



PLANNING STATEMENT

Proposed hotel and conference facility

Bicester Heritage, Bicester

July 2018

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement relates to an application for planning permission to Cherwell District Council for the construction of a new hotel with restaurant, conference, and leisure facilities at Bicester Heritage along with associated parking and landscaping.

1.2 This statement sets out why the development is considered acceptable by reference to the character of the application site and surrounding area, an appraisal of the prevailing planning policy and an assessment of the planning issues raised by the proposal.

1.3 Consideration of the various impacts arising from development is informed by the following specialist assessments:

- Arboricultural appraisal by Innovation Group Environmental Services
- Archaeological assessment by Oxford Archaeology
- Design and access statement by Dexter Moren Associates
- Drainage strategy by AKS Ward
- Ecological assessment by Ecology Solutions Ltd.
- Economic impact assessment by SQW
- Energy assessment by Ridge
- Flood risk assessment by RAB
- Heritage assessment by Worlledge Associates
- Land contamination assessment by Crestwood Environmental Ltd.
- Landscape appraisal by Anthony Stiff Associates
- Transport assessment by Mode Transport Planning

2.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE AND LOCALITY

- 2.1 Bicester Heritage is sited on the north eastern side of Bicester, north of the A4421, which is part of the “ring road” around Bicester. It extends to some 141.5 hectares and includes various buildings and a flying field. It does not include the residential site to the west of the A4421 Buckingham Road.



- 2.2 Bicester Heritage lies within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area and features 22 listed buildings, in addition around the fringe of the technical site and flying field there are a number of structures which have scheduled monument protection.
- 2.3 The basis for designating the historic RAF station as a conservation area, and listing or scheduling a number of structures, derives from the fact that it is one of the best preserved airfields of its age and has a long history of military flying. Having become surplus to the MOD's needs there were concerns the historic buildings and flying field could be lost to insensitive development, there was therefore a concerted effort to secure formal designation of the heritage assets.
- 2.4 Since acquiring the site Bicester Heritage has undertaken comprehensive restoration works securing the buildings and their settings, the success of which is shown in the removal of structures from the Historic England's 'At Risk' register. The success of the restoration is shown in the numerous awards and plaudits obtained. The RAF Bicester Conservation Area was removed from

Historic England's (then English Heritage) 'At Risk Register' in 2015. More recently, in 2017, the site was visited by Duncan Wilson OBE, Chief Executive of Historic England who declared it "*...a real and successful example of heritage at the centre of a regeneration programme which draws on the authentic spirit and identity of a historic place*".

- 2.5 Bicester Heritage has not only been successful in rescuing heritage assets, but also in creating an international centre of excellence for motoring and aviation engineering. The site is the nation's first business park dedicated to historic aviation and motoring offering a campus of leading national and international specialists. The site also provides training for apprentices and hosts events allowing the public to once more access and enjoy the historic environment. In 2016 Bicester Heritage were named Industry Supporter of the Year at the International Historic Motoring Awards acknowledging the status they have attained in the international arena.
- 2.6 Bicester Heritage has become established as a brand with a number of internationally renowned businesses locating to the area, and more expressing an interest. All have connections to historic motoring and aviation, they are however also leading innovators in their respective fields
- 2.7 The site subject of this application is set to the northern edge of the former Technical Site of RAF Bicester between the site boundary with Buckingham Road and the perimeter track to the Flying Field. The site lies in the peripheral area of spatial and functional transition between the flying field and supporting technical site. The area is principally mown grass and is used for parking and other activities during events on site. During the 1930s expansion period the site had been allocated, along with the corresponding area to the south, for the construction of a Type-C hangar offering a crescent of four, however only the central two were constructed. The land was used for the siting of smaller buildings during the RAF operation of the site.
- 2.8 The site is within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area which features a number of listed buildings, the closest of which are the listed hangars 79 and 108 to the south and south east of the site. The land is adjoined by the flying field to the north and east with the airfield perimeter road passing between the two. The

restored technical site to the south while the Buckingham Road (A4421) passes to the west separated by the secure airfield boundary.

- 2.9 The land is generally flat and is not in an area at risk of flooding according to the Environment Agency's online flood map. An aerial photograph showing the site and surrounding land is below:



- 2.10 This planning application is accompanied by a full Design and Access Statement prepared by Dexter Moren Associates and a Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by Worlledge Associates which further describe the site and its surroundings.

3.0 SITE PLANNING HISTORY AND PROPOSAL

3.1 The historic military use of the site and permissive development rights for the crown mean the site has a limited planning history prior to the twenty first century.

3.2 Since taking ownership of the site in 2013 Bicester Heritage have undertaken significant developments at the site to allow for the restoration of historic buildings, and creation of a commercial hub. The developments permitted involve conversion of buildings, limited demolitions and new-build structures, and associated site enhancements including parking, and improved access.

3.3 A schedule of planning decisions is provided below, the most significant of which is the recent Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening opinion in relation to the development proposed under this application. The Council conclude EIA is not required and the impacts of development can be adequately assessed through this planning application.

- 18/00567/F
 - Planning application for change of use of Building 143 from Ministry of Defence use to B1(c) light industrial and alterations to north-east elevation
 - Planning permission was granted on 19th June 2018
- 18/00044/SO
 - EIA screening opinion for proposed hotel (up to 360 rooms) with associated conference and leisure facilities
 - Confirmed proposal is not EIA development 20th June 2018
- 17/01847/F
 - Planning application for improvements to existing access from Buckingham Road to Technical Site
 - Planning permission was granted on 31st October 2017

- 16/01806/LB
 - Application for listed building consent for physical alterations to buildings 79, 108, 109, 113, 123, 129, 130, 131, 135, and 137 to facilitate proposed commercial uses and restorations.
 - Listed building consent was granted on 25th September 2017

- 16/01805/F (subject to subsequent amendments)
 - Planning application for physical alterations and change of use of sixteen buildings from MOD to commercial purposes including the demolition and replacement of two buildings.
 - Planning permission was granted on 25th September 2017

- 15/00611/F and 15/00612/LB
 - Application for planning permission and listed building consent for physical alteration and change of use of buildings 92, 93, and 94 to commercial uses.
 - Planning permission and listed building consent were granted on 25th February 2016

- 15/00523/F (subject to subsequent amendments)
 - Planning application for physical alterations and change of use from MOD use to commercial purposes for building 119
 - Planning permission was granted on 17th April 2015

- 14/01759/F and 14/02065/LB
 - Application for planning permission and listed building consent for physical alteration and change of use of building 96 to commercial uses
 - Planning permission and listed building consent were granted on 30th December 2014

- 14/01448/F and 14/01449/LB
 - Application for planning permission and listed building consent for physical alteration and change of use of building 99 to commercial uses

- Planning permission and listed building consent were granted on 21st October 2014

- 14/01430/F and 14/01431/LB
 - Application for planning permission and listed building consent for physical alteration and change of use of building 90 to commercial uses
 - Planning permission and listed building consent were granted on 24th October 2014

- 14/01428/DEM
 - Application for permission to demolish buildings 83 and 98
 - Permission was granted on 9th October 2014

- 14/00454/F
 - Application for planning permission for physical alteration and change of use of building 102 to commercial uses
 - Planning permission was granted on 13th May 2014

- 14/00209/F
 - Application for planning permission for physical alteration and change of use of building 82 to commercial uses
 - Planning permission was granted on 11th April 2014

- 13/01774/F and 13/01775/LB
 - Application for planning permission and listed building consent for physical alteration and change of use of building 87 to commercial uses
 - Planning permission was granted on 16th January 2014

3.4 This application proposes the erection of a hotel including catering, conference, and leisure facilities along with associated landscaping, parking and access works. The development is to be provided in a single building of five storeys to reflect the height of the nearby hangars.

- 3.5 The scheme has been developed to complement the existing buildings at the site taking particular influence from the nearby hangars. The proposed building occupies a site originally planned for an aircraft hangar to create a crescent of four Type-C structures, of which only two were constructed. The development has been informed by a Heritage Appraisal of the existing site with reference to published planning guidance, including the RAF Bicester Conservation Area Character Appraisal.
- 3.6 The proposed building has a footprint of approximately 5,200 square metres and will provide 344 rooms of hotel or aparthotel accommodation both of which are considered to fall within Use Class C1. The facility will have a total floor area of around 18,500 square metres.
- 3.7 Externally the development is proposed with a site specific landscaping scheme developed in connection with the project ecologist to also mitigate against any adverse impact on biodiversity. The site is also to be provided with dedicated parking areas in accord with adopted standards.
- 3.8 The development will benefit from its own dedicated access to the Buckingham Road, including highway enhancements.
- 3.9 The proposed development is the result of extensive pre-application discussions between Bicester Heritage and Cherwell District Council as the Local Planning Authority. The development has also been informed by discussions with Oxfordshire County Council as the Local Highway Authority, and Historic England.
- 3.10 The pre-application process has involved a collaborative approach between the applicant and Council with early discussions surrounding the principles of development taking place in November 2016. Initial discussions confirmed support in principle for the proposed hotel, while exploration of site constraints and opportunities identified the proposed site to the north of the Technical Site as the most suitable location for the development.
- 3.11 Following positive discussions a scheme was submitted for pre-application discussion in February 2017 indicating a 403 bedroom hotel to be delivered in two phases. The suggested scheme consisted of a central block containing

main hotel facilities with two projecting accommodation wings. The proposal secured agreement for the suggested modern design approach and provision of a glazed atrium as a statement feature. Officer advice also confirmed the support for a development to the north of the Technical Site and acknowledged the considerable economic benefits connected with the proposed development. Advice was offered on the positioning of the building and feedback suggested a simplified footprint to reflect the form and dimensions of a Type-C hangar.

3.12 Following officer feedback a refined proposal was presented in January 2018 offering 410 bedrooms with conference facilities in a simplified form with a main block reflecting the size and form of the historic hangars with a single accommodation wing. The building was orientated to address Buckingham Road and sited to maintain historic views and the hangar crescent arrangement of the hangars. The simplified form was supported by the Council, although the proposed wing was not endorsed and re-orientation requested.

3.13 June 2018 saw the applicant's most recent pre-application submission to the Council. The submission proposed a development reflecting that subject of this application and marked the culmination of pre-application discussions. The proposal provides 344 rooms of accommodation, the reduction resulting from the omission of the accommodation to provide a simple form rectangular form characteristic of a hangar. The building is orientated to align with the Type-C hangar to the south east and proposed with materials to reflect historic development.

3.14 The June 2018 proposal received officer endorsement with the siting, orientation, form, scale and height supported by officers. The proposal was considered a suitable response to the historic environment, and sensitive to other amenity considerations.

3.15 Throughout the course of pre-application discussions the applicants have consulted with Oxfordshire County Council as the Local Highway Authority. Their advice has informed the proposed highway works and the parameters of the transport assessments which support this planning application.

3.16 Bicester Heritage also benefit from a working relationship with Historic England who have inspected the evolving schemes for the site. Their advice has guided

proposals and confirmed the site to be suitable for development in principle and underlined the heritage benefits of an economically sustainable use for the site.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 4.1 Under Section 38(6) of the Planning Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 there is a statutory obligation to determine planning applications and appeals in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations can include Government guidance and any other matters relevant to the use and development of land.
- 4.2 The Development Plan in Cherwell District presently consists of the saved policies of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 so far as they are consistent with the NPPF. The Local Plan 2031 Part 1 was adopted in July 2015 and is the principal planning document for strategic matters in the District.
- 4.3 The Council has a non-Statutory Local Plan dating from 2004 which was adopted by the Council for development control purposes but which carries no statutory weight. There are also a number of supplementary planning documents which are material considerations for development proposals in the District.
- 4.4 The Council has undertaken a partial review of its Local Plan 2031 Part 1 with regard to the need to address unmet housing need arising in Oxford City. The review has been submitted for examination, its scope however is limited with its effects of limited impact for this proposal. The Council are also in the preliminary stages of preparation for their Local Plan Part 2 which will include detailed development management policies, the document is not however at a stage to be afforded notable weight.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.2 *Achieving sustainable development:* The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's overarching policies on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. Sustainability is identified to have economic, social and environmental components; the NPPF states that all three should be sought simultaneously. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out at paragraph 14; when it comes to determining planning applications this means:

- *“approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
- *where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:*
 - *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or*
 - *specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.”*

4.3 *Core planning principles:* In pursuit of sustainability the NPPF sets out core planning principles at paragraph 17 that planning should seek to achieve, these include:

- Planning should be plan-led;
- It should be creative in finding ways in which to enhance and improve places;
- It should proactively drive and support sustainable economic development and meet the needs for housing business and other development needs responding positively to wider growth opportunities;
- It should seek high quality design and amenity standards;
- It should take account of the roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of urban areas, including protecting green belts, and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside;
- It should encourage the reuse of resources and encourage the use of renewable resources;
- It should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment;
- It should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed provided it is not of high environmental quality;

- It should conserve heritage assets in a manner consistent with their significance;
- It should ensure the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling and focus development in sustainable locations; and
- It should support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being (paragraph 17).

4.4 *Building a strong, competitive economy:* Bicester is one Cherwell's main centres offering employment, and attracting economic investment including significant numbers of visitors. Bicester Heritage has established a centre of international renown for motoring and associated industries, the absence of hotel and conference facilities has however been raised as a constraint to growth. The NPPF places great importance on development supporting a strong, competitive economy. Paragraph 21 of the NPPF identifies that planning should recognise and seek to address potential barriers to investment including any lack in services.

4.5 *Transport:* The NPPF sets out sustainable modes of transport should be encouraged. Safe and convenient access to development should be provided (paragraphs 29-41).

4.6 *Low carbon energies:* Planning authorities should also have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources for development in pursuit of sustainability. New developments have to comply with these policies in development plans.

4.7 *Requiring good design:* The NPPF includes requirements for good design that it considers a key aspect of sustainable development; it sets out decision should aim to ensure developments:

- Will function well and add to overall quality of an area;
- Establish a strong sense of place;
- Optimise the potential of a site;
- Respond to local character and history reflecting local identity while not preventing or discouraging innovation;
- Create safe and accessible environments;

- Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and landscaping.
- 4.8 The NPPF states that design policies should concentrate on guiding overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, materials and access in relation to neighbouring buildings and the area generally. Policies should seek to promote local distinctiveness although they should not seek to impose architectural styles or tastes. The NPPF confirms that good design goes beyond aesthetic considerations and also needs to include connections between people and places and the integration of development into the natural, built and historic environment (paragraphs 56-64).
- 4.9 *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment:* The NPPF states that the planning system should protect and enhance valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils; recognise the wider benefits of ecosystem services; minimise the impacts on biodiversity; prevent new and existing development being at risk from soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; remediate and mitigate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land.
- 4.10 Planning policies and decisions should encourage the effective use of land where not of high environmental value. Criteria-based policies should be produced against which proposals affecting wildlife, geodiversity, or landscape areas will be judged. Impacts on biodiversity should be minimised. The effects of pollution on health from pollution or contamination should be taken into account. In addition development that gives rise to unacceptable noise, air quality or light pollution should be resisted (paragraphs 109-125).
- 4.11 *Conserving and enhancing the historic environment:* The NPPF requires planning authorities to have a positive strategy for the enhancement of the historic environment. The NPPF recognises heritage assets as irreplaceable resources that should be conserved in a manner consistent with their significance. Heritage assets can be affected by work to the asset itself, or development that impacts upon its setting.
- 4.12 The NPPF confirms that the more important the asset the greater the weight that should be afforded to its protection in decision making. There is an onus on applicants for development to describe the significance of assets affected by

development and for planning authorities to take the significance into account in decision making. Great weight should be afforded to the conservation of assets when making decisions: the more important the asset the greater that weight should be.

4.13 While noting the desire to conserve assets the NPPF acknowledges the practicalities of building conservation, noting the most effective means of maintaining assets is to encourage their beneficial use. Where a development would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated asset this should be weighed against other public benefits of a proposal (paragraphs 126-141).

4.14 *Decision taking:* The NPPF requires that planning authorities approach decision taking in a positive way, looking for solutions rather than problems and should seek to approve applications for sustainable development (paragraphs 186-187).

National Planning Practice Guidance

4.15 The Government replaced its previous list of planning guidance documents with a new web-based resource on 6th March 2014, which links with the policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The guidance seeks to explain a number of aspects of policy set out in the NPPF but does not add to the policies set out in the NPPF.

Cherwell Local Plan 2031 Part 1, adopted 2015

4.16 Adopted in July 2015 the Local Plan Part 1 sets out high level policies for the development of the District to 2031, including the strategy for meeting housing and economic need, and delivering high quality development. The following policies are of particular relevance in considering this proposal.

4.17 Policy PSD 1 of the Local Plan enshrines the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development in local policy. The policy sets out the Council's commitment to approach development in a positive and proactive manner, and to support development proposals which accord with planning policy:

Policy PSD 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

When considering development proposals the Council will take a proactive approach to reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. The Council will always work proactively with applicants to jointly find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

Planning applications that accord with the policies in this Local Plan (or other part of the statutory Development Plan) will be approved without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:

- **any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole; or**
- **specific policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted.**

4.18 The Local Plan contains a schedule of policies dedicated to the sustainable economic growth of the District, prefixed SLE. Policies confirm the Council's commitment to developments which provide and support jobs and business in the District, particularly in towns. Policy SLE 3 specifically relates to the support for tourism growth and the aspiration to increase overnight stays and visitor numbers in the District:

Employment proposals at Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington will be supported if they meet the following criteria:

- Are within the built up limits of the settlement unless on an allocated site
- They will be outside of the Green Belt, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated
- Make efficient use of previously-developed land wherever possible
- Make efficient use of existing and underused sites and premises increasing the intensity of use on sites
- Have good access, or can be made to have good access, by public transport and other sustainable modes
- Meet high design standards, using sustainable construction, are of an appropriate scale and respect the character of its surroundings
- Do not have an adverse effect on surrounding land uses, residents and the historic and natural environment.

Unless exceptional circumstances are demonstrated, employment development in the rural areas should be located within or on the edge of those villages in Category A (see Policy Villages 1).

New employment proposals within rural areas on non-allocated sites will be supported if they meet the following criteria:

- They will be outside of the Green Belt, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.
- Sufficient justification is provided to demonstrate why the development should be located in the rural area on a non-allocated site.
- They will be designed to very high standards using sustainable construction, and be of an appropriate scale and respect the character of villages and the surroundings.
- They will be small scale unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the character of a village or surrounding environment.
- The proposal and any associated employment activities can be carried out without undue detriment to residential amenity, the highway network, village character and its setting, the appearance and character of the landscape and the environment generally including on any designated buildings or features (or on any non-designated buildings or features of local importance).
- The proposal will not give rise to excessive or inappropriate traffic and will wherever possible contribute to the general aim of reducing the need to travel by private car.
- There are no suitable available plots or premises within existing nearby employment sites in the rural areas.

The Local Plan has an urban focus. With the potential for increased travel by private car by workers and other environmental impacts, justification for employment development on new sites in the rural areas will need to be provided. This should include an applicant demonstrating a need for and benefits of employment in the particular location proposed and explaining why the proposed development should not be located at the towns, close to the proposed labour supply.

Monitoring and review will be undertaken regularly.

Extensions to existing employment sites will be considered in the Local Plan Part 2.

Policy SLE 3: Supporting Tourism Growth

The Council will support proposals for new or improved tourist facilities in sustainable locations, where they accord with other policies in the plan, to increase overnight stays and visitor numbers within the District.

- 4.19 Policy SLE 4 seeks to support the economic growth of the District through enhanced transport connections, and ensuring new developments are adequately supported by the transport network:

Policy SLE 4: Improved Transport and Connections

The Council will support the implementation of the proposals in the Movement Strategies and the Local Transport Plan to deliver key connections, to support modal shift and to support more sustainable locations for employment and housing growth.

We will support key transport proposals including:

- Transport Improvements at Banbury, Bicester and at the Former RAF Upper Heyford in accordance with the County Council's Local Transport Plan and Movement Strategies
- Projects associated with East-West rail including new stations at Bicester Town and Water Eaton
- Rail freight associated development at Graven Hill, Bicester
- Improvements to M40 junctions.

Consultation on options for new link and relief roads at Bicester and Banbury will be undertaken through the Local Transport Plan (LTP) review process. Routes identified following strategic options appraisal work for LTP4 will be confirmed by the County Council and will be incorporated in Local Plan Part 2.

New development in the District will be required to provide financial and/or in-kind contributions to mitigate the transport impacts of development.

All development where reasonable to do so, should facilitate the use of sustainable modes of transport to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. Encouragement will be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion. Development which is not suitable for the roads that serve the development and which have a severe traffic impact will not be supported.

- 4.20 The Local Plan contains policies which seek to secure environmentally sustainable development for the District. Measures include distributing growth to the most sustainable locations, including Bicester, and policies to promote the sustainable use of materials and energy in the construction and operation of buildings. Policy ESD 2 confirms the preference for a reduction in energy use, where energy is required generation is preferred through sustainable means:

Policy ESD 2: Energy Hierarchy and Allowable Solutions

In seeking to achieve carbon emissions reductions, we will promote an 'energy hierarchy' as follows:

- Reducing energy use, in particular by the use of sustainable design and construction measures
- Supplying energy efficiently and giving priority to decentralised energy supply
- Making use of renewable energy
- Making use of allowable solutions.

- 4.21 Policy ESD 3 seeks to secure environmentally sustainable construction in the District, while policies ESD 4 and ESD 5 seek to ensure new developments meet high standards of environmental performance:

Policy ESD 3: Sustainable Construction

All new residential development will be expected to incorporate sustainable design and construction technology to achieve zero carbon development through a combination of fabric energy efficiency, carbon compliance and allowable solutions in line with Government policy.

Cherwell District is in an area of water stress and as such the Council will seek a higher level of water efficiency than required in the Building Regulations, with developments achieving a limit of 110 litres/person/day.

All new non-residential development will be expected to meet at least BREEAM 'Very Good' with immediate effect, subject to review over the plan period to ensure the target remains relevant. The demonstration of the achievement of this standard should be set out in the Energy Statement.

The strategic site allocations identified in this Local Plan are expected to provide contributions to carbon emissions reductions and to wider sustainability.

All development proposals will be encouraged to reflect high quality design and high environmental standards, demonstrating sustainable construction methods including but not limited to:

- **Minimising both energy demands and energy loss**
- **Maximising passive solar lighting and natural ventilation**
- **Maximising resource efficiency**
- **Incorporating the use of recycled and energy efficient materials**
- **Incorporating the use of locally sourced building materials**
- **Reducing waste and pollution and making adequate provision for the recycling of waste**
- **Making use of sustainable drainage methods**
- **Reducing the impact on the external environment and maximising opportunities for cooling and shading (by the provision of open space and water, planting, and green roofs, for example); and**
- **Making use of the embodied energy within buildings wherever possible and re-using materials where proposals involve demolition or redevelopment.**

Should the promoters of development consider that individual proposals would be unviable with the above requirements, 'open-book' financial analysis of proposed developments will be expected so that an independent economic viability assessment can be undertaken. Where it is agreed that an economic viability assessment is required, the cost shall be met by the promoter.

Policy ESD 4: Decentralised Energy Systems

The use of decentralised energy systems, providing either heating (District Heating (DH)) or heating and power (Combined Heat and Power (CHP)) will be encouraged in all new developments.

A feasibility assessment for DH/CHP, including consideration of biomass fuelled CHP, will be required for:

- All residential developments for 100 dwellings or more
- All residential developments in off-gas areas for 50 dwellings or more
- All applications for non-domestic developments above 1000^m² floorspace.

The feasibility assessment should be informed by the renewable energy map at Appendix 5 'Maps' and the national mapping of heat demand densities undertaken by the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) (see Appendix 3: Evidence Base).

Where feasibility assessments demonstrate that decentralised energy systems are deliverable and viable, such systems will be required as part of the development unless an alternative solution would deliver the same or increased benefit.

Policy ESD 5: Renewable Energy

The Council supports renewable and low carbon energy provision wherever any adverse impacts can be addressed satisfactorily. The potential local environmental, economic and community benefits of renewable energy schemes will be a material consideration in determining planning applications.

Planning applications involving renewable energy development will be encouraged provided that there is no unacceptable adverse impact, including cumulative impact, on the following issues, which are considered to be of particular local significance in Cherwell:

- Landscape and biodiversity including designations, protected habitats and species, and Conservation Target Areas
- Visual impacts on local landscapes
- The historic environment including designated and non designated assets and their settings
- The Green Belt, particularly visual impacts on openness
- Aviation activities
- Highways and access issues, and
- Residential amenity.

A feasibility assessment of the potential for significant on site renewable energy provision (above any provision required to meet national building standards) will be required for:

- All residential developments for 100 dwellings or more
- All residential developments in off-gas areas for 50 dwellings or more
- All applications for non-domestic developments above 1000^m² floorspace.

Where feasibility assessments demonstrate that on site renewable energy provision is deliverable and viable, this will be required as part of the development unless an alternative solution would deliver the same or increased benefit. This may include consideration of 'allowable solutions' as Government Policy evolves.

4.22 Policies ESD 6 and ESD 7 seek to manage flood risk and ensure development proposals make use of sustainable drainage techniques:

Policy ESD 6: Sustainable Flood Risk Management

The Council will manage and reduce flood risk in the District through using a sequential approach to development; locating vulnerable developments in areas at lower risk of flooding. Development proposals will be assessed according to the sequential approach and where necessary the exceptions test as set out in the NPPF and NPPG. Development will only be permitted in areas of flood risk when there are no reasonably available sites in areas of lower flood risk and the benefits of the development outweigh the risks from flooding.

In addition to safeguarding floodplains from development, opportunities will be sought to restore natural river flows and floodplains, increasing their amenity and biodiversity value. Building over or culverting of watercourses should be avoided and the removal of existing culverts will be encouraged.

Existing flood defences will be protected from damaging development and where development is considered appropriate in areas protected by such defences it must allow for the maintenance and management of the defences and be designed to be resilient to flooding.

Site specific flood risk assessments will be required to accompany development proposals in the following situations:

- All development proposals located in flood zones 2 or 3
- Development proposals of 1 hectare or more located in flood zone 1
- Development sites located in an area known to have experienced flooding problems
- Development sites located within 9m of any watercourses.

Flood risk assessments should assess all sources of flood risk and demonstrate that:

- There will be no increase in surface water discharge rates or volumes during storm events up to and including the 1 in 100 year storm event with an allowance for climate change (the design storm event)
- Developments will not flood from surface water up to and including the design storm event or any surface water flooding beyond the 1 in 30 year storm event, up to and including the design storm event will be safely contained on site.

Development should be safe and remain operational (where necessary) and proposals should demonstrate that surface water will be managed effectively on site and that the development will not increase flood risk elsewhere, including sewer flooding.

Policy ESD 7: Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

All development will be required to use sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) for the management of surface water run-off.

Where site specific Flood Risk Assessments are required in association with development proposals, they should be used to determine how SuDS can be used on particular sites and to design appropriate systems.

In considering SuDS solutions, the need to protect ground water quality must be taken into account, especially where infiltration techniques are proposed. Where possible, SuDS should seek to reduce flood risk, reduce pollution and provide landscape and wildlife benefits. SuDS will require the approval of Oxfordshire County Council as LLFA and SuDS Approval Body, and proposals must include an agreement on the future management, maintenance and replacement of the SuDS features.

- 4.23 Policy ESD 10 seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment:

Policy ESD 10: Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment

Protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the natural environment will be achieved by the following:

- In considering proposals for development, a net gain in biodiversity will be sought by protecting, managing, enhancing and extending existing resources, and by creating new resources
- The protection of trees will be encouraged, with an aim to increase the number of trees in the District
- The reuse of soils will be sought
- If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or as a last resort, compensated for, then development will not be permitted.
- Development which would result in damage to or loss of a site of international value will be subject to the Habitats Regulations Assessment process and will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no likely significant effects on the international site or that effects can be mitigated
- Development which would result in damage to or loss of a site of biodiversity or geological value of national importance will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the harm it would cause to the site and the wider national network of SSSIs, and the loss can be mitigated to achieve a net gain in biodiversity/geodiversity
- Development which would result in damage to or loss of a site of biodiversity or geological value of regional or local importance including habitats of species of principal importance for biodiversity will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the harm it would cause to the site, and the loss can be mitigated to achieve a net gain in biodiversity/geodiversity
- Development proposals will be expected to incorporate features to encourage biodiversity, and retain and where possible enhance existing features of nature conservation value within the site. Existing ecological networks should be identified and maintained to avoid habitat fragmentation, and ecological corridors should form an essential component of green infrastructure provision in association with new development to ensure habitat connectivity
- Relevant habitat and species surveys and associated reports will be required to accompany planning applications which may affect a site, habitat or species of known or potential ecological value
- Air quality assessments will also be required for development proposals that would be likely to have a significantly adverse impact on biodiversity by generating an increase in air pollution
- Planning conditions/obligations will be used to secure net gains in biodiversity by helping to deliver Biodiversity Action Plan targets and/or meeting the aims of Conservation Target Areas. Developments for which these are the principal aims will be viewed favourably
- A monitoring and management plan will be required for biodiversity features on site to ensure their long term suitable management.

- 4.24 Policy ESD 13 seeks to protect and enhance the local landscape, including historic landscapes:

Policy ESD 13: Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement

Opportunities will be sought to secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape, particularly in urban fringe locations, through the restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscapes, features or habitats and where appropriate the creation of new ones, including the planting of woodlands, trees and hedgerows.

Development will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage to local landscape character cannot be avoided. Proposals will not be permitted if they would:

- Cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside
- Cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography
- Be inconsistent with local character
- Impact on areas judged to have a high level of tranquillity
- Harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features, or
- Harm the historic value of the landscape.

Development proposals should have regard to the information and advice contained in the Council's Countryside Design Summary Supplementary Planning Guidance, and the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS), and be accompanied by a landscape assessment where appropriate.

- 4.25 Policy ESD 15 seeks to ensure development of high quality to complement and enhance its surroundings, including heritage assets. The policy provides a schedule of criteria to be fulfilled, the covering text of which is below:

Policy ESD 15: The Character of the Built and Historic Environment

Successful design is founded upon an understanding and respect for an area's unique built, natural and cultural context. New development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. All new development will be required to meet high design standards. 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.

- 4.26 Policy Bicester 8 relates specifically to the Bicester Heritage site. The policy confirms support in principle for conservation led developments to secure an economically viable future for the site including the development of hotel and conference facilities. The policy benefits from supporting text which confirms the use of the Technical Site should not be restricted to employment with museum, cultural, sport, and community uses all potentially appropriate (C.93). While the preservation of the historic fabric and layout of the site is clearly important the policy also acknowledges the need for flexibility in order to secure an economically viable future for the site (C.92).

Policy Bicester 8: Former RAF Bicester

The Council will encourage conservation-led proposals to secure a long-lasting, economically viable future for the Former RAF Bicester technical site and flying field.

It will support heritage tourism uses, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses. The development of hotel and conference facilities will also be supported as part of a wider package of employment uses.

All proposals will be required to accord with the approved Planning Brief for the site and take into account the Bicester Masterplan.

They must maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, protect listed, scheduled and other important buildings, their setting, and protect the sensitive historic fabric of the buildings and preserve the openness of the airfield. The biodiversity of the site should be protected and enhanced and habitats and species surveys (including a Great Crested Newt survey) should be undertaken. The continuation of gliding use will be supported. Opportunities for improving access to the countryside will be encouraged. The Council's SFRA should be considered. Proposals should be considered against Policy ESD 15.

- 4.27 Policy INF 1 seeks to ensure all development in the district is supported by adequate infrastructure:

Policy INF 1: Infrastructure

The Council's approach to infrastructure planning in the District will identify the infrastructure required to meet the District's growth, to support the strategic site allocations and to ensure delivery by:

- Working with partners, including central Government, and other local authorities, to provide physical, community and green infrastructure
- Identifying infrastructure needs and costs, phasing of development, funding sources and responsibilities for delivery
- Completing a Developer Contributions SPD to set out the Council's approach to the provision of essential infrastructure including affordable housing, education, transport, health, flood defences and open space
- Development proposals will be required to demonstrate that infrastructure requirements can be met including the provision of transport, education, health, social and community facilities.

Cherwell Local Plan 1996

- 4.28 Adopted in November 1996 the Local Plan contains detailed policies with regard to amenity against which development proposals are assessed. The plan is considerable age, however policies have been saved and remain a material consideration insofar as they are consistent with the NPPF.
- 4.29 Policy C1 seeks to protect the natural environment requiring development to respect sites of designated importance. Policy C2 precludes development which

is detrimental to protected species, while policy C4 seeks to promote the creation of new habitats:

C1 THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO PROMOTE THE INTERESTS OF NATURE CONSERVATION. DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD RESULT IN DAMAGE TO OR LOSS OF SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST OR OTHER AREAS OF DESIGNATED WILDLIFE OR SCIENTIFIC IMPORTANCE WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED. FURTHERMORE, THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF SITES OF LOCAL NATURE CONSERVATION VALUE. THE POTENTIAL ADVERSE AFFECT OF DEVELOPMENT ON SUCH SITES WILL BE A MATERIAL CONSIDERATION IN DETERMINING PLANNING APPLICATIONS.

C2 DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT ANY SPECIES PROTECTED BY SCHEDULE 1, SCHEDULE 5 AND SCHEDULE 8 OF THE 1981 WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT, AND BY THE E.C. HABITATS DIRECTIVE 1992 WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED.

C4 THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO PROMOTE THE CREATION OF NEW HABITATS. IN URBAN AREAS THE COUNCIL WILL PROMOTE THE INTERESTS OF NATURE CONSERVATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF NEW DEVELOPMENT AND WILL ESTABLISH OR ASSIST WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ECOLOGICAL AND NATURE CONSERVATION AREAS, WHERE SUCH AREAS WOULD FURTHER THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND PASSIVE RECREATION AND WOULD NOT CONFLICT WITH OTHER POLICIES IN THE PLAN.

4.30 Policy C7 seeks to resist development which would result in harm to the character of the landscape:

C7 DEVELOPMENT WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED IF IT WOULD CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE TOPOGRAPHY AND CHARACTER OF THE LANDSCAPE.

4.31 Policy C23 presumes in favour of retaining features which make a positive contribution to conservation areas:

C23 THERE WILL BE A PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF RETAINING BUILDINGS, WALLS, TREES OR OTHER FEATURES WHICH MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF A CONSERVATION AREA.

4.32 Policy C25 confirms the Council's support for the protection and enhancement of ancient monuments, a number of which feature at Bicester Heritage:

C25 IN CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD AFFECT THE SITE OR SETTING OF A SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT, OTHER NATIONALLY IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS OF SPECIAL LOCAL IMPORTANCE, THE COUNCIL WILL HAVE REGARD TO THE DESIRABILITY OF MAINTAINING ITS OVERALL HISTORIC CHARACTER, INCLUDING ITS PROTECTION, ENHANCEMENT AND PRESERVATION WHERE APPROPRIATE.

4.33 Policy C28 sets out controls over all new development to ensure high standards of layout, design, and external appearance:

C28 CONTROL WILL BE EXERCISED OVER ALL NEW DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING CONVERSIONS AND EXTENSIONS, TO ENSURE THAT THE STANDARDS OF LAYOUT, DESIGN AND EXTERNAL APPEARANCE, INCLUDING THE CHOICE OF EXTERNAL-FINISH MATERIALS, ARE SYMPATHETIC TO THE CHARACTER OF THE URBAN OR RURAL CONTEXT OF THAT DEVELOPMENT. IN SENSITIVE AREAS SUCH AS CONSERVATION AREAS, THE AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY AND AREAS OF HIGH LANDSCAPE VALUE, DEVELOPMENT WILL BE REQUIRED TO BE OF A HIGH STANDARD AND THE USE OF TRADITIONAL LOCAL BUILDING MATERIALS WILL NORMALLY BE REQUIRED.

Cherwell non-statutory Local Plan 2011 (2004)

4.34 The Local Plan 2004 was intended to replace the 1996 Local Plan, work on the document was however discontinued prior to its adoption. The document is not part of the statutory development plan, it has however been adopted by the Council to guide the development management process.

RAF Bicester Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2008)

4.35 The RAF Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal offers a narrative of the development of the area and identifies attributes and features of particular importance. The Character Appraisal has informed the proposed development through the heritage impact assessment which has led the proposed scheme.

RAF Bicester Planning Brief (2012)

4.36 The RAF Bicester Planning Brief was produced in 2012 following the declaration by the Ministry of Defence that the site was surplus to their requirements and has the status of informal planning guidance. The document was prepared at a time of speculation as to the future of the airfield, including substantial concern with regard to the potential loss of historic features to including buildings and the open Flying Field to insensitive development.

4.37 The Planning Brief predates both Bicester Heritage's successful restoration of the Technical Site and seeks to protect the site from unsuitable speculative development by offering supplementary planning guidance on the constraints and features of particular interest. The Brief also identifies development opportunities on the site and identifies principles for the maintenance and restoration of historic features.

- 4.38 The document also pre-dates adoption of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and policy Bicester 8 which endorses the principle of hotel and conference development and acknowledges the need for pragmatism to secure a viable future.

Heritage Partnership Agreement- RAF Bicester (2016)

- 4.39 The Heritage Partnership Agreement was produced collaboratively by Bicester Heritage and Cherwell District Council with the document adopted by the Council in October 2016.
- 4.40 The document identifies characteristics of the site and sets guidelines for the restoration of the Technical Site. The HPA is informed by a good deal of research and advises on suitable colour and material palettes along with a style guide for features such as lighting and signage to ensure development which retains the cohesive historic character of the military site.
- 4.41 The document is an example of the successful collaborative working between the Council and Bicester Heritage and has guided the award winning restoration of the Technical Site. Details identified as contributing to the cohesive character of the site such as details and colouration have informed the proposed development to ensure it reads as a complementary continuation of the historic site.

Bicester Masterplan SPD- consultation draft (2012)

- 4.42 In August 2012 the Council published their consultation draft of their Bicester Masterplan. The proposed document was to guide the long-term vision for the town and integrate those developments committed in the Local Plan as part of a sustainable town.
- 4.43 Development of the Masterplan did not progress beyond the consultation stage, its weight is therefore limited.

Other Guidance and relevant documents

- 4.44 Historic England: Historic Environment Good Practice in Planning Advice Note 2 (2015): The guidance within this document builds upon that contained within the

NPPF and PPG offering advice on assessing the significance of heritage assets, using appropriate expertise, historic environment records, and recording and furthering understanding of assets.

- 4.45 Historic England: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (2017): This document sets out guidance, against the background of the NPPF and the related guidance given in the PPG on managing change within the settings of heritage assets. The note offers general advice on understanding setting and views in relation to heritage assets and serves as a guide to developers and decision makers in the planning process.

5.0 PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS ISSUES

5.1 In this instance the following issues are considered to be of relevance:

- Whether the principle of development is acceptable
- Whether the impact of the proposed development is acceptable

The principle of development

5.2 The principle of development of the site for hotel and conference facilities in connection with the collection of employment uses created and planned at the site is established in policy Bicester 8 of the Local Plan 2031 part 1. The policy explicitly states: *“The development of hotel and conference facilities will also be supported as part of a wider package of employment uses”*.

5.3 The allocation policy Bicester 8 includes a requirement for proposals to be conservation led to maintain and enhance the heritage assets which make up the Bicester Heritage site. The proposed development is led by heritage appraisal and has benefitted from pre-application discussions with the Council’s conservation officers and Historic England.

5.4 Discussions have allowed officers of the Council and Historic England to endorse the site as a suitable location in principle for the construction of a large hotel building to read as a continuation of the hangar crescent. Officers have also informed and supported the proposed building with the scale, form, and siting of the all considered acceptable.

5.5 Policy Bicester 8 is one of a raft of policies for specific sites in the town. Bicester is one of the District’s main centres benefitting from a high level of facilities, and thus one of the most sustainable locations for development and the focus of a large proportion of homes, employment opportunities, and tourist attractions.

5.6 Bicester Heritage has been successful in regenerating the Technical Site including the restoration of numerous listed buildings. The high quality development has successfully attracted new businesses creating an international centre of excellence for engineering, motoring and aviation. Despite the success of the development opportunity on the site, and more

broadly in the town, has been constrained by the absence of suitable hotel and conference accommodation.

- 5.7 The site is clearly in a sustainable location being to the edge of Bicester, one of Cherwell's principal settlements. The town is focussed for significant growth including additional employment; Bicester Heritage is an integral part of this vision. The proposed development will provide employment opportunities for staff in the new facility with analysis indicating in excess of 150 full time jobs could be created (SQW, 2017). The location is such that it is accessible to workers in the local area by sustainable means.
- 5.8 The hotel and conference facilities can also serve to unlock the potential of Bicester to attract new business, including high skilled jobs. The development should contribute a broad range of job opportunities to the benefit of a cross section of residents, and local economic sustainability. Full discussion of the economic benefits of development follows at paragraph 5.33.
- 5.9 The Local Plan 2031 identifies the need for high quality hotel accommodation to support the economic growth of the District (SLE 3). The document acknowledges expenditure associated with overnight is presently likely to be lost from the District because towns, including Bicester, are principally seen as destinations for day trips (paragraph B.63). The proposed hotel represents an opportunity to retain visitor spending.
- 5.10 The development can also generate vital funds to allow for the maintenance and restoration of heritage assets within Bicester Heritage and improve public access to the historic environment.
- 5.11 The proposal is explicitly supported by Local Plan policy Bicester 8. Subject to amenity impacts considered below we consider planning permission should be granted.

Whether the impact of the development is acceptable

- 5.12 The various impacts arising from this proposal are assessed in specialist reports included with this application. Each impact is fully appraised in the relevant

report; however a summary of the impact and suggested mitigation is made in this section.

5.13 *Impact on heritage assets*

5.14 Policy Bicester 8 requires that developments on the site be ‘conservation led’ in order that development preserves and enhances the various heritage assets on the site. The proposal site is within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area which includes the flying field, technical site, and the residential site to the opposite side of Buckingham Road. The area also features numerous listed buildings including the grade II listed hangars 79 and 108 which are the buildings in closest proximity to the proposed building. There are also a number of scheduled ancient monuments, although none are in the immediate vicinity of the proposal site.

5.15 The proposal has been developed through discussions with the Council’s Conservation Officers and with advice from Historic England. Positive discussions have allowed assessment of site constraints and opportunities, and discussion of design proposals. The consultative process has involved exploration of a number of siting, orientation, and design options to ensure the best possible development for the site. Historic England have endorsed the principle of a hotel on the site while the design, scale, form, and siting of the proposal have all been supported by Council officers at the pre-application stage.

5.16 This application is accompanied by a Heritage Impact Statement prepared by Worledge Associates which considers the significance of the various heritage assets, an appreciation of which has led the proposed development, including siting, layout and design. The significance of the assets principally stems from the completeness of the collection of buildings preserved, particular emphasis has therefore been placed on maintaining the historic principles of the layout of the historic site.

5.17 The location of the proposed hotel has been selected as it allows a sensitive and logical continuation of the development of the site. Although previously occupied by smaller buildings the site had been identified for the construction of a hangar in the interwar period to form a crescent of four buildings, of which only

the central two were constructed. A suitable development upon the site can, therefore, maintain the historic principles which led the layout of the historic site.

5.18 The proposed development maintains important views in the site as identified in the Conservation Area Character Appraisal including those from the Watch Tower, those from the Technical Site along its western avenue and from hangar aprons. The siting of the building does require some minor realignment of the distributor road from the hangars to the perimeter road of the flying field, the proposed repositioning however ensures the historic purpose of the road remains legible.

5.19 Knowledge of the site as a historically planned location for a hangar has also informed the design and form of the proposed structure. While maintaining an obvious legibility as a modern hotel the proposed building takes influence from the hangars on site to offer a coherent and complementary form of development.

5.20 The proposed development has a simple footprint reflecting that of the Type-C hangars in a rectangular form of matching dimensions. The building is of similar height to complement that of the hangars. The size of the proposed and existing buildings is such that they will in the main only be seen together in distant views within which the hotel will read as a complementary continuation of the hangar crescent. The Heritage Impact Statement underlines the need for a well-designed and suitably sized building to complement the historic form stating *“it is important that the proposed development has a physical presence, not to compete with the scale of the existing hangars, but to complement the visual role they play in marking the edge of the airfield”* (page 26).

5.21 While the structure respects the scale and form of the hangars care has been taken to ensure the development is legible as a hotel of modern construction. The structure makes use of materials characteristic of the historic site applied in a contemporary manner. The hotel features areas of metal cladding reminiscent of camouflage nets applied to the hangars in military service, while the glazed atrium emphasises the top-lit open spaces characteristic of the hangars. The proposed structure is considered to be a sensitive addition to the historic environment, offering a fitting complement through an honestly modern development.

- 5.22 The Heritage Impact Assessment considers the impact of the proposals on the significance the site holds and concludes the development: *“would not result in harm. The proposed development evidences the new use for the ex-military airfield and introduces change that will help to shape the future of the site, but not undermine its history or character”* (page 29).
- 5.23 The evidential value of the existing site will not be undermined by the proposed development, furthermore the proposals will help facilitate the preservation and rediscovery of evidence which can enhance historic value. The contribution the hangars make to the appearance of the Technical Site, understanding of its layout and functional relationship to the airfield will be preserved.
- 5.24 The proposed development on the edge of the flying field can enhance the aesthetic value of the ‘waterfront’ group of service and technical buildings within the site preserving the relationship between spaces and structures. While the development will change the setting of the adjacent hangars the contribution they make to the airfield will be preserved. The proposal would also preserve the Arcadian and campus like qualities of the Technical Site, while access arrangements do not disrupt historic routes within the site, including the trident road layout.
- 5.25 The development would not have any direct physical impact on existing buildings, structures or road layout, the survival of which is the point in which the greatest historic interest lies. The new buildings will add to the existing buildings lining the airfield (or ‘waterfront’) without detracting from the understanding and experience of the functional and visual role the hangars play.
- 5.26 With regard to communal value the assessment states that its value: *“lies in its ‘place memory’ preserved through the survival and continued use of the military buildings on the site. The proposed development will help to ensure that the site and its constituent buildings have a sustainable future, thus preserving those collective memories”* (page 28). The proposal will make the heritage assets of the site more publicly available, adding to their communal value. This opportunity for enhancement is noted and encouraged in the RAF Bicester Planning Brief.

- 5.27 Heritage assessment has considered the heritage value of the site in evidential, aesthetic, and communal terms. While it is acknowledged the proposed development will change the setting of assets it will not give rise to any harm to the aesthetic or evidential heritage value of the site, while communal value can be enhanced.
- 5.28 Heritage appraisal has concluded the development would not result in harm to heritage assets, there should therefore be no reason to withhold planning permission on heritage grounds. The appraisal continues to note that if any harm were to arise from the development with regard to heritage assets it would be *“at the bottom of the ‘less than substantial’ scale”* (page 29). If it were concluded the proposal results in less than substantial harm paragraph 134 of the NPPF sets out: *“this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use”*. The proposed development offers considerable public benefits, particularly with regard to economic development an overview of which follows. The Heritage Impact Assessment concludes these benefits would outweigh less than substantial harm in the planning balance.
- 5.29 The most substantial benefit of the proposed development is with regard to economic development. The proposed scheme has been developed to address a known deficit in hotel and conference facilities in the area which has acted as a constraint to growth, not only at Bicester Heritage, but in the town and District more broadly. The development can serve to stimulate investment in the area and encourage new business and employment, including employment for high skilled workers, as sought under the strategic objective SO1 of the Local Plan.
- 5.30 The development can offer a substantial number of new jobs (in the region of 180 full time equivalent) aligned with local skill sets, and therefore of direct benefit to the local community. The project is also anticipated to generate in the region of £5m GVA annually through its operation. The project can also offer substantial benefits in the course of development with an anticipated generation of £19m GVA, and 455 temporary job years through the construction phase.
- 5.31 The enhanced appeal of the area to new business is not limited to economic benefits, but can also contribute to the heritage assets of the Bicester Heritage site. The increased appeal of existing employment space on the site provided in

historic buildings which have already been restored will act to add a safeguard their future. The development can also facilitate the restoration of listed hangars the size and condition of which is such that they require considerable investment. The heritage benefits of facilitating inward investment are noted in the Heritage Impact Assessment, along with the enhancement which would be made to the communal value of the asset by the increased public asset.

5.32 The proposed development has been subject to rigorous assessment which concludes the proposals would not give rise to any harm to heritage assets. The development is also noted to give rise to public benefits including a substantial contribution to the local economy, creation of job opportunities, safeguarding of historic buildings, and enhancing public access to heritage assets. The benefits are material considerations in the assessment of heritage impact under paragraph 134 of the NPPF.

5.33 *Economic impacts*

5.34 The Cherwell Local Plan sets out the Council's vision for the District. The Council desire the area to be prosperous and offer all residents a good quality of life (A.8). The Council note in order to achieve this it is essential to develop a sustainable vibrant economy supported by excellent education facilities, while also cherishing, protecting and enhancing the built environment (A9).

5.35 The District's lack of diversity of employment, presently focussed on manufacturing, is identified as a weakness in its present economy (A.13). Key challenges identified are the need to grow the 'knowledge economy', provide additional employment space, and improve the quality of space to attract new business (A.14). Strategic objective SO1 seeks to facilitate economic growth by attracting and developing higher technology industries while SO5 seeks to encourage sustainable tourism in the District.

5.36 The Local Plan has a particular aspiration to develop a sustainable economy in Bicester. When the plan was adopted in 2015 the town experienced significant levels of out-commuting, something the Council seeks to change through addressing the imbalance between jobs and homes. Engineering, including motorsport, is noted to be a particular strength in the town and an opportunity for innovation and growth. Although opportunities are identified the Council also

acknowledge current limitations; in particular they note the need to “make Bicester more attractive to new businesses, particularly knowledge based and high technology companies”.

5.37 The absence of adequate hotel and conferencing facilities have been identified as a key constraint by Bicester Heritage, the provision of facilities as proposed can serve to enhance the attractiveness of the town to increase inward investment. The proposed hotel will offer direct job opportunities as staff will be required for its operation and can also serve to facilitate economic growth, including high skill jobs. The proposal would also encourage sustainable tourism in line with the strategic objectives of the Local Plan. The proposal offers considerable opportunities for the economic development of the area.

5.38 In considering proposals the emerging development was subject of economic assessment by SQW. The analysis undertaken concludes there are considerable economic benefits associated with the development, an overview of the findings is provided below.

5.39 The proposed facility will provide employment opportunities for the local community and contribute to a local economy which is growing relatively rapidly, while also improving the balance of activities and employment opportunities locally.

5.40 The improved balance of employment opportunities is particularly relevant given the Local Plan priorities to support a more diverse economy. Bicester benefits from a strong retail sector, and allocated sites in the town will provide for new employment in both retail and office roles. The provision of the hotel and wider facilities such as the conference centre and restaurant will help to diversify the town's employment base.

5.41 The proposals subject of assessment by SQW were anticipated to provide 445 temporary job years, while operation of the hotel was expected to offer 180 full time equivalent jobs. It is relevant to note at times in the last few years unemployment in Bicester and Cherwell has been higher than Oxfordshire as a whole.

- 5.42 The report anticipates the proposed development to generate considerable value with construction activity expected to generate in the region of £19m GVA, while operation can create approximately £5m GVA.
- 5.43 The assessment notes tourism is growing as a source of employment in the local economy and the opportunity for the facility to attract business users. The improving business conditions in the area could also help to generate demand for the proposed facility.
- 5.44 The proposed development serves to address issues identified in the Local Plan and presents an opportunity to realise strategic objectives with regard to Bicester and Cherwell's economic growth. The development has been assessed to offer substantial economic benefits through local investment and job opportunities both directly provided, and facilitated through growth elsewhere. The benefits are substantial and a matter of considerable weight in the planning balance.
- 5.45 *Impact on neighbouring amenity*
- 5.46 The proposal site is remote from dwellings, however the scale of development is such that potential impacts merit consideration.
- 5.47 The proposed building is a significant distance from the closest dwellings which are set around 150m to the west. The properties benefit from two belts of screening vegetation to either side of the Buckingham Road with the additional intervening street Turnpike Road. The distance and intervening features are such that the dwellings should not suffer any loss of amenity through overbearing or overshadowing impacts.
- 5.48 The same separation should preclude overlooking from the proposed hotel to dwellings with any impact further mitigated by the orientation of dwellings on Turnpike Road with their public front aspects facing the proposal site. The nature of the proposed development is such that it should not give rise to unneighbourly noise or odour impacts, particularly when considered in the context of permitted uses in the vicinity of the site.

5.49 *Transport*

5.50 The effect of the proposed development on local traffic and transport is considered in the dedicated Transport Statement provided by Mode which accompanies this application. As set out previously the development is in a sustainable location with all necessary services and facilities available by walking, cycling, or public transport, including rail and premium bus services for long distance journeys.

5.51 The Statement concludes the site is accessible by sustainable modes of transport with existing pedestrian and bicycle links located in close proximity and bus services, including premium long distance services to Oxford, Cambridge, Milton Keynes, and Buckingham, within 300m.

5.52 The local highway network has not been shown to have any historic or existing safety concerns, there are therefore no issues which might be exacerbated by the proposals. Surveys revealed speeds passing the site to average 45mph in both directions.

5.53 The development is proposed with a vehicular access to Buckingham Road via a new ghost island priority junction. The access junction will allow for all movements entering the site but will prohibit vehicles leaving the site from turning right across Buckingham Road (left out/exit only). A shared cycle and footway will be provided within the site, with a footway to the existing southbound bus stop. A new toucan crossing is also proposed which will allow for safe crossing for pedestrians and cyclists and connect with existing routes to the west of Buckingham Road.

5.54 Car parking has been informed by pre-application discussions with Oxfordshire County Council and is provided in line with expected standards, with adjustment to reflect the accessible location of the site. Ten per cent of parking capacity will be provided for disabled guests.

5.55 The proposed development takes account of local policy on sustainable travel. The facility is to benefit from bicycle parking in line with local standards offering 24 secure stands. Washing and changing facilities will be available to staff and guests increasing the attractiveness of cycling as a mode of transport. Provision

is also made for the charging of electric vehicles with ten bays benefitting from charging posts.

5.56 Assessment has concluded the site will generate 181 two-way vehicle trips during the morning peak, and 149 during the evening peak, the equivalent of three vehicular movements per minute during weekday peak hours.

5.57 The assessment recommends works to mitigate anticipated traffic to the local highway network with such works expected to be supported through contributions from the applicant. Modelling has shown the proposed access should not result in vehicles queuing on Buckingham Road to enter the site, the proposed access is therefore considered suitable and sufficient to support the proposed development.

5.58 The Statement concludes: *“the proposed development will not have a significant adverse impact on the operation of the surrounding highway network when compared with the 2022 future year (inc. committed development), and therefore, in accordance with the NPPF, the proposal should be considered acceptable in transport terms”* (paragraph 7.2.2).

5.59 *Landscape and visual impact*

5.60 Care has been taken in developing these proposals to limit their visual impact, including that upon heritage assets, and views from the site to surrounding countryside as identified in the Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

5.61 The building has been sited to retain important views within the former military site, including those along the western avenue of the Technical Site, and from the airfield watch tower to the Buckingham Road. The siting also allows for views from the apron of the aircraft hangars to the Flying Field.

5.62 The position of the building is such that it does not necessitate the removal of existing mature trees while the proposed landscaping screen allows for additional screening, particularly of parking areas. The scheme has been designed to blend with its surroundings and retain the character of the area including nearby designated assets.

5.63 The proposal includes a comprehensive landscaping scheme which will serve to integrate development in to the landscape. The scheme is informed by the historic landscaping principles which were very much part of site development serving to camouflage the military site. A scheme following the same principles can allow for the development to assimilate in to the historic military environment to the benefit of landscape and heritage interest.

5.64 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment concludes that proposal will have adverse effect on the local landscape, this however must be balanced against the bigger picture of considering and securing the site's future. The appraisal also acknowledges the impact on the historic landscape is a key consideration, an issue analysed through the Heritage Impact Assessment and concluded to suffer no significant harm, with opportunity for enhancement through safeguarding of historic features and increased communal value.

5.65 In terms of visual impacts on the wider landscape the assessment confirms these are gradually reduced as the distance increases, impact on the elevated landscape to the north and east is only moderate. Impacts in closer views from the Buckingham Road and nearby dwellings would be mitigated in the medium to longer term by proposed tree planting within the site.

5.66 Within the Bicester Heritage site views are sensitive being within the Conservation Area and including listed buildings. There will be a major change in certain views, however the building is in scale and character with the historic hangars. The building will not compete visually and the materials will complement those already used. The visual impact of the proposal is considered to be acceptable when taking into account the existing and future uses and context of the site. In time the proposed planting will provide a maturity and setting to the building to assimilate the building into the historic site.

5.67 *Ecological impact*

5.68 The proposal site is located in the RAF Bicester Local Wildlife Site, the impact upon which is a material consideration. The Stratton Audley Quarry Site of Special Scientific Interest is set around 750m to the east of the proposal site which is designated for its geological interest. The separation combined with the

nature of the special interest is such that the proposals should not impact on the area.

5.69 The ecological impacts of the proposals, including their impact upon local wildlife sites are considered in the accompanying Ecological Assessment prepared by Ecology Solutions which accompanies this application.

5.70 The assessment confirms the proposed development is not likely to give rise to any significant adverse impacts on any statutory designated sites. While the site is within a local wildlife site development is contained to an area of lower value with impacts capable of mitigation. Subject to the recommendations of the assessment the proposed development should not result in any adverse impact on designated ecological sites or protected species.

5.71 *Trees*

5.72 No trees feature on the site of the proposed building with specimens limited to the periphery of the site. This application is accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment which includes indicative protection plans. The scheme includes a comprehensive landscaping scheme which provides for new planting. Vegetation to be retained is to be fenced off and where possible protected by solid hoardings during construction works.

5.73 *Noise*

5.74 The proposed development is not such that it would give rise to significant noise impacts. The site is also remote from sensitive receptors with the closest dwellings being around 150m to the west, separated by the Buckingham Road. The separation and intervening road are such that the proposed hotel should not be detrimental to neighbouring amenity by way of noise impacts.

5.75 Occupants of the proposed hotel should not suffer with regard to noise from surrounding uses. The road is a notable distance from the site and not subject to unusual traffic. While the Technical Site features a number of commercial uses the closest buildings are permitted for restricted storage uses and therefore have relatively low levels of activity. The nature of the use is also such that hours of operation do not conflict with the need for quiet around the hotel.

5.76 *Air quality*

5.77 The proposal site is not within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), there is however one to the south in Bicester town centre. The proposed development should not give rise to unusual impacts with regard to air quality and is sufficiently removed that there should be no impact on the AQMA.

5.78 The proposal site is set on the perimeter road to Bicester with all signposted routes directing traffic around the town centre, it is also accessible by rail and public transport visitors therefore will not be reliant on their private car. The proposed development should not give rise to notable increases in town centre traffic detrimental to the AQMA.

5.79 *Land contamination*

5.80 The site was subject of review by the Ministry of Defence prior to disposal which concluded the site was not subject to unusual contamination risks. This application is accompanied by a contamination assessment.

5.81 The nature of use of the proposed hotel, conference, and leisure facilities is such that users would not be subject to notable risks from contamination. The risk from contamination is not such that it should preclude the proposed facility.

5.82 *Flood risk and hydrology*

5.83 The proposal site is located in Flood Zone 1, the area of lowest risk from flooding. The proposals have been subject to detailed assessment with regard to flooding of both the site and the impact of the development on flooding elsewhere. A detailed assessment accompanies this application.

5.84 The proposed development involves the formation of areas of hardstanding. The development includes a drainage strategy incorporating SUDS which utilise infiltration methods to dispose of run-off. The development should not be at risk of flooding and should not increase flood risk elsewhere.

5.85 *Natural resources and energy*

5.86 The proposed development has been informed by a sustainable energy strategy, the measures of which are incorporated in the proposed development. The recommended measures reduce the overall energy demand of the building and allow the development to exceed the energy efficiency and renewable energy targets set by Building Regulations.

5.87 *Aviation impacts*

5.88 While no longer in the use or ownership of the RAF flying activities continue from the field. The proposed building is a continuation of design proposals from the flying field heyday and reflective of planned developments in siting and scale.

5.89 The proposal has benefitted from input from aviation consultants who confirm the proposal will not preclude safe flying activities, including those of gliders, on the flying field.

CONCLUSION

- 6.0 The proposed development site is allocated within Cherwell Local Plan 2031 Part 1 for the construction of hotel and conference facilities. The proposed development will provide up to 344 hotel and aparthotel rooms with leisure and conference facilities. The development will also benefit from considerable landscaping and provide generous internal and external amenity areas.
- 6.1 The proposed development will contribute to meeting the District's clearly identified need for additional and improved hotel and conference facilities to support employment growth and sustainable tourism. The proposal makes efficient use of a sustainable site while remaining sensitive and appropriate to its surroundings.
- 6.2 The development proposed respects the setting of nearby heritage assets and can make a positive contribution to the RAF Bicester Conservation Area that it stands within. The development will not be unneighbourly in terms of overshadowing or overbearing impacts from the built form while the location of the site limits impacts from the proposed use.
- 6.3 The development will have limited visibility from the public aspect and respects the historic landscape of the military site including distant views to surrounding countryside. The siting of the proposed building is such that important views identified in the Conservation Area Character Appraisal are maintained. Any views obtained of the development will reveal a building complementary to the historic site assimilated into its setting by a landscaping scheme following military principles.
- 6.4 The proposed development will be provided with adequate car and bicycle parking that it will not affect parking locally. The proposed scheme has been subject of assessment with regard to transport impacts which confirms subject to proposed mitigations the development should not be deleterious to highway safety. The local highway can accommodate the additional foot and cycle traffic while users of the facility can also support local public transport.
- 6.5 The proposals have been subject to rigorous assessments, and the site closely considered in terms of ecological, noise, flooding, and land

contamination. The proposed development has been found to be acceptable in every regard when assessed local policies.

- 6.6 In summary, the proposed development will have considerable benefit in contributing to the strategic aims of the Local Plan, particularly economic development objectives, in a sensitive and sustainable matter. The benefits of the development would not be outweighed by any harm in terms of local and wider amenity. No local or national policies indicate that the proposed development should not be permitted. In view of this, planning permission should be granted in line with paragraph 14 of the NPPF.