

## Heritage Impact Assessment

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



on behalf of  
Albion Land

**May 2015**  
GLA-174

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document constitutes a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) in connection with 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 principle of the application site being developed for a mix of employment uses has been established for over twenty years. The site has, in part, been allocated for such use under the relevant saved policy in the Cherwell Local Plan 1996. More recently the allocation has been extended to incorporate the entirety of the application site under Draft Policy Bicester 11 of the emerging Cherwell Local Plan. This HIA therefore assesses, amongst other things, the potential built heritage impacts of the development against the relevant development management criteria set out under Bicester 11.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.

- 1.6 It should be noted that this HIA does not deal with buried archaeological heritage. Reference is made within the Development Management Criteria of Draft 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 put forward in the Draft 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.
- 1.7 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 be implemented during the construction phase, the details of which could be confirmed through an appropriately worded planning condition.
- 1.8 This HIA should be read in conjunction with other application documents, in particular the Design and Access Statement and proposals drawings prepared by Chetwoods, and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Landscape Parameters Plan 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.

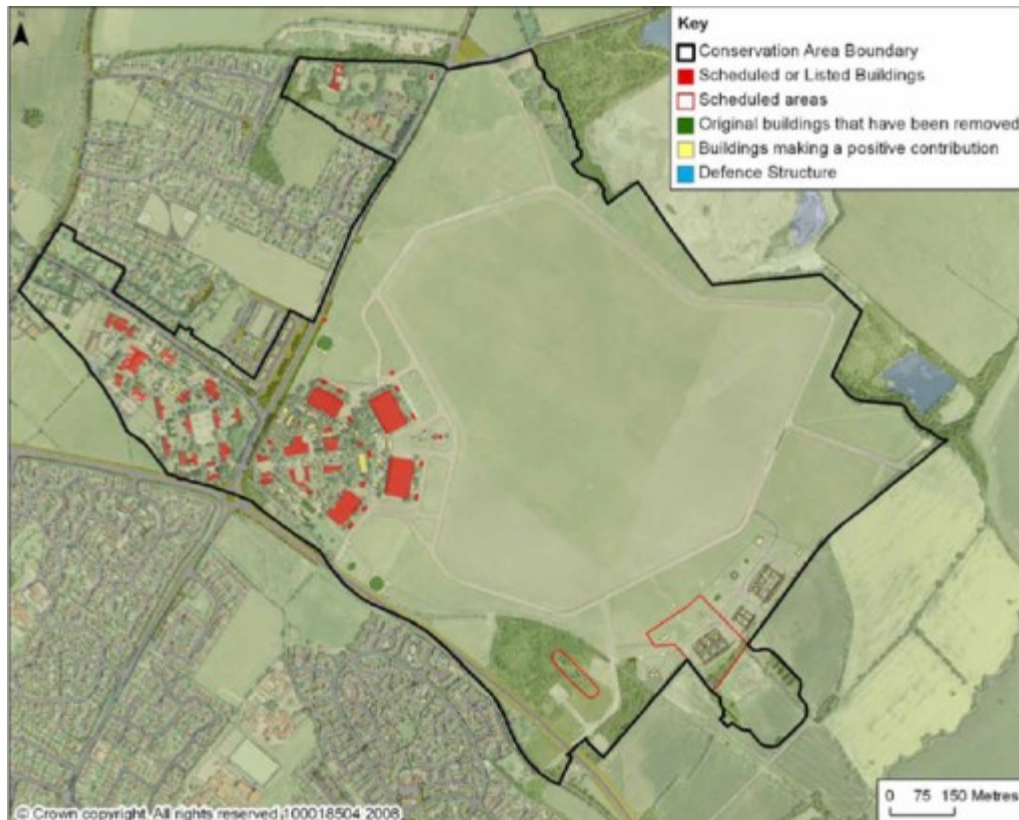
### **Heritage designations and their significance.**

- 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 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 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, which equates to the 1939 boundary of RAF Bicester (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Plan of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area

- 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 over the whole of the flying field. The character appraisal highlights that from the Watch Tower 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 base are identified in the character appraisal as an essential characteristic of the airfield requiring preservation.





**Figure 2:** Plan showing the extent of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area and important vistas within it, including views across the flying field.

- 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.

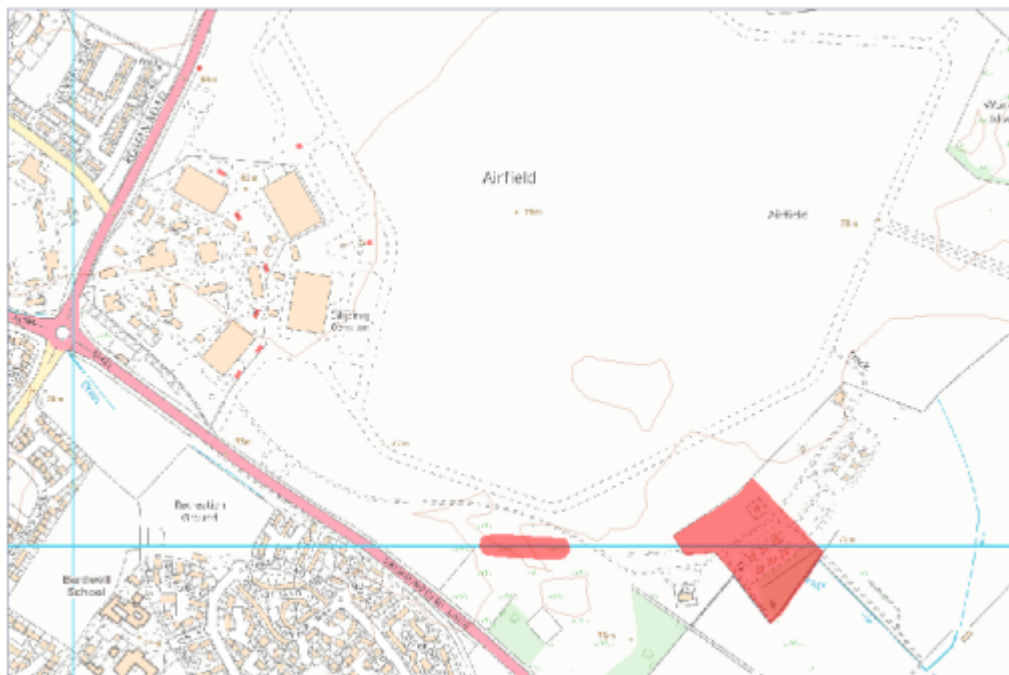
### **Listed Buildings**

- 2.8 Close to the entrance of the airbase on its western side there is a concentration of buildings that once formed the core of the operational base. A number of these original buildings have been afforded statutory protection through listing. These listed buildings (all grade II) include, most notably, the 1930s hangars, but also include the station HQ, workshops, lecture rooms, stores, transport sheds, barrack blocks, officers' mess and quarters, the Dining Room and Institute, Guard House and the airfield watch tower. These buildings are described in detail and illustrated in the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal, and therefore not repeated 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, the settings and significance of these listed buildings will be unaffected by the development proposals.

### ***Scheduled Ancient Monument***

- 2.10 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 separated areas of protection (termed in the scheduling description as 'constraint areas'). Figure 3 is a plan showing the extent of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and the constraint areas.



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

- 2.11 The largest of these areas, defined as 'constraint area 1' in the scheduling description, lies immediately 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.



- 2.12 The bomb stores consist of two rows of three back-to-back concrete buildings with surrounding earth banking or traverses (see Plate 1). 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 2).
- 2.13 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.
- 2.14 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 3). It should, however, be noted that the unobstructed view of the bomb stores from the Watch Tower, which was necessary for surveillance purposes, is an important aspect of the significance of these otherwise camouflaged features.
- 2.15 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 some modest 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.

- 2.16 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. These low-lying structures are not prominent features in the landscape. The visual aspect of this group of structures, including their wider setting, contributes very little to their significance as designated heritage assets. It should be noted that the structures comprising 'constraint area 2' are not readily visible from the application site due to intervening trees and scrub. Therefore the impact of the proposed development on their setting will be minimal.
- 2.17 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. 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, and their low-lying nature, these structures would not be affected by the development proposals.



**Plate 1:** Typical view of one of the brick and concrete bomb store buildings protected by earth banking.



**Plate 2:** View of one of the curved roof corrugated steel and earth Ultra Heavy Fusing point buildings



**Plate 3:** 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

## 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 of long-standing in terms of development plan policy. An extended area of land for a mix of employment uses has now been allocated under draft Policy Bicester 11 in the emerging Draft Cherwell Local Plan. The proposed use of the land for a mix of employment purposes is therefore not in question. Instead, 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 conservation areas are contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In this instance the relevant statutory duty 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 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.
- 3.5 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***

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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).*
- 3.8 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).*
- 3.9 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).*
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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.



- 3.12 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.*
- 3.13 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**

- 3.14 The local planning policy context is provided by relevant saved policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 which for the time being is the development plan for the district. There are no saved heritage policies in the Cherwell Local Plan. A replacement local plan, the Cherwell Local Plan 2011, reached an advanced stage of production but was withdrawn from the statutory local plan process. To avoid a policy void the non statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011 has been approved by the Council as interim non-statutory planning policy for development control purposes, pending the production of a new suite of statutory Development Plan Documents that are currently under preparation.
- 3.15 Although non-statutory, a number of policies in the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 are of relevance to the proposed development. Specifically, Policy EN39 sets out general principles aimed at preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas. Policy EN40 seeks to ensure amongst other things that in conservation areas, or on sites that make a contribution to their setting, new development should understand and respect the sense of place. Policy EN47(I) seeks to ensure that Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings are preserved.
- 3.16 Cherwell District Council is well advanced in the preparation of its new Local Plan for the district. The Plan has been through various stages of consultation and underwent Examination by an independent Inspector in December 2014. Whilst the inspector's report is currently awaited the Local Plan is sufficiently well-advanced to be afforded substantial weight in the determination of planning applications.

- 3.17 Policy ESD 16 of the emerging Cherwell Local Plan is an overarching policy that seeks to protect the character of the built and natural environment through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. It 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 Policy ESD 16 goes on to advise 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.'*

- 3.19 The policy for Bicester 11 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, 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 the extended area of this allocation has been confirmed in the relevant policy in the emerging Draft Cherwell Local Plan. 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, 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.

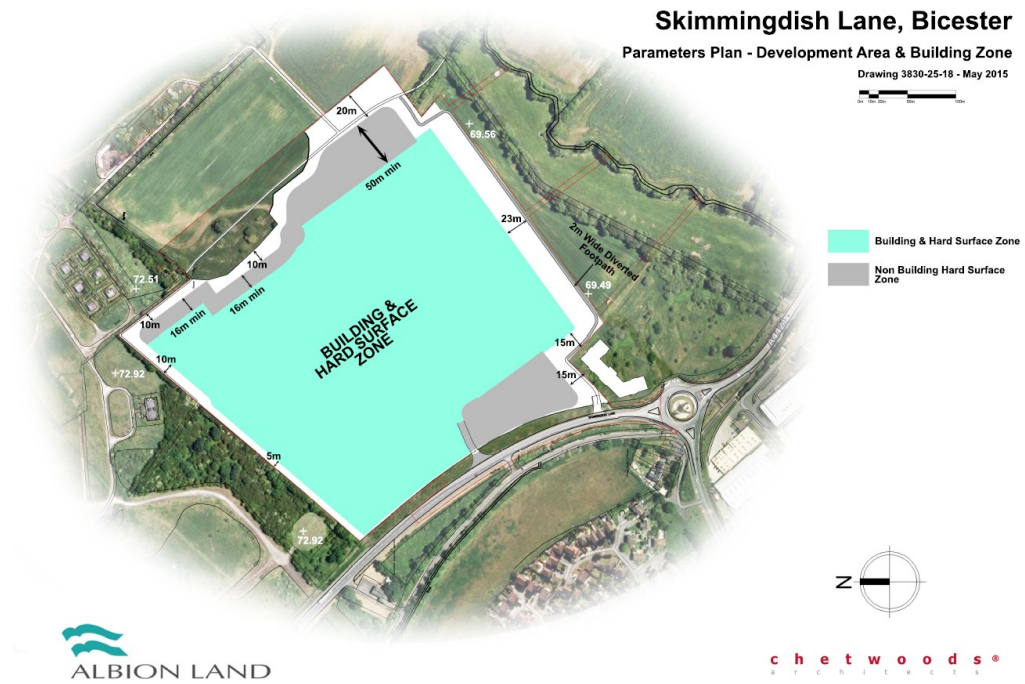
### ***The development proposals and rationale***

- 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 proposed development site abuts and, at its northern edge, slightly overlaps the RAF Bicester Conservation Area. It is also adjacent to the defined boundary of the southern bomb stores which form the largest of eleven separate 'constraint areas' that form part of a designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- 4.5 The development parameters that have been set under the outline planning application have been conceived to in order to minimise the impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area, and to conserve its open setting. Similarly, the parameters have been established in order to safeguard the setting the southern bomb stores that form a component element within the conservation area, and in turn form part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument.



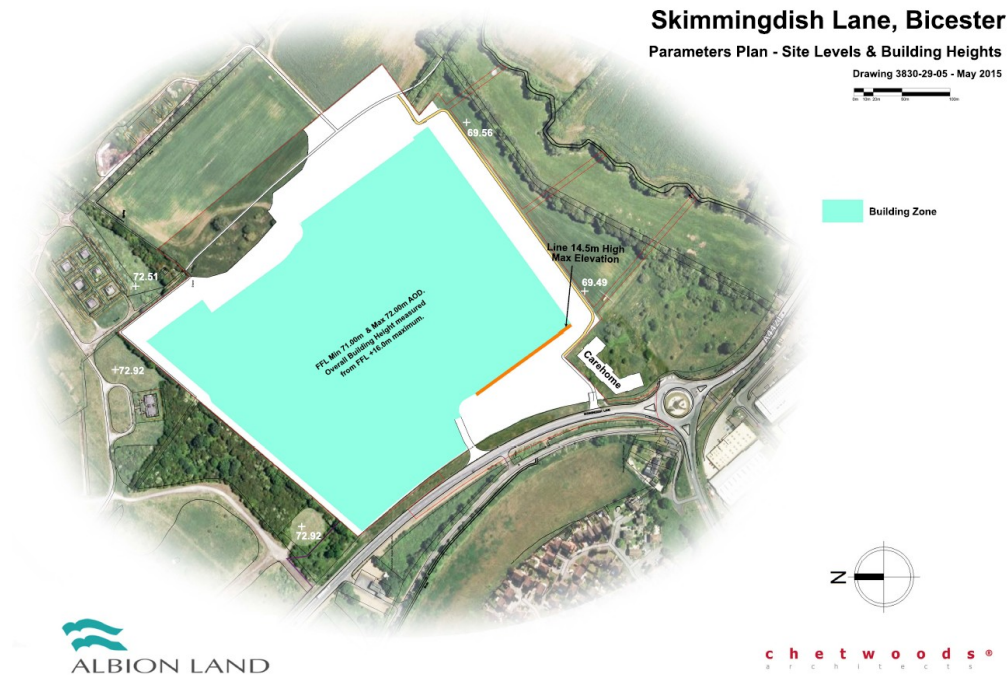
- 4.6 An underlying design aim has been to avoid material harm to the significance of these designated heritage assets. The disposition of development as shown on the parameters plans has been the subject of pre-application discussions with planning and conservation officers at Cherwell District Council and the resulting proposals take into account comments made by officers.
- 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. The development management policies contained in the emerging Draft Cherwell Local Plan prescribe appropriate landscaping 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. With this objective in mind appropriate margins have been left within the application site to enable landscape buffer planting to be incorporated.
- 4.8 The landscape/planting objectives outlined above are demonstrated on the landscape parameters plan for the site that form part of the 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).
- 4.9 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 conservation area boundary and the defined boundary of 'constraint area 1' of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, 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 retained and reinforced buffer planting is indicated on a set of site section drawings prepared by Re-form Landscape Architecture. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) report forms part of the application documentation.





**Figure 5:** Development Area and Building Zone Parameters Plan

- 4.11 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) has been established for the buildings proposed on the site. A maximum height of no more than 16m, with the set-backs outlined above, will ensure that the proposed development would not be overly dominant in relation to the conservation area or the Scheduled Ancient Monument. These constraints are illustrated on the Height Constraints Parameters Plan (Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** Site Levels and Building height Parameters Plan

- 4.12 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 plan (see Figure 7). This plan is for illustrative purposes only to show a possible configuration of employment development within the site. It should be noted that, in this plan, at a maximum only 55.7% of the site would be occupied by buildings.
- 4.13 It should be noted that in addition to the proposed buildings on the site, it will be necessary to provide access roads and serving 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 minimised. It is anticipated that the disposition of lighting columns, and the level of lighting, would be dealt with at reserved matters stage, and be subject to an appropriate



planning condition. However, an illustrative lighting plan, based on the illustrative Masterplan, is contained within the Design and Access Statement.



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

### ***Impact of the proposals on RAF Bicester Conservation Area***

- 4.14 In the case of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area the proposed development does not fall within the principal views and vista as defined in the conservation area character appraisal. Specifically, the proposed development does not intrude into the viewing cone from the airfield Watch Tower across the flying field towards the southern bomb stores. Furthermore, as highlighted in the conservation area appraisal, the edge of the flying field is contained at this point is by the presence of mature trees and scrub planting, which would have formed part of the original camouflage for the bomb stores. This means that the visual impact of the proposed development in critical views looking across the flying field would be diminished. Hence, the internal views within the airfield, which area a critical attribute of the character, appearance and significance of the conservation area will be safeguarded.



- 4.15 Addition 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. Whilst the roofs of the proposed development are likely to be seen 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.
- 4.16 Having regard to the duty under s72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to 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 the Scheduled Ancient Monument***

- 4.17 The constraint area of the southern bomb stores, which constitutes part 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.
- 4.18 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 control tower towards the bomb stores will be unaffected. The presence of existing trees and scrub, and its reinforcement with additional landscape buffering, will safeguard the immediate setting of the monument. Having regard to the national policy advice set out in the NPPF, it is considered that, whilst the proposed development would potentially be visible as a background feature, partially screened by trees and scrub, such visibility would cause no material harm to the significance of the bomb stores as part of a designated heritage asset.

## 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 aim to respect and safeguard the significance of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area and the Scheduled Ancient Monument, the boundaries of which lies in close proximity 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. This forms part of the landscape design proposals for the site and have been safeguarded within the parameter plans that form part of the application documents.
- 6.1 In conclusion, the proposed development will not cause material harm to the setting or significance of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area or the southern bomb stores that lie adjacent to the development site, and which form a component part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument. As such the proposals accord with the policy principles set out in Section 12 of the NPPF, are compliant with the overarching heritage policies in the emerging Cherwell District Local Plan, and the site-specific design and place-shaping policies for Bicester 11.

## 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*