

Heritage Advice

Bicester Heritage: Alterations to Buildings 81, 97, 2.no tank stores, construction of new bin store, and car port – Reference 19/00146/LB

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A. Proposals

The application is in respect of the following proposals:

- The conversion and alteration of Buildings 81 and 97 to create vehicle access to enable a relevant future business use;
- The alteration of 2 no. derelict tank stores to create bin storage;
- The addition of a new brick enclosure between Buildings 146 and 147 to create bin storage, and alteration to an existing door and window to create access to an accessible WC; and
- The construction of a new car port and area of hardstanding in the orchard car park to the rear of Building 129

These are considered in turn, as follows. The change of use proposal is also considered in the individual assessments.

B. Context and Advice

1. The conversion and alteration of Building 81 to create vehicle access to enable a relevant future business use



This proposal was discussed with Jonty Ashworth during a site visit. The structure was originally a 300,000-gallon reservoir, which is featured as an example in Graham Buchan Innes' book on expansion-period and interwar RAF airfield architecture (Midland Publishing, 2000 – above image from that book). The reservoir forms a group with Buildings 82 and 84, of a 1924 design, to the central northern part of the technical site, near to A-Type hanger (Building 79). Building 82 is brick-built power house. Building 84 is a high-level water tank. Both Buildings 81 and 84 are early examples of pre-cast concrete structures. Because of its height, the water tower is identified in the

CA appraisal as being of visual interest within the technical site. As a group, these buildings form part of a cluster of buildings making a positive contribution to the CA – the nearest Listed Building (Building 91) is to the south-east of the power house (Building 82) and is therefore fully screened from the proposed re-use and landscaping around Building 81 (reservoir).

The proposal is to convert the structure into two garage workshop units, formed from the water tank structures. Two roller-shutter doors are proposed to the north and south elevations, with rooflights and additional doors for normal entry. Landscaping around the building to enable new use is also proposed. Currently, Building 81 is surrounded by rough-grass with no road / track providing vehicular access to it.

The specific heritage considerations are:

- The impact upon the external character of the building itself
- The impact upon the setting of nearby Listed Buildings
- The impact upon the Conservation Area

Currently, Building 81 is an unused structure, rather isolated to the north of the technical site, along with several other buildings making a positive contribution to the CA. Whilst the building, and the group of which it is a part, are an early part of the airfield technical site, they were not Listed or Scheduled as part of the wider then English Heritage Monuments Protection Programme assessment of military structures during the later 1990s, into 2000. In this sense, whilst they undoubtedly contribute positively to the technical site and CA, they are not considered nationally significant, as part of a suite of thematic protection.

This suggests that an appropriate re-use is potentially possible. Moreover, whilst Building 81 is in quite close proximity to several Listed Buildings, because of intervening screening from adjacent buildings, there is little inter-visibility. This extends to the proposed landscaping to provide vehicular access to the site, which would again be largely hidden from key viewpoints within the technical site. For these reasons it is considered that the proposed re-use would have a limited impact upon the setting of adjacent heritage assets, and the CA itself.

The proposed re-use is an unusual one, but it has merit. Because of the building's form, materials and construction, options for its re-use are very limited. If the building is to be re-used positively and therefore conserved into the longer term, this is one of the very few potential options without a more dramatic level of remodelling. The proposed door openings will alter its appearance, but the longer elevation facing east, is not much altered. Similarly, rooflights will allow daylight into workshop areas, but will not be visible from the ground. Given these reasons, the proposed re-use is considered to be viable, and is supported. It would also inject activity into this part of the technical site.

2. The conversion and alteration of Building 97 to create vehicle access to enable a relevant future business use

This proposal was discussed during a site visit with Jonty Ashworth. The building was originally used as an inflammable store, and built c. 1926 as part of the airfield's initial phase of development. Originally used to store flammable materials, its louvered windows and doors confirm the then need for ventilation. The building is not Listed, but is identified as making a positive contribution to the airfield Conservation Area. Listed Buildings 90, 96 and 99 are those closest to it – Building 96 is to its immediate east.



Building 97 seen from the south

The specific heritage considerations are:

- The impact upon the external character of the building itself
- The impact upon the setting of nearby Listed Buildings
- The impact upon the Conservation Area

External changes are to the primary frontage, which is visible from various viewpoints within the technical site (see above image). What are currently three double-doorways to the centre of the building will be altered to form two wider openings, the central, existing one, fully-glazed as the new entrance. Part-glazed timber doors are proposed for the widened openings. Existing windows will be retained, with the metalised louvres removed and replaced with glazing.

Given the site's wider focus on classic cars, and the building's internal layout / position, re-using it as a workshop is the most realistic option to ensure its effective conservation. The current doors are not wide enough to allow practical vehicle ingress. Whilst it would be preferred to retain the existing door arrangement, this is however clearly not possible. The proposed approach retains the three-entrance arrangement, and in heritage terms is supported.

Whilst the primary elevation is altered, its impact upon adjacent heritage assets including the CA, will be limited. The benefit of bringing the building back into positive use outweighs any less-than-substantial harm to the setting of assets. No alterations to other elevations are proposed. The removal of internal walling to open up the workshop space is supported.

It is recommended that:

- the metalised louvres to the windows are retained, rather than being replaced with glazing
- rather than forming a continuous concrete lintel (faced-steel), the current separate lintels over openings is retained for the three doors (including the retention of the existing central one)

- consideration be given to seeking to integrate the door louvres into the new doors (but this may not be practical)
- the proposal for the central entrance door is revised so that it blends stylistically with the existing (it could have a contemporary style, but which also reflects a sense of the earlier RAF design)

Would it be possible to insert rooflights to provide additional lighting, so that the windows to the frontage, and door styles, can be retained / designed as above?

3. The alteration of 2 no. derelict tank stores to create bin storage behind Buildings 108 (Type C) and 137 (Type A)



Building 137



Building 108

Discussed with Jonty Ashworth during a site visit, the proposal to re-use the two brick tank installations as brick stores is supported. Both structures are currently unused, and the proposal is a valuable means of bringing both back into use, which also contributes to their conservation. With the tank store to Building 137, it was suggested that the brick salvaged from creating the opening, and also originally to support the tank, would be used to raise the height of the front wall, which would also serve to hide the bins. With the tank to Building 108, this would necessitate the forming of an opening, which again is supported. It is considered that the proposed change of use and alterations will not harm the setting of heritage assets.

4. The addition of a new brick enclosure between Buildings 146 and 147 to create bin storage, and alteration to an existing door and window to create access to an accessible WC

Buildings 146 and 147 are both Listed, originally used as the station offices (147), and ops block (146). The station office and ops block dates from 1926 and is a typical bomber station arrangement for this period. Neither building is currently occupied.



Current and proposed bin store position indicated at left

The specific heritage considerations are:

- The impact upon the external character of the Listed Buildings
- The impact upon the setting of nearby Listed Buildings
- The impact upon the Conservation Area

The proposal was discussed with Jonty Ashworth during a site visit. The WC and proposed bin store nestle into the angle of a thick brick blast-wall between Buildings 146 and 147. The WC building lacks historic interest despite its proximity to Buildings 146 and 147. The proposal makes use of the existing (disused) WC, in currently poor condition. Bringing the WC back into use as a part DDA facility is fully supported.

There is evidence for an earlier timbered mono-pitched structure in the proposed bin store position. Currently, large bins are stored in this area, which are visible from the main entrance to the site, near the guardroom when looking south. The intention is to provide a more suitable store which is more sympathetic to the Listed Building (station office).

Because this proposed structure is largely hidden from view between the two Listed Buildings, it is considered that its impact upon the setting and character of these assets, and the CA, is largely limited. The exception to this assessment is that the westernmost louvered double-door and opening will be visible when viewing Building 147's primary elevation – e.g. from the guardroom (see image above). It would be preferable to consider an alternative approach to this visible entrance, given the relative significance of the station offices and proposed bin-store.

Several suggestions:

- Reduce the length of the bin store so that a door can be fitted to the western-side instead (e.g. taking account of the air-raid shelter). This might also require the bin-store to be wider than the WC, which would be considered reasonable as it is hidden away
- Having one main entrance into the bin-store, positioned centrally, but so that it is not visible from the guardroom area
- Having one part of the bin-store as an open-fronted structure, the other with doors (though this defeats the object)
- Using a less noticeable form of door for the openings – perhaps rigid mesh (?) which obscures the bins but blends into the background

These suggestions aside, the principle of re-using the WC and creating a bin-store to this area is supported in heritage terms.

5. The construction of a new car port and area of hardstanding in the orchard car park to the rear of Building 129

Building 129 is T-shaped in plan, and is one of three Listed Grade II MT buildings around a central courtyard. The initial ranges dating to 1927 were extended by a further range dated 1936/7. The proposal is to build a deep-in-plan open-fronted, mono-pitched roofed car port extending along part of Building 129's rear elevation.



Proposed car port will be in front of the rendered building to the right

The specific heritage considerations are:

- The impact upon the external character of the building itself
- The impact upon the setting of nearby Listed Buildings
- The impact upon the Conservation Area

The proposed car port will alter the character and appearance of the rear elevation of Building 129, such that the rendered element of the building will no longer be easily visible. Depending upon viewpoint, the setting and character of what is currently legible as a coherent series of historic MT sheds would be altered and harmed by the proposed car port. Its significance would therefore be somewhat diminished within the wider technical site of which it forms a part.

Although the nearest Listed Buildings are some distance away (Buildings 90, 123 and 135), the proposed car port would potentially alter their setting, depending upon viewpoint. For example, if standing near Building 126, and the indicated pond to its north-east, looking north through the gap between Buildings 129 and 123, towards Building 90, the car port would be a very visible structure, whilst the earlier MT building would be obscured, especially with vehicles stored inside it. Similarly, if looking west from Building 99, the car port would again be visible as a main feature to this side of Building 129. Noted above, the impact upon the Conservation Area is potentially negative because of the impact upon views in which the car port would be visible as a large new structure.

For the above reasons, it is considered that in its present form the car port would constitute less-than-substantial harm to the setting of the host building, and adjacent heritage assets. The current proposal would not therefore be supported in heritage terms. A more modest car port of shallower footprint, or a separate structure in a different location, might be a better solution.

Thank you for asking for my advice. GC