

Heritage Impact Assessment

Proposed development:
Land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester



on behalf of
Albion Land

September 2015
GLA-174-v10

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1.1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document constitutes a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) in connection with an outline planning application for the proposed development of land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester, Oxfordshire for employment use. The report has been prepared on behalf of Albion Land by Grover Lewis Associates Limited. The report has been written by Philip Grover BA (Hons), BTP, Dip Arch. Cons., and reviewed by Roy M Lewis BA (Hons), MA (Arch Cons), MRTPI, IHBC.
- 1.2 Grover Lewis Associates is a planning consultancy that specialises in consideration of development proposals relating to the historic environment. The practice is recognised as a Historic Environment Service Provider by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC).
- 1.3 The document has been revised and updated to respond to and address amendments to the scheme that have been made following the adoption of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 on 20 July 2015 and in the light of comments received on the application from the Conservation Officer at Cherwell District Council dated 11 August 2015.
- 1.4 The principle of the application site being developed for a mix of employment uses has been established for over twenty years. The application site, other than a small area to its north east, has been allocated for such use under the relevant policy in the recently adopted Cherwell Local Plan. This HIA therefore assesses, amongst other things, the potential built heritage impacts of the proposed development against the relevant development management criteria contained within the adopted Cherwell Local Plan and those applying specifically to Bicester 11: *Employment Land at North East Bicester*. In particular, the HIA addresses the policy requirement for development proposals to be accompanied and influenced by landscape and visual and heritage impact assessments.
- 1.5 It is of special note that Historic England, who were consulted on the application, raise no objection in their response and note that as the site is allocated in the Local Plan “...*there is a strong presumption in favour of the principle of development ...*”. It is in this context that the heritage impact of the proposal should be considered.

- 1.6 The application site is located adjacent to the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, which in turn contains a number of statutorily designated heritage assets. This document therefore focuses on the detail of how, through careful understanding of the significance and sensitivities of the designated heritage assets and their settings, and through appropriate establishment of appropriate development parameters and mitigation measures, the proposed development can be accommodated in a manner that avoids material harm to them. It describes how the proposals have been carefully shaped to take account of statutory duties, relevant national and local policies and guidance in respect of built heritage.
- 1.7 This HIA responds to the requirements of paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which stipulates that applicants for planning permission should describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by development proposals, including any contribution made by their setting. The HIA considers the impact of the proposal on the significance of built heritage assets, to assist the local planning authority with regard to the requirements of paragraph 129 of the NPPF in relation to determination of the application for planning permission. Specifically, it summarises the historical development of the former RAF Bicester airfield, and identifies the significance of its component built heritage assets and their settings. The report sets out the national and local heritage policy framework in which the development proposals will be assessed.
- 1.8 It should be noted that this HIA does not deal with buried archaeological heritage. Reference is made within the development management criteria of Policy Bicester 11 to the need to consider the impact of any proposed development on cultural heritage and archaeology as is the case for all of the strategic allocations within the Local Plan. It is recognised that there is potential for buried archaeological remains to be encountered in the course of the development of the site, although archaeological investigation undertaken by Thames Archaeological Services on the adjoining site in October 2005 would appear to indicate that the archaeological potential is low.
- 1.9 Quod discussed the archaeological potential of the site with Oxfordshire County Archaeologist, Richard Oram on 13 February in order to clarify whether or not an archaeological assessment would be required in this particular instance to support the outline application. Mr Oram confirmed that a standalone archaeology report would not be needed but that the Council may require a watching brief to be implemented during the construction phase, the details of which could be confirmed through an appropriately worded planning condition.

- 1.10 This HIA should be read in conjunction with other application documents, in particular the Design and Access Statement and proposals drawings (August 2015 revisions) prepared by Chetwoods, and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Landscape Parameters Plan (September 2015 revisions) prepared by Re-form Landscape Architecture.

2.0 Site description and heritage significance

- 2.1 The application site lies to the north-west of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester which forms part of the ring road on the northern side of Bicester. It is a roughly rectangular shaped undeveloped piece of land of approximately 14.45 hectares in area. On its eastern side the site is abutted by open agricultural land, and to the immediate north and west, is the former RAF Bicester airfield. The development site and the surrounding land is substantially flat and open in nature, and is punctuated with trees and hedgerows.
- 2.2 The former RAF Bicester airfield became fully redundant in 2004 and has been acquired by Bicester Heritage Limited who are developing it as a business park for the restoration storage and display of vintage cars, motor cycles and aeroplanes. The main part of that operation is concentrated in the hangars and associated buildings at the core of the former RAF base, which lies to the west, away from the proposed development site. The flying field itself is leased by the Windrushers Gliding Club and subsidiary gliding groups.

Heritage designations and their significance.

- 2.3 The former RAF Bicester was constructed as the principal arm of Sir Hugh Trenchard's expansion of the RAF from 1923 to 1939. The airbase was created on the philosophy of offensive deterrence. It is considered to retain, 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 in the period leading up to the declaration of war in 1939. The grass flying field still survives with its 1939 boundaries largely intact, bounded by a group of bomb stores built in 1928-1929 and airfield defences built in the early stages of the war. Consequently, the airfield, together with its surviving buildings and structures from the 1930s, is nationally significant in heritage terms.

RAF Bicester Conservation Area

- 2.4 Due to its heritage significance the whole of the former RAF Bicester airbase has been designated a conservation area by Cherwell District Council. The conservation area boundary encompasses the entirety of the area of the airbase that had been constructed by the outset of World War II. It includes the core of the base (the Technical Site) and its buildings to the western

edge of the site, together with the flying field, including the remaining defensive structures on and adjacent to the flying field. The conservation area boundary equates to the 1939 boundary of RAF Bicester (see Figure 1).

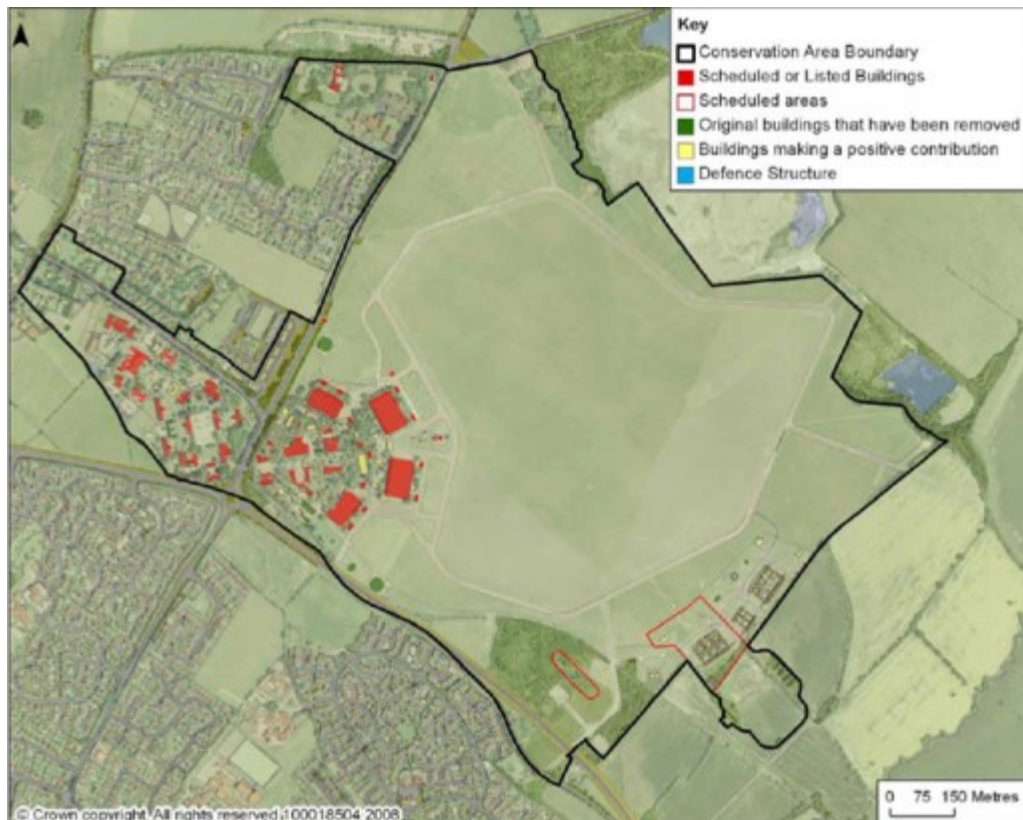


Figure 1: The boundary of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area (source: the plan is a reproduction of Figure 7 of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal, Cherwell District Council, 6 October 2008)

- 2.5 Cherwell District Council has prepared a detailed character appraisal for the RAF Bicester Conservation Area. The document explains the rationale for the designation of the conservation area. It highlights that, as a pre-World War II air base, RAF Bicester is regarded as being of high national significance in the context of 20th century military aviation.
- 2.6 The RAF Bicester Conservation Area Character Appraisal defines the spatial qualities of the former RAF base, and the relationships between the various zones within it. The character appraisal also identifies the important views and vistas within the conservation area (see Figure 2). The most important of these, identified in paragraph 7.2.3 of the character appraisal, is the open vista from the Watch Tower/Office over the whole of the flying field and beyond. The character appraisal highlights that from the Watch Tower/Office a direct view can be obtained of the Bomb Stores beyond the perimeter

track, which are set against scrub and tree planting for camouflage purposes. Views of the Bomb Stores from the Technical Site are identified in the character appraisal as an essential characteristic of the airfield requiring preservation.



Figure 2: Spatial Analysis Plan indicating the extent of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, an open vista from the Watch Tower across the flying field to the Bomb Stores, vistas within the airfield, and formal axial views (source: the plan is a reproduction of Figure 11 of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal, Cherwell District Council, 6 October 2008)

- 2.7 A number of the component structures within the airfield are considered to be particularly important elements within the former military landscape and accordingly have been statutorily protected in their own right, some by listing, and some by scheduling.

Listed Buildings

- 2.8 Close to the main entrance of the airbase on its western side there is a concentration of buildings that once formed the core of the operational base. This part of the airbase is referred to as the Technical Site. A number of these early airbase buildings within the Technical Site have been afforded statutory protection through listing. These listed buildings (all grade II)

include, most notably, the large pre-Second World War hangars and the airfield Watch Tower/Office, which are discussed below. The group of listed buildings also includes the station HQ, workshops, lecture rooms, stores, transport sheds, barrack blocks, officers' mess and quarters, the Dining Room and Institute, and the Guard House. These buildings are described in detail and illustrated in the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal, and therefore not discussed comprehensively here.

- 2.9 The interrelationship of the group of the listed buildings at the core of the site, and their visual relationship with the airfield as a whole, contributes to their significance. It should be noted that the listed buildings at RAF Bicester are situated at the western side of the airfield, nearly a kilometre away from the application site. Consequently, in the great majority of cases, the settings and significance of these listed buildings are unaffected by the development proposals. The Watch Tower/Office and hangars have a particularly close functional and visual relationship with the flying field and therefore warrant detailed consideration.

Watch Tower/Office

- 2.10 The Watch Tower/Office dates from 1938. It is constructed from brickwork on a reinforced concrete frame and has flat roofs with an asphalt finish. It replaced an earlier tower of 1927 design. The Watch Tower/Office is typical of the 1934 'Fort' type design by Archibald Bullock, architect to the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings. Plate 1 is a general view of the Watch Tower/Office.
- 2.11 The Watch Tower/Office is located at the end of the main axis through the Technical Site from the guardhouse, closing the vista at the edge of the flying field. The statutory list description states that this arrangement is strongly representative of developments on flying fields in the mid-1930s, highlighting that *'the now-familiar airfield landscape of runway, perimeter dispersals and flight control was only beginning to gain acceptance within the Air Ministry in the late 1930s, when increasing attention was being given in airfield planning to their ability to disperse and shelter aircraft from attack, ensure serviceable landing and take-off areas, and control movement: hence increasingly sophisticated designs for control towers'*.
- 2.12 The Watch Tower/Office is of square plan form, and of three storeys. The ground floor was designed to function as the main watch office and rest room. From this a tight spiral stair rises to the two upper storeys containing the observation room in the tower. Both upper levels have flat roof decks, the lower level has a raised brick parapet, and the upper level a parapet and

safety railing. The building has steel casement windows. The watch office window on the ground floor occupies the full width of the façade facing towards the flying field, and is returned one by light at ends, with smaller lights to the other frontages. The upper level is glazed all round to provide 360 degree visibility. Plate 2 is a view from the upper level window of the Watch Tower looking towards the application site.

- 2.13 Architecturally the Watch Tower/Office is significant as it represents the first attempt for a design of a military watch office. A total of 41 of this type of watch tower were built, of which only five of the brick-clad design remain, due in part to the fact that after 1936 most were constructed in un-faced reinforced concrete.
- 2.14 As well as its architectural interest the Watch Tower/Office also derives significance from its functional and visual interrelationship with the group of other original airfield buildings within the Technical Site and its functional and visual relationship with the flying field as an integral part of a planned pre-World War II airbase. The airfield setting, in which the Watch Tower/Office can be seen in tandem with other related buildings and the flying field, contributes to its significance as a designated heritage asset.
- 2.15 The setting of the Watch Tower/Office includes both views towards the Watch Tower/Office, in which the flying field and other buildings other can be appreciated together, and views from the Watch Tower/Office over the flying field and beyond. The original function of the Watch Tower/Office was to enable surveillance of the flying field and the skies beyond. Therefore views from the tower contribute to its setting and significance as a designated heritage asset.



Plate 1: General view of the grade II listed Watch Tower/Office of 1934 'Fort' type design. Note brick facing and flat roof construction. Note the defensive pillbox in front and the two 'Type C' aircraft hangars to the sides



Plate 2: View from upper level observation room within the Watch Tower in the direction of the application site.

Hangars

- 2.16 Within the Technical Site, and facing the flying field, are four large, grade II listed aircraft hangars. These buildings are the largest structures within the Technical Site. Two of the hangars (buildings 79 and 137) are 'Type A' hangars dating from 1926 that were erected during the first phase of the development of the airfield. These hangars are built to the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings Drawing No. 19a/24. They are constructed with a steel main frame and roof trusses, with in-situ concrete and brick wall panels and corrugated asbestos sheet roofing. The hangars have full-height sliding doors at each end, with a series of lean-to annexes on either long flank. Plate 3 is a general view of one of the 'Type A' hangars.



Plate 3: General view of one of the 'Type A' hangars.

- 2.17 The 'Type A' shed was the RAF's standard hangar from 1924 to the 1930s, and designed to accommodate twelve of the largest bombers envisaged at that time. The hangars were 249ft (75.9m) in length, 122ft (37.3m) in span. Originally six such hangars were planned for Bicester, but financial restrictions led to only two being built. A further two aircraft hangars were added to the two existing hangars in 1936, and the group of four hangars are grouped symmetrically at the end of the axial avenue, sharing broad concrete aprons.

- 2.18 The two large 'Type C' hangars (buildings 108 and 113 within the Technical Site) that date from 1936 were erected during the expansion phase of RAF Bicester. They are constructed with a steel main frame and roof trusses, with lightweight sheet roofing replacing the original asbestos slates. The roof is in the form of a series of transverse ridges with hipped ends, behind a parapet. The hangars have brick walls and full height doors at either end. Plate 4 is a general view of one of the 'Type C' hangars. The C type shed was the standard hangar for the post-1934 expansion airfields. Originally designed in 1934, 155 examples were built. They were designed to accommodate heavy bombers with 100ft (30.48m) wing span and measured 300ft (91.44m) in length, 150ft (45.72m) in span with a clear internal height of 35ft (10.66m).
- 2.19 The four aircraft hangars have architectural and historic significance as survivals from both the initial and expansion phases of RAF Bicester. Like the Watch Tower/Office, the hangars also draw significance from their functional and visual interrelationship with the group of other historic airfield buildings within the Technical Site, and their functional and visual relationship with the flying field as an integral part of a planned pre-World War II airbase. Consequently, the airfield setting, in which the hangars can be seen in tandem with other related buildings and the flying field, contributes to their significance as designated heritage assets. Plate 5 shows one of the 'Type C' hangars in relation to the flying field, looking south-east in the direction of the application site.



Plate 4: General view of one of the 'Type C' hangars



Plate 5: View of the flank side of one of the 'Type C' aircraft hangars, looking across the flying field in the direction of the applications site

Scheduled Ancient Monument

- 2.20 As well as the listed buildings at the core of the site, other key structures within the airbase have been singled out for statutory protection. These include the bomb stores and a series of airfield defence structures, which have been designated as part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The monument falls within eleven separate areas of protection (termed in the scheduling description as 'constraint areas'). Figure 3 is a plan showing the extent of the Scheduled Ancient Monument with the 'constraint areas' marked in red.
- 2.21 The largest of these areas, defined as 'constraint area 1' in the scheduling description, lies adjacent to the proposed development site on land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane. This area comprises the southern bomb stores group that was constructed in 1938-39 as one of the three intended Squadron Bomb Stores, only two of which were completed. The constraint area includes a series of structures based around the High Explosive Bomb Stores Building.

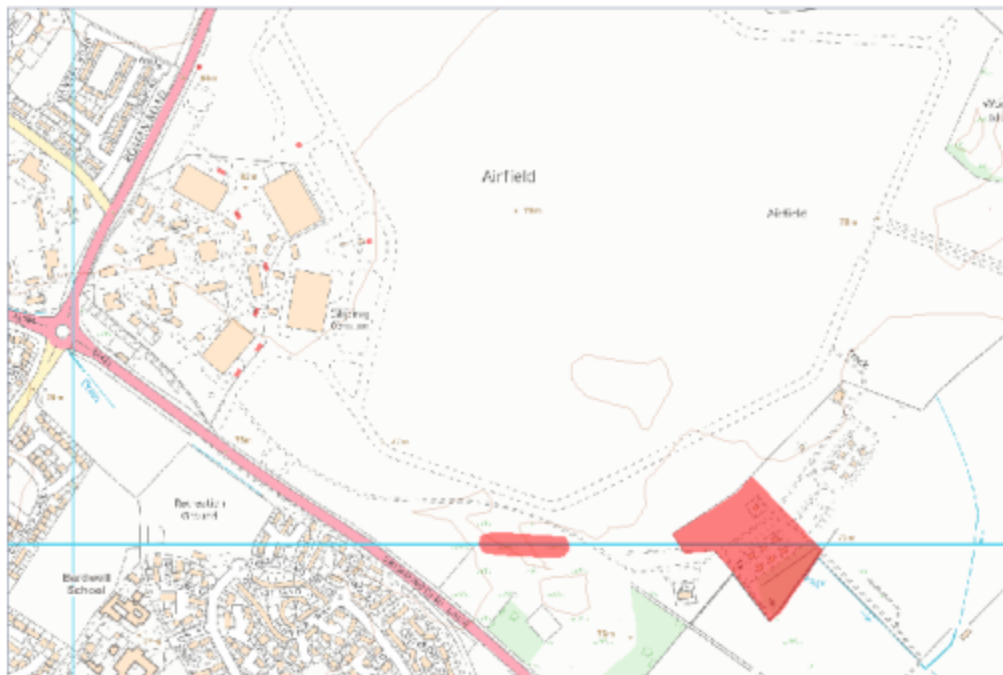


Figure 3: Plan of the scheduled Ancient Monument at RAF Bicester showing the constraint areas marked red (source: English Heritage/Historic England).

- 2.22 The bomb stores consist of two rows of three back-to-back concrete buildings with surrounding earth banking or traverses (see Plate 6). Originally a gantry ran along both the north and south 'frontages' to allow bombs to be lifted into bomb carts before being taken to the Ultra Heavy Fusing point building, a curved roof corrugated steel and earth building of ten bays capable of accommodating a bomb cart 'train' under cover where fuses were added (see Plate 7).
- 2.23 The significance of the structures comprising the southern bomb stores lies primarily in their historical and evidential value, i.e. their potential to yield evidence about past human activity. In this regard the Bomb Stores are significant in providing visible evidence of the methods taken to store safely and securely the components of the bomber armament. Their historical value derives from the ways in which past events, notably the momentous events of World War II are illustrated by the structures. Closely bound with the historical value of the site is the communal value, derived from the meaning that the site holds for the people who related to it in their collective experience of memory.
- 2.24 Far less significant in the case of the bomb stores is their aesthetic or artistic value. These brick and concrete structures were conceived for purely functional military purposes, with no concessions to design or aesthetics.

Furthermore, they were designed to be hidden, surrounded by earthen banks for camouflage and safety reasons. The earth banked traverses help to screen the bomb stores from the immediate surroundings, and the group of structures as a whole was designed to be disguised by mixed shrub and tree planting. Therefore, the group of structures does not have a strong visual presence in the landscape. As a consequence, the visual aspect of this group of structures, including their wider landscape setting, contributes very little to their significance as designated heritage assets (see Plate 8). It should, however, be noted that the unobstructed view of the bomb stores from the Watch Tower/Office, which was necessary for surveillance purposes, is an important aspect of the significance of these otherwise camouflaged features.

- 2.25 Given the discrete nature of these structures, and their overgrown state, and backdrop of dense scrub, they do not enjoy a strong relationship with the wider surroundings beyond the airfield. The intentional isolation of the bomb stores at the periphery of the airfield, away from the residential and other buildings, does however make a contribution to their significance. The relatively close proximity to the application site on adjacent land means that it is necessary to give careful consideration to this aspect of the significance of the Scheduled Ancient Monument in conceiving the disposition, height and layout of the proposed development.
- 2.26 A further component of the Scheduled Ancient Monument defined in the scheduling description as 'constraint area 2' is located approximately 300 metres to the west of the bomb stores. It comprises a group of defences consisting of two 'mushroom' pill boxes flanking an approximately 50 metre long double 'seagull' trench - the former so named for their saucer-domed concrete roofs, and the latter for their wing-shaped plan form. These low-lying structures are not prominent features in the landscape (see Plate 9).
- 2.27 As with the southern bomb stores, the significance of the group of defences consisting of two 'mushroom' pill boxes and 'seagull' trenches lies primarily in their historical and evidential value, i.e. their potential to yield evidence about past human activity. Their historical value derives from the ways in which events of World War II are illustrated by the structures. Closely bound with the historical value of the site is the communal value, derived from the meaning that the site holds for the people who related to it in their collective experience of memory.
- 2.28 The structures comprising 'constraint area 2', the 'mushroom' pill boxes and 'seagull' trenches, were conceived for purely functional military purposes, without concern for aesthetics. Furthermore, they were designed to be

largely subterranean in nature for defensive reasons. The visual aspect of this group of structures, including their wider setting, therefore contributes very little to their significance as designated heritage assets. It should be noted that the structures are not readily visible from the application site, and due to their low-lying nature and intervening trees and scrub there is little visibility towards the application site.

- 2.29 The remaining constraint areas that form part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument are located in the vicinity of the technical site at the core of the airfield at its western side. These comprise a series of Defended Air Raid Shelters close to and associated with the hangar complexes. Plate 10 is a view of the pair of the Defended Air Raid Shelter to the east of the southern hangar (constraint areas 3 & 4 of the Scheduled Ancient Monument). These low-lying concrete and earth structures were intended to provide cover for defenders in the event of ground attack by enemy paratroopers and provided some protection against bombing and strafing by enemy aircraft. Given their distance from the proposed development site, their low-lying nature, and the presence of adjacent mature planting, these structures do not have a strong visual relationship with the application site, which is nearly half a mile (0.8km) away.



Plate 6: Typical view of one of the brick and concrete bomb store buildings protected by earth banking.



Plate 7: View of one of the curved roof corrugated steel and earth Ultra Heavy Fusing point buildings



Plate 8: View of the scheduled portion of the southern bomb stores, looking in the direction of the application site. Note the well-hidden nature of the structures, and the presence of tree and scrub planting



Plate 9: View of one of the two 'mushroom' pill boxes flanking an approximately 50 metre long double 'seagull' trench, looking in the direction of the application site. Note the well-hidden nature of the structures, and the presence of tree and scrub planting



Plate 10: View of the pair of Defended Air Raid Shelters to the east of the southern hangar (constraint areas 3 & 4 of the Scheduled Ancient Monument). Note their low-lying nature.

3.0 Heritage policies, duties and guidance

Overview

- 3.1 The principle of the use of the greater part of the land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester for employment uses is long-standing in terms of development plan policy. An extended area of land for a mix of employment uses has now been allocated under Policy Bicester 11 in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 (adopted 20 July 2015). The proposed use of the land for a mix of employment purposes is therefore not in question. However, a key planning objective is to ensure that such development pays due regard to the setting and significance of designated heritage assets that might be affected by the proposals.
- 3.2 The proposed development site abuts (and slightly overlaps) the RAF Bicester Conservation Area and is adjacent to component elements that are designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Consequently, the outline planning application for proposed mix of employment development will need to be considered in the light of statutory duties relating to the historic environment as well as relevant national and local heritage planning policies and associated guidance.

Statutory duties

- 3.3 Statutory duties relating to proposals affecting the historic built environment are contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The relevant statutory duty relating to development within conservation areas is contained in Section 72 of the Act, which states that, in the exercise of a local authority's planning functions, "*with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area ... special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area*".
- 3.4 The House of Lords clarified, in the case of South Lakeland District Council v Secretary of State for the Environment and another [1992] 1 ALL ER 573, that the *statutorily desirable object of preserving the character or appearance of an area is achieved either by a positive contribution to preservation or by development which leaves character or appearance unharmed, that is to say, preserved*. In effect, this means that neutral development proposals satisfy the statutory duty. It should be noted that this duty refers to development *in* a

conservation area, rather than development outside conservation area, that might affect its setting.

- 3.5 The courts have held that “*preserving means doing no harm*” and have established that, where a proposal would cause some harm, the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings and the character and appearance of conservation areas, should not simply be given careful consideration, but should be given “*considerable importance and weight*” when the decision-maker carries out the planning balance.
- 3.6 The relevant statutory duty relating to development affecting a listed building is contained in Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This makes it a statutory duty for a local planning authority, in considering whether to grant listed building consent or planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to “*have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*”
- 3.7 There is no equivalent statutory duty to have regard to the settings of scheduled Ancient Monuments when determining a planning application, although national policy advice set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advises that such consideration be given to all designated heritage assets.

National Planning Policy Framework and related guidance

- 3.8 As well as having regard to the relevant legislation, the application proposal must be assessed in the context of prevailing heritage policy. National heritage policy is set out in section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in March 2012.
- 3.9 The policies in section 12 of the Framework refer to the concept of a *heritage asset*, which is defined as *a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)* (Annex 2: Glossary).
- 3.10 The policies in section 12 of the Framework place an emphasis on *significance*, which is defined as *the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only*

from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting (Annex 2: Glossary).

- 3.11 The NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as *the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral* (NPPF Annex 2: Glossary).
- 3.12 A number of the policies set out in the Framework are of direct relevance to the consideration of the proposed development on land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester.
- 3.13 Paragraph 128 of the Framework states that *in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.* This document aims to satisfy this requirement.
- 3.14 NPPF Paragraph 132 states that in considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, *great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.* Paragraph 132 clarifies that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset *or development within its setting.* It goes on to state that *substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, should be wholly exceptional.*
- 3.15 Paragraph 134 states that in cases where there is less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, *this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.*

Local heritage policy context

- 3.16 The local planning policy context is provided by relevant policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2013 (adopted July 2015)

- 3.17 Local Plan Policy ESD 15: *The Character of the Built and Historic Environment*, is an overarching policy that seeks to secure appropriate new development that complements and enhances the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. The policy states that:

'Where development is in the vicinity of any of the district's distinctive natural or historic assets, delivering high quality design that complements the asset will be essential'

- 3.18 The policy goes on to state that new development proposals should:

'Conserve, sustain and enhance designated and non-designated 'heritage assets' (as defined in the NPPF) including buildings, features, archaeology, conservation areas and their settings, and ensure new development is sensitively sited and integrated in accordance with advice in the NPPF and NPPG'.

- 3.19 The development management criteria policy for Bicester 11: *Employment Land at North East Bicester*, provides key site-specific design and place shaping principles. Amongst other matters it states the following heritage objectives:

'A comprehensive landscaping scheme to limit visual intrusion into the wider landscape, particularly given the need to preserve the open setting, character and appearance of the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area'

'Conserve or enhance the setting of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area and adjoining Scheduled Ancient Monument.'

Although, as previously mentioned, the principle of employment use for Bicester 11 has been established and land use policy terms, it is for the applicant to demonstrate that the above criteria have been met in respect of specific proposals for the site.

Relevant guidance

- 3.20 Interpretation of the policies in the NPPF is provided by the on-line Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) that was first published in March 2014. The PPG emphasises the need for a clear understanding of the significance of a heritage asset and its setting in order to develop proposals which avoid or minimise harm to significance (Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 18a-019-20140306).

- 3.21 The PPG reiterates much of the advice set out in earlier guidance, for example the advice previously set out in the *PPS5 Historic Environment Practice Guide*. Amongst other things the PPG provides useful guidance on the concepts of significance, and setting, as well as guidance on how to assess if a proposal would cause substantial harm.
- 3.22 A key element set out in Paragraph 009 of Section 12 of the PPG is the principle that, in the context of decision-taking, proper assessment of significance is at the heart of understanding the potential impact and acceptability of proposals. Paragraph 020 advises that a clear understanding of significance is necessary to develop proposals which avoid or minimise harm
- 3.23 The Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning (GPA2), entitled '*Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment*' was published by Historic England/English Heritage in March 2015. This guidance forms part of a suite of good practice advice documents that supersede the earlier *PPS5 Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide*. GPA2 reiterates earlier guidance that the assessment of the significance of heritage assets is an essential part of the planning process. Due regard has been had to this advice in preparing this HIA.
- 3.24 Of particular relevance in the context of the current application is the Historic England/English Heritage Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning (GPA3) entitled *The Setting of Heritage Assets*, published 25 March 2015. This supersedes the earlier English Heritage guidance on setting published in 2011. The new document is considerably shorter but broadly analogous with the earlier guidance. It defines setting as '*the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced*'. The guidance advises that '*While setting can be mapped in the context of an individual application or proposal, it does not have a fixed boundary and cannot be definitively and permanently described for all time as a spatially bounded area or as lying within a set distance of a heritage asset because what comprises a heritage asset's setting may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve.*'
- 3.25 GPA3 provides a framework for the assessment of proposed changes to the setting of a heritage asset. It gives helpful and up to date advice that provides clarity and detail to the understanding of the concept of the *setting* of a heritage asset.

3.26 In order to assess the degree of potential harm to the significance of a heritage asset, GPA3 advises a five step approach:

- **Step 1:** Identify which heritage assets and their setting are affected
- **Step 2:** Assess whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s)
- **Step 3:** Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance
- **Step 4:** Explore the way of maximising enhancement and avoiding or minimising harm
- **Step 5:** Make and document the decision and monitor outcomes

3.27 In respect of Step 2, assessing the degree to which setting makes a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s) in question, GPA3 recommends that the assessment should identify the key attributes of the heritage asset itself and then consider:

- The physical surroundings of the asset, including its relationship with other heritage assets
- The way the asset is appreciated; and
- The asset's associations and patterns of use

3.28 In respect of Step 3, assessing the effect of the proposed development on the significance of the asset(s) GPA3 recommends that the assessment should address the key attributes of the proposed development in terms of its:

- Location and siting
- Form and appearance
- Additional affects
- Permanence

3.29 In seeking to evaluate the impact that the proposed development on land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester would have on the historic environment in its locality, regard has been had in this HIA to the Historic England/English Heritage guidance on setting contained in GPA3. Specifically, the first three steps advocated in the guidance as a broad framework have been broadly followed in order to assess the impact that the proposed development would have on the heritage assets. The parameter plans submitted as part of the application documentations seek to address the objectives set out in Step 4, of the guidance in GPA3, namely to maximise enhancement, and avoid or minimise harm.

4.0 The impact of the proposed development

- 4.1 As previously highlighted, the principle of employment use on land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester is long-established, and this allocation has been confirmed in the relevant policy in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 (adopted 20 July 2015). Consequently, the focus of the assessment contained in this report is the impact of the proposed employment development on designated heritage assets on adjoining land, in terms of its disposition, scale, massing, as expressed on the Parameter Plans and Design Codes submitted as part of the application documentation.
- 4.2 Having regard to statutory duties, and relevant national and local policy, this section of the HIA explains the rationale and nature of the development proposals, and evaluates the impact that the development would have on the settings of designated heritage assets in the vicinity of the application site. In doing so it highlights the process by which the heritage sensitivities of the site have been taken into account and have informed the formulation of the development proposals.

The development proposals and rationale

- 4.3 Outline planning permission is sought for a flexible mix of employment uses within the site (Class B1c, B2 and B8 together with ancillary Class B1a office use). The application proposals involve the creation of up to 48,308 square metres of employment floorspace, along with associated servicing access, car parking and strategic landscaping.
- 4.4 The application site abuts and, at its northern edge, slightly overlaps the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, which embraces the entirety of the former airbase. It is also adjacent to the defined boundary of the southern bomb stores which form 'constraint area 1' the largest of eleven separate 'constraint areas' that form part of a designated Scheduled Ancient Monument. The application site is approximately 250m to the east of the defined boundary of the 'constraint area 2' of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, which comprises a largely subterranean group of defences consisting of two 'mushroom' pill boxes flanking an approximately 50 metre long double 'seagull' trench. At its closest point the application site lies approximately 750m from the Technical Site of the former RAF Bicester airbase, which includes a group of grade II listed airfield buildings.
- 4.5 The development parameters for the outline planning application have been established and updated as part of the latest scheme changes, in order to

minimise the impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, to conserve its setting, and to preserve the settings of the listed buildings within the Technical Site, including the Watch Tower/Office and the four aircraft hangars. Likewise, the development parameters have been set in order to safeguard the significant component elements of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, which include the southern bomb stores, and the airfield defence structures.

- 4.6 In devising the layout of the proposed development in both its submitted and amended form, an underlying aim has been to avoid material harm to the significance of these designated heritage assets. The disposition of development as shown on the parameters plans has been the subject of pre-application discussions with planning and conservation officers at Cherwell District Council and the resulting proposals take into account comments made by officers. The latest parameter plans take account of post submission comments where appropriate.
- 4.7 The location of built form and areas capable of accommodating building, as shown on the parameters plans, has been conceived to minimise impact on the setting of heritage assets. None of the built form will take place within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, or within the 'constraint area' of the southern bomb stores that form part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- 4.8 The development management polices contained in the adopted Cherwell Local Plan prescribe appropriate landscaping to limit visual intrusion into the wider landscape, particularly given the need to preserve the setting, character and appearance of the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area. With this objective in mind appropriate margins have been left within the application site to enable landscape buffer planting to be incorporated.
- 4.9 The landscape/planting objectives outlined above are demonstrated on the updated landscape parameters plan for the site that forms part of the amended application documents. The Landscape Parameters Plan, prepared by Re-form Landscape Architecture, defines the areas within the site that are to be retained or 'formed' as landscaped zones (see Figure 4).
- 4.10 The areas defined on the Landscape Parameters Plan are expressed as minimums demonstrating the minimum set back distances for the Development Zones from the boundaries of the site, and from the adjacent boundaries of the designated heritage assets, i.e. the RAF Bicester Conservation Area boundary and the defined boundary of 'constraint area 1' of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, i.e. the southern bomb stores. For these critically sensitive areas a minimum set back of 10 metres is to be

allowed for the development to ensure that an appropriate depth and density of buffer planting can be achieved that will be sufficient to ensure that the planting remains viable once the development is implemented. The effect of the existing woodland and reinforced buffer planting is indicated in a set of site section drawings prepared by Re-form Landscape Architecture, including a key section taken across the airfield from the Watch Tower/Office to the application site. This shows that, even in a 'worst case scenario', with development occupying the whole of the potential area allowed for buildings, only a limited portion of the built form would be visible above the tree line.

- 4.11 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) report prepared by Re-form Landscape Architecture that forms part of the application documentation is accompanied by an appendix containing a series of photomontages taken from a number of key viewpoints within the landscape. This includes a photomontage based on a view from the elevated position in the observation room of the Watch Tower/Office (Figure 1.22 View 11). This confirms that only a portion of the development would potentially be visible above the tree line, and that the overall visual impact from this viewpoint would be limited. It should be noted that within this photomontage, existing built form within the settlement of Bicester is clearly visible as well as suburban development in Caversfield village.



Figure 4: Landscape Parameters Plan showing landscape/planted buffer zone around the site.

- 4.12 The Development Area and Building Zone Parameters Plan (August 2015 revision) defines the overall development area within the site (see Figure 5). This shows the maximum extent of land that could be occupied by buildings. It also shows that the maximum extent of the area that could contain buildings is to be set back at least 16 metres from the outer edge of the overall development area. As shown on the Landscape Parameters Plan this is, in turn, set back a minimum of 10 metres from the north-west boundary of the application site, giving an overall minimum set back of 26 metres for buildings from the conservation area and Scheduled Ancient Monument. This is a substantial margin. The proposed building zone, as amended to provide the margin is 14% or 1.166 hectares (2.88 acres) smaller than originally proposed.
- 4.13 The assessment of impact within this report assumes the 'worst case scenario', i.e. the prospect of the maximum possible area being occupied in its entirety by buildings. In reality, the whole of the building zone will not be occupied by buildings.

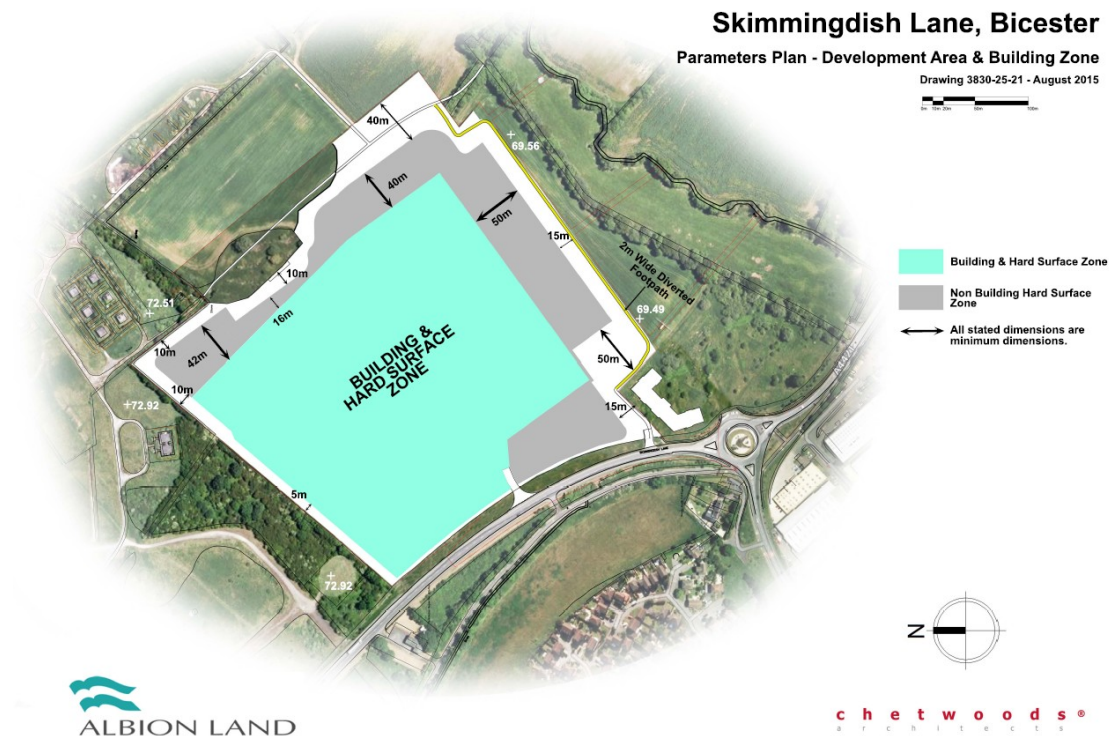


Figure 5: Development Area and Building Zone Parameters Plan

- 4.14 The maximum height of the proposed development across those areas within which buildings will be permitted will be controlled by means of a Site Levels and Building Heights Parameter Plan. The plan shows a maximum of 72 metres AOD across the whole site. A maximum building height of 16m (floor to ridge) is proposed for the buildings on the site. As indicated on the parameter plan, a maximum eaves of 14.5m along the north-west edge of the building zone is proposed. These are typical dimensions for buildings of the type allocated for this site in the adopted Local Plan. The combination of the control on the maximum height, and the set-backs outlined above, will ensure that the proposed development will not be overly dominant in relation to the conservation area or the Scheduled Ancient Monument. These constraints are illustrated on the Site Levels Building Parameters Plan (August 2015 revision) (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Site Levels and Building height Parameters Plan

- 4.15 Although the current planning application is in outline, an illustrative masterplan has been prepared to indicate how the proposed quantum of employment floorspace could be successfully accommodated within the constraints of the landscape and other parameters plans (see Figure 7, which is the August 2015 revision of the illustrative masterplan). This plan is for illustrative purposes only to show a possible configuration of employment development within the site. It should be noted that the illustrative masterplan shows only 62% of the proposed building zone occupied by buildings. As noted previously, the Building Zone has been reduced in size by 14% from that originally proposed.
- 4.16 It should be noted that in addition to the proposed buildings on the site, it will be necessary to provide access roads and servicing yards to support the development, and that these will need to be illuminated. The potential impact of this element of the proposals on the setting of designated heritage assets is recognised. It is envisaged that many of the lighting fittings will be attached to the buildings and that there would only be a limited number of columns along the north-east boundary adjacent to the scheduled monument

and conservation area. Columns along the common boundary would have special optics, directing the light away from the boundary and into the yard areas. Coupled with the retained and reinforced areas of planting significant light overspill into the adjacent areas would be avoided. An illustrative lighting plan, based on the illustrative masterplan, is contained within the Design and Access Statement and demonstrates the lighting principles that may be adopted across the site. The detailed disposition of lighting columns, and the level of lighting, will be set out and agreed at the Reserved Matters stage.

- 4.17 The illustrative plan shows how light spill beyond the site boundary can be effectively controlled to result in an immaterial effect on the surrounding environment. Moreover, the illustrative lighting plan does not take account of the influence of existing and proposed landscaping in and around the site's boundaries which will further reduce the levels indicated.



Figure 7: Illustrative Masterplan showing how the proposed quantum of employment floorspace could be accommodated within the constraints of the landscape parameter plan

- 4.18 The controls proposed to be placed on the development will help to assimilate the scheme onto its environment, and have been provided primarily to protect the nearby designated heritage assets.

Impact of the proposals on RAF Bicester Conservation Area

- 4.19 In the case of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area the proposed development does not fall within the principal views and vistas as defined in the conservation area character appraisal (Figure 2). Specifically, the proposed development does not intrude into the viewing cone from the airfield Watch Tower/Office across the flying field towards the southern bomb stores, which is specifically highlighted on the viewpoint plan within the conservation areas appraisal. Furthermore, as highlighted in the conservation area appraisal, the edge of the flying field is contained at this point by the presence of a woodland of mature trees and dense scrub planting, which would have formed part of the original camouflage for the bomb stores. The woodland has now increased greatly in height and will continue to do so (see the LVIA). Consequently, the visual impact of the proposed development in critical views looking across the flying field will be significantly diminished. Hence, the internal views within the airfield, which are a critical attribute of the character, appearance and significance of the conservation area, will be safeguarded.
- 4.20 Additional planting is proposed to be introduced along the north-east and north-west boundaries of the application site where they abut that of the boundary of the conservation area. This reinforcement of the existing planting will create an additional landscape buffer that will help to protect the setting of the conservation area (see the LVIA). Whilst the upper portion of the proposed development is likely to be visible as a distant feature beyond the tree line, the visual impact on the conservation area will be limited, and will be softened by the presence of additional tree planting. The encircling ring of trees and scrub around the airfield will not be interrupted by the proposed development.
- 4.21 The impact of the proposed buildings can be further mitigated through careful selection of appropriate cladding materials and in particular, colours, to minimise contrast with the sky. Such details are not part of the current outline application and would be controlled by planning conditions requiring approval of the colour and nature of external cladding materials at the reserved matters stage.
- 4.22 With regard to the duty under s72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, it is considered that no material harm will be caused to the significance of RAF Bicester Conservation Area by the proposed development, and that its character and appearance will be preserved.

Impact of the proposals on listed buildings

- 4.23 As outlined above, the local planning authority has a duty under s66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 when considering development likely to affect a listed building or its setting to “*have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*”. This means that, when considering the current application, Cherwell District Council will need to consider the impact that the proposed development will have on the setting of listed buildings at the former RAF Bicester.
- 4.24 As highlighted above, all of the listed buildings at RAF Bicester are grouped together within the Technical Site. For the most part these buildings have no intervisibility with the application site due to a combination of distance, mutual screening, or the presence of now mature on-site planting. Those buildings located adjacent to the open flying field are the Watch Tower/Office and the aircraft hangars. The impact of the proposed development of these heritage assets is discussed below.

Watch Tower/Office

- 4.25 As outlined above, the Watch Tower/Office is significant in historical and architectural terms as it represents the first attempt for a design of a military watch office. Of the total of 41 of this type of watch tower to be built, only five of the brick-clad design remain. It is this architectural and historic interest that has led to the designation of the Watch Tower/Office as a grade II listed building. The proposed development will not affect this aspect of the Watch Tower’s significance, and its architectural, archaeological/evidential, technological and historic attributes will remain unchanged.
- 4.26 Part of the heritage significance of the Watch Tower/Office derives from its setting within the airfield, amongst the group of other related historic airfield buildings, and in relation to the flying field. In the great majority of views towards the Watch Tower/Office, particularly those in which the building is seen in tandem with the hangars and other listed buildings within the group, the listed building will be unaffected by the proposal. In limited sector of view, looking south-east from the edge of the technical area towards the flying field, with the Watch Tower/Office in view, the top part of the proposed development will be glimpsed as a distance feature in only one. This will have an extremely limited visual impact on the setting of the listed building.
- 4.27 The *raison d’être* of the Watch Tower/Office was to provide surveillance over the flying field and the sky beyond to monitor the take-off and landing of aircraft and to provide early warning of attack by enemy aircraft. As

previously outlined, views from the Watch Tower/Office consequently contribute to the significance as a designated heritage asset.

- 4.28 It is clear from the photomontage based on a view from the elevated position of the observation room of the Watch Tower, prepared in support of this the current application, that the upper part of the proposed development will in part be visible above the tree line. Whilst the proposed development will be visible in this view, it should be noted that the development will occupy only a small sector (18 degrees or 5%) of the total 360 degree sweep of visibility available from the Watch Tower/Office (see Figure 8). It should also be noted that the development will be partially obscured by intervening dense trees and shrub planting, that the level of the land fall away gradually from the base of the Watch Tower/Office towards the proposed development (from circa 80m to 72m) and that the proposed development will be at a distance of approximately half a mile or 850m. Furthermore, the photomontage represents a hypothetical worst case that assumes an unlikely 100% building coverage of the zone at a full height of 16m, with an edge height of 14.5m to the entire north western boundary.
- 4.29 The effect of these factors will be that the proposed development will be seen as a distant feature rising above the tree line in a small sector of the overall field of view from the Watch Tower/Office. Whilst it is accepted that this would affect one small aspect of the setting of the Watch Tower/Office, in overall terms it is considered that the proposed development will cause no material harm to the significance of the listed building.



Figure 8: Watch Tower Visibility Plan showing that the development will occupy only 18 degrees or 5% of the total 360 degree sweep of visibility available from the Watch Tower

Hangars

- 4.30 The four large grade II listed aircraft hangars that are located immediately adjacent to the flying field are the dominant features of the former RAF Bicester airbase. Arranged symmetrically along the axis of the main route from the principal entrance to the base the hangars are by far the largest structures within the technical Site.
- 4.31 For the most part the proposed development will be visible in views towards the listed hangars, for example in views along the roadways within the Technical Site, or in closer range views of the hangars, looking out across the flying field. Only in a narrow field of view, looking south-east in the direction of the application site, would the proposed development be visible as a distant feature rising above the tree line. Consequently, the listed aircraft hangars would remain the dominant architectural feature within the context of the former RAF Bicester airbase, and their significance as designated heritage assets will not be harmed.

Impact of the proposals on the Scheduled Ancient Monument

- 4.32 The southern bomb stores, which constitute 'constraint area 1' of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, abuts the application site at its northern corner. At this point within the monument boundary there is dense mature tree and scrub planting, which forms a visual backdrop to the upstanding structures forming the monument. The structures themselves are densely overgrown with scrub, hidden behind earthen banks, and were purposely designed to be of low visibility and camouflaged.
- 4.33 The significance of the bomb stores lies primarily in their historical and evidential value. These aspects of their significance will remain unharmed by the presence of new development of the adjacent site. The bomb stores are well-hidden by earth mounding and tree and shrub planting, and their wider setting makes a very small contribution to their significance as part of a designated heritage asset. The key view between the Watch Tower/Office towards the scheduled bomb stores will be unaffected.
- 4.34 The presence of existing trees and scrub, and its reinforcement with additional landscape buffering, will safeguard the immediate setting of the monument. Whilst it is understood that some limited clearance of shrub growth in the immediate vicinity of the scheduled structures might conceivably take place in future for conservation and interpretation reasons, it is most likely that the bulk of the now mature camouflage tree and shrub planting would remain in the longer term. Indeed, these structures were intended to be camouflaged and it would therefore not be appropriate to assess the impact of the proposed development on the basis of comprehensive tree and shrub clearance.
- 4.35 Having regard to the national policy advice set out in the NPPF, it is considered that, whilst the proposed development would be visible as a background feature, it will be partially screened by existing trees and scrub, which will be augmented by additional screen planting. Such limited visibility would cause no material harm to the significance of the bomb stores as part of a designated heritage asset.
- 4.36 As outlined above, the structures comprising 'constraint area 2' of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, the 'mushroom' pill boxes and 'seagull' trenches, were designed to be largely subterranean in nature and camouflaged for defensive reasons. Consequently, the structures are not readily visible from the application site, and due to their low-lying nature and intervening trees and scrub there is little visibility towards the application site.

- 4.37 'Constraint area 2' consisting of two 'mushroom' pill boxes and 'seagull' trenches lies approximately 250m away from the proposed development at its closest point. It is likely that parts of the development would be seen from the vicinity of the monument through and above the tree and shrub belt, particularly during winter months. However, since the significance of this group of defences lies primarily in their historical and evidential value, rather than from their setting, no harm would be caused to their significance as heritage assets.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 This Heritage Assessment has outlined the historical development of RAF Bicester, and identified its heritage significance. The report sets out the national and local policy framework in which proposals for business development on land north-east of Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester will be assessed. It outlines the intended approach to the proposed development, and assesses its impact on the significance of RAF Bicester and its component elements.
- 5.2 The outline application proposals have been developed to respect and safeguard the significance of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area and the Scheduled Ancient Monument, the boundaries of which lies adjacent to the proposed development site. The disposition of the proposed development has been conceived to minimise impact on the setting and significance of both designated heritage assets. Appropriate margins have been left within the development site to enable appropriate landscape buffer planting to be incorporated at the periphery of the site as required by the site-specific policies for Bicester 11 contained in the adopted Cherwell District Local Plan 2011-2031. The provision of buffer planting forms part of the landscape design proposals for the site, and appropriate margins have been safeguarded within the parameter plans that form part of the application documents to accommodate such planting. At the reserved matters stage the Local Planning Authority can ensure that the proposed buildings are clad in suitably coloured materials to ensure that the contrast between the appearance of the buildings and the sky is minimised, by way of an appropriately worded planning condition.
- 5.3 It is considered that the proposed development will not cause material harm to the setting or significance of the designated heritage assets at the former RAF Bicester airbase. This includes the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, listed buildings within the Technical Site and the Scheduled Ancient Monument, incorporating the southern bomb stores, the defensive trenches and pillboxes and other protected features. As such the proposals accord with the policy principles set out in Section 12 of the NPPF, are compliant with the overarching heritage policy principles in the adopted Cherwell District Local Plan 2011-2031, and the site-specific design and place-shaping policies for Bicester 11. In conclusion, given that there will be no material harm caused to the designated heritage assets discussed above, and the strong presumption in favour of development of the application site in accordance with the adopted development plan, there are no grounds for

Appendix A: Scheduled Ancient Monument designation extract

RAF Bicester: World War II airfield

List Entry Number: 1021455

Date first scheduled: 28-Feb-2006

Date of most recent amendment: 11-Mar-2011

Reasons for Designation

When the RAF was formed as the world's first independent air force in April 1918, and during the period of retrenchment which lasted from the Armistice until the early 1920s, its founding father and first Chief of Staff, General Sir Hugh Trenchard, concentrated upon developing its strategic role as an offensive bomber force. His primary considerations were in laying the foundations for a technology-based service, through the training of officers and technicians. Subsequently, more than 100 stations were built in permanent fabric between 1923 and 1939. Trenchard's expansion of the air force, given Parliament's blessing in 1923, was centred upon the building of offensive bomber bases in East Anglia and Oxfordshire, behind an 'aircraft fighting zone' some 15 miles deep and extending around London from Duxford in Cambridgeshire to Salisbury Plain. This principle of offensive deterrence, although subject to fluctuations which reflected events on the world stage and varying degrees of political support, continued to guide the siting and layout of stations after 1933, when Hitler's rise to power and the collapse of the Geneva disarmament talks forced the British government to engage in a massive programme of rearmament. The continuing development of existing bases (some dating from the First World War), and the building of new ones thus concentrated on the establishment of training and maintenance bases behind an eastern front line, extending from Yorkshire to East Anglia, facing Germany. The completeness or otherwise of inter-war bases, and the extent to which they have retained their architectural detail, external fittings and inter-relationships as planned groups, is closely linked to the nature and intensity of their post-War use. Upper Heyford, for example, which was the test-bed for the planning of Trenchard's Home Defence Scheme stations, was greatly extended and adapted as a key USAF site in the Cold War period. Less intensive use - at present for administration, storage and glider training - has ensured that Bicester is the most complete representative of developments on bomber airfields for the period up to 1939. RAF 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 in the period up to 1939. The grass flying field still survives with its 1939 boundaries largely intact, bounded by a group of bomb stores built in 1928-1929 and airfield defences built in the early stages of the war. The remains included in the scheduling are, along with the listed hangars and other listed buildings, the key structures within this military landscape.

Details

The monument includes the southern bomb stores group and a series of airfield defence structures forming part of the former RAF Bicester Airfield site. These fall within 11 separate areas of protection (termed here constraint areas) as detailed below, and as listed above with their national grid references. The first constraint area includes the southern bomb stores group built in 1938-1939 as one of three intended Squadron bomb stores, only two of which were fully completed. The constraint area (the largest) includes a series of structures based around the High Explosive bomb stores (building 224). The bomb stores consist of two rows of three back-to-back concrete buildings with surrounding earth banking or traverses and a gantry running along both the north and south 'frontages' to allow bombs to be lifted onto bomb carts. The bombs would then be taken to the Ultra Heavy Fusing point building (building 226). This curved roofed corrugated steel and earth building was built with ten bays and could accommodate a bomb cart 'train' of High Explosive (HE) bombs under cover where the fuses were added, having been collected from the Component stores (building 214). Together these buildings show the methods taken to store safely and securely the components of the bomber armament. At constraint area 2, about 300m west of the bomb stores, lies a group of defences consisting of two mushroom pill boxes flanking an approximately 50m long double seagull trench - the former so named for their saucer-domed concrete roofs (set on to a cross-wall which provided ricochet compartments internally) and the latter for its wing-shaped plan, which maximised the arc of fire. These defensive structures combined to form a formidable ground defence group as part of the wider airfield defences. Constraint areas 3 and 4 include a pair of linear Defended Air Raid shelters to the east of the southern hangar. These brick, concrete and earth structures provided cover for defenders in the event of ground attack by enemy paratroopers and provided some protection against bombing and strafing by enemy aircraft. Of the three further pairs of Defended Air Raid shelters which protected the other three hangars that form the core of the Technical site, only a single shelter survives (constraint area 7). The shelters were linked defensively by a series of pillboxes of which two survive within the scheduling (constraint areas 5 and 6). These are based on the octagonal, type 27, pillbox design and formed part of a series of fixed defensive points around the inner core and perimeter of the air base. At the northernmost point of the scheduling lies a small air raid shelter (constraint area 8), intended for those using the adjacent fuel installation. Three further undefended air raid shelters, located close to the hangars to provide protection to ground crew in the event of air attack are also included in the scheduling. These brick, concrete and earth structures are situated within the hangar complex (constraint areas 9-11). Although Bicester was first used as an airfield in 1918, it is the Trenchard Bomber Base and the 1934 expansion period remains which make it nationally important. Blenheims, Halifaxes and Mosquitos all flew from Bicester. Bomber crews trained at Bicester included both British and many Commonwealth squadrons including Australian, Canadian and New Zealand airmen. From 1944 it was involved as a forward equipment unit for Operation Overlord (the Normandy landings), and after the war it was the home of the principal aircraft salvage unit for southern England. Its later use as a glider school while the domestic site was used for logistical purposes ensured it was not dramatically altered from its wartime layout. Excluded from the scheduling are all modern services and their trench fills, although the land around and beneath them is included. *Source: English Heritage/Historic England*

Appendix B: Listed Building designation extracts

BUILDING NO 109 (WATCH TOWER AND OFFICE)

List Entry Number: 1393042

Grade: II GV

Date first listed: 01-Dec-2005

Airfield watch tower and office. 1938, to 1934 type design. By A Bulloch of the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings, to drawing number 1959/34. Brickwork facing to reinforced concrete frame and flat roofs with asphalt finish.

PLAN: A square structure to flat roof with smaller central tower, also square rising two further storeys. The ground floor has the main watch office and rest room, with latrines, from which a tight spiral stair rises to the observation room in the tower; both levels with flat roof decks, the lower with raised brick parapet, and the upper with parapet and safety railing.

EXTERIOR: Steel casements across full width of lower floor, returned one light at ends, and smaller lights to other fronts, and door with over-light to rear (W) and south sides. The upper level glazed all round, some of the original horizontal glazing bars later removed. Small plinth, continuous frieze bands with projecting toe at roof levels.

INTERIOR: Iron stairs to top floor. Original doors and joinery.

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 1930s Expansion Period. This observation tower - which replaced an earlier 1927 design - is typical of the design made in 1934; a total of 41 were built, this being one of only five remaining in brick as, after 1936, most were reinforced concrete. It represents the first attempt for a design of a military watch office. Located at the end of the main axis through the site from the guardhouse, closing the vista at the edge of the flying field, it is strongly representative of developments on flying fields in the mid 1930s. The now-familiar airfield landscape of runway, perimeter dispersals and flight control was only beginning to gain acceptance within the Air Ministry in the late 1930s, when increasing attention was being given in airfield planning to their ability to disperse and shelter aircraft from

attack, ensure serviceable landing and take-off areas, and control movement: hence the increasingly sophisticated designs for control towers. Grouped with the 'C' type hangars which were built under Scheme F in 1936/7, this is a significant element of an uniquely important site.

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)

Source: Historic England

BUILDINGS 108 AND 113 (TYPE C HANGARS)

List Entry Number: 1392762

Grade: II GV

Date first listed: 01-Dec-2005

Aircraft hangars with annexes housing associated stores, workshops and offices. 1937. By the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings, to drawing number 872 and 1581/35. Steel main frame and roof trusses, brickwork in Flemish bond, sheet roofing replacing asbestos slates.

PLAN: Large sheds with full height steel doors at each end, running to external gantries, with a series of single storey lean-to annexes on either long flank, in part rising to two storeys, which housed workshops, rest rooms and squadron offices. The roof a series of transverse ridges with hipped ends, behind a parapet, and with deep apron above doors.

EXTERIOR: At mid height of side walls are 10 large 32-pane fixed steel casements separated by concrete piers, and with continuous sill and lintel bands. Above the windows a high parapet to flush coping. One bay at each end, also in concrete, is slightly brought forward, and with a higher parapet; a tall single light with horizontal bars is centred to the bay. The short ends have full height and width steel doors, with 12-pane lights at the top, under a deep projecting concrete rail carrying the rolling headgear; beyond the opening a light steel lattice beam projects out and is carried by a light steel strutted support, with steel ground-stops for the doors. Above the doors, and contained by the wing walls of the first bays, a deep apron with asbestos-cement slate hanging. The doors originally had sand or gravel fill between inner and outer sheeting at the lower panels, to enhance blast protection. Replacement windows to annexes.

INTERIOR: Plain concrete floor, steel stanchions exposed internally carry deep lattice trusses in steel channel, double to top and bottom chords, set to the ridges of the transverse roofs and shaped to the hipped ends. At right angles to these are cantilevered members, in steel angle, at 15ft (4.6m) centres, meeting at and carrying the internal gutters. The bays adjoining the doors have horizontal wind-bracing members. The roof slopes are underlined in softwood square-edged boarding.

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. In 1937, two Type 'C' hangars were added to the earlier pair of hangars on the site, and the four are grouped symmetrically at the end of the axial avenue, and sharing broad concrete aprons. The C-type shed was the standard hangar type for the post-1934 Expansion

Scheme, originally designed in 1934 and of which 155 examples were built. Its dimensions (300ft long, 150ft span and clear height of 35ft), were intended to accommodate 100-ft span heavy bombers, enabling new specifications to be issued to aircraft manufacturers by the Air Ministry. It evolved from the earlier Type A, and first versions had exposed gabled ends to the roofs: after 1935 the hipped version behind parapets, as here, was normal. An internal height of 35ft (10.7) was later reduced to 30ft (9.1), as used in this example.

Until the onset of perimeter dispersal from the late 1930s all the aircraft of an operational airfield - typically an omni-directional flying field of 1000 yards diameter - would be accommodated in its hangars: their construction took up a considerable part of the construction cost for a new site, the 6 hangars at Upper Heyford taking up 30% of its total budget. As a consequence, military planners shadowed aircraft development through the planning and development of hangar buildings, a fact which underpins the importance of the Bicester group and their relationship to this uniquely important site. Although subjected to some loss of original detail, these form an historically important and prominent part of the site as viewed from the 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).

Source: Historic England

BUILDINGS NOS 79 AND 137 (TYPE 'A' HANGARS)

List Entry Number: 1393035

Grade: II GV

Date first listed: 01-Dec-2005

Aircraft hangars with annexes housing associated stores, workshops and offices. 1926. By the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings, to drawing number 19a/24. Steel main frame and roof trusses, concrete in-situ wall panels, some brickwork in Flemish bond, corrugated asbestos or asbestos slate roofing.

PLAN: Large sheds with full height steel doors at each end, running to external gantries, with a series of single storey lean-to annexes on either long flank, in part rising to two storeys.

EXTERIOR: At each end two pairs of sliding doors with bolted sheet steel cladding on steel framework, but the upper half with corrugated steel; at each side a braced steel gantry to take doors when open. To each long side a series of 7 gables, in brickwork, but with encased steel external stanchions taken through almost to each ridge, and flush secondary stanchions at the valleys. Below these a continuous strip of patent glazing, in 9 lights to each bay, except the two end half-bays. Carried on cantilevered steel brackets the full length each side above the glazing a steel-framed catwalk, with steel ladder drop at the ends in open cylindrical protective shafts. The concrete infill below glazing is in horizontal lifts of about 450 mm.

The annexes have a variety of steel sashes set to flush concrete lintels and with stooped sills. One section to each hangar has an 8-bay 2-storey office unit. Large square hopper-heads feed down-pipes from the main roof.

INTERIOR: The standard framework for an 'A' Type hangar, has deep open trussed beams with double bottom chord, all in I-section steel, bearing the ridges, and carrying a series of transverse trusses in steel flat and angle, cantilevered out to a steel valley beam, carried in turn by vertical stanchions set flush to the concrete walling. Horizontal wind-bracing is set at each end immediately adjacent to the doors.

HISTORY: The dimensions of the A-type shed, the standard hangar type for Trenchard's Home Defence Expansion Scheme, designed in 1924 and of which 34 examples were built on 17 sites, were based on the need to accommodate the RAF's largest projected twin-engined bomber - the De Havilland DH9A. Its length of 249 feet (75.9m) and span of 122 feet 5 inches (37.3 m), was the result of discussion in November 1923 between the Aerodrome Board and the Directorate of Works and Buildings in which each hangar was envisaged to accommodate 12 machines. The Type 'A' aircraft shed was the RAF's standard hangar from 1924 until the 1930's. Six were planned for Bicester, but financial restrictions on Trenchard's scheme led to only two being built. In 1936, two Type 'C' hangars were added, and the four are grouped symmetrically at the end of the axial avenue, and sharing broad concrete aprons. Until the onset of perimeter dispersal from the late 1930s all the aircraft of an

operational airfield - typically an omni-directional flying field of 1000 yards diameter - would be accommodated in its hangars: their construction took up a considerable part of the construction cost for a new site, the 6 hangars at Upper Heyford taking up 30% of its total budget. As a consequence, military planners shadowed aircraft development through the planning and development of hangar buildings, a fact which underpins the importance of the Bicester group and their relationship to this uniquely important site.

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Military flying at Bicester commenced in 1918, when the new aerodrome was established as a three-squadron Training Depot Station. The site was demolished after closure of the base in 1920, but it was selected as a bomber station by the Aerodrome Board as part of Trenchard's Home Defence Expansion Scheme, sanctioned by Baldwin's government in June 1923. General Sir Hugh Trenchard founded the independent status of the RAF upon the concept of offensive deterrence, a principle which he shared with Italy's Marshall Douhet and America's General Mitchell. This doctrine envisaged fleets of self-defending bomber formations as the instrument of war most likely to ensure swift victory in any future conflict, and underpinned the justification for the Strategic Bomber Offensive in the Second World War. The RAF's infrastructure was subject to severe political fluctuations in the inter-war period, the result of both events on the world stage and political and financial pressures at home. Only two of the proposed six 'A-type' hangars at Bicester for the 3-squadron station, for which plans were drawn up in August 1926, were built, due to an early deceleration in Trenchard's programme, the next major phase of building forming part of the post-1934 Expansion Period, which had been prompted by the collapse of the Geneva disarmament talks in 1933.

The station was opened in January 1928, the 10th of that month seeing the arrival of Hawker Horsleys from Spittlegate. The fabric and layout, planned on dispersed principles, retains an identifiable 1920s character, and provide examples of the first permanent buildings erected for RAF operational stations. Air Commodore (later Air Chief Marshall Sir) Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, President of the Aerodrome Board until late 1925 and C-in-C Bomber Command early in the Second World War, was

responsible for the selection and outline planning of these stations, often in close collaboration with Trenchard. Designs for the built fabric were developed in detail by the staff of the Director of Works and Buildings (Maj-Gen Sir Andrew M Stuart, and Maj-Gen Sir William A Liddell from April 1924 to July 1929). The most prominent technical buildings, most notably the guardroom (Building 89) and station headquarters (Building 47), and the buildings on the domestic site were designed in a simple, astylar, neo-Georgian style. The domestic buildings were laid out in an open plan manner, more formally than the technical site to the east (see below) and thus enabling the principal buildings around the parade ground area to play a particularly important role in defining the character of the site. The planning of the technical site is dominated by a strong east-west axis, from the west entrance to the flying field. This road is tree-lined and flanked by the 1920s motor transport group (Buildings 129, 130 and 131), armoury (123) and workshops (90 and 99). It provides clear views towards the hangars to the east and, across the A421, the domestic site to the west. From the west entrance, which is flanked by the impressive group of Station Headquarters and Guardhouse (Buildings 146-7 and 89), two service roads branch out, one to the north-east serving the power house and water supply group (Buildings 81, 82 and 84) and that to the south-east serving the Air Ministry Works Department Group (Building 144) and the now-demolished coal yard. The latter, and the main workshops (Building 99), was served by an Air Ministry railway which entered the site from the east.

The 1930s extensions and new buildings carefully match the style of the 1920s scheme. Whilst the married quarters to the N of Skimmingdish Lane and the W of Buckingham Road drew their inspiration from the Garden City Movement, the neo-Georgian officers' mess (Cherwood House, Buckingham Road) and married quarters off Skimmingdish Lane reflect the distinct change in the aesthetic quality and design of RAF stations, which resulted from the Air Ministry's consultation with the Royal Fine Arts Commission and appointment of an architectural advisor to the Directorate of Works and Buildings in 1934. The buildings constructed in 1939 for Scheme M, notably the decontamination centres, boiler and power houses and flat-roofed barracks buildings, are characterised by developed Art Deco characteristics; Buildings 23, 25 and 20 are distinguished by flat protected concrete roofs - to counter the effects of incendiary bombs and minimise the effects of bomb blast - and the use of glazing detail and string courses to give a much more streamlined horizontal design. The increase in aircraft at Bicester was marked by the completion of new C-type hangars in 1937, and the building of a new control tower in 1938 reflected the increased importance given to the need to control movement with the defined zoning of serviceable landing and take-off areas.

1938 was marked by the arrival of Blenheim bombers, which replaced the obsolete Overstrands with which many airfields had been equipped into the mid 1930s, and in October 1939 the first Halifax prototype made its maiden flight from Bicester. From 1938 to October 1944 Bicester served as an Operational Training Unit, mainly for the training of pilots, observers and gunners for the Blenheim crews of 2 Group. The outset of the conflict saw the completion of the bomb stores group to the south and construction of pillboxes and trenches for the close defence of the airfield, now surviving on the east side of the hangars and in a group to the south of the flying field. The flying field was considerably enlarged to the north and south, with tracks and 'panhandle' standings for the dispersed parking of aircraft characteristic of World War Two bomber stations. RAF Bicester functioned as an Operational Training Unit

until October 1944, 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. Crews for the medium bomber units in the Middle East and then the Far East were formed and trained at Bicester and Upwood, Mosquitos replacing the Blenheims from January 1944. From autumn 1943 it was already serving as a Forward Equipment Unit for the logistical support of Operation Overlord. After 1945, 71 Maintenance Unit formed here as one of the principal aircraft salvage units, responsible for southern England. Crashed aircraft were brought here and reconstructed in one of the hangars for crash investigation purposes. This use, together with its role as a gliding school and the administrative use of the domestic site (DCTA Caversfield) has ensured the preservation of the inter-war character of the site and the rare and consistent preservation of exterior detail and fitments. Post-war redevelopment and encroachment by quarrying has removed most of the Second World War extensions to the flying field.

(Dobinson, C: *Airfield Themes* (Report for English Heritage), 1997; Francis P: *British Military Airfield Architecture*, 1996; Francis,P: *RAF Bicester* (Site Report for Cherwell District Council), 1996, 28)

Source: Historic England