



NEED ASSESSMENT

Land to the west of Chilgrove Drive, North of Camp Road and adjoining former RAF Upper Heyford, Upper Heyford, incorporating former MOD gymnasium

EP Barrus Ltd

November 2014

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	The Company's Expansion Plans	5
3.0	The Need for New Premises	7
4.0	Location and Site Requirements	9
5.0	Review of Alternative Sites	12
6.0	The Upper Heyford Site	16
7.0	Compliance with National Planning Policy	19
8.0	Compliance with Local Planning Policy	21
9.0	Summary	25

Appendix 1 – Letter from VSL dated 26th June 2014

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 EP Barrus Ltd (Barrus) is one of the leading employers in Bicester. Following recent significant investment, its existing premises in Launton Road have reached capacity, and are constraining the Company's ability to expand further. Barrus currently occupies additional temporary accommodation at Upper Heyford, and has recently taken a third additional temporary accommodation there. However, the Company requires additional, modern purpose built space to accommodate its continued growth.
- 1.2 After actively searching for over four years for a new site within Cherwell which is capable of accommodating its current and future needs, Barrus has identified a site at Upper Heyford, as the only suitable, affordable and available opportunity capable of meeting its requirements if it is to remain in Cherwell. The site comprises circa 12 acres on the South east edge of Upper Heyford, at the junction of Camp Road and Chilgrove Drive, as shown on Plan 1.
- 1.3 Ultimately, Barrus require 22,000 sq. m of flexible B1/B2/B8 floor space within an integrated purpose built facility. Barrus requires bespoke new buildings capable of accommodating its specialist equipment and facilities, with adequate car parking and external storage, and good access to its predominantly local workforce and the M40. Barrus has appointed DP9 Ltd (DP9) to progress the planning application for this site.
- 1.4 The development will come forward on a phased basis, initially comprising a 9,837 sq. m building to meet current operational needs which cannot be accommodated at Launton Road, for which the current temporary accommodation at Upper Heyford is unsuitable. However, the long term objective is to relocate from the existing Launton Road site, releasing this for other employment uses, to a purpose built facility capable of providing sufficient space for the business to expand, in order to secure the home of Barrus in Cherwell District for the foreseeable future
- 1.5 This document has been prepared to explain Barrus' specific operational and business needs, and the very special circumstances which have led to their conclusion that this is the only opportunity currently available to meet their particular needs. It also considers the principle of the development against relevant national, regional and

emerging local planning policy, and the current suitability and availability of alternative opportunities in Cherwell.

1.6 The remainder of this Statement is structured as follows:-

- Section Two describes the Company, and its planned expansion over the next five years
- Section Three describes the existing accommodation and the need for new space
- Section four considers the specific location and site requirements
- Section Five identifies the alternative sites which have been considered
- Section Six explains the rationale for selecting the Upper Heyford Site
- Section Seven considers the relevant national planning policies
- Section Eight addresses the relevant provisions of the emerging local plan
- Section Nine draws the need case together and provides the conclusions.

1.7 This statement has been prepared by DP9, but draws on detailed information provided by Barrus, and the views of VSL, experienced local agents who set out their comments on the availability of suitable sites and premises in their letter, attached as Appendix 1. The Statement also draws on the extensive evidence base and sites analysis which underpins the emerging Cherwell Local Plan. This indicates that despite the significant potential supply of employment land over the plan period, there is an acute shortage of suitable, affordable, and readily available land in the District.

2.0 THE COMPANY'S EXPANSION PLANS

- 2.1 EP Barrus is a leading private engineering and manufacturing company, specialising in research and development and the manufacture of specialist marine engines. The Company was established in 1917, and has been based in Bicester since 1977.
- 2.2 From its main base in Launton Road, the Company provides specialist engines and specialist engineering services to private and Government customers throughout the UK and worldwide. The Company is at the forefront of specialist defence applications, and is a world leader in this field. It is an important supplier to the MOD, and in particular, develops and supplies specialist applications for UK and other Special Forces. Barrus custom builds engines for over 200 RNLI stations around our coast – Barrus custom builds all the beach rescue engines and flood relief engines for the RNLI, all the search and rescue engines for most of the UK police forces, and all the flood relief and search engines for most of the UK fire services, including Oxfordshire.
- 2.3 The Company currently has a turnover of circa £50 million, and is a major employer within the district, employing 150 people across four sites, with 84% of the workforce being resident in Cherwell, mainly in and around Bicester. The payroll costs are £6.25m. The skills of the local workforce in the advanced engineering sector, and links to other local companies are key benefits of the location, and if possible, Barrus would like to stay within the Bicester area. However, if this is not possible, the alternative would be a wholesale relocation from the Cherwell area.
- 2.4 Over the last 36 years, Barrus has established strong links with the local community. The Company operates an OCVC training programme, and close links with Oxford Brookes University. It also trains circa 600 people a year from external organisations including MOD, RNLI and overseas clients. As a consequence, the business needs training rooms and associated facilities, as well as storage, manufacturing, research and development and office accommodation i.e. a flexible B1/B2/B8 planning use.
- 2.5 Barrus also undertakes extensive Research and Development and testing on the site, including operating 5 dynometers and outboard motor test tanks, requiring extensive cooling and venting and safety requirements. These are essential to the operation of the business, but as a consequence, the Company has large space requirements, which

are not affordable at conventional market rates for intensive commercial uses. Barrus specialist requirements negate the possibility of renting.

- 2.6 Barrus is achieving significant growth. The intention is to grow by over 60% over the next five years, and doubling the turnover of the business over the next ten years. This will safeguard existing jobs and create at least 50 new local jobs. However, in order to achieve this, the Company needs to make significant investment in new premises, and ultimately, Barrus needs a single, purpose built facility for the next stage of its growth.
- 2.7 Despite the Company's close connections with Cherwell, the business operates at a national and global level, and if its commercial requirements cannot be accommodated in the District, Barrus will have to consider relocation to more affordable accommodation outside the area.

3.0 THE NEED FOR NEW PREMESIS

- 3.1 Barrus has invested heavily recently to expand its operations, and currently operates out of four buildings in two locations. The main accommodation comprises the 8,361 sq. m unit at Launton Road. This is the engineering and manufacturing base that accommodates the majority of the workforce. However, following recent significant investment in the Launton Road site, this is now at capacity. There is no scope for Barrus, or its neighbours, to expand their existing premises further in this location. This is a major problem for the local economy.
- 3.2 As a consequence of these capacity constraints, Barrus lease two 2,787 sq. m sheds with eaves height of 9.1m, and associated external storage at Upper Heyford, and have recently taken a temporary lease on a further 929 sq. m former Hanger. However, this accommodation is only providing a short term, temporary solution, and does not meet the Company's long term requirements. In addition to the shortcomings of the existing space, it is inefficient to operate out of four separate sites, and this situation is constraining the Company's ability to make further long term investment in the area.
- 3.3 A significant proportion of the Company's vehicle movements use Junction 9 of the M40, which is south of Bicester. This junction is the main access for Bicester, Kidlington and traffic approaching or leaving the north of Oxford. This results in congestion on the network, which results in delays for the delivery vehicles arriving and leaving the manufacturing site. This is in contrast with the situation at J10, which serves the facilities at Upper Heyford.
- 3.4 Barrus has looked into expanding the existing Launton Road site to accommodate the distribution centre as well. However, following their recent investment, there is no further room for growth on the existing site. In addition to the physical site constraints, there is a premium placed on the available space within the Park. We understand that other occupiers (Polestar, British Bakels and Britta) are also seeking to expand, and the constraints on the site and ability for key employers to expand is a major challenge to the local economy.
- 3.5 The demand for the space means there is a requirement to pay a premium, driven by more profitable business occupiers. Even if there was additional freehold expansion land available at Launton Road, VSL advise that this would command circa £400,000

per acre. This is not viable for an engineering company like Barrus, based on its specialist space requirements. As a consequence, as a short term solution Barrus has had to take temporary accommodation at Upper Heyford.

- 3.6 The three sites at Upper Heyford are occupied on temporary leases, and provide a ‘stop gap,’ short term solution. However, the fragmented location of the floorspace across multiple sites is inefficient as, in many cases, the engines are custom built and re-manufactured at the Launton Road site but must then be collected and stored at the distribution site at Upper Heyford prior to delivery. This is particularly difficult with heavy, fragile, equipment. There are also security issues given the need to store sensitive MOD equipment.
- 3.7 In the long-term, in order to safeguard its position in Cherwell, Barrus needs to rationalise its operations onto a single location. The temporary accommodation currently occupied at Upper Heyford is inefficient, not fit for purpose, and on the basis that it is rented on a short term basis, does not allow the company to make the long term investment decisions needed to secure its planned expansion. The current arrangements are expensive, inefficient, and result in additional unnecessary trips on the local highway network.
- 3.8 As a consequence, Barrus has concluded that the only option if the Company is to remain in Cherwell in the long term is to relocate onto a single site in the Bicester or Upper Heyford area. This will unlock the opportunity for other occupiers to expand, and for new companies seeking to invest in the area, and help to address what is widely acknowledged to be an acute shortage of readily available B1/2/8 employment land in Bicester at present, as confirmed by VSL.

4.0 LOCATION AND SITE REQUIREMENTS

4.1 Over the last 4 years Barrus has been considering its long term requirements, in terms of size, location and accessibility, tenure and affordability.

Size

4.2 Barrus requires a site which is ultimately capable of accommodating up to circa 22,000 sq. m of B1/2/8 floor space in an integrated series of buildings. This will include a large, clear span warehouse facility measuring 9,844 sq. m and service yard as part of the Phase One development, with further production facilities, offices and training school measuring over 12,000 sq. m for outboard motors, industrial and marine engines; including production and specialist workshop areas; and spare parts distribution area.

4.3 In addition to accommodating circa 22,000 sq. m of flexible space, the site needs to be able to accommodate car parking, and external storage, means of access and internal circulation, and landscaping. These operational requirements dictate a site of circa 12-15 acres is required. Given the defence and MOD connections, and external storage requirements, a secure site with appropriate perimeter treatment is required.

Location and accessibility

4.4 The current operation is split between north Bicester and Upper Heyford, and this represents the primary area of search. The majority of Barrus' existing employees live in the Bicester area. The provision of a single, integrated facility between Bicester and Upper Heyford will be more accessible for the wider Barrus workforce, and provide sustainable employment opportunities for the existing and planned populations to the north of Bicester and the new community at Upper Heyford.

4.5 Accessibility is also a key issue for Barrus in terms of deliveries as the majority of products need to be delivered by lorry due to weight/volume. Accordingly, a site to the north of Bicester, which provides quick and easy access to Junction 10 of the M40 motorway is of key importance for the continued development of the company.

4.6 Barrus has considered sites throughout the Cherwell area, as part of its extensive search for a new site. However, the optimum location in commercial and operational

terms is in the north of Bicester, or on the eastern side of Upper Heyford, with good links to J10 of the M40. This is consistent with Councils strategic aspiration to improve employment opportunities in and around Bicester, to better match the current population and planned housing growth in the District, and the specific objective to create a sustainable and balanced community at Upper Heyford.

Tenure

- 4.7 Barrus has specific accommodation needs, in terms of design and specification, which cannot be accommodated within a standard commercially rented industrial building. The conventional terms of a commercial lease would not support the scale of alteration and investment in specialist plant and equipment. In addition, some of the research and development and MOD property held by Barrus is sensitive, and requires a level of confidentiality and control over access and specification. Accordingly, Barrus requires a freehold property.
- 4.8 A freehold site is also much easier to manage for a private company during an economic downturn, and provides the certainty needed to make long term investment decisions. The company's existence for nearly 100 years has seen a number of downturns but managed to remain in business due to owning property and buildings. It is therefore a primary requirement to obtain the freehold on any site. This also reflects the Company's long term commitment to remaining in the District, provided a suitable site can be secured.

Affordability

- 4.9 Barrus requires a freehold site which is available at a price which reflects the scale of investment needed to build new purpose built accommodation and install new/relocated specialist plant and equipment, taking into account the expected proceeds from the sale of their existing premises at Launton Road. Even if any sites were available, the likely cost of employment land within existing employment areas, of between £4.8-£6m for a 12 -15 acre site, would not be affordable. As such, Barrus would have no option but to seek cheaper land outside the area to accommodate the next stage of their growth.

Summary

- 4.10 In light of the above issues and requirements, Barrus requires a site between Bicester and Upper Heyford, with good links to Junction 10 of the M40 motorway, that can be purchased freehold, and accommodate circa 22,000 sq. m of space plus hardstanding, parking and landscaping in order to realise its' long-term plan for expansion of the business.
- 4.11 It is widely recognised that there is an acute shortage of affordable, readily available employment sites within Cherwell which would meet these requirements, which is evidenced by the views of local agents that occupiers have relocating to other areas, and businesses are being discouraged from relocating to Bicester. VSL confirm that there are no suitable premises, or allocated sites currently available in the area which match these requirements.

5.0 REVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE SITES

- 5.1 Barrus have been actively searching for new premises within Cherwell for 4 years, without any success, and as the VSL letter demonstrates, there are no allocated or consented sites within the area of search which meet their identified requirements.
- 5.2 The Cherwell District Council Employment Land Review, produced by URS in 2012, identifies all the potential employment sites within the district. The March 2014 Topic Paper prepared for the Examination into the Submission Local Plan updates the position, and identifies a number of additional sites, which have been put forward as part of the site allocations requirements.
- 5.3 The Examination into the Plan was suspended in June 2014, pending further major modifications required in respect of housing issues. The Examination is currently expected to be reconvened in December, following the submission of the focussed changes in October 2014, which includes significant additional employment land allocations both within and on the edge of existing settlement boundaries. However, given that the proposals seek extensions to existing employment allocations, or those previously put forward, there are no employment sites allocated in any up to date adopted plan, or the draft plan that are appropriate for this development.
- 5.4 We have undertaken an assessment of all the sites identified in the 2012 review and the latest Local Plan focused amendments. In total, the draft plan now identifies circa 235 hectares of potential employment land allocations. Given the operational requirement for a site in the Bicester area, where most of the existing workforce live, we have discounted sites in Banbury.
- 5.5 The most significant sites identified in the Bicester area are North West Bicester, Graven Hill, Bicester Business Park and Bicester Gateway. The draft plan also refers to the Former RAF Upper Heyford airbase, which has received consent for a mixed use development including some employment floorspace.

Bicester Business Park/Bicester Gateway

- 5.6 The Bicester Business Park and Bicester Gateway sites do not meet the identified requirements. Both are situated south of Bicester, and are being promoted for high quality B1 office and research and development uses. While the Business Park has the

benefit of a planning consent, based on the owners stated aspirations, neither site is suitable for general B1/2/8 uses required by Barrus. Furthermore, neither location offers the opportunity for a readily available freehold site of the size required.

Graven Hill

- 5.7 The Graven Hill site is located to the South of Bicester, and has been recently acquired by Cherwell Council. There is a resolution to approve an application for employment uses on part of the site. However, the site is currently unavailable and we understand will not be available until after 2019 at the earliest. The site is in any event located to the South of Bicester, which is not well placed in terms relation to the Barrus workforce, and its requirement for a site to the north of Bicester with access to J10 of the M40.

North West Bicester

- 5.8 The North West Bicester Eco-Town site comprises 390 hectares, which comprises a minimum of 10 hectares of employment floorspace, located to the north of Bicester Town Centre. The only consent granted so far is a first exemplar phase approved in 2012, which includes only circa 2,900 sq. m of B1 floorspace, (including an eco-business centre). The draft plan anticipates the site will include B1 uses, with limited B2/8 uses where these contribute to the low carbon economy and do not adversely affect neighbouring uses.
- 5.9 We understand that the owners of the site are seeking greater flexibility, and it remains to be seen what the outcome of the current local pan process will be, and what scale and form of employment uses may be found acceptable if and when further planning applications come forward. However, even if this location was suitable in planning terms for the type of use proposed by Barrus, the timescale for the delivery of additional employment land in North West Bicester is uncertain.
- 5.10 Specifically, there is no readily available serviced site capable of meeting the identified requirements. Nor is there any indication of the cost of securing a site of the size required, and how this would accord with the wider masterplan for the Eco town.

Former RAF Bicester

- 5.11 The site is located to the north of Bicester. The policy suggests that employment uses could be appropriate in this location, but goes on to stipulate that these should be associated with the development of a museum to RAF Bomber Command. All proposals must also complement and enhance the character and appearance of the heritage asset of the site.
- 5.12 The Domestic site to the south of the airfield and technical site has already been granted planning permission and the remaining areas have recently been sold off by the MoD. Given the site is now in private ownership, there may be an opportunity to purchase an element of the site for redevelopment. However, the emerging local plan policy for the site makes no provision for the scale of employment uses required by Barrus, and we do not consider the site could be regarded as suitable, viable or available to accommodate their current requirements.

North East Bicester

- 5.13 This 15 hectare greenfield site is identified in the draft local plan for B1, B2 and B8 uses, with a requirement to specifically provide B1(a) surrounding the existing care home to protect the residential amenity of the area. In addition to this, there is a requirement to retain the existing public rights of way through the site.
- 5.14 At the current time, the emerging policy position would not support the scale and form of development required by Barrus, and given the significant MOD contracts, there is also an issue of security. The site could not be regarded as preferable in policy terms, even if it was suitable and a freehold site was available on acceptable terms.

Former RAF Upper Heyford airbase

- 5.15 The former RAF Upper Heyford site received planning permission in 2010 for a mixed use development including up to 115,000 sq. m of employment space. The modifications to the draft plan identifies the site for a settlement of 1,600 dwellings (in addition to the 761 dwellings (net) already permitted) and associated uses, including approx. 120,000 sq. m of unspecified employment uses, within the wider 500 hectare site, suggesting this site is suitable in principle to accommodate employment uses.
- 5.16 The site is a Conservation Area, and is subject to various planning requirements and constraints. The current owners made representations to the draft plan, calling for

significant additional housing to achieve a sustainable and deliverable scheme. As such, the scale and form of development likely to come forward and the timescales for delivery remain uncertain at this stage, and may in practice prompt a review of the settlement boundary if significant additional housing is proposed. There is no readily available, allocated site capable of meeting Barrus' current requirements, and no up to date adopted development plan policy for the site and surrounding area.

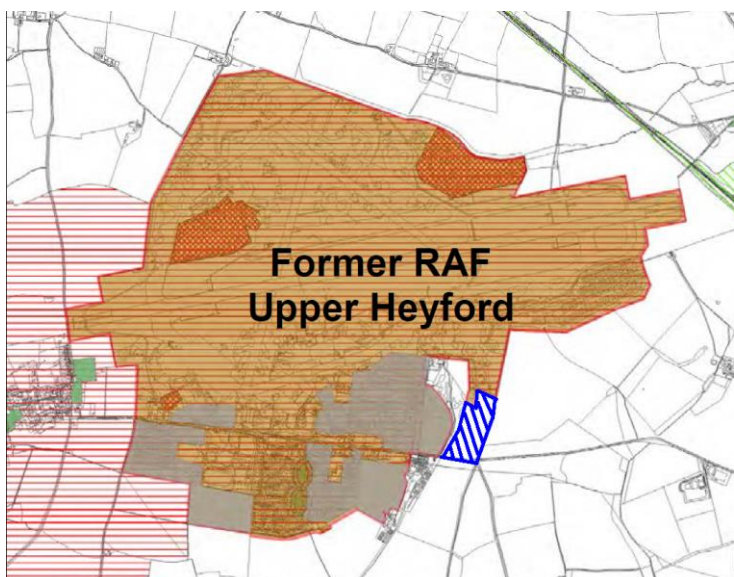
- 5.17 Barrus has taken temporary accommodation within the site, but this does not meet its long term requirements, and is at best a 'stop gap' solution. The location is in principle well suited to meeting the Company's long term needs. However, a new manufacturing facility would have a specific building design requirement, which may be difficult to accommodate on a piecemeal basis, and within the defined Conservation Area. In any event, having made inquiries, Barrus understands there is no opportunity at the current time to acquire a freehold development site of the size required.
- 5.18 In summary, none of the sites identified in the emerging local plan within the defined area of search are suitable, viable or available to Barrus to meet its immediate and long term needs.

6.0 THE UPPER HEYFORD SITE

- 6.1 Based on the specific requirements identified, there are no sites within the Bicester/Upper Heyford area that are currently identified for employment use in the draft local plan that are likely to be suitable, viable, and available. The scale and form of employment uses likely to be acceptable and deliverable on the proposed allocations remains uncertain, particularly given the representations made and the ongoing Local Plan examination. The further call for housing sites has not resulted had a significant bearing on the supply of suitable and available employment land.
- 6.2 Having considered these and all the other opportunities identified, the only site identified by Barrus which is capable of meeting its requirements, which is suitable, viable, and available is the identified land at Upper Heyford, at the junction of Camp road and Chilgrove Drive. The site has no specific policy designation, but is located on the edge of the former RAF Upper Heyford airbase and used to house the RAF / MOD gymnasium. The focussed modifications to the draft Local Plan have identified a requirement to provide additional housing at Upper Heyford to nearly triple the previous requirement. They identify the land to the west of the site for inclusion within the settlement boundary to accommodate this increase. We therefore suggest the extension to Chilgrove Drive would provide a logical ‘rounding off’ of the settlement boundary in any review.
- 6.3 In 2010 outline planning permission was granted for 1,075 new residential dwellings, associated employment uses, community facilities, a school and associated other works on the former airbase. This was granted by Secretary of State following opposition from the Council on the grounds of the impact of the employment uses on the historic character of the airbase. However, the principle of new residential, employment and associated development in this area is well established.
- 6.4 The former airbase is designated as a Conservation Area, and a Conservation Area Appraisal was produced in 2006. The site adjoins the boundary of this area. The RAF Upper Heyford Revised Comprehensive Planning Brief was published in 2007 and sets out the comprehensive requirements for the redevelopment of the site, as well as the requirements for enabling development. The key principle is that “*protected*

buildings within the settlement area must be sensitively integrated into the new settlement and their curtilage and setting must be respected.”

- 6.5 The former airbase is the subject of Saved Policy H2 of the Oxford Structure Plan. This policy designation is carried forward in Policy Villages 5 in the draft Local Plan. This supports the development of a settlement comprising circa 761 new homes and associated infrastructure and approx. 120,000 sq. m of employment uses. The draft Policy identifies, inter alia, the importance of the conservation of heritage resources, landscape, restoration, enhancement of biodiversity and other environmental improvements across the whole site.
- 6.6 The focused changes to the Local Plan recognise Upper Heyford as a proposed strategic site for new rural settlement and include the provision of 2,361 new homes; an increase of 1,601 from the submission plan. In recognition of the heritage and environmental constraints within the former air force base, the focused changes identify an area of land directly to the west of the proposed site, as an extension to the proposed settlement boundary.
- 6.7 Cherwell have accepted the principle of extending the settlement boundary, as shown by the grey areas on Map 1 below, to include the land directly adjacent to the application site. Therefore, we suggest that a more appropriate settlement boundary would be the road at Chilgrove Drive, instead of the suggested watercourse, which would provide a logical rounding off of the boundary, as is evident from Map 1 below, which shows the extended boundary hatched in blue.



- 6.8 The proposed site is bordering the modified draft Policy area as currently defined, and lies outside the Conservation Area. Whilst it is currently lying fallow, records demonstrate that an RAF/MOD gymnasium was located on the southern part of the site, which is still evident from aerial imagery. The Deeds show this was originally owned by the MOD and therefore presumably linked to the use of the air base. As partly previously developed land associated with the airbase, the site would form a logical part of the wider new settlement, with a defensible boundary defined by Camp Road and Chilgrove Drive.
- 6.9 Barrus has acquired an option to purchase the site, and is in a position to progress with a planning application in order to proceed with the first phase of the wider development without delay. At circa 15 acres, the site is large enough to accommodate Barrus' long term needs. As such, the site is suitable, viable and available for development without delay, subject to planning.
- 6.10 In the absence of any up to date adopted Development Plan, there are no specific policies which would restrict the development site, subject to satisfying the wider requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework. Limited reliance can be placed on the draft local plan employment allocations, but in any event the policies as drafted do not preclude development outside these locations.

7.0 COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

7.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) states that the determination of planning applications should be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance, the Local Plan was adopted in November 1996, and so is no longer consistent with the adopted National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

7.2 Paragraph 214 and 215 of the NPPF state that *For 12 months from the day of publication, decision-takers may continue to give full weight to relevant policies adopted since 2004, even if there is a limited degree of conflict with this Framework.* The Adopted Development Plan comprises the Saved Policies of the 1996 Local Plan, and Saved Policy H2 of the Oxford Structure Plan, but both are out of date.

7.3 Therefore, at this stage there is no up to date development plan, and in these circumstances, the key policy considerations are set out in the NPPF. This was adopted on 27 March 2012 and replaces all previous Planning Policy Statements and Guidance Notes. In respect of the proposed development, the NPPF therefore covers employment, natural environment, transport and sustainability.

7.4 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision making, the NPPF states that this means:

- *Approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
- *Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies out-of-date, granting permission unless:*
 - *Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or*
 - *Specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.*

7.5 There are no specific policies in the framework which suggest that development on the site should be restricted. Specifically, it is not Green Belt, AONB, or SSSI and contains no designated heritage assets, although it adjoins a Conservation Area. As

such, there is a clear presumption in favour of development. Within this context, any application should be considered positively, subject to other material considerations.

- 7.6 In this case, the need to secure the viable long term future of one of the Districts key employers, and underpin local employment which supports the sustainable settlement at Upper Heyford, are additional important material considerations.
- 7.7 The NPPF focuses on the delivery of sustainable development. In particular, the core planning principles include, amongst others, to “*drive and support development*”. In determining planning applications, the NPPF acknowledges that the planning system is plan-led, and that Local Plans should be the starting point for the determination of any planning applications.
- 7.8 In terms of employment the NPPF states that under paragraph 18, the Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity, building on the country’s inherent strengths, and to meeting the twin challenges of global competition and of a low carbon future.
- 7.9 It goes on to state that investment in business should not be over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations. Planning policies should seek to address potential barriers to investment, including a poor environment or any lack of infrastructure, services or housing. Paragraph 57 identifies the importance of achieving high quality and inclusive design, including individual buildings and private spaces.
- 7.10 In these circumstances, in the absence of any up to date development plan policy restricting development on the site, there is a clear presumption in favour of planning permission, subject to other material considerations. The need to support the growth of an important local employer, and safeguard their long term future in the District, and the absence of any other more suitable, viable and available opportunities are both important material considerations in support of the proposals.

8.0 COMPLIANCE WITH LOCAL POLICY

- 8.1 The Adopted Development Plan comprises the Saved Policies of the 1996 Local Plan, and Saved Policy H2 of the Oxford Structure Plan. However, both are materially out of date.
- 8.2 Cherwell has also produced the ‘Non-Statutory Cherwell Plan 2011 (December 2004)’ which was intended to review and update the 1996 Local Plan. It is not part of the statutory development plan but is approved as an interim planning policy for development control purposes.
- 8.3 The emerging Local Plan was originally submitted for Examination on 31st January 2014. The Examination was suspended as major changes were required in respect of housing matters. The Focused Modifications to the Local Plan have been consulted on and have now been submitted to the Secretary of State. This document is therefore a material consideration as it provides Cherwell’s most up to date policies, but only attracts very limited weight given it is subject to objections and has yet to be subjected to EIP.
- 8.4 Paragraph B.13 states that 41% of employment in the District is located in Banbury, 20% in Bicester, 14% in Kidlington and 25% in the rural areas. Overall the levels of economic activity are high, with 82% of the working age population economically active. Upper Heyford is a former RAF base which has consent for over 1,000 dwellings (including the existing homes) but which also has just under 1,000 jobs already located within the existing buildings with more to come as part of the sites redevelopment.
- 8.5 As such it is one of the larger employment locations within Cherwell and provides a good range of jobs and premises from engineering and scientific activities to specialist storage activities. While the site is located on the edge of the policy area as currently defined, it would form a natural extension of the area, establishing a defensible boundary to the new settlement. The provision of new local employment opportunities in this area, as part of a sustainable new settlement, is supported in principle.
- 8.6 Paragraph B.21 echoes the NPPF by stating the provision of a sufficient number and variety of available employment sites and the formation of planning policies which

allow employment generating development to come forward in sustainable locations is critical to enabling existing companies to grow and to provide for new company formation. Employment sites are also needed in order to respond to inward investment including the planned electrification of the railway, new routes and stations in the District.

8.7 Paragraph B.29 identifies the types of employment development the District wants to attract and will concentrate on:

- Advanced manufacturing/high performance engineering
- The Green Economy
- Innovation, research and development
- Retailing
- Consumer services

Supporting the continued growth of Barrus within the District clearly accords with this objective.

8.8 Paragraph B.42 seeks to ensure employment is located in sustainable locations, to avoid problems such as traffic on rural roads and commuting, employment development in the rural areas will be limited. This accords with the Council's strategy for focusing new housing development at Banbury and Bicester, ensuring housing and employment are located in the same place.

8.9 Emerging Policy SLE 1 'Employment Development' provides criteria for three different employment issues. The first provides criteria for the loss of employment land for alternative uses, and is therefore not of relevance for our proposal. The second looks at sites within Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington, and so is also not of relevance to our proposal.

8.10 The final criteria within SLE 1 relate to employment within rural areas. The modifications to the draft policy states that new employment proposals within rural areas on non-allocated sites will be supported if they meet the following criteria:-

- *They will be outside of the Green Belt, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.*
- *Sufficient justification is provided to demonstrate why the development should be located in the rural area on a non-allocated site.*

- *They will be designed to very high standards using sustainable construction, and be of an appropriate scale and respect the character of villages and the surroundings.*
- *They will be small scale unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the character of a village or surrounding environment.*
- *The proposal and any associated employment activities can be carried out without undue detriment to residential amenity, the highway network, village character and its setting, the appearance and character of the landscape and the environment generally including on any designated buildings or features (or on any non-designated buildings or features of local importance).*
- *The proposal will not give rise to excessive or inappropriate traffic and will wherever possible contribute to the general aim of reducing the need to travel by private car.*
- *There are no suitable available plots or premises within existing nearby employment sites in the rural areas.*

8.11 Policy SLE 1 goes on to state that justification for employment development on new sites in the rural areas will need to be provided. This should include demonstrating a need for and benefits of employment in the particular location proposed and explaining why the proposed development should not be located at the towns, close to the proposed labour supply.

8.12 While Upper Heyford is not currently defined in draft Policy for Villages 2, it is clearly identified as a suitable location for significant employment uses, and the site forms a logical extension to the current draft policy area. The site is not within the Green Belt or any special protection area, and in the absence of an up to date adopted plan, there are no allocated employment sites and no clear justification for any policy preference between the draft allocations and the proposal site. In any event, Barrus has a current, clearly defined need which it is unable to meet on the currently identified draft allocation sites.

8.13 Policy ESD 15 ‘The urban-rural fringe’ states that *“Proposals for development on the edge of the built up area must be carefully designed and landscaped to soften the built edge of the development and assimilate it into the landscape by providing green*

infrastructure that will positively contribute to the rural setting of the towns. Existing important views of designated or attractive landscape features will need to be taken into account. Proposals will also be considered against the requirements of Policy ESD 13: Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement. In addition, green buffers as indicated on the Policies Maps will be maintained to:

- *Maintain Banbury and Bicester's distinctive identity and setting;*
- *Protect the separate identity and setting of neighbouring settlements which surround the two towns;*
- *Prevent coalescence and protect the gaps between the existing/planned edge of the towns and surrounding settlements;*
- *Protect the identity and setting of landscape and historic features of value that are important to the identity and setting of the two towns;*
- *Protect important views*

Development proposals within the green buffers will only be permitted if they would not conflict with these objectives."

8.14 Policy Villages 5 'Former RAF Upper Heyford' states there is a requirement for approximately 120,000 sq. m of new employment floorspace within Class B1, B2 and B8 to accommodate 1,500 new jobs in the area as part of the redevelopment of the site to ensure it retains its heritage interest. While outside the policy area as currently defined, we consider the proposals will form a logical extension to the area, and contribute to the overall objective of creating a sustainable new settlement, subject of course to design and their effects on the appearance and setting of the conservation area.

8.15 The emerging Local Plan should be afforded very little weight at this stage. However, given the general presumption in favour of development, and the specific needs identified by Barrus, which can only realistically be accommodated on this site, we consider that subject to design and other detailed planning considerations, the proposed development would accord with the general principles and objectives of the emerging local plan.

9.0 SUMMARY

- 9.1 This report is submitted in support of an outline application, for 22,000 sq. m GIA of flexible B1/B2/B8 floorspace, with some matters reserved. The objective is to secure consent for the full extent of the floorspace likely to be required, together with means of access, in order to secure the opportunity for the Company to consolidate onto a single site.
- 9.2 Barrus is a major employer within the district, providing highly skilled manufacturing jobs and employing 150 people across four sites, with 84% of the workforce being resident in Cherwell.
- 9.3 There is no scope for Barrus to expand their existing premises due to physical site constraints. They have therefore leased three additional sites in Upper Heyford. In addition to the shortcomings of the existing space, it is inefficient to operate out of four separate sites, and this situation is constraining the Company's ability to make further long term investment in the area.
- 9.4 Barrus has certain specific requirements, including a requirement for two large single span buildings, and significant areas of outdoor storage comprising 22,000 sq. m of building within a 12 – 15 acre plot.
- 9.5 There are no existing or allocated employment sites that are suitable for the specific requirements in the district in terms of size, accessibility, freehold availability and cost.
- 9.6 The Company's distribution is already headquartered at Upper Heyford, albeit the current facilities are not appropriate for the long-term requirements of the applicant in terms of size and layout.
- 9.7 The proposed site does not have a specific policy allocation, and lies on the boundary of the proposed Upper Heyford settlement identified for residential and Class B employment development.
- 9.8 This document demonstrates that there are no appropriate, available, suitable or viable sites for Barrus to occupy within the district other than the application site, and they would have to relocate outside the district if this proposal were not supported.

APPENDIX 1

Our Ref: RV/ap

26th June 2014

Robert Glenn
Chairman
EP Barrus
Telford Road
Bicester
Oxon, OX26 4UR

By email only: rglen@barrus.co.uk

Dear Robert

**Venables Sherrott
Lockhart and Partners**

22 Bankside
Kidlington
Oxford
OX5 1JE

t 01865 848488

f 01865 856940

www.vslandp.com

Commercial Land Availability Bicester and Surrounding Areas

I refer to our meeting last week and as promised set out below my report to investigate the availability of commercial development sites of approximately 15 acres (6.07 ha) within close proximity to Bicester. The criteria for the search is that the site must benefit from an existing planning allocation to allow for immediate development of B1(c) light industrial and B8 storage use.

In summary I am unable to identify any land in the immediate Bicester area that meets this criteria. At present there is only one site which could accommodate this scale of development which is at Bicester Office Park. This site comprises approximately 43.2 acres (17.5 hectares) and has consent for 50,000 sq m of B1 office use and a hotel.

The planning landscape within Cherwell District Council is changing rapidly. A new local plan has recently been submitted for approval. This was subject to an Examination in Public which commenced at the beginning of June. The proposed Local Plan seeks to release considerable areas of land around Bicester for future commercial and residential development. The Examination in Public was adjourned shortly after it commenced in order that Cherwell District Council could review their housing land allocation. The Examination in Public is likely to recommence in the autumn but this delay could have an impact on the timing of release of the employment land.

The sites are set out within a recently published paper entitled Topic paper 3; Employment March 2014 which is to be submitted at the Examination in Public. This identifies 9 Bicester sites which are proposed for future employment development. At present they do not have a commercial allocation and this will not be confirmed until the planning inspector has reported on the local plan submission later this year. I attach with this letter a copy of the sites identified within the employment paper and set out below my further comments on each site.

Bicester 1 This comprises the eco-town development and is proposed to provide one job per household. The employment land is to comprise 63 acres (25.5 hectares) according to the schedule. This site is still evolving and whilst originally conceived as home working and focused on the 'green economy' it is likely to change.

Bicester 2 This is the Graven Hill site which comprises a total of 496 acres (190 hectares). This has recently been purchased by Cherwell District Council and is intended to provide approximately 64 acres (26 hectares) of land for commercial development. Cherwell have submitted their own planning application (11/01494/OUT) and are proposing 2,160 sq m of B1(a) office use, 2,400 sq ft m of B1(b) research and development uses, 20,520 sq m of B1(c) light industrial/B2 general industrial and B8 storage uses. There is very little additional detail provided regarding this site at present.

I have made further investigations with Cherwell District Council regarding the employment land at the Graven Hill site. I understand that Cherwell District Council have now appointed a director to lead the master planning of this site. I have been advised that the MOD will have an ongoing requirement for some of the site until 2019 due to the relocation of the troops and equipment from Afghanistan. This comprises the area of land that is intended for future commercial use and therefore any future commercial opportunities may be limited for some time. As the site is quite larger there may be other opportunities for smaller areas of land release but there are no other master planning details available at this time.

Directors: Tom Barton BSc (Hons) MRICS, Andrew Lockhart BSc MRICS MCIArb, Richard Sherrott BSc (Hons) FRICS ACIArb, Richard Venables BSc (Hons) MRICS

Consultant: Vivienne Spurge BSc (Hons) FRICS

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- Bicester 3** This comprises land within the Kingsmere Development. There are proposed to be two phases of development. Phase one comprises the site of the existing Premier Inn together with an additional 3.5 acres (1.41hectares) of employment land with B1 and B2 use restrictions. There is a further phase of development proposed at the other end of the scheme nearer to Chesterton but the developers are trying to change this to a residential use.
- Bicester 4** Bicester Business Park – this site comprises 43.25 acres (17.5 hectares) of commercial development land. Planning permission was granted in 2007 under application 07/01106/OUT for 50,000 sq m of B1 use and a hotel. The site has recently received planning consent for the relocation of Tesco Supermarket under the planning application 12/01193/F. The scheme is designed as a high quality office park with buildings from 20,000-50,000 sq ft and is aimed very much as the headquarters office market. It is unlikely that the developers be keen to encourage more industrial style usage on this site.
- Bicester 6** Bure Park – small scale in-town development.
- Bicester 8** Former RAF Bicester – this site is dedicated to tourism development and motor and aviation heritage and unlikely to be suitable.
- Bicester 10** Bicester Gateway – this site comprises approximately 18.5 acres (7.5 hectares) of employment use and is to be located at the south side of Bicester opposite the A41 and just below Bicester Business Park and Bicester Avenue Retail Centre. It is intended as a location for high technology businesses but will no doubt evolve with time.
- Bicester 11** Northeast Bicester – this comprises two sites totaling approximately 59 acres (24 hectares) and is located at Skimmingdish Lane. It is proposed to provide an allocation for B1, B2 and B8 uses.
- Bicester 12** Opposite Graven Hill and Langford Village – to comprise approximately 61 acres (25 hectares) within Class B1, B2 and B8 uses. It is understood that at least some of this site is owned by Barwood developers. It is also described as being suitable for high technology uses.

I have also now spoken to the agent who acts for the Dorchester Group at Upper Heyford. He has confirmed that they have no land for sale at present which has a commercial planning consent. They have now let most of their existing stock and are reviewing their future marketing strategy at present. This may lead to land potentially becoming available but at today's date they have no land available. The adjournment of the Examination in Public may have some bearing on the Upper Heyford site. It is my understanding that Cherwell District Council and The Dorchester Group are now reviewing potential for further land release for residential purposes at Upper Heyford. At this stage they are still unable to provide any further information regarding possible additional employment land release.

My conclusion is therefore that with the exception of Bicester Business Park there are no other allocated employment sites of approximately 12 acres in the Bicester area at the present time. There is still uncertainty regarding the outcome of the Examination in Public but it is possible there will be further land release in due course. It is my opinion that employment land with planning permission for B1, B2 and B8 uses would be likely to command a price of approximately £350,000 - £400,000 per acre based on serviced sites, subject to location and other potential variables.

Please let me know if you require further information.

Yours sincerely



Richard Venables MRICS
Director

Direct Dial: 01865 856943
Mobile: 07816 491860
Email: rvenables@vslandp.com

Encs *Topic Paper 3 – Employment 2014 and
Accompanying plan*