**18/00825/HYBRID**

**Heyford Park, Camp Road, Upper Heyford**

**Demolition of buildings and structures as listed in Schedule 1; Outline planning permission for up to 1,175 new dwellings (Class C3); 60 close care dwellings (Class C2/C3); 929 m2 of retail (Class A1); 670 m2 comprising a new medical centre (Class D1); 35,175 m2 of new employment buildings, (comprising up to 6,330 m2 Class B1a, 13,635 m2 B1b/c, 9,250 m2 Class B2, and 5,960 m2 B8); 2.4 ha site for a new school (Class D1); 925 m2 of community use buildings (Class D2); and 515 m2 of indoor sports, if provided on-site (Class D2); 30m in height observation tower with zip-wire with ancillary visitor facilities of up of 100 m2 (Class D1/A1/A3); 1,000 m2 energy facility/infrastructure with a stack height of up to 24m (sui generis); 2,520 m2 additional education facilities (buildings and associated external infrastructure) at Buildings 73, 74 and 583 for education use (Class D1); creation of areas of Open Space, Sports Facilities, Public Park and other green infrastructure; Change of Use of the following buildings and areas: Buildings 357 and 370 for office use (Class B1a); Buildings 3036, 3037, 3038, 3039, 3040, 3041, and 3042 for employment use (Class B1b/c, B2, B8); Buildings 217, 3102, 3136, 3052, 3053, 3054, and 3055 for employment use (Class B8); Buildings 2010, 3008, and 3009 for filming and heritage activities (Sui Generis/Class D1); Buildings 2004, 2005 and 2006 for education use (Class D1); Buildings 366, 391, 1368, 1443, 2007, 2008 and 2009 (Class D1/D2 with ancillary A1-A5 use); Building 340 (Class D1, D2, A3); 20.3ha of hardstanding for car processing (Sui Generis); and 76.6ha for filming activities (Sui Generis); the continuation of use of areas, buildings and structures already benefiting from previous planning permissions, as specified in Schedule 2; associated infrastructure works including surface water attenuation provision and upgrading Chilgrove Drive and the junction with Camp Road**

**Significance of site and principle of development**

RAF Upper Heyford is a cold war landscape with a range of designated and non-designated heritage assets including a conservation area, scheduled monuments (one of which is identified as being of international significance), listed buildings and non-designated buildings of national and local significance.

RAF Upper Heyford has been identified as a mixed used development site within The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 in Policy Villages 5. The policy carefully balances development requirements with the need to preserve the heritage and there is a fundamental principle enshrined within this that there is to be no development on the flying field.

The Mid Cherwell Neighbourhood Local Plan, which is currently out to consultation, includes a policy that states ‘*To strongly encourage the use of brownfield sites before any development is considered on greenfield sites, unless specifically allocated within the Neighbourhood Plan’.* This is seen as contradictory to Policy Villages 5 and comments to this affect have been made to the consultation.



RAF Heyford functional zones. Flying field shown in green.

The character of this area is described in the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area Appraisal ‘*The general character of the flying Field is one of open grassland bisected by runways, taxiways and hardstand. Around the periphery of this open area are strategically located HAS’s and areas with specific function, some self-contained within their own securing fencing’ and ‘The present day character of the flying field has thus been largely determined by the requirements of the strategy of Flexible Response and the F111s ability to threaten the Warsaw Pact’s key military installations’* .

The layout and stark, open character of the flying field is fundamental to the significance of heritage asset of RAF Upper Heyford. The flying field is of significance as a single entity and it is the functional relationship between the different aspects of the site that is of importance. The southern side of the airfield is of particular significance due to its close physical links with the Technical site and the Domestic Site.

Any proposal to provide built development on the areas not identified by Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Policy Villages 5 would be considered to cause **substantial harm** to the character and appearance of the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area and the setting of all listed buildings, Scheduled Monuments and non-designated heritage assets in the area. Development in this area is considered to be contrary to the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031.

The currently submitted masterplan which has been the focus of an ongoing pre-application process proposes development on the flying field. Concerns have been raised about this general principle at every stage. This is acknowledged within the Design and Access Statement following a summary of initial feedback to the proposed masterplan developments. *‘Avoid development on the flying field. New development should be focused to the south of the flying field and on limited greenfield land south of Camp Road’.* Notwithstanding the fundamental objection to the principle of development in this location I have the following comments to make on specific aspects of the Heyford Masterplan.

**Control Tower Park and Flying Field Park**

The proposal to allow public access to RAF Upper Heyford is enshrined within the Cherwell Local Plan Policy Villages 5. The general principle of general public access was discussed at an early stage of the pre-application process.

There is considered to be a **public benefit** to allowing greater public appreciation of the heritage asset. It is, however, fundamental to the significance of the heritage asset that the existing *‘stark, functional character* ‘ is retained.

The Design and Access Statements claims that *‘The park will be an informal landscape and include a range of amenities and facilities for casual and informal use by visitor and the parkland and commercial community’.* The landscaping details are of fundamental concern and details will need to be submitted at an early stage of any reserved matters application. The **public benefit** of access to the airfield could be outweighed by **harm** if the landscaping details are inappropriate for the context.

There are significant concerns with the proposed ‘Observation Tower’ which it is noted will be up to 30m in height. This will potentially have an impact on surrounding heritage assets (including Rousham Park) as well as the airfield itself. The original proposal was to have the tower on the runway itself, but following comment during the pre-application process it has been moved slightly to the south of the runway, but is still considered to be in too close proximity and will cause harm to the understanding of the function and layout of the airfield runway.

The proposal to use the Control Tower for public access is also welcome subject to details. A full listed building consent application will be required which assesses the significance of the Control Tower and puts forward a comprehensive programme for the refurbishment and conversion of the building which retains the core significance. A key consideration will be the provision of a staircase to provide public access to the upper floor. A listed Control Tower at Greenham Common has been converted to a café and event space and this may set a useful precedent.

Careful consideration will need to be given to the landscaping around the Control Tower with particular reference to parking and lighting. Also need to consider how to address the blast wall that is currently in place.

Views from the Control Tower should be careful considered in relation to other developments on site, ensuring that the character of the site is maintained from this viewpoint.

It is fundamental that the public benefits of the site are provided at an appropriate and early stage in the development and this should be controlled by a phasing plan and legal agreement.

**Core Destination Area**

The proposal to provide further public access to the site within the Core Destination Area is generally welcome and seen as a public benefit.

The existing Hardened Aircraft Structures on the site are proposed to be retained and converted into tourism facilities. The buildings are non-designated heritage assets and by their nature with large, open spaces are eminently convertible without losing their core significance. The key area of concern is to find suitable, sustainable uses for the buildings. The Design and Access Statement indicates potential uses for the buildings to include Heritage Centre, Exhibition Space, Science and Technology Hub (including code breaking escape room) and Adrenaline Park to include stake park, climbing wall and public seating area. There would be no objections to these uses.

The public benefits of the opening up of the site should be provided at an early stage in the development and should be controlled by a phasing plan and legal agreement.

A key consideration will be the impact of any proposed development between the Hardened Aircraft Shelters including parking, lighting, landscaping etc. These will need to take consideration of the military character of the site. Overdevelopment of the areas around the buildings could cause **harm** to their setting and the character and appearance of the conservation area. A strategy will be required to deal with all these elements on site to ensure an appropriate form of development.

**Educational Site**

There are concerns about the provision of a school site in such close proximity to the proposed runway. There are particular concerns with the subdivision of the school site from other uses in the area and how this will impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

 It is appreciated that the general proposal is to incorporate the school buildings within the aircraft hangar buildings and this is welcome. There are, however, concerns about the treatment of the spaces between the buildings with particular emphasis on playground, sports field, parking, lighting, boundary treatments etc. This detail should be provided at an early stage in any detailed application on the site. These details could cause **harm** to the setting of the aircraft hangars and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

It is fundamental that any granting of consent for educational use on the site is tied to the retention and conversion of the aircraft hangars on site. A standardised school building located on this area would cause **substantial harm** to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

**Residential development – outside of Policy Villages 5 allocation**

It is understood that there is concern by the developers that it is not possible to get the quantum of development required by Policy villages 5. Nevertheless there are substantial concerns with the proposal for residential development on the flying field and this is seen to be entirely contrary to Policy Villages 5 *‘The potential development areas shown within Policy Villages 5 are not large enough to provide for the required amount of development’*. This should be addressed in the first instance by considering the densities on the land available.

The proposal to provide domestic dwellings on the former flying field will cause **substantial harm** to the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of scheduled monuments, listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets. The harm is likely to be greater than that caused by the proposed employment, educational and recreational uses on this area.

The proposed residential zones are identified in the Design and Access Statement. The two areas which go beyond Policy Villages 5 are Z5 Contemporary Airfield Living and Z6 Creative City Living and parts of parcel Z4 Trident North. The Design and Access Statement claims that there has been a detailed assessment of Heyford Park and that *‘details that exhibit distinctive local design’* will be used to *‘ensure the architectural response of the proposal reflects traditional local character, rather than the more recent development in the immediate surroundings’.* The Design Principles established for each parcel suggests understanding of the urban form and building lines required, but architectural style and building type suggested by both the principles and the associated images suggest that it is intended that the buildings will be of standard domestic scale and massing which will substantially dilute the character of the airfield, regardless of architectural design. Apartment blocks, which can vary in size, scale and massing may help to mitigate the harm in this area as they could potentially be of a scale more in-keeping with the military architecture on the site.

In additional to concerns about the principle of housing development in this location and the design of any such housing there are significant concerns about the proposal to demolish a substantial number of the southern bomb stores. This will cause **substantial harm** to the character and appearance of the conservation area for which no justification has been given. The requirement for these structures to be demolished could be negated by adjusting density elsewhere on the site, particularly with the provision of contemporary apartments.

E**mployment uses**

**Creative City**

The proposal to find a new use for the Hardened Aircraft Shelters for the 79th Squadron around the ‘Christmas Tree’ to the south west of the site was generally welcomed at pre-application stage. The proposal to adapt the structures for use by high tech creative industries was supported. It was considered that there would be a **public benefit** to finding a sustainable new use for these buildings. It was understood that there would be a need for some extension to these buildings in order to make them viable for use.

It is appreciated that the buildings will remain and that in the proposed arrangement the central space would be retained. The proposed footprint of the extensions to the buildings outlined within the application, however, suggest a scale that will completely dwarf the existing buildings and will cause **substantial harm** to the setting of the buildings.

The application for extensions of this scale cannot be supported from a conservation perspective. The principle of conversion and extension is potentially acceptable subject to amended and further detailed plans.

**Filming area**

 The proposal for filming on the airfield in the two separate areas identified on the masterplan is welcome and is a continuation of an existing use. A form of management agreement may be required to ensure that filming activity on site does not damage historic fabric and this should be conditioned as part of the application. There are, however, concerns with the proposal to provide ‘temporary set construction’ along the taxiway. There is concern that any ‘temporary’ development in this location could become semi-permanent and would have a detrimental impact on the surrounding heritage assets. An alternative location in the hardstanding around the ‘Creative City’ Christmas Tree should be considered. If this element is absolutely essential to the viability of Creative City any temporary structures should be very tightly controlled by condition / management agreement which should relate to nature of construction as well as numbers of days per year.

**Car processing**

There is a long-standing planning permission for the processing of cars on RAF Upper Heyford. This has an existing detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area, the setting of listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets. There is, however, no long term physical impact on the historic fabric of the area.

The proposed re-location of the car processing operation will have cause **additional harm** as it will have a greater visual impact on the surrounding landscape (as the cars will be located in closer proximity to open countryside). There will also be an impact on the setting of the Control Tower Park and Flying Field Park which will reduce the visitor experience of the airfield.

The Masterplan suggests some potential screening, but this is not detailed within the application. Further details would need to be sought as any bund or screening could be just as damaging to the character and appearance of the airfield as the cars themselves.

**Conversion of buildings – 370, 357, 217, 3102, 3136, 3052, 3053, 3055.**

There are no objections to the conversion of existing buildings to employment use. This is considered to be a benefit of the application to find sustainable new uses for the former RAF buildings. Further details may be required in a reserved matters application for issues relating to parking, lighting, boundary treatments and signage.

There are a large number of buildings proposed for demolition as part of the application as a whole. A heritage justification statement is required for each of these buildings demonstrating the contribution the building makes to the significance of the conservation area and outlining why demolition rather than conversion is required.

**Extra Care and Health facilities**

There are significant concerns about the proposal to demolish two A-type hangars in the Trident area to provide sites for Extra Care and Health facilities. These aircraft hangers form part of a grouping of 6 which are described in the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area Appraisal as being unique in their survival and are the largest collection of interwar period end opening airplane sheds in the country.

There is no justification for the demolition of these structures within the application and no consideration of the possibility of converting the structures to alternative use. The creation of a modular building or pod within the existing structure would not undermine the significance of the building.

**Impact of traffic, movement and connectivity across the site**

There are some concerns regarding proposed movement and access across the site.

There are no particular concerns with the use of areas (including the runway) for limited vehicular and particularly pedestrian traffic as the impact on historic fabric is not considered to be significant. The key issue is the subdivision of uses and the control of movement. There are, however, concerns about the proposed use of the crossing of the runway for HGV access the accumulative impact this could have on the fabric of the runway. The layout and access shows only a very indicative outline of the proposed route and therefore the full impact on historic assets cannot be assessed.

The physical requirements for signage, road markings, boundary treatments and highways requirements could have a significantly detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the RAF Heyford conservation area and the setting of heritage assets. This could potentially amount to **substantial harm.** Further details are required in order to be able to assess these impacts.

**Impact on heritage assets outside the application boundary**

The Heyford Masterplan has the potential to impact on heritage assets at some distance from the site. There are two particular concerns the visual impact and associated settings issues and the impact of the additional traffic associated with the development.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment document identifies a number of viewpoints from around the Cherwell Valley which face towards Heyford Park. This includes a number of heritage assets including views from a number of conservation areas.

The key heritage asset of concern in this location is Rousham Park, which in addition to its grade I listed building and Registered Park and Garden is designated as a conservation area due to its designed landscape associated with William Kent. The Rousham Park landscape is of international significance as a largely unaltered example of the first phase of the English Landscape Design in the Picturesque tradition. Viewpoint 16 deals with Rousham Park (from the Dying Gladiator statue) and concludes that whilst the sensitivity is high the overall magnitude of change is negligible.

The Rousham Conservation Area Re-appraisal has been put out to consultation since the application was submitted and this identifies 10 key views which are considered to be of core significance. Given the significance of the heritage asset and the sensitivity of the visual receptor it would be useful for the Landscape and Visual Appraisal exercise to be conducted on the 10 identified views to include a consideration of seasonal variation and night time views with particular reference to light pollution.

There are also concerns about the potential impact from increased traffic created by the new development on heritage assets in the surrounding area. This relates to the physical impact on historic buildings lining routeways from changes in the environment (additional pollution, water penetration, salt run off etc) as well as the visual impact of any proposed traffic calming measures (signage, traffic management, bollards, traffic islands etc) on conservation areas and the setting of heritage assets.

There is a significant concern about the impact of additional traffic on Heyford Bridge, a grade II\* listed structure which is of medieval origin, but was also associated with the designed landscape surrounding Rousham. The bridge is currently vulnerable to modern traffic and is managed by a traffic light system allowing one way traffic only. There have been a number of knocks and traffic accidents along the bridge and there have been a range of modifications and patch repairs over time. A comprehensive repair and ongoing maintenance programme is required and consideration needs to be given to imposing a weight limit to reduce physical impact on the bridge.

**Conclusion**

The Heyford Masterplan application is an extremely complex application dealing with a wide range of issues. It is appreciated that an overview of the proposed development of the site is required, but it is extremely difficult to be able to assess the full range of impact on the historic assets without further detail.

* Further details in the form of a Heritage Impact Assessment tailored to the proposed Masterplan development would assist with understanding.
* A justification for the proposed demolition of key structures including southern bomb stores and A-type hangers in Trident area.
* Further details on the proposed design of residential development on the flying field and the layout and configuration of Creative City.
* Further details required on boundary treatments, lighting, signage, parking which could accumulatively impact on the character and appearance of the area.

There are elements of the proposed development which will undoubtedly cause **substantial harm**, but in other cases it is not possible to determine the level of harm and whether appropriate mitigation strategies have been put in place.

**Jenny Ballinger**

**Senior Conservation Officer**

**Place and Growth Directorate**