## Representations on application 18/00825/HYBRID

**Introduction**

These comments arise from an examination of some of the documents submitted with this hybrid application, assumed to support the masterplan required by local plan policies V5. **A summary of elements/extracts of the application being considered and relevant comments (in italics) is attached.**

It should be noted that thousands of hours have been spent considering various proposals for the site over the last 23 years during which a consensus has been built about how a lasting arrangement for the site could be achieved through a redevelopment that respected its heritage value, i.e. the only reason that the military remains from the Cold War have not been demolished. Some elements of the current proposals appear to defy this consensus and substitute an incoherent juxtaposition of a new settlement, employment uses and theme park.

Notwithstanding the fact that the only justification for any development at this location is the conservation of what are now recognized as the pre-eminent remains from the Cold War, heritage has been placed in a subordinate position to the residential, employment and ancillary uses. The application is made in the context of vigorous debate about the Cold War; what it comprised, the extent and identity of the victims, and the lasting geo-political effects including, crucially, the current relationship with Russia and its former and current allies. In so far as built-heritage has been found to be a preferred and effective access to the study and understanding of history (see the 2016 Culture White Paper) the potential of the former airfield at Upper Heyford for heritage purposes should not be underestimated. Whilst the erosion (described by Pegasus group as ‘dilution’) of the site and its Cold War heritage value since 1995 is regrettable, it currently stands as an authentic example of the collective irresponsibility of the relevant authorities. However, this application represents an opportunity to ensure that no further damage is done to the potential for using the site to better understand the history of the world over the last hundred years.

There does not appear to be any reference in the application to collaboration with heritage organisations in other countries eg CWIHP, Presidential libraries or the National Parks Service in the US or Memorial or Perm36 in Russia or even with Oxford University a few miles away (with a number of specialist departments). Despite reference to some interest in ‘technology’ there do not appear to be any partnerships being proposed with the companies responsible for its development and operation; eg Constain, Laing, Amey, Heyfordian, General Dynamics, Northrop Grummon, Pratt and Whitney. The application seems to have a very limited vision of what could and should be achieved at Upper Heyford.

Since the permission was granted by the Secretary of State in 2009 the enabling residential allocation has been increased by about 250% and a proportionate increase in job creation. At the same time the LPA has agree that the space allocated to heritage use to be reduced by 10 times. This application is an opportunity for the authorities to establish a proper balance between the conservation of the heritage, the primary justification for development at Upper Heyford, and and all other uses.

**Support**

Notwithstanding the inordinate delay (‘heritage delayed is heritage denied’), the prospect of properly organised guided tours across the Cold War landscape to include important elements of the site is to be welcomed. However, this aspect of the proposals should be secured without any further delay based on the existing approval.

The proposal for a ‘Heyford Park Research Centre for Cold War and Contemporary Peace Studies’ would be a good idea if called the Upper Heyford Cold War Research Centre - RAF Upper Heyford being the logical name and the study of peace being a component of the work.

**Objections**

1. In the absence of the feasibility studies (2005 Structure Plan) or the Heritage Impact Assessment (Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031) there is no evidence to support any of the claims made in the application in respect of the heritage value of the site. There is no reference to the exceptional accessibility of the heritage site; that it is located at the most accessible point on the national road network and being connected by a proposed shuttle bus to a station on a main line between London, Oxford and Birmingham. The site is also on the tourist trail including London, Windsor, Oxford, Blenheim and Stratford and only 15 min from the 6.4 million visitors to Bicester Village. All this potential needs to be properly assessed. Compliance with the commitments made by the Government in signing up to the relevant Conventions Paris, Granada and Valetta should also be taken into account in respect of both conservation of heritage assets and public access.

2. The demolition of the southern bomb stores is without justification as is the unnecessary intrusion of residential development into the flying field.

3. There is no proposal to change the use of the flying field and related buildings to the heritage purposes that should be their primary use.

4. The “Flying Field Park" is an unjustified intrusion of an inappropriate use into the ‘core area of national heritage significance’. The Cold War landscape has been variously described by English Heritage and the Secretary of State as ‘bare functionality’, ’ hostile’, and ‘engendering awe and foreboding’. Visitors cannot receive more than an introduction to the existence and complexities of the Cold War period, and the primary aim should be to instill a lasting impression and inspire further interest from experiencing the authentic landscape of nuclear holocaust. The current proposals (in particular the parkland and school) would, instead, reinforce an impression that there is a continuing level of indifference and denial regarding that period.

5. The Flying Field Park and 20 ha of hardstanding for car storage and processing would not just intrude into the Cold War landscape but isolate the Battle Command Centre/Hardened Telephone Exchange, the listed nose-docking sheds, the A frame hangars and the SW HASs from the airfield. The coherence of the airfield would be lost and, likewise, the setting of these scheduled monuments and listed buildings would be seriously harmed.

6. It is important to establish whether the application preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the conservation area. The designation document states that, “in the case of RAF Upper Heyford the sum holistic character is greater than the collection of the parts and each area within the airbase is crucial to the functioning of the site." Until now, the owners have made proposals “without compromising the integrity of the site as a monument to the Cold War". The official advice at NPPF para 132 applies to heritage assets of this importance. There is no, “clear and convincing justification" as is required in the case of development within the setting of a site of international heritage importance. In the circumstances the justification for the approval of such harmful proposals would be “wholly exceptional". In this case the suggested benefit of providing public access to the main runway would be outweighed by the impact the means of access (i.e. a recreational park) would have on the Cold War landscape. Perfectly adequate access by the public could be achieved without causing serious harm to the landscape they have come to appreciate.

7. No assessment is made of the traffic generated by the heritage use. The shuttle bus to Lower Heyford station would be welcome but the 1 hour service to Oxford might be inadequate.

8. It is unclear what access is being provided to the QRA and the HASs with a nil use (this should be heritage use) or the associated hardened squadron building.

**Summary**

9.The proposals comprised in this application will define the future of what is currently acknowledged as representing the best preserved Cold War airfield in the country. While its particular contribution to the conflict lasting over 100 years can be debated, this will apply to any individual site (the basis for the World Heritage Site panel to recommend a ‘transnational’ approach to Cold War heritage that may include Upper Heyford). What is beyond dispute is the current state of preservation, its availability for public access and the exceptional locational characteristics.

10. There have been many expert assessments made of the Cold War landscape and a consensus has developed around preserving the impression of awe and foreboding that it represents. Some of the proposals that have no evidential justification would cause the further dilution or cultural cleansing of the historic remains conflicting with national planning advice and international conventions.

11. The damage to heritage assets of international importance (e.g. the setting of the Battle Command Centre), in particular to the ability to appreciate and experience the site as a whole, would conflict with the development plan (also its requirement for heritage impact assessments) and the relevant advice in the 2012 NPPF.

**Call-in**

12. The application raises significant matters of wider than of local importance (in this case of international interest) and should be referred to the Secretary of State for determination (unless previously refused). When considering whether the LPA is likely to take proper account of the wider (ie international interest) the Secretary of State should note that the LPA is primarily responsible for the fact that over 20 years since the site became redundant and 8 years since the requirements set out in the 2010 appeal decision, there is still no heritage centre or public access to the site. There is no reason to believe that the planners or the committee/council will give any greater weight to the heritage interests or start to take note of either the conservation officers or heritage organisations responsible for providing that advice.