

RIDGE

BICESTER HERITAGE

**NEW TECHNICAL SITE
DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
INCORPORATING SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT**
July 2018

2 of 3

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2. PROJECT CONTEXT

2.3 EXISTING SITE + CONTEXT ANALYSIS



2. PROJECT CONTEXT



1. Gate at Old Skimmingdish Lane boundary
2. Main entrance to Old Technical Site, looking across from the middle of the Trident
3. South part of the Trident and northern part of the New Technical Site boundary
4. Building 143 and surrounding hardstanding
5. Wall of the pyrotechnic store
6. Existing access towards Skimmingdish Lane
7. View from the northern part of the boundary with buildings 135 and 137 (Type A hangar) at the background
8. Existing hardstanding
- 9, 10. The two air-raid shelter defence structures on site
11. Blast shelter (open top) defence structure on site

2. PROJECT CONTEXT

2.3 EXISTING SITE + CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The following information is a summary of the key site constraints and opportunities that informed and shaped the design proposals put forward for Full Planning Application. This section should be read in conjunction with the technical reports submitted, including Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by Worledge Associates, Landscape and LVIA prepared by ASA, Ecology prepared by Crestwood Environmental and Transport and Access prepared by Mode.

The Bicester Heritage site, being a former military airfield and technical site that is the “most complete airbase to have survived from the 1930s” (Historic England) carries a rich historic fabric that can be traced by its formal layout, the different typologies of buildings that reflect the era in which they were constructed, the Grade II Listed status that 35 of these buildings have and the Scheduled Ancient Monument Listing on many of its structures. The layout of the existing Technical Site follows a formal language and the siting of the buildings represent the principles that established the planning of military airfields during the second half of the 20th century. To a great extent, the aesthetic significance of the existing site lies in the sum of its parts as opposed to the singular qualities of its individual architectural elements.

The survival of many of the site’s buildings and other monuments, many of which are the only remaining best preserved examples, contributes to the site’s heritage value as they provide a strong record of the development and evolution of military airfields as a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Marking various stages of building development, these survivals as a whole offer a unique record of British military architecture and help illustrate the evolving development of the British wartime aircraft estate.

The application site contains three defence structures and the remnants of a pyrotechnic store. Its northern-east boundary reaches the south avenue of the Trident and includes the land by Building 143. Identifying this part of the Bicester Heritage site for the development of the New Technical Site as an extension to the existing Technical Site, required an extensive site analysis in order to trace the site’s sensitivities and capture its assets; these then informed the design proposals which responded directly to their context by embracing its constraints, preserving and enhancing its historic eroding elements, while also considering the wider impacts to the site for creating a modern, efficient and sustainable environment. The intention is to seamlessly tie this degraded pocket of land back to the Bicester Heritage site.

Old Skimmingdish Lane

The line of Old Skimmingdish Lane originally formed the edge of the Technical Site (p.6, fig. 2.2.4 & fig. 2.2.5) but by the end of World War II, dispersal tracks, including panhandle standing areas and a collection of minor buildings had expanded into this area south of Skimmingdish Lane (p.6, fig. 2.2.1, fig. 2.2.2 & p.7, fig. 2.2.7). The line of Old Skimmingdish Lane was moved south during the 1980s, to accommodate new suburban development, leaving the old alignment redundant in a strip of what is now overgrown land between the existing perimeter fence and the new line of the road. The New Technical Site proposals will seek to reinstate the Old Skimmingdish Lane, as an important part of the historical significance of the site.

The Trident & Existing Technical Site Layout

The various buildings within the existing Technical Site are sited alongside its three internal avenues which form the Trident; it is an important ‘structural’ component to the layout with views channelled up and down the Avenue towards the hangar and the airfield beyond at one end and the Guards House at the other. Its value is not only historical or evidential but also aesthetic. Looking across the site towards the existing buildings, their dispersed layout and campus style setting is apparent. The land between Old Skimmingdish Lane and the southern avenue of the Trident had buildings that have now been removed (p.6, fig. 2.2.1, fig. 2.2.2 & p.7, fig. 2.2.7). The New Technical Site proposals will reflect the campus like environment by incorporating a non-linear layout, with buildings of variant scales and forms in differing orientations and juxtapositions. The southern avenue will be reinforced by new buildings.

Existing Buildings’ Form, Materials and Colours

There is variety in the appearance of the existing buildings, which reflects their function as well as the era in which they were built. The most prominent building typologies and the architectural styles are presented in detail in the Heritage Impact Report. Overall, the scale of the buildings varies from as small as the Fire Party House to Type A and Type C Hangars, with the latter being the biggest buildings on site. The roofs of the buildings are pitched, double pitched, hipped or flat, all of which along with the differing scale, provide for forms that reinforce the campus like, organic environment. Along with the organic siting, the New Technical Site will incorporate different roofs and heights, breaking down their form and massing. References are made to building 90, 119 and 123.

The existing material and colour palette is limited; brick is the predominant material on site, followed by steel, concrete, timber and glass (i.e. critical

windows, skylights etc.) elements. A General Camouflage Policy was enforced between 1938-1944 as part of a strategy that aimed to reduce the visual impact of the structures, especially when viewed from above. The use of red bricks in a variety of hues, matte green as the preferred colour used mainly on hangars to reduce reflection, painting of open grass areas to blend in with hedge lines and black, brown and yellow powders were scattered to imitate crops; they all assisted in breaking up the regularity and visibility of buildings. A research on the original colours used at the site has been carried out by Patrick Baty, an acknowledged expert in military paint and colours of the past four centuries, which showed that four main colours were used on external timber and metal work during the WWII; Mid Brunswick Green, White, Pale Cream, Dark Grey/Black. These colours were not the only ones used and many buildings changed their colours many times throughout their life. The Heritage Partnership Agreement (2014) shows colours for external paint for refurbishment works within the existing Technical Site. The proposals for the New Technical Site will use mainly brickwork and metal cladding on their elevations, and the HPA has been used as a reference guide for the colour palette to be used.

Defence Structures

There are three defence structures on the application site; two air-raid shelters and a blast-shelter (with an open top). Although none of these are listed nor Scheduled Ancient Monuments, the proposals seek to retain all three, within a context that allows understanding of their relationship to the Technical Site buildings and the spaces between.

Hangar 137 + the Airfield

The Type A Hangar 137 is the one closest to the application site. Beyond it lies the airfield and the proposals for the New Technical Site will respect this visual openness between the Hangar and the Airfield by having no building extending the beyond the notional line of Hangar 137 and therefore eliminate any encroachment into this area and safeguard the green space around.

Pyrotechnic Store

The Conservation Area appraisal makes no mention of this structure, however the Council’s officers believe it to be the remnants of a pyrotechnic store compound, added probably during the war period with the expansion of the airfield activities into the adjoining areas. Although the reason such a facility would be located in such a close proximity to the Technical Site is unclear, the New Technical Site proposals will retain part of this structure’s wall.

Site Levels + Existing Technical Site + Skimmingdish Lane

The application site is relatively flat, however its southern part is in cases 1.5 metres lower than the levels around the southern avenue of the Trident, which is its northern boundary. There is a negligible height difference of 1.5m between the site and Skimmingdish Lane. Remaining below the existing road level, to connect and operate as an extension to the existing Technical Site, levels will be slightly raised.

Screening

The southern part of the application site that runs parallel to Skimmingdish Lane is currently screened by trees. The proposed development will have no impact on existing trees outside of the site boundary along the highway frontage which are identified as important. The health and stability of the trees will not be undermined and the boundary planting will be enhanced through planting of additional trees and shrubs. The site will be screened from the highway and immediate surrounding area.

Access

The application site can currently be accessed only internally, from the south avenue of the Trident. There are two gated existing site entrances, one at the top of Old Skimmingdish Lane, south of the main entrance to the existing Technical Site, where Old Skimmingdish Lane would continue to the Domestic Site across, and one from Skimmingdish Lane, south-east of the pyrotechnic store. These will be retained for emergency access and special event days. The proposals are for an extension to the existing Technical Site and are therefore for access from the Main Bicester Heritage Access. Existing access analysis and proposals for access are detailed in the Transport Statement prepared by Mode.

Thames Water Sewer

Just after the third pre-application discussions concluded, it transpired that there is a sewer running across the north-west part of the site. This easement had to be accommodated and the design responded to it by building rearrangements, which can be seen in section 5.1 Proposed Site Layout.



Green space within the application site boundary across Hangar 137



The Parachute Store



Siting + Campus feel



Mixed Materiality

Hangar 137 // Type A

Hangar 113 // Type C



View from the south part of airfield perimeter road towards the Technical Site seeing Hangar 113 and Hangar 137

2. PROJECT CONTEXT

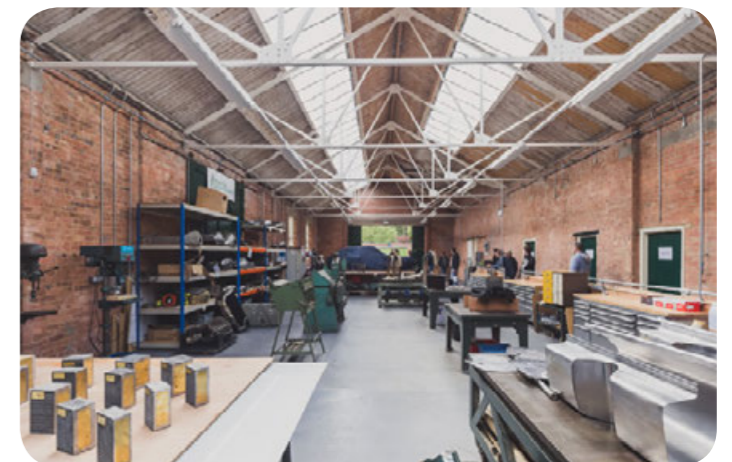
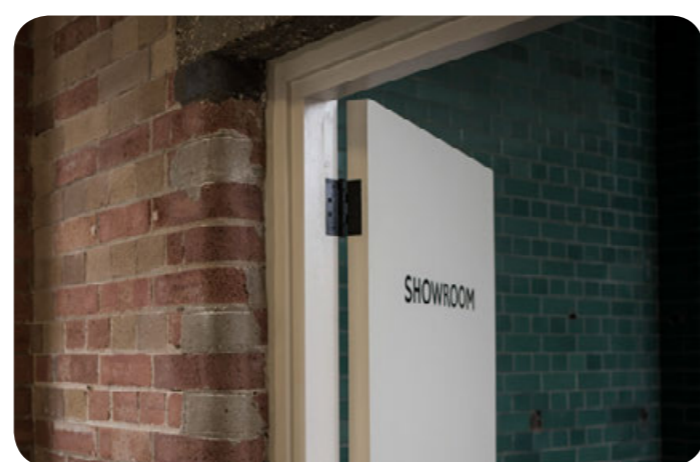
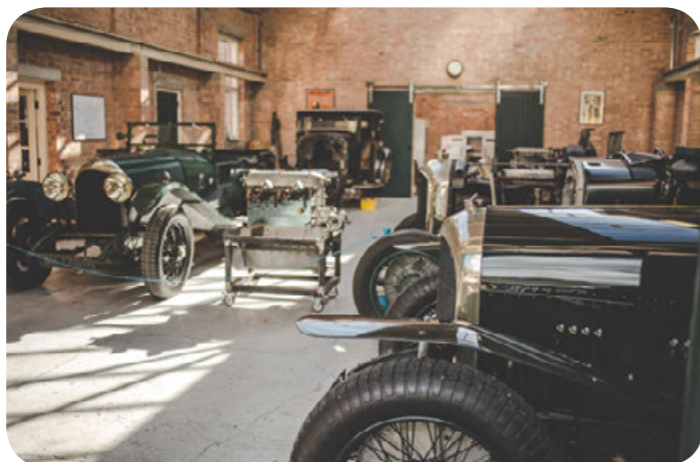
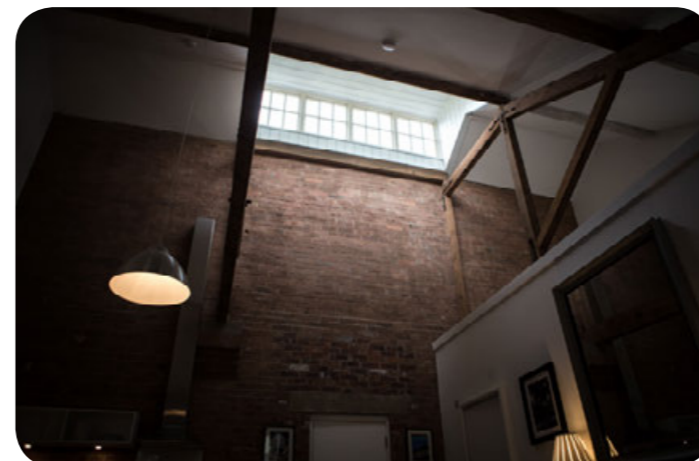
2.4 BICESTER HERITAGE SITE // PRIOR TO RENOVATION



Sample images of buildings prior to renovation

2. PROJECT CONTEXT

2.5 BICESTER HERITAGE SITE // POST RENOVATION



Sample images of buildings post renovation by Bicester Heritage

3. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

3.1 PLANNING STATEMENT

The planning statement is submitted as a separate, standalone document by Edgars.

3.2 PLANNING POLICY

The Planning Statement prepared by Edgars provides the relevant planning policy in full under section 5 for the New Technical Site proposals. Key planning policies considered related to design are outlined below:

- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

// Paragraph 7 // There are three dimensions to sustainable development and planning is required to perform a number of roles; economic, social, environmental. The proposals are for new employment space that will contribute to the growth of an already successful, innovative, vibrant and sustainable development in the existing Technical Site. The natural, built and historic environment of Bicester Heritage will be enhanced by use.

// Paragraph 15 // The policies in Local Plans should follow the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

// Paragraph 17 // Core Planning Principles should be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings with local plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area. They should form a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve places and pro-actively drive and support sustainable economic development, taking into account the needs of the residential and business communities. They should seek to secure high quality design, encourage the effective use of land, promote mixed use developments and conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance;

The NPPF defines significance and setting of heritage assets as follows:

Significance (for heritage policy): The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

Setting of a heritage asset: The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve.

// Paragraph 18 (Chapter 1 - Building a Strong, Competitive Economy) // States that the Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity, building on the country's inherent strengths. Bicester Heritage is located within the UK's "motorsport valley";

between Oxford and Silverstone and is well positioned to attract visitors and highly skilled workers to support engineering and innovative technology companies. Bicester Heritage has already set the foundations by creating the country's first business park dedicated to historic motoring.

// Paragraph 58 + 66 (Chapter 7 - Requiring Good Design) // Good design is key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning and should contribute positively to making places better for people. Additionally, where proposals relate to heritage assets there is a balance to be achieved between any impact on the heritage asset and the proposal's economic, social and environmental benefits. The pre-application discussions and the early engagement with the CDC Officers and Historic England along with the information provided by the studies undertaken to date, resulted in the creation of a design proposal which evolved throughout this process and is now put forward for Full Planning Application as the optimal conservation-led development for the site considering its historic, natural and cultural context and its sustainable future.

// Paragraph 109 (Chapter 11 - Conserving & Enhancing the Natural Environment) // The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate. The proposed New Technical Site is mainly located on what the Conservation Area Appraisal (October 2008, page 34, fig. 11) shows as a degraded edge on the "Spatial Analysis". The proposed development ties this unintentional frayed edge back to the Technical Site, giving it purpose and reinforcing its boundary.

// Paragraph 131 + 132 + 134 + 135 + 137 (Chapter 12 - Conserving & Enhancing the Historic Environment) // The design and layout have been the subject of extensive pre-application discussions to ensure that the proposals are properly informed by an understanding of the site's heritage significance and that the character and appearance of the conservation area in which the proposed development will sit will be preserved. Bicester Heritage and their team of consultants have consulted Historic England and have also been working closely with the Council Officers to ensure that every opportunity for enhancing the conservation area and preserving the historic buildings is identified and captured. A Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by Worlledge Associates accompanies this planning application.

3. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

• Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031: Part 1

// Policy Bicester 8 - Former RAF Bicester // Allocates the former RAF Bicester (including the Technical Site, Flying Field and Domestic Site) for heritage tourism, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses. It encourages conservation-led proposals to secure a long-lasting economically viable future for the Former RAF Bicester technical site and flying field. It seeks to establish appropriate uses that will be complementary to, and help enhance, the character of the Conservation Area and the wider site as a nationally important heritage asset. The proposed use is in accordance with the allocation by providing primarily employment uses. The proposal will complement the success of the existing historic Technical Site at Bicester Heritage and enhance the character of the Conservation Area by improving a site that is identified as being degraded and of poor quality. The proposal will support the delivery of a mix of employment and ancillary motor car sales that will help to secure the long-term viability of the site whilst being sensitively designed in recognition of the historic qualities of the site. The development will maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and Listed Buildings and will protect other buildings identified as being important. The setting and sensitive historic fabric of the buildings and openness of the airfield will be maintained and protected.

Policy 8 also seeks to protect the biodiversity of the site. Ecological surveys have been undertaken which indicate there is no impact on protected habitats and species and on-site ecological mitigation is appropriate where other habitats are affected.

// Policy SLE1 - Employment Development // Support shall be given to proposals that 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 site and meets high design standards, using sustainable construction and of an appropriate scale and respects the character of its surroundings. The proposed development will deliver employment uses in Bicester, make efficient use of previously development land, and make efficient use of an underused site. Designed to the highest standards and respecting the character of its surroundings the development will be of an appropriate scale.

// Policy SLE2 – Securing Dynamic Town Centres // The proposed development site is within the Bicester Heritage ownership boundary, parallel to Skimmingdish Lane and north-east of the town centre of

Bicester. Its location is therefore accessible and well connected with the town centre.

// Policy SLE3 – Supporting Tourism Growth // Although not a tourism development per se, the proposed development will become an integral part of the Technical Site, where many events are happening throughout the year with visitors coming from all around the UK.

// Policy SLE4 – Improved Transport Connections // The proposed development aims to facilitate the use of sustainable modes of transport to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling.

// Policy ESD 1 – Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change // The supporting text explains that Bicester is considered to be one of the most sustainable locations for growth.

// Policy ESD 2 – Energy Hierarchy and Allowable Solutions // Policy ESD3 – Sustainable Construction // Policy ESD4 – Decentralised Energy Systems // Policy ESD5 – Renewable Energy // Sustainable design and construction and renewable solutions will be implemented for the proposals wherever possible. Section 8.1 Sustainability Statement discusses this further.

// Policy ESD 15 – The Character of the Built and Historic Environment // identifies that, within the vicinity of any of the district's assets, the delivery of high quality design that complements the asset will be essential. The proposals have been informed by the extensive pre-application process, consultation with Historic England and studies by consultants, including the detailed study undertaken by Worlledge Associates on heritage significance and heritage impact assessment. The design was also formed around physical constraints on site, which were transformed into opportunities. Examples include but are not limited to; the reinstatement of the Old Skimmingdish Lane which becomes the spine route of the proposed development, the retention of all three defence structures with access to them within a context that allows understanding of the relationship between those structures, the Technical Site and the spaces in between; the retention of part of the pyrotechnic store and its conversion to a bicycle shed. The design will be of high quality, with massing, building forms and materials that respect their context. The proposals will enhance this area of the Bicester Heritage site by taking this degraded edge and tying it back with the existing Technical Site.

3.3 PLANNING PRE-APPLICATION TIMELINE SUMMARY

The proposed site layout and buildings' design is very much a result of the early engagement that Bicester Heritage had with the Cherwell District Council through the pre-application process that commenced in July 2017.

The first pre-application presented 10 buildings of a total Ground Floor GIA of 5,400m² and the site did not include the land adjacent to existing building 143 at the time. The proposal included the removal of the blast-shelter defence structure (with open top) and the relocation of one of the two air-raid shelters to the Old Technical Site.

Following the feedback received by the Planning, Heritage and Highways Officers, the second pre-application submitted in April 2018 was a very much different scheme. The proposed buildings were reduced in GIA by 20%, at 4,460m², whilst the site area was expanded to include the land adjacent to existing building 143. All three defence structures were retained and Old Skimmingdish Lane reinstated, serving as the main circulation spine running across the site. The proposed buildings borrowed elements from the existing buildings in the Old Technical Site both in variations, siting and massing. This response resulted in a proposed scheme where every building was unique and more reflective of the variance to the buildings on the Old Technical Site, without making the site to appear overdeveloped.

Further feedback was received by the CDC Officers on the above, which in turn informed revised proposals that responded positively to previous officers comments and which were submitted to the LPA in June 2018. These proposals are now put forward in this Planning Application. The buildings have been reduced both in height/massing and footprint with GIA at 4,285m², (6,530m² including Mezzanine area) and further amendments occurred in siting (i.e. building D) and some buildings were redesigned (i.e. building B), whilst a small 90m² building (G) has been introduced at the top of Old Skimmingdish Lane, reinforcing the vista and creating interest to key views. The pyrotechnic store, proposed for demolition throughout the pre-application process, is now retained in part and will serve as a bicycle shelter.

Following the pre-application discussion, minor alternations were made due to the location of a main sewer; building A is now proposed to be divided to building A and H and building G is rotated, so that every building has a minimum distance of 3 metres away from the sewer.

The options explored throughout the planning pre-application process are presented in Section 4.2 Planning Pre-Application Process + Design Evolution.