**Comments from Cherwell District Council’s Economic Growth Service**

**Application No.: 18/01333/F**

**Applicant:** Bicester Heritage

**Proposal:** Extension to existing Technical Site to provide new employment units comprising flexible B1(c) light industrial, B2 (general industrial), B8 (storage or distribution) uses with ancillary offices, storage, display and sales, together with associated access, parking and landscaping.

**Summary**

The proposed development accords with the Council’s economic growth strategy, building upon the considerable success of Bicester Heritage in restoring this important site. The development will enhance the cluster alongside the hotel and conference proposal and support not only existing and potential tenants but also the wider economy through the development of skills and inter-relationships.

**Vision**

The vision to create “a worldwide centre of excellence for automobiles of the past, present and future…. a destination for leisure and skills, automotive innovation and technology, exhibitions, cultural events, and experience centres” is welcomed. The Planning and Design & Access Statements submitted as part of this planning application note that Bicester Heritage is “firmly embedded within the UK’s ‘motorsport valley’ and is already becoming an economically important centre for the local community, a national destination for families and enthusiasts and a global centre of excellence for automotive conservation, engineering and development.”

This vision is already partly in place and the planning application proposes to expand this by creating a cluster of business units that have clearly been carefully designed and detailed through pre-application discussions.

The principle of the development is of strategic importance, as expanded upon below.

**Cherwell Economic Development Strategy**

The local economic development strategy, adopted in 2011 by the Council, identified its desired outcome with RAF Bicester as being to:

1. “Conserve the heritage land and buildings through a commercially viable scheme” and
2. “Attract more visitors & expenditure to Bicester.”

With the first ambition, the progress made to date has been impressive and has exceeded expectations by not only restoring the fabric of the buildings but also developing a unique cluster of commercial activity that provides high quality specialist services, employment and skills.

The second ambition is being realised through a separate planning application to develop a significant hotel and conference facility on the Bicester Heritage site.

The combination of both development proposals is consistent with the aims of the Council’s economic growth objectives. The resultant ‘hub’ of activity promises not only to serve the needs of existing businesses, enabling them to expand on-site, but should also create the facilities to support the leisure economy through creating experiences related to the primary uses and heritage of the site.

**Economic Impact**

The businesses located at Bicester Heritage add value to each other and to the whole. According to Bicester Heritage, the site is already the home of 35 businesses providing over 400 jobs worth around £35million to the economy.

The value added by the proposed development is not only likely to expand this value considerably, it will serve to protect existing jobs and nurture successful businesses as they seek ‘grow-on’ space to operate from.

Technical skills are already being developed on site through a partnership with Activate Learning. The Planning Statement refers to apprenticeships and skills being an important part of this development but it does not elaborate on the expected provision. However, I expect the arrangement with learning providers will be developed further through the proposed expansion.

The emerging Local Industrial Strategy for Oxfordshire in relation to the Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor is also likely to be highly supportive of such investment, providing access to skill enhancement that I would encourage Bicester Heritage to engage with in support of its tenants.

**Steven Newman**
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Cherwell District Council