

Design Advice

Application Number	15/01012/OUT
Applicant's Name	Albion Land Ltd
Application Type	Outline
Location	BICESTER 11 - SKIMMINGDISH LANE, BICESTER
Case Officer	Andrew Lewis

Outline – Development of 48,308sqm of employment floorspace

Context

This document provides a summary of the heritage issues being raised for the application. This has been provided at the request of the developer's agent and should be read in conjunction with the previous comments submitted.

The LPA supports the principle of commercial development at Bicester 11; however we have a fundamental concern regarding the scale and height of the development proposals. In assessing the impact of the development proposals set out in the application, we have to consider the maximum scale of development that the parameter plans would support. The parameter plans indicate that up to 48,308 sq m of development is proposed. This figure can be translated into a building envelope of 240m length, 200m wide and 16m high (14.5m at the eaves on some frontages).

The site is allocated in the Cherwell Local Plan. The Bicester 11 policy in this document makes specific reference to the need for consideration of the height of development, the enhancement of RAF Bicester Conservation Area and the setting of the adjoining Scheduled Monuments. Advice has consistently been given to the applicant through both sets of the formal Pre Application process that the height of the building is a fundamental concern of the LPA. It is our view that the development proposals fail to preserve, conserve or enhance the setting of the various heritage assets which sit adjacent to the site and that the proposals as currently shown will cause harm.

The Cherwell Local Plan provides the starting point for understanding the site; the document contains site specific guidance that should inform the development of the site. The RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal has been a key document in understanding the significance of the heritage assets. In accessing the proposals due weight has also been given to the National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance, including the 1990 Planning Acts, GPA2, GPA3 and case law. The planning history of the site has also been appraised. There have been a number of proposals for this site where building heights have been a critical concern. While the policy context has altered, the relationship between the heritage assets and the development site has not changed since their designation and the planning history regarding height concerns on this site remains a material consideration.

Assessment of the Impact of Development on Adjacent Heritage Assets

While it is clear that development of the B11 site will have some impact on the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments, with this current development proposal the impact is extended to harm. Guidelines which would help in minimising the impact of development are set out at the end of this note.

The setting of the airfield is a fundamental part of the significance of the conservation area. It is also the case that views from the listed Watch Tower across the flying field into the open countryside and beyond are part of the functionality of the building and therefore integral to its significance. Similarly the isolation of the bomb stores is not only functional necessity but an indisputable part of the significance of these structures.

Conservation Area

The significance of the Conservation Area is set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal. An airfield depends on its setting and a key characteristic of the flying field is its open aspect and distant views to the surrounding countryside. Although views out and over the open landscape are not directly part of the use of an airfield they underpin the possibilities for successful flight to and from any given aerodrome and are therefore a significant part of the character and use of this site as an airfield.

- The proposals will harm the visual setting of the airfield and the view and vistas over the open countryside. Currently the setting is of the airfield in terms of the significant arced views eastwards, which are much as they were and remain unspoilt.
- The proposals may impact on the uses at Bicester Heritage (Former RAF Bicester). The Local Plan supports heritage tourism uses, leisure, recreation and employment on this site. The flying field is currently leased by Bicester Gliding Centre who has

raised concern that the proposed development at Bicester 11 will impact on their use of the runways. The RAF Bicester Safeguard Map highlights issues with the western part of the application site. If development undermines the original purpose of the airfield by limiting flying, this would be particularly harmful.

Listed Buildings

The significance of the Watch Tower lies in the purpose for which it was built. The views from the Watch Tower are critical to its function to guard the skies and control flight on the airfield. A wide and open vista is, by necessity, afforded over the whole of the flying field and also to the open countryside beyond, which includes distant views to Muswell Hill.

- The Watch Tower and the wider landscape are inextricably linked and the proposed development will harm the setting largely through the impact on operational and defensive views of the site from the Watch Tower.

Scheduled Monuments

The role and significance of the Scheduled Monuments is interconnected to their setting and the proximity of the proposed development will clearly have an impact.

- The setting of the bombstores is an important component in their significance as structures. The sense of isolation and understanding of the dangerous nature of the bomb stores will be compromised by the proposed development.
- The appreciation of the defensive layout of the Seagull Trenches with central anti-aircraft Lewis gun will be affected by the proposals, as the views out of these structures were critical to the defence of the air base (Figure 4 Analysis of the Seagull Trenches, mushroom pillboxes and Lewis gun).

Recommendations

The LPA has been consistent in their advice to the applicants that the height of the proposals is a fundamental concern which makes them unacceptable. The applicant has stated on a number of occasions that they cannot negotiate on the height of the building as 16m is an operational requirement. There are economically viable warehouse and distributions buildings of all shapes and sizes up and down the country and given the sensitivity of the site and its adjacent heritage constraints it is considered reasonable that the scale of the buildings is reduced to mitigate the impact.

The LPA has considered how the height parameters could be amended to reduce the building to an acceptable scale. Based on the views from the Watch Tower at RAF Bicester, we would recommend that the height is reduced to meet the following parameters (see figures 1, 2 and 3):

- The height of development should not break horizon line of near trees (as annotated in the attached figure)
- As a guide as to the appropriate height, the top of the Grade 1 listed tower at St Mary's Launton should not be exceeded.
- The reduction in height could be achieved through a combination of reducing the overall building height and finished floor level.
- In addition, the following issues should be considered at Reserved Matters, to further reduce the impact of development:
 - Breaking down the massing of the built form
 - Materials / finishes that reduce impact by blending with landscape
 - Green roofs
 - Landscape structure planting

Conclusion

Clear guidelines for development have been set out in the Cherwell Local Plan for the development of the site (Bicester 11 policy). The principle of development at Bicester 11 is clearly accepted; however the site parameters must be developed in line with policy. At this stage the parameters do not meet the policy set out in the Local Plan, namely in respect of heights and in relation to the adjacent heritage assets. We recommend that the applicant reconsiders their position on the heights of the building.

TO BE READ WITH PREVIOUS DESIGN AND CONSERVATION COMMENTS DATED 11/08/2015 AND 26/10/2015.

Officer	Joyce Christie
Date	24.11.2015
Other Information	It must be stressed that these comments cannot constitute a formal determination under the 'Town and Country Planning Act 1990', or the 'Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990' and that it contains only informal, officer advice, which cannot prejudice any subsequent decision of the Local Planning Authority.



A. View from roof viewing platform

The roof of the care home and Launton Church Tower are visible from the upper roof terrace.

The ridge of any new building on B11 should be below the top of the Church Tower and below the rear tree line before the land becomes more open and rises up the hill.

See Figure 2



B. View from office below roof

The roof of the care home and Launton Church Tower are visible from the office below the upper roof terrace.

The ridge of any new building on B11 should be below the top of the Church Tower and below the rear tree line before the land becomes more open and rises up the hill.

See Figure 2



C. View from office next to lower viewing platform

The roof of the care home and Launton Church Tower are visible from the office which leads out to the lower roof terrace.

The ridge of any new building on B11 should be below the top of the Church Tower and below the rear tree line before the land becomes more open and rises up the hill.

See Figure 2



D. View from ground level Watch Office

The care home and Launton Church Tower are not visible from the ground level 'Watch Office' but the poplars can still be seen.

See Figure 2



E. View from outside Watch Tower

The care home and Launton Church Tower are not visible from exterior ground level at the base of the Watch Tower but the poplars can still be seen.

See Figure 2

Figure 1: Views from the Watch Tower



A. Key buildings with ridge heights viewed from the top viewing platform of the Watch Tower – the red line shows the top of the Grade I listed St. Mary's Church, Launton



B. Key buildings viewed from the top viewing platform of the Watch Tower – the blue line shows the top of the Grade I listed St. Mary's Church, Launton

Figure 2: Key buildings with ridge heights viewed from the top viewing platform of the Watch Tower