

18/00825/HYBRID at Upper Heyford

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There is general agreement that the site represents the best preserved remains from the Cold War in the UK (and possibly anywhere), that was the defining historical 'event' of the last hundred years. In fact the only reason the redevelopment of the site was allowed in preference to its clearance, was the conservation of, "...the heritage interest of the site as a military base with Cold War associations..." (Inspector's Report 2009). The masterplan includes proposals that detract from and do not conserve that interest.

Why should Cherwell DC not be trusted to decide this masterplan application?

1. As planning authority, the Council has been largely responsible for the cultural cleansing, dilution of historical interest, and damage to the character, appearance and heritage value that has already occurred.
2. The submitted heritage assessments have not been through the necessary 'scoping' in order to investigate the potential of the site to display and interpret aspects of Cold War history to different audiences.
3. Para 190 of the NPPF 2019 states, "Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal ... taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise." The plan submitted for the heritage site is authored by Dorchester Living who have been accepted by the Council as meeting the 'necessary expertise' test.
4. The international significance of the site is not disputed, but the Council chose to oppose the application to have Upper Heyford included on the World Heritage Site tentative list, and in dealing with the site has never referred to the relevant international conventions of Paris, Granada and Valetta. Instead, the Council encourages local tourists to visit Crocodile World in a neighbouring district?
5. The tourist potential is not addressed in the submitted assessments of transport or employment. Only the existing heritage centre (one tenth of the size approved in 2010, and now proposed to be moved) has a permitted heritage use. The airfield is in B8/storage use and the Council has failed to protect the runways, taxiways or hardstandings that are essential to the Cold War landscape.
6. The application is being supported by the planning officer against the recommendations of both Historic England and the council's conservation officer.

The glaring disparity between how the Council and the developer are dealing with this pre-eminent Cold War heritage site, and what could and should be achieved if the heritage potential had been properly scoped, assessed and prioritised, justifies deferral of the application and the involvement of the Secretary of State in its determination.