



Planning and Heritage Impact Statement

**Site: Building 89- The Guardhouse
Bicester Heritage**

Applicant: Bicester Heritage Ltd

December 2015

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1.0 Introduction

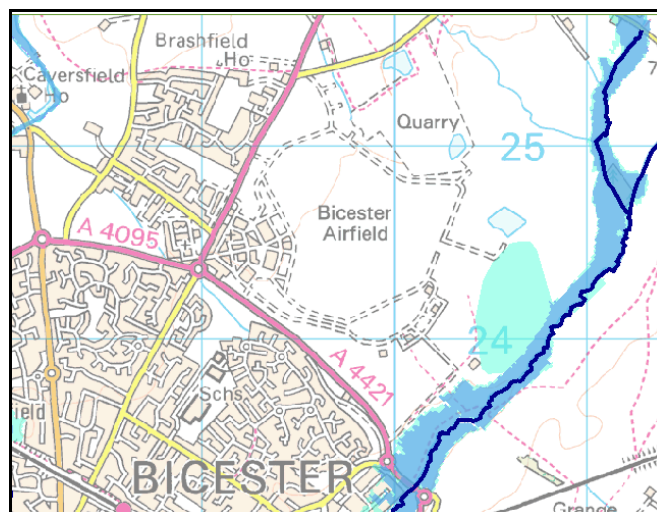
- 1.1 This statement has been produced by JPPC to accompany the application by Bicester Heritage Ltd seeking combined planning permission and listed building consent for the change of use of Building 89 at Bicester Heritage to an A3 restaurant. The application also seeks the Council's approval for a number of associated external and internal alterations to facilitate the new use.
- 1.2 With reference to the character of the application site and surrounding area, an appraisal of the prevailing planning policy and planning history specifically, and assessment of the planning issues raised by the proposal, this statement sets out why the development is considered acceptable.
- 1.3 The application should be read in conjunction with the plans and design and access statement produced by CMI Architecture.

2.0 Site Description, Planning History and Proposal

- 2.1 RAF Bicester is sited on the north eastern side of Bicester, north of the A4421, which is part of the "ring road" around Bicester. It extends to some 141.5 hectares and includes various buildings and a flying field. It does not include the residential site to the west of the A421.
- 2.2 RAF Bicester is a conservation area. Within the technical site there are 19 listed buildings and 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 most 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 numbered 89, is situated at the western edge of the site close to the site entrance off the A421 having been the former entrance building to the former RAF base.
- 2.8 Building 89, also known as the Guardhouse, dates from the inter-war period having been constructed around 1926 and is Grade II listed. A copy of the listing specification is attached as **Appendix 1**.

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

"The Guardhouse was the first and last building on any RAF Station and therefore it was here that any visitors had to report to on arrival for verifying that they had the correct authority to enter the camp. Furthermore, visitors were sent back here on leaving. Airmen stationed on the camp also reported to the Guardhouse to have their leave-pass checked before leaving the station. The guardroom part of the building was the working office of an Orderly Officer who operated the building in a good workman like manner to create a good impression.

Other duties included, the issuing of keys, basic investigations of crime, controlling station transport on leaving the base, providing an escort, lost and found property, dress and discipline of airmen on the station.

Another important function was the care of prisoners pending appearance before the Section Officer or CO depending how serious the 'crime' was. They were confined to the general detention room or a single prisoner could be kept in the service detention room. In either cell, windows were in the form of top lighting, air ventilators provided fresh air and electric lighting was of the guarded type. There were no doors on the latrine or showers and only a plank bed and a pillow board were provided for sleeping. Defaulters (perpetrators of a minor crime) periodically throughout the day, had to report to the guardroom, but still carried on with their everyday jobs. They reported for inspection in full 'marching order' morning and evening, at lunch time in normal dress and for two hours cleaning at 1800hrs.

Built of dark red brick with pointing of grey mortar, the most significant architectural feature here is the gambrel roof. Clad in slate, the roof slope projects forward to form a covered verandah where it is supported by reinforced concrete pillars. In the centre of the ridge line, is a wooden bell tower which until recently housed an air-raid siren.

This example is the larger version, built with a fire party rest room side annexe.

Comments: This is a very impressive building and today is the best example of its type. The rear elevation still contains the walled exercise yard and cells with their characteristic air ventilators. The front elevation has had one door opening bricked up, but this does not detract from the impact of this elevation. A date stone showing 1926 was noted.

This example at Bicester is thought to be the only one extant of the larger version. Smaller examples survive at Lee-on-Solent, Upper Heyford and Wittering”.

Planning History

- 2.10 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 89.
- 2.11 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) and building 102 (application 14/00454/F), building 96 (14/01759/F), and building 119 (15/00523/F). Application 15/00611/F in relation to buildings 92, 93 and 94 is anticipated for approval imminently.

Proposals

- 2.12 Bicester Heritage has created 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.
- 2.13 The application proposes the change of use of the buildings to commercial uses in line with the vision for Bicester Heritage. Planning permission and listed building consent is sought for the conversion of Building 89 to an A3 restaurant use along with the necessary internal and external changes

required to facilitate that use. The proposed changes for the building are considered in detail in the accompanying Design and Access Statement.

- 2.14 The proposed facility is to act as a hub for the Bicester Heritage site and includes private dining/meeting spaces alongside the more conventional dining hall. The restaurant will also be open to the public to allow a wider range of visitors to experience and enjoy the heritage site. The proposed A3 use will emulate the building's original purpose, providing an entrance to the site where visitors to the site can be greeted and entertained.
- 2.15 The restaurant will, in the main, be contained within the existing structure with all kitchen and storage provided in the single building. A modest extension is proposed to the eastern end of the northern elevation. It is also proposed to cover the enclosed exercise yard to create additional dining space.

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 also adopted its Local Plan 2031 Part 1 in July 2015 following public examination. The plan sets out strategic aspirations for the district including policies particular to the former RAF Bicester site and economic development.

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. This is very up to

date with the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 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 the former 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 open other structures.
- 3.15 Part of the airfield at the former 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 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.

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2031 Part 1

- 3.18 Adopted in July 2015 the Local Plan provides the most up to date policy with regard to the Council's aspirations for development in the District.
- 3.19 Policy Bicester 8 relates specifically to the future use of the former 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

Listed Building Issues

- 4.1 The NPPF recognises that the most effective means of securing the future of listed buildings is for them to be in an active viable use. We accept that an active use is not to be established 'at any cost'; however in this case we do believe the proposed restaurant to be an appropriate use for Building 89.
- 4.2 The design proposed has been shaped by the historic building in order to limit unnecessary interventions and has been informed by discussion with the Council's Conservation Officers. It will be noted that the historic cells have been retained as private dining and meeting rooms. This allows retention of the particularly characteristic feature and also provides much needed meeting space for businesses on site.
- 4.3 The exercise yard is also proposed to be enclosed with a shallow pitched glazed roof that will ensure the sense of the external space is retained. Where interventions are required to the fabric of the building elements of the structure will be retained wherever possible (for example as wall nibs). This will ensure the historic separation of spaces can still be read to the benefit of historic interest.

- 4.4 The proposed works to the listed building are considered to be the minimum required to create a viable restaurant. The covers proposed are the lowest necessary for a viable business with the kitchen space the smallest realistic area with which to serve those covers.
- 4.5 We accept that the works proposed to the building will impact on the character of the listed building, however we believe that addressing design in a sensitive manner can go a good way to mitigating this impact.
- 4.6 Building 89 is unique on the site having provided the principal entrance on an otherwise inward looking site. A restaurant is considered to be a suitable role for the building as it again provides a public entrance to the site. The nature of businesses and historic road layout mean that it would be undesirable to direct significant numbers of visitors through the Technical Site to an alternative building.

Planning considerations

- 4.7 The proposed development will create a restaurant for the benefit of Bicester Heritage and the wider community as encouraged by Local Plan policy Bicester 8 which states that the Council will support: *“heritage tourism uses, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses”*. The provision of conference facilities is also supported under the same policy.
- 4.8 The NPPF aspires to deliver sustainable development through positive planning. Sustainability is identified as being achieved through three key strands; the environment, the economic and the social. Local Plan policies consistent with the NPPF share the same aspiration for sustainable development.
- 4.9 Bicester Heritage has been successful in restoring the historic site and providing a range of high quality premises for heritage motoring and aviation companies. The quality of the development is reflected by occupancy rates alongside independent endorsement from Historic England.
- 4.10 Whilst the individual premises provided have been attractive to occupying companies the absence of any suitable space for businesses to meet and entertain clients on the site has consistently been raised as an issue. This is

particularly problematic in view of the number of businesses on the site that deal in high-value premium goods and services.

- 4.11 Presently businesses operating at Bicester Heritage are forced to schedule meetings away from the site adding to vehicle movements. The absence of dining facilities also means workers travel elsewhere for lunch, coffee, etc. The enhancement of on-site facilities for workers will enhance the environmental sustainability of businesses at Bicester Heritage through a reduction in vehicular movements.
- 4.12 The lack of a communal ‘hub’ facility of the site has also prevented the true potential of Bicester Heritage as a specialist knowledge and business centre from being realised. At present there are very limited opportunities for networking and sharing of knowledge between businesses, normally a key asset of such a specialised cluster. Provision of the proposed restaurant will enhance the sustainability of the site in economic and social terms.
- 4.13 In addition to enhancing the appeal of Bicester Heritage as a business environment we also believe the proposal holds a broader community benefit. There has been a good deal of expansion to the north of the town including the Garden Quarter; however the provision of facilities has been very limited.
- 4.14 The provision of a restaurant to serve the northern portion of the town would clearly be beneficial to the area fostering a sense of community and identity. The scale of the facility proposed is not such that it would undermine the wider offer in Bicester town centre. The restaurant will contribute to the social sustainability of the area, particularly the new communities of north Bicester.
- 4.15 The provision of a new facility on the site has potential to generate new movements on the local highway. The proposed dining area is however well below Oxfordshire County Council’s published threshold for which a Transport and Travel Plan Statement is expected (300sqm) as identified in the Council’s March 2014 guidance. It is also relevant to note that a principal reason for introduction of the facility is to serve businesses already operating from the site. The restaurant will remove the need for businesses to make multiple trips off-site for similar facilities; this will to some extent offset any new trips arising from the restaurant.

- 4.16 The proposal for the restaurant includes dedicated parking provision for the facility. The spaces provided are in line with Council standards and are intended to remove the need for vehicles to enter the broader Bicester Heritage site and avoid a proliferation of parked vehicles.
- 4.17 A further application is anticipated to be submitted shortly providing a comprehensive development of MOD buildings on the site. This will include further measures to address on site parking and vehicular movements.
- 4.18 A great deal of work has been undertaken to secure the heritage assets making up the Technical Site. Presently these assets are shared with the public through events such as 'Sunday Scrambles' and the Flywheel Festival, these however in the main only appeal to a limited audience. It is clearly beneficial to provide a facility allowing greater access to the heritage assets for the general public on a routine basis.
- 4.19 In view of the clear and significant benefits we believe the proposal is supported by policy Bicester 8 should be allowed unless it would result in such significant harm that the benefits are outweighed. In this case we consider the most significant issue to be the impact of the proposed works on the listed building.
- 4.20 Considered on balance we consider that the considerable benefits arising from the development, namely the enhanced economic and environmental sustainability of Bicester Heritage, combined with the social sustainability of the north Bicester area outweigh the impact upon the listed building. Furthermore the development will also have some beneficial impacts for heritage assets through securing its long-term future of the listed building and enhanced public access to the building and conservation area.

APPENDIX 1- LISTING DESCRIPTION



Historic England

BUILDING NO 89 (GUARD AND FIRE PARTY HOUSE)

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: BUILDING NO 89 (GUARD AND FIRE PARTY HOUSE)

List entry Number: 1393037

Location

BUILDING NO 89 (GUARD AND FIRE PARTY HOUSE), A 421 (SOUTH-EAST SIDE)

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Oxfordshire

District: Cherwell

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Launton

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 01-Dec-2005

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 497525

Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List entry Description

Summary of Building

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

LAUNTON

SP5924 A 421 (SOUTH-EAST SIDE) 1714/0/10052 RAF Bicester: Technical Site

GV II

Guardhouse with exercise yard and accommodation for fire party. Dated 1926. By the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings, to drawing number 959/25. Dark brick in Flemish bond, but some stretcher bond, slate gambrel roof, some flat concrete extensions, brick stack.

PLAN: A long rectangular building containing guardhouse and office, with cells; roof sweeps down over non-enclosed verandah to the front, and at the rear is a walled exercise yard.

EXTERIOR: Verandah on four square chamfered concrete posts to stone pads and with broad impost blocks set to shallow concrete platform; sloping soffit is boarded. Steel casements set to flush chamfered concrete lintels and stooled sills, one doorway with second blocked, and in flat-roofed bay at each end a further plank door with over-light. Large double casements to rear. Centred over the verandah at the ridge a square bell-turret in timber with clad skirt, small metal cupola. The walled rear enclosure in stretcher bond, rising to parapet at mains eaves level. Metal vents to rear cells.

INTERIOR: Retains original joinery. Wooden cell doors with original fittings.

HISTORY: The Technical Site at Bicester, separated from the Domestic Site, still has many of the original buildings, mostly of 1926 but with others added during successive phases of the 1930's Expansion Period. As part of the first phase of buildings on this uniquely important site, this comprises one of the first permanent designs for Britain's independent air force. It is a good example of the larger version of guardhouse of its period, thought to be the only extant example (Francis, 1996, 23). It is also prominently sited at the main gate, facing the Station Offices (qv) across the main axial route that bisects the technical site and leads to the hangars and flying field.

Bicester is the best-preserved of the bomber bases constructed as the principal arm of Sir Hugh Trenchard's expansion of the RAF from 1923, which was based on the philosophy of offensive deterrence. It retains, better than

any other military airbase in Britain, the layout and fabric relating to both pre-1930s military aviation and the development of Britain's strategic bomber force - and the manner in which its expansion reflected domestic political pressures as well as events on the world stage - in the period up to 1939. It was this policy of offensive deterrence that essentially dominated British air power and the RAF's existence as an independent arm of the military in the inter-war period, and continued to determine its shape and direction in the Second World War and afterwards during the Cold War. The grass flying field still survives with its 1939 boundaries largely intact, bounded by a group of bomb stores built in 1938/9 and airfield defences built in the early stages of the Second World War. For much of the Second World War RAF Bicester functioned as an Operational Training Unit, training Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders as well as British air crews for service in Bomber Command. These OTUs, of which Bicester now forms the premier surviving example, fulfilled the critical requirement of enabling bomber crews - once individual members had trained in flying, bombing, gunnery and navigation - to form and train as units. For further historical details see Buildings Nos 79 and 137 (Type 'A' Hangars).

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Dobinson, C, *Airfield Themes*, (1997)

Francis, P, *British Military Airfield Architecture From Airships To The Jet Age*, (1996)

Francis, P , *RAF Bicester*, (1996)

National Grid Reference: SP 59056 24427

Map



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