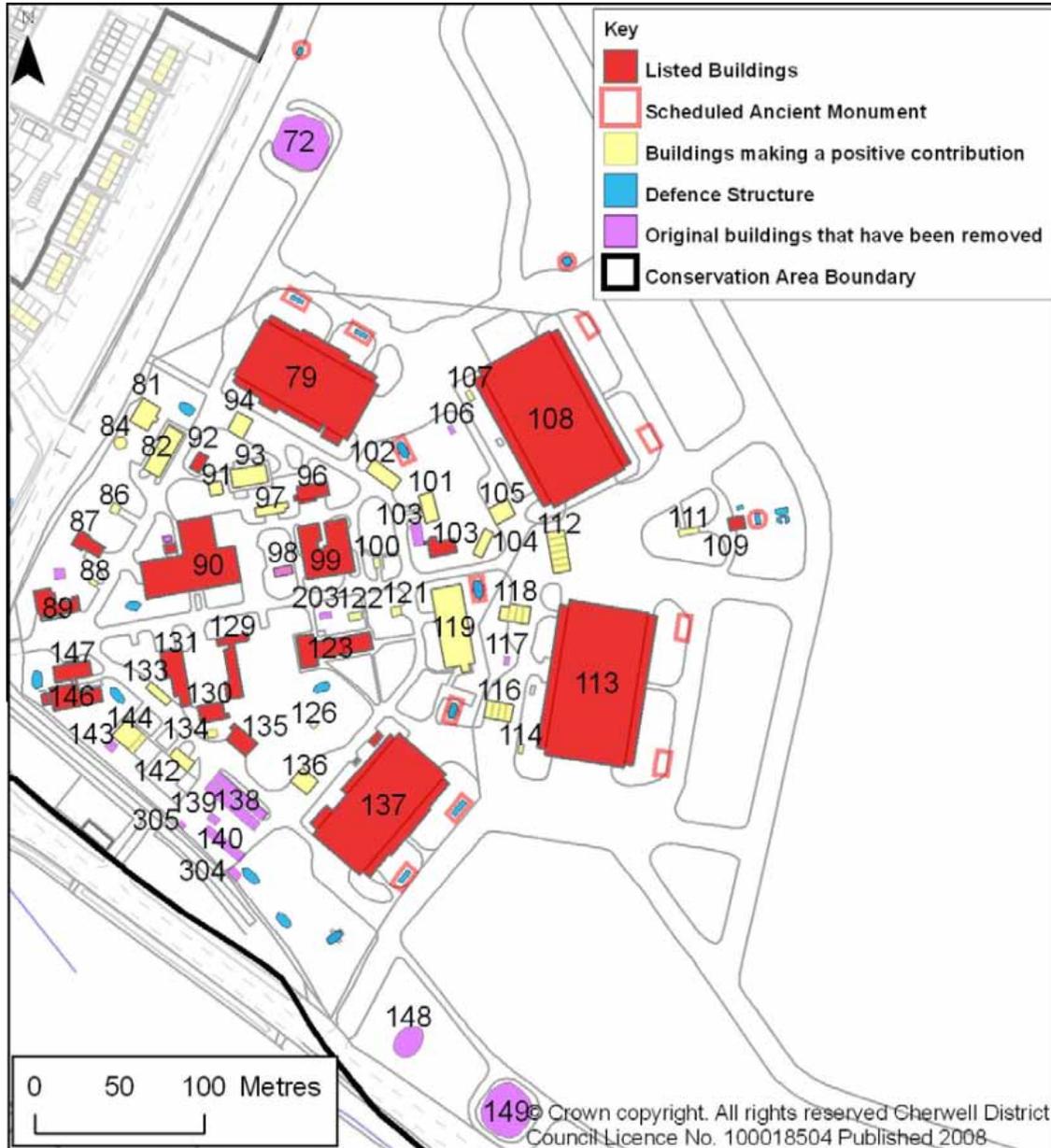


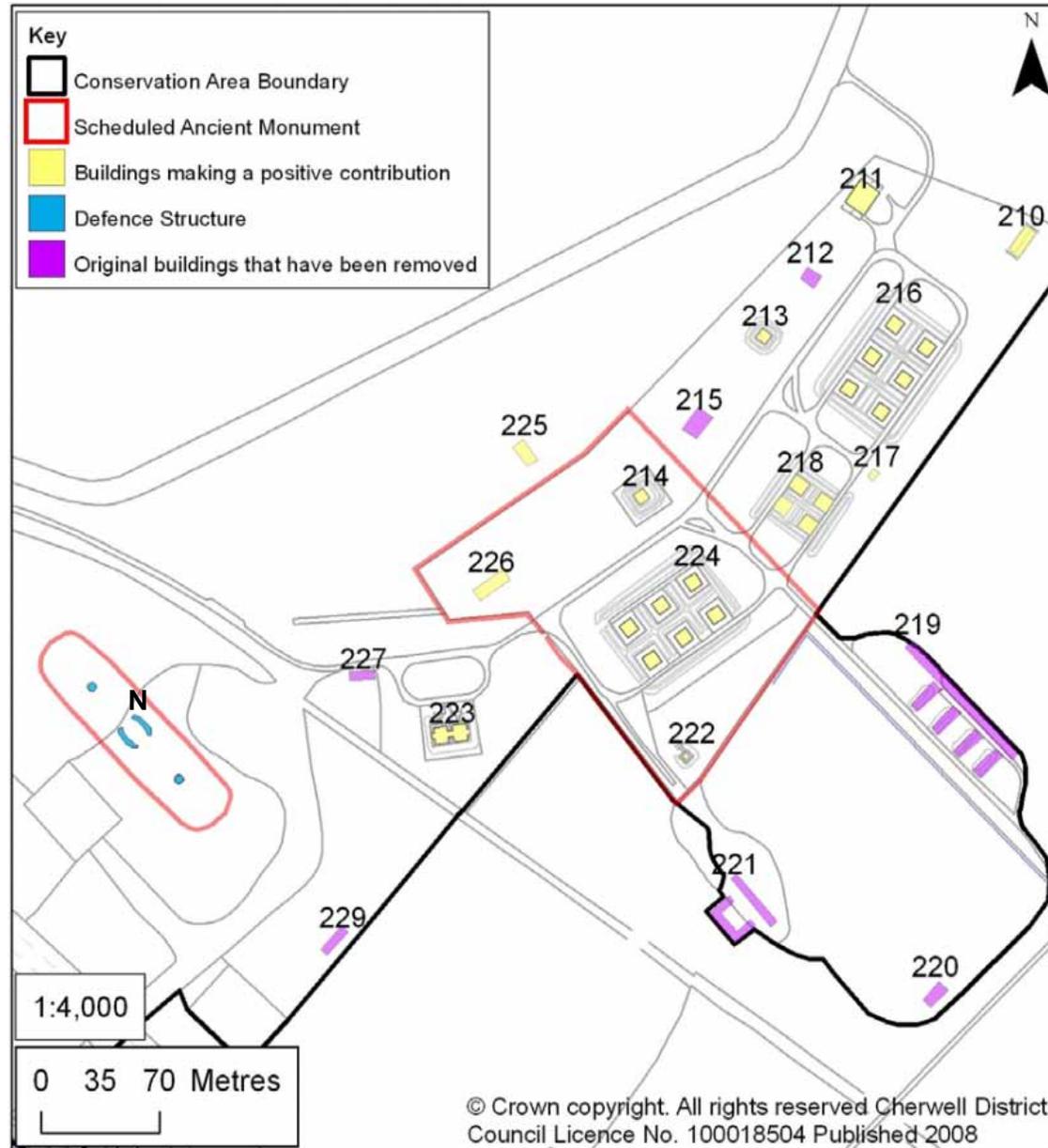
Figure 14: Technical Site

### A1.4.3 Bomb Stores

- 210. Fusing Point Building
- 211. SAA Stores
- 212. 2 Pounder SAA Store
- 213. Component Store
- 214. Component Store
- 216. Bomb Store
- 218. Fused and Spare bomb Store
- 220. Pyrotechnic Store
- 221. Incendiary Store
- 222. Ammo Store Group XII
- 223. Incendiary Bomb Store
- 224. Bomb Store
- 225. Fusing Point Building
- 226. Fusing Point Building
- 229. Fusing Point Building

#### Defence Structures

N. Mushroom Pillboxes and Seagull Trenches



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Figure 15: Bomb Stores

### A1.5 List of buildings at risk

Buildings 79 and 137 (Type A hangars)  
Category A

Building 87 (Fire Party House) Category C

Building 89 (Guard and Fire Party House)  
Category C

Building 90 (Main Stores) Category A

Building 92 (Parachute Store) Category A

Building 96 (Lubricant Store) Category A

Building 99 (Main Workshops) Category A

Building 103 (Link Trainer) Category A

Building 108 (Type C hangar) Category E

Building 109 (Watch Office and Tower)  
Category C

Building 123 (Lecture Rooms and Armoury)  
Category C

Buildings 129, 130 and 131 (Motor Transport  
Sheds) Category A

Building 135 (Special Repair Bay Shed)  
Category C

Building 144 (Works Service) Category A

Buildings 146 and 147 (Station Offices and  
Operations Block) Category A

The categories of risk are defined as:

- A Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed.
- B Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; solution agreed but not yet implemented.
- C Slow decay; no solution agreed.
- D Slow decay; solution agreed but not yet implemented.
- E Under repair or in fair to good repair, but no user identified; or under threat of vacancy with no obvious new user (applicable only to buildings capable of beneficial use).
- F Repair scheme in progress and (where applicable) end use or user identified; functionally redundant buildings with new use agreed but not yet implemented.

## Appendix 2: Policy

There are a number of policy documents which contain policies pertaining to the historic built environment. The main policies are summarised in this section. Other policies of a more general nature are also of some relevance, these are not listed here but can be found elsewhere in the specific documents mentioned below.

### A2.1 Oxfordshire structure plan 2016

**EN6** There will be a presumption in favour of preserving *in situ* nationally and internationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings. Development affecting other archaeological remains should include measures to secure their preservation in situ or where this is not feasible, their recording or removal to another site.

### A2.2 Cherwell local plan 1996

**H21** Within settlements the conversion of suitable buildings to dwellings will be favourably considered unless conversion to a residential use would be detrimental to the special character and interest of a building of architectural and historic significance. In all instances proposals will be subject to the other policies in this plan.

**C10** Development which would have a detrimental effect upon the character and appearance of historic landscapes, parks and gardens and battlefields and their settings will normally be resisted.

**C18** In determining an application for listed building consent the council will have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. The council will normally only approve internal and external alterations or extensions to a listed building which are minor and sympathetic to the architectural and historic character of the building.

**C21** Sympathetic consideration will be given to proposals for the re-use of an unused listed building provided the use is compatible with its character, architectural integrity and setting and does not conflict with other policies. In exceptional circumstances other policies may be set aside in order to secure the retention and re-use of such a building.

**C23** There will be a presumption in favour of retaining buildings, walls, trees or other features which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area.

**C25** In considering proposals for development which would affect the site or setting of a scheduled ancient monument, other nationally important archaeological sites and monuments of special local importance, the council will have regard to the desirability of maintaining its overall historic character, including its protection, enhancement and preservation where appropriate.

**C30** Design control will be exercised to ensure: (i) that new housing development is compatible with the appearance, character, layout, scale and density of existing dwellings in the vicinity; (ii) that any proposal to extend an existing dwelling (in cases where planning permission is required) is compatible with the scale of the existing dwelling, its curtilage and the character of the street scene; (iii) that new housing development or any proposal for the extension (in cases where planning permission is required) or conversion of an existing dwelling provides standards of amenity and privacy acceptable to the local planning authority.

### A2.3 Non-statutory Cherwell local plan 2011

**EN34** the council will seek to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the landscape through the control of development. proposals will not be permitted if they would: (i) cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside; (ii) cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography; (iii) be inconsistent with local character; (iv) harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features; (v) harm the historic value of the landscape.

**EN35** The Council will seek to retain woodlands, trees, hedges, ponds, walls and any other features which are important to the character or appearance of the local landscape as a result of their ecological, historic or amenity value. Proposals which would result in the loss of such features will not be permitted unless their loss can be justified by appropriate mitigation and/or compensatory measures to the satisfaction of the council.

**EN39** Development should preserve listed buildings, their features and settings, and preserve or enhance the character or appearance of designated conservation areas, as defined on the proposals map. Development that conflicts with these objectives will not be permitted.

**EN40** In a conservation area or an area that makes an important contribution to its setting planning control will be exercised to ensure, inter alia, that the character or appearance of the area so designated is preserved or enhanced. There will be a presumption in

favour of retaining buildings, walls, trees or other features which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area. a new development should understand and respect the sense of place and architectural language of the existing but should seek to avoid pastiche development except where this is shown to be clearly the most appropriate.

**EN42** Sympathetic consideration will be given to proposals for the change of use of a listed building, provided that the new use minimises damage to the character, fabric, interior or setting of the building, and does not adversely affect the reasons for its statutory listing.

**EN43** proposals that would result in the total or substantial demolition of a listed building, or any significant part of it, will not be permitted in the absence of clear and convincing evidence that the market testing set out in ppg15 paragraphs 3.16 to 3.19 has been thoroughly followed with no success.

**EN44** Special care will be taken to ensure that development that is situated within the setting of a listed building respects the architectural and historic character of the building and its setting.

**EN45** Before determination of an application for planning permission requiring the alteration, extension or partial demolition of a listed building, applicants will be required to provide sufficient information to enable an assessment of the likely impact of the proposals on the special architectural or

historic interest of the structure, its setting or special features.

**EN45A** The inclusion of a building in a local list of buildings of architectural or historic interest adopted by the council for planning purposes will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications that would affect it.

**EN47** The Council will promote sustainability of the historic environment through conservation, protection and enhancement of the archaeological heritage and its interpretation and presentation to the public. In particular it will: (i) seek to ensure that scheduled ancient monuments and other unscheduled sites of national and regional importance and their settings are permanently preserved; (ii) ensure that development which could adversely affect sites, structures, landscapes or buildings of archaeological interest and their settings will require an assessment of the archaeological resource through a desk-top study, and where appropriate a field evaluation; (iii) not permit development that would adversely affect archaeological remains and their settings unless the applicant can demonstrate that the archaeological resource will be physically preserved in-situ, or a suitable strategy has been put forward to mitigate the impact of development proposals; (iv) ensure that where physical preservation in-situ is neither practical nor desirable and sites are not scheduled or of national importance, the developer will be responsible for making appropriate provision for a programme of archaeological

## Appendix 3: RAF Bicester, Oxfordshire: Urban Capacity Study. CgMs.

### A3.1 Assessment of Development Potential.

investigation, recording, analysis and publication that will ensure the site is preserved by record prior to destruction. Such measures will be secured either by a planning agreement or by a suitable planning condition

**EN48** Development that would damage the character, appearance, setting or features of designed historic landscapes (parks and gardens) and battlefields will be refused.

**EN49A** In seeking the preservation and enhancement of the R.A.F. Bicester conservation area permission will be granted for: (i) proposals for the re-use of the buildings within the technical area shown on the proposals map INSET2, including proposals for adaptation or conversion, provided that they are set in the context of an agreed comprehensive plan and are sympathetic to the appearance and character of those buildings, their settings, the trident layout and the wider conservation area; (ii) proposals for the use of the open airfield for recreational purposes provided that such use would not conflict with or change its open, flat, and treeless landscape character and its visual relationship with the technical area and adjoining countryside; (iii) proposals that would be compatible with the ecological value present on the site.

**EN51** In considering applications for advertisements in conservation areas the council will pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.

#### Introduction

The project brief states that purpose of the study is to establish the capacity of the site to accommodate residential and related development. This exercise is undertaken below in relation to each of the main part of RAG Bicester, namely the flying field, the technical site, and the domestic site. The main emphasis on the section will be on the flying field and its adjacent technical site as defined in the brief study area, rather than the domestic sites on the other side of the A421. However, issues such as the relationship between these sites and the adjacent residential areas to the west of the A421, whether military or not, are clearly very relevant to the possible development capacity of the site.

Cherwell District Council's designation of the RAF Bicester conservation area (March 2002), and English Heritage's recommendation to list 39 buildings and to schedule a significant number of monuments on the site, have resulted in a presumption in favour of retaining the great majority of the buildings on the domestic and technical sites. In the case of the listed buildings this presumption arises from paragraph 3.3 of PPG 15, and the case of unlisted buildings, which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area, this presumption arises from paragraph 4.27 of the PPG.

The presumption in favour of the preservation of the buildings runs in parallel

with the duty on the local planning authority to give high priority to the preservation or enhancement of the conservation area (paragraph 4.14 of PPG15). In the case of the RAF Bicester conservation area this duty would extend to the protection of open spaces, tress, vistas and views which are characteristic features of the former air base, and to other details which make up its character and appearance.

The presumption in favour of preservation automatically places the emphasis on the viable and sustainable re-use of buildings, rather than on demolition and redevelopment. While the best use of a building may be the one for which it was designed and built (paragraph 3.10 of PPG15) this option is no longer available at

RAF Bicester. If there are alternative uses, which preserve the fabric, appearance and character of the former air base, these should be considered in preference to the option of demolition and wholesale redevelopment. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

#### Enabling development

The project brief refers in paragraph 2.5 (iv) to enabling development, and the relevant policy document on this subject is "Enabling development and the conservation of heritage assets" originally published by English Heritage in March 1999 and supplemented with a practical guide to

assessment in June 2001 (N.B. "heritage assets" include listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled ancient monuments). This statement applies only to development contrary to established planning policy. It does not apply to proposals to secure the future of historic assets that are in accordance with the statutory development plan and national policy.

Paragraph 1.2.1 of the English Heritage statement advises that:

*"The case for enabling development ultimately depends on demonstrating that the cost of repair (and, where appropriate, optimum beneficial use) plus other valid development costs... is greater than the value on completion. Since optimum uses, costs and values fluctuate over time, the case can only properly be considered in the context of a specific application, whose assertions should normally be tested by first offering the property on the open market."*

On this basis, the case for enabling development at RAF Bicester would appear to be premature, to say the least. The brief refers to enabling development "in addition to the re-use and/or adaptation of those buildings for new purposes," but it is quite clear that most of the important historic buildings on the site are capable of conversion to beneficial new uses with a minimum of repair or alteration. In more detail, the policy can be analysed as follows (with the seven criteria of the policy in bold and the response in relation to RAF Bicester in italics):

English Heritage believes that there should be a general presumption against enabling development which does not meet all of the following criteria:

1. The enabling development will not materially detract from the archaeological, architectural, historic or landscape interest of the asset, or materially harm its setting. *Development on the flying field, or development involving partial demolition of buildings within the technical site, or new-build between listed buildings on the technical site, would materially detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area, the setting of listed buildings, and the setting of scheduled ancient monuments. While this is a matter of fact and degree, and has not been tested by specific proposals, enabling development would be almost certain to cause some material harm.*
2. The proposal avoids detrimental fragmentation of management of the heritage asset. *Again, this is a matter of fact and degree (and some fragmentation of management may be inevitable in any case) but new development on the flying field, or within the technical area, would almost certainly result in fragmentation of management.*
3. The enabling development will secure the long term future of the heritage asset, and where applicable, its continued use for a sympathetic purpose. *Although the long term future of the technical area could be secured by enabling development on the flying field, this process would destroy the character and appearance of the flying field (rather than securing its long term future). There is no solution that would not cause significant harm to one part of the heritage asset or another.*
4. The problem arises from the inherent needs of the heritage asset, rather than the circumstances of the present owner or the purchase price paid. *This particular asset has "inherent needs," mainly to do with the preservation of the relationship between the close-knit technical site and the more open flying field. However, in themselves, the buildings on the technical site are in relatively good repair and could be re-used with minimal repair and alteration. It is open to question as to whether there is a "problem" that needs solving through enabling development at all.*
5. Financial assistance is not available from any other source. *We are not aware that any financial assistance has been sought in order to preserve the historic buildings at RAF Bicester, or that any case has been made for application for such assistance.*

6. It is demonstrated that the amount of enabling development is the minimum necessary to secure the future of the heritage asset, and that its form minimises disbenefits.  
*This seems to go against the grain of the "general presumption against enabling development" as set out by English Heritage. The key words are "necessary to secure the future of the heritage asset" - an objective which on present evidence can be achieved by straightforward conversion and re-use.*
7. The value of the survival or enhancement of the heritage asset outweighs the long-term cost to the community (i.e. the disbenefits) of providing the enabling development.  
*On present evidence the balance clearly suggests that the long term costs and disbenefits would outweigh the retention of the heritage asset, not least because of the damage that would be caused to the character, appearance and setting of the latter.*

On the basis of the above analysis we do not see any case for requiring enabling development in order to preserve historic buildings or areas at RAF Bicester at the present time. It should be noted that part 2 of the English Heritage document deals with measures to reduce the need for enabling development, and points out in paragraph 2.1 that:

*"If timely action to prevent or limit deterioration had been taken by the owner, or in default and where powers allow, the*

*planning authority, the conservation deficit, the need for subsidy, would either not have arisen or would have been much smaller."*

Fortunately, the current generally good preservation and condition of buildings at RAF Bicester means that this provision does not apply, and that there is no need for it to apply while the site is maintained and managed to at least the present level. Considering the responsible ownership and management of the site to date, it appears to us to be unlikely that enabling development will be required here in the future.

### **The Technical Site**

#### Re-use of buildings

Alternative uses have been suggested for the buildings at RAF Bicester, by Cherwell District Council (Appraisal, draft November 2000) and by Airfield Research Publishing (report commissioned by Cherwell District Council in 1996).

These uses include employment, light manufacturing, live-work units, cinema, theatre, gallery, sports, research and development, and offices. While there may be no specific proposals at present, the full range of possibilities was considered as part of the present study. An important part of this was the comment in Part 6 of the local planning authority's conservation area appraisal, that it is essential that a comprehensive approach is taken to the use and management of the technical base.

No demand study has been undertaken as part of this study and no costs for conversion

studied, but given the nature and character of the buildings, and the location of the site there may be very limited demand for certain uses.

A number of buildings would lend themselves to conversion to offices with little impact on their internal or external fabric, notably the station offices (Building 146), the guard house and fire party house (Buildings 87 and 89), and the station armoury and lecture rooms (Building 123). Other buildings could be converted to workshops or to office use with the insertion of additional floors (e.g. of mezzanine type) and, in some cases, additional windows. These include the two power houses and bore hole pump house (Buildings 82, 86, 93), the main workshops (Building 99), the lubricant store (Building 96) and the motor transport sheds (Buildings 129, 130, 131, 134). Major buildings that would not be suitable for office conversion include the four hangars, but here there are possible alternative uses for sport and leisure, light manufacturing or bulk storage.

On this basis it is possible to envisage a small employment park incorporating a mix of development including offices, light manufacture and storage, with sporting and leisure facilities on site. In all these considerations it would be important to consider access and highway matters as well as the likely parking demands for varying intensities of site use, because these could easily have adverse impacts on the site's character. Other permutations of this type of re-use are possible, with an element of live-work units in, for example, the station offices and guard house (Buildings 87, 89 and 146),

the two power houses and bore hole pump house (Buildings 82, 86, 93) and, possibly, the main workshops (Building 99).

The character and urban form of the majority of buildings on the Technical Site do not lend themselves to residential conversion without fundamental alterations to the buildings, which would probably be unacceptable in conservation terms. Exceptions to this include the Guardhouse (Bldg 89), Operations Buildings (Bldgs 146 and 147) and Station Armoury (Bldg 123), which may have potential for residential conversion. How such residential conversions would sit within the employment park concept has not been considered at this stage, nor have issues such as alterations to the curtilage and car parking.

#### Partial redevelopment involving selective demolition and new-build

There is very little land within the technical site which is either undeveloped or unplanted, and the combination of buildings (many of which are to be listed) and mature tree cover means there is little or no scope for development.

RAF Bicester's technical base is a campus with a 'trident' of roads radiating out from the entrance. These roads are linked by a radial road just inside the four hangars, which is heavily planted with mature trees that do much to soften the appearance of the technical site generally and the setting of the hangars in particular (Appendix 5, CgMs).

The central spine road runs from the main entrance to the control tower and originally

provided access to buildings associated with aircraft and motor transport. The buildings lining this road are varied in type and scale, with a relatively weak tree structure of birches. Any demolition and new build in this area would effectively destroy the heart of the technical base.

The northern access road, by contrast, is very well planted and there are few gaps in the mature tree cover. New build is not possible without tree felling. In addition, the majority of buildings lining this road are to be listed, so there is little opportunity for development without adverse impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of the listed buildings.

The southernmost road of the trident layout served the most utilitarian part of the technical site, containing the coal stores, other service buildings (some of which have been recently fire damaged) and the railway goods line. The avenue planting to this road is not as strong as that on the northern road but nevertheless forms a strong edge to the main core of the site.

The only area where a significant development opportunity exists lies to the south of the old line of Skimmingdish Lane (i.e. beyond the technical site boundary) where there is an area of previously used land running down to the new by-pass, which is now called Skimmingdish Lane. It may be that, with sensitive design, this area could accommodate some limited form of development without compromising the overall integrity of the technical site. Access

to this area could possibly be achieved via the existing access road, which serves the gliding club.

In summary, given the distribution of shortly to be listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, and mature tree planting (protected by the conservation area designation) across the site there is very limited opportunity for even partial redevelopment of the technical site. The only area where development may be acceptable is in the area between the old line of Skimmingdish Lane and the present by-pass. This would, of course, need to be of a design and scale appropriate to the retained buildings to the north.

#### Substantial redevelopment retaining listed/positive buildings only

For the reasons given above, and given the widespread distribution of shortly to be listed buildings, SAMs and trees across the site, it is not considered that substantial redevelopment of the technical site is a realistic option.

#### Total demolition and redevelopment

These reasons clearly also rule out the option of total demolition and redevelopment.

#### **The domestic site**

This has not been considered as it does not fall within the site area.

## The Flying Field

### Setting

The landscape and visual survey and appraisal of the flying field, including the identification of its Zone of Visual Influence, has demonstrated that the flying field forms an integral part of the Technical Site, both visually and historically.

As stated in paragraph 5.7.1 of the Council's conservation area appraisal, 'The open flying field is the major feature of the site. Clearly, it is the *raison d'être* of the entire development and its open aspect, the vistas across it from key vantage points and the functional relationship between the flying field and specific buildings are all critical to an appreciation of the character and appearance of the site'.

The national importance of the flying field to military history, forming a prime example of an intact and largely unaltered grass flying field that is physically and functionally linked with the Technical Site;

Its importance in relation to the setting of the buildings within the Technical Site, and the need to remain entirely 'open' in order to be consistent with its functional design;

The retention of unobstructed short to medium distance views from the

Technical Site across the flying field to the perimeter track and historically important features such as the bomb store to retain the historical integrity and links between these features;

The relationship of the flying field to the wider rural landscape providing a continuum of open land between the well defined edge of the Technical Site, and Domestic Site to the west, and the rural landscape to the east;

Its importance in longer distance views from prominent vantage points within the rural landscape surrounding the site, notably Poundon Hill, from where it appears as a notable foreground and setting to the built edge of RAF Bicester and the north eastern perimeter of Bicester generally.

### **Opportunities for Development**

The analysis has clearly demonstrated that the retention of the flying field as an unobstructed area of green space is essential to ensure the historical integrity of the flying field. As a consequence, appropriate land uses across the flying field are limited to those that respect the need to retain a sense of openness.

The current use of the flying field for gliding would seem to be entirely appropriate, and apart from the establishment of other aircraft related uses such as a helicopter base for business users, or a small civil airport comparable with Oxford Airport, (both of which would have the disadvantage of being noisier), it is hard to envisage a more suitable use for the land, There is also an historical integrity in retaining the flying field for gliding, since the existing RAF Gliding Club has been in existence since 1963.

It is accepted, however, that the existing club has generated a considerable amount of

visual intrusion as a consequence of the rows of caravans and associated service areas. Re-organisation of the area could with benefit include the removal of temporary caravans. This could also include the adaptation of some of the buildings for weekend accommodation use by Glider members. The possible development of a dedicated training centre for gliding is a further option, with the added attraction of being linked to a prestigious historic military site of national interest. It is accepted that this would necessitate considerable investment and would not be affordable by the Gliding Club alone, but is nevertheless worth pursuing.

If the option of retaining the flying field site for gliding were for some unforeseen reason considered to be inappropriate, other options that retain the visual simplicity and open grassed character of the flying field would then need to be considered. The use of the field for sports pitches is an obvious option although the anticipated level of demand for such facilities might result in only a relatively small proportion of the field being used, concentrated close to the entrance access road. Furthermore, the pitches would need to be generally unobtrusive with no associated structures, and in no particular lighting columns; even the 'clutter' associated with goal posts might well be considered intrusive on this open, simple site. Floodlighting would be especially inappropriate, but the absence of such provision would also limit the viability and attractiveness of the site for sports club users.

The opportunity for adaptation of the

buildings and development of part of the site as a museum of military aviation has been considered elsewhere. The opportunity to visit this nationally important site is certainly an option to pursue. Such development would necessitate the inclusion of the flying field as an integral part of the museum to demonstrate its functional relationship with the Technical Site. A dedicated museum trail for visitors that involved the principal external features, including the flying field and features such as the bomb store, air raid shelters, mushroom pill boxes and seagull trenches would need to be provided. Such development would require the retention of the field in its present condition in order to retain the integrity of its historic setting and character. With careful site management, a museum development providing wider access for the public could co-exist with a retained gliding club, either through limitations in opening hours, limits to the land accessible from the museum, or restriction on the days available for gliding use.

In addition to public access associated with a potential museum trail, the opportunity for wider public access to the site could also be considered, allowing local people and interested visitors to walk across at least part of the flying field. If the gliding use was still in operation this could be limited to a clearly defined footpath that extended along the southern and western sides of the site, including the pill box and trenches area, but also crossing close to the north-eastern side of the Technical Site to enable views of the buildings of historical and military architectural interest. This would also avoid

potentially dangerous access onto land utilised for 'take off' and landing.

If the Gliding Club and flying use of the field ceased, extensive short term temporary uses of the site might also be a consideration, and provide some income to an otherwise retained open grassed field. Such uses could include temporary festival use, and outdoor concerts. Semi-permanent uses such as external storage, which would be visually intrusive, would not be acceptable.

### **Conclusions**

RAF Bicester is a site of national importance in the context of 20th century military aviation, and this is reflected in its designation as a conservation area, and the recommendations by English Heritage to protect many of the structures on the site by listing and scheduling

The three components of RAF Bicester, namely the technical base, the flying field, and the domestic site, are exceptionally well preserved and have a coherent relationship with each other. Their character, appearance and setting are acknowledged to be of importance and they are protected by national and local planning policy and guidance. The landscape assessment confirms that RAF Bicester has a significance that extends beyond the immediate confines of the study boundary.

The buildings within the technical base are, for the most part, in good condition and are capable of re-use for a variety of purposes including storage, workshops, offices and other employment uses. These uses could in

most cases be inserted without significant alteration to the buildings. No case for enabling development has been established.

No case or justification has been found for new development on the flying field, and any development here would have a harmful impact on the open landscape setting, the character and appearance of the conservation area, and the setting of listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments. The flying field has a number of potential uses, described in the body of this report, which would preserve its character and appearance.

Although any new use for the technical base would involve some change, and may ultimately require limited demolition, alteration and reconstruction, no case has been found for additional new-build within this part of RAF Bicester. Limited development may be possible on and to the south of the old line of Skimmingdish Lane, subject to the impacts on the conservation area and ecological considerations. However, this is not seen as an opportunity for enabling development so much as identifying a piece of land which could be used to help to sustain the future use of the technical site.

## Public Consultation Details

This document has been the subject of public consultation. Comments on a draft document were invited from all interested organisations and members of the public alike.

Where appropriate views or corrections submitted before 30 July 2008 were incorporated into this final document.

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