



Planning and Heritage Impact Statement

**Site: Building 119
FFMT Building
Former RAF Bicester**

Applicant: Bicester Heritage Ltd

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been produced by JPPC to accompany the application by Bicester Heritage Ltd seeking planning permission for the change of use of Building 119 at RAF Bicester for B1c light industrial purposes. The application proposes a number of associated external and internal alterations to facilitate the new use.
- 1.2 The report assesses the character of the application site and surrounding area, appraises the prevailing planning policy and planning history and, specifically, assesses the planning issues raised by the proposal in order to demonstrate why the development is considered acceptable.
- 1.3 The application should be read in conjunction with the application plans and the Design and Access statement produced by Gaunt Francis Architects.

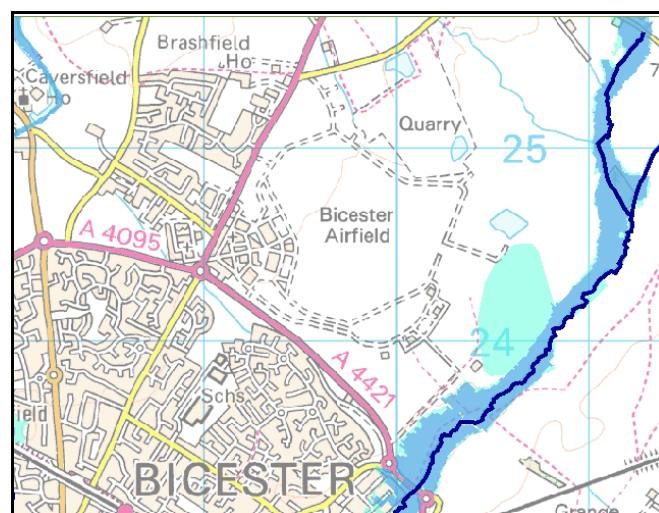
2.0 Site Description, Planning History and Proposal

- 2.1 The former RAF Bicester is sited on the north eastern side of Bicester, north of the A4421, which is part of the “ring road” around Bicester. The land extends to some 141.5 hectares and includes the Technical site and the principal flying field. It does not include the residential site to the west of the A421.
- 2.2 The former RAF Bicester is a designated conservation area. Within the technical site there are 22 listed buildings, in addition around the fringe of the technical site and flying field there are a number of structures which have scheduled monument protection.
- 2.3 The basis for designating the site as a conservation area, and listing or scheduling many of the existing structures, derives from the fact that it is one of the best preserved airfields of its age and has a long history of military flying.
- 2.4 Indeed, its flying field origins date back to its use as a Royal Flying Corps aerodrome towards the end of WWI and, from 1925 onwards, as a military

airfield by the newly formed Royal Air Force. Whilst many of the buildings have not been actively used for decades, English Heritage identify that the site's importance relates to the fact that it 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 Home Defence Expansion Scheme'*.

2.5 In addition, it is relevant to note that the Technical site layout has not been affected by later infilling, as at Upper Heyford for example, nor have the structures been significantly altered. Indeed, as confirmed in the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA), the special interest of the site lies in the fact that a number of the buildings on the site are the only remaining examples of certain types of Inter-war airfield buildings and many of the remaining are the best preserved examples.

2.6 The site generally falls outside the areas liable to flooding on the Environment Agency website and there are some public rights of way to the eastern side of the site.



2.7 The building subject of this application, building 119, is situated centrally within the Technical site and between the lower and central of the trident of roads that lead from the site entrance off the A421. The building, also known as the Fire Fighting Mechanical Transport (FFMT) Shed, is one of the later buildings

on the Technical site and was constructed between 1939 and 1941 and, as the name suggests, was used to garage fire fighting vehicles. The building is not a listed building.

4.1 The function and form of the building is described in the 'RAF Bicester' publication produced by Airfield Research Publishing (Author Paul Francis, August 1996) in the following terms:

4.2 *"This is a large hangar-like building for garaging fire fighting vehicles. Built of a series of steel stanchions and steel beams supporting steel trusses, arranged in four bays with two bays built side-by-side ("M-shaped roof") and the other two positioned at right angles to them. End elevations are clad in brick, while the front and rear are welded steel sheeting with glazed panels. Side opening doors in tow leaves open out on the front elevation only".*

Planning History

2.9 Prior to the acquisition of the site by Bicester Heritage Ltd early in 2013 there had been no significant recent planning history on the site and none at all in respect of building 119.

2.10 Since 2013, applications for listed building consent and/or planning permission have been submitted and approved in respect of building 87 (applications 13/01774/F and 13/01775/LB), building 82 (applications 14/00072/F and 14/00209/F), building 96 (14/01759/F and 14/02065/LB), building 99 (14/00429/DISC and 14/01449/LB) and building 102 (application 14/00454/F).

Proposals

2.11 Bicester Heritage is seeking to create the nation's first business park that is dedicated to historic aviation and motoring excellence and to create a campus of leading specialists. In this context, the overall vision is the creation of a mixed use development, with continued aviation activities from the flying field, and a range of campus uses related to the storage, maintenance, repair, sales etc of historic vehicles and aircraft, together with ancillary activities including office uses, training facilities and the provision of overnight accommodation.

- 2.12 The application proposes the change of use of the building to B1c light industrial use. The proposal involves the internal division of the building to separate the large space; the proposal also makes use of existing internal enclosures. The proposed use is to complement existing heritage motoring and aviation operations on the site.
- 2.13 The external changes proposed to the building are set out in detail in the Design and Access Statement. Works are clearly required to arrest the current decay of the existing steel panel cladding and to provide accommodation that meets modern standards. The existing metal cladding, support structure and windows in the east and west elevations are to be replaced with traditional profile corrugated sheet cladding, which is commonly used on other buildings within the Technical site. The new cladding will incorporate insulation and include new windows and pedestrian and roller shutter doors for access to the respective areas of the building. No changes save for the refurbishment and/or like-for-like replacement of existing doors and windows, are proposed to the northern and southern elevations.
- 2.14 The existing slate roof is to be removed and replaced with traditional profile corrugated sheet roofing that will incorporate patent glazing and insulation. The existing cast iron rainwater goods to the building will be replaced or restored as necessary.
- 2.15 In addition to the proposed changes to the building, modest landscaping works are included within this proposal. Specifically, a single self-set sycamore tree to the west of the building is proposed to be removed and new tarmac surfacing will be laid to the roller shutter door entrances on the western side of the building.

3.0 Planning Policy

- 3.1 Under Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 there is a statutory obligation to determine planning applications and appeals in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 3.2 The Development Plan in Cherwell District presently consists of the saved policies of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996.

- 3.3 The Council has a non-Statutory Local Plan dating from 2004 which was adopted by the Council for development control purposes but which carries no statutory weight.
- 3.4 The Council has also submitted the new Cherwell Local Plan (2006-2031) to the Secretary of State for formal Examination. Public examination sessions have been held with the Plan being amended in line with the Examination Inspector's requirements. The Examination Inspector is yet to publish his findings from the Local Plan Examination but the plan nonetheless represents the Council's latest policy vision for the future and indicates how it wishes it to proceed in the future; therefore it is an important consideration for this statement.

National Planning Guidance

- 3.5 Government Guidance and Policy is also capable of being a material consideration to be taken account of in decision making. Current guidance is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that was introduced on 27th March 2012.
- 3.6 The NPPF presents a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In terms of proposals for development, this means that proposals which accord with the relevant development plan should be approved without delay, unless the effects of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the associated benefits (Para 14).
- 3.7 The core planning principles (para 17) underpin plan making and decision taking and state that planning should, *inter alia*, proactively drive and support economic development, encourage the re-use of existing resources and conversion of existing buildings, encourage the effective use of land that has been previously developed, promote mixed use developments and conserve heritage assets.
- 3.8 One of the central aims of the NPPF is to build a strong and competitive economy. It states that the Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity (para 18) and that planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth (para 19).

- 3.9 Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is indivisible from good planning – it should contribute positively to making places better for people (Para 56). Policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or tastes, although it is proper to seek to reinforce local distinctiveness (Para 60). Paragraph 73 recognises that access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well being of communities.
- 3.10 Local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying certain principles, as set out in the NPPF.
- 3.11 The NPPF also sets out the Government’s approach in using the planning system to conserve and enhance the historic environment. Where applying for planning permission, applicants should be required to assess the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution which is made by their setting. The level of detail provided should be proportionate to the asset’s significance and no more detailed than sufficient to assess the potential impact of the proposal upon this significance.
- 3.12 As a minimum, the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any assets which may be affected by a proposal, taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise (Para’s 128 - 129). In planning for the historic environment, local planning authorities should have up-to-date evidence about the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment (Para. 169).
- 3.13 Finally the NPPF encourages pre-application engagement and front loading to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system.

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan (CLP)

- 3.14 The Adopted CLP is of an age which may be considered out of date by the NPPF. There have also been significant material changes in circumstances at RAF Bicester since its adoption, notably the designation of the conservation area, the statutory listing of many of the buildings and designation of scheduled monument status upon other structures.

- 3.15 Part of the airfield at RAF Bicester surrounding the existing hangars was allocated for employment generating development with the remainder identified for recreational uses in Policy EMP2 of the adopted CLP. However, the policy was not saved.
- 3.16 Policy EMP 4 refers, more generally, to employment generating development in rural areas. According to Policy EMP4, the conversion of an existing building or group of buildings to employment use in rural areas will normally be permitted provided the form, bulk and general design of the buildings is in keeping with the surrounding area. The relevance of this policy, which was drafted to deal with redundant agricultural buildings, may be questionable, however it is an approach to existing buildings that is consistent with the NPPF and as such the spirit of the policy is relevant.

Non Statutory Local Plan

- 3.17 There are no policies in the NSCLP referring specifically to the former RAF Bicester buildings or flying field. However, Policies EMP4 and EMP6 refer to existing employment sites and re-use of rural buildings respectively, with EMP6 supporting re-use provided proposals do not harm the character or the setting of buildings of architectural or historic interest. Again these policies are broadly in line with the thrust of the NPPF.

Cherwell Local Plan 2031 (Submission January 2014)

- 3.18 The emerging CLP has reached the examination stage and provides the most up to date indication of the Council's aspirations for development in the District.
- 3.19 Policy Bicester 8 relates specifically to the future use of RAF Bicester. It states that the Council '*will encourage conservation-led proposals to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for RAF Bicester's Technical Site and Flying Field*'. Additionally, the policy states that the Council will support a range of uses for the site - including employment, recreation, leisure, tourism and community uses.
- 3.20 It further identifies that the development of hotel and conference facilities may also be supported as part of a wider package of employment uses, but makes clear that development proposals must maintain and enhance the character

and appearance of the conservation area, protect listed, scheduled and other important buildings, and protect the sensitive historic fabric of the buildings and preserve the openness of the airfield.

Bicester Master Plan (SPD Consultation Draft Aug 2012)

- 3.21 The Master Plan identifies RAF Bicester as a mixed use employment area, described thus: *‘providing a wide range of employment opportunities in new and refurbished buildings including the reuse of the listed buildings. Uses could include: history and heritage interpretation; conservation, repair and restoration activities; specialist aviation manufacturing and repair; community performing arts; health club and small business units and tourism facilities’.*

RAF Bicester Planning Brief

- 3.22 The Planning Brief was adopted by the Council in 2009 and, therefore, is a material consideration for future proposals at the site. It does not however have the status of a Supplementary Planning Document.
- 3.23 The Brief encourages the re-use of the buildings for their original purpose but recognises that, in most instances, a new use will need to be found. It seeks a comprehensive approach to the management of the technical site, which ensures a consistent maintenance regime across the campus style layout and no subdivision of the landscape with means of enclosure.
- 3.24 The Brief recognises that employment uses would be suitable for many of the buildings, but that care would need to be taken over the level of alterations to facilitate such uses.

4.0 Discussion

- 4.1 This application for planning permission relates to a change of use of building 119 to use falling within Classes B1c of the Use Classes Order. The building is described in the Design and Access Statement produced by Gaunt Francis Architects and the nature of the internal and external works proposed to the building are set out in their report and the accompanying application drawings.
- 4.2 The changes proposed to the building are numerous, both internally and externally, but the fundamental character and appearance of the building would be unharmed by the proposal and its significance to the site and its

positive contribution to the RAF Bicester Conservation Area would be preserved. Indeed, it is considered that the proposal represents an excellent opportunity to ensure the long term maintenance and retention of the building as the uses proposed both promise an active and viable long-term purpose for the building.

- 4.3 The significance of the building is as part of its group appeal on what is considered (by English Heritage) to be the best preserved airfield base from the Inter-War years. As set out above, and in the supporting documents, whilst the internal and external form of the building will inevitably be altered to a degree, the proposed new works - together with the proposed works of renovation and repair – have been carefully conceived so as to reflect and respect the importance of the existing building in order that its positive contribution to the conservation area is safeguarded.
- 4.4 The proposed external alterations to the building while necessary to bring the building to modern operational standards will be visually sensitive and preserve the character and appearance of the area. The existing steel cladding to the east and west elevations of the building is in a very poor state of repair and in need of replacement. Profile corrugated metal is characteristic of the area and is commonly seen elsewhere on the site and its use on the east and west elevations would be in character with the existing building.
- 4.5 The proposed roller-shutter proposed respect the proportions of the existing building and, while a modern intervention, preserve the overall character of the structure, particularly in view of its historic fire station garage use.
- 4.6 The proposed alterations to the roof will have a very limited impact on the wider area. The roof has a low profile and is recessed behind a parapet wall; the setback and overall height of the structure mean the roof is only visible from above. The patent glazing respects the substantial proportions of the building, and features on other workshop buildings, as does the proposed profiled metal sheet roofing.
- 4.7 The building's former use as garaging for fire fighting vehicles means it already benefits from access to the internal road network to the west with tarmac hardstanding to part of the frontage. The proposed design takes advantage of existing hardstanding using this to provide access to one of the proposed roller

shutter doors. Modest new areas of tarmac surfacing are also proposed to serve the two other new roller-shutter doors in the western elevation.

- 4.8 The proposed formation of the area of hardstanding to the northern-most of the roller-shutter doors will require the removal of a single self-set sycamore tree. The tree proposed for removal does not form part of the formally laid out planting on the avenues of the and its removal would not be detrimental to the character or the appearance of the conservation area.
- 4.9 With regard to the proposed use this would not be detrimental to local amenity, including the amenity of nearby occupiers. The establishment of commercial uses on the site has been accepted in principal and is something supported under policy Bicester 8 of the emerging Local Plan. The proposed light industrial use is in line with the accepted site vision for the site as a heritage automotive and aviation centre and has been approved for other buildings upon the site. The building is located well within the commercial area of the site well served by the existing access and is sufficiently removed from neighbours that the proposed use should not be detrimental to amenity.
- 4.10 The proposed built development is sensitive to the existing environment and would preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. The proposed use of the building accords with the aspirations for development of the wider site and would not be detrimental to local amenity. In these circumstances, therefore, it is hoped that Officers will support the application and recommend that planning permission is duly granted.