Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

29th November 2023

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Wiltshire Council Conservation (Central)

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Application No: **PL/2023/08464**
Installation of 2.4m high mesh security fencing (incorporating pedestrian and vehicular access gates).
Hangar 180, Hullavington Airfield, Hullavington, Chippenham

Please find following comments in respect of the above application(s).

Recommendations:

	Mixed – part support/part object
	Support in principle subject to amendments to the scheme (as set out below)
	Support subject to conditions (as set out below)
	Object (for reasons set out below)
X	No objections

Scope of comments: the following comments relate to the built historic environment.

Policy: Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also requires the Council to pay **special attention** to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of designated Conservation Areas.

The NPPF outlines government policy, including its policy in respect of the historic environment. Section 16 of the NPPF 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development. Paragraphs 201-3 of the NPPF require a balanced approach with any harm which would be caused being weighed against the potential public benefits which might be achieved.

The Council's Core Strategy Policy CP58 'Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment' requires that "designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced, in a manner appropriate to their significance." It is also required that distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved, and where possible enhanced.

Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy Policy CP57 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping': A high standard of design is required in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality.

Historic England Advice Note - Historic Military Aviation Sites 2016.

A draft Conservation Area statement was commissioned by the Council 2015 but remains unfinished. It provides additional information in regard of the site.

Site and significance: Hullavington opened as a flying training station in 1937. It is one of 28 'key' sites identified in the Historic England guidance on Military Aviation Sites as those which represent the best preserved airfield landscapes and the most historically significant groups of original buildings in England. The guidance notes that it "embodies, to a unique degree, the improved architectural quality associated with the post-1934 expansion of the RAF. Most of the original buildings survive and form a coherent and well-ordered ensemble. The flying field remains, with groups of hangars along its boundaries." The design of the buildings, their layout and use of materials etc. are a key consideration in their understanding and special interest.

Increasing national concern through the 1930s over rearmament and the pace of environmental change led the government to involve the Royal Fine Arts Commission (including distinguished architects such as Sir Edwin Lutyens, Sir Reginald Blomfield and Giles Gilbert Scott) in the design of new air bases. The Hullavington site shows a blend of Garden City planning for the married quarters, neo-georgian propriety for the barracks and other domestic buildings and a watered down Moderne style for the technical buildings. In contrast to other layouts which the RFAC considered too disorderly, an axial layout on Beaux Arts principles directed the overall concept at Hullavington. Lutyens had advocated the study of local materials and traditions and, at Hullavington, the facing of the buildings in Bath Stone was the probable result of local consultation with the Wiltshire branch of the CPRE and is a very visual expression of the account which was felt to be due to local sensitivities at the time.

In 1993 the RAF airbase was handed over to the army and re-named Buckley Barracks. It is occupied by a Regiment of the Royal Logistics Corps.

The airfield was designated as a Conservation Area in 1992 by North Wiltshire District Council. Around 30 of the buildings on the site are included on the statutory National Heritage List.

The current application relates to one of a pair of Two 'L' type aircraft storage hangars on the original "Site E" dispersal site. Completed August 1940 to Air Ministry Directorate of Works and Buildings. The two hangars are set off the west side of the airfield and mostly hidden from longer views to the site by a wooded area to the east and slightly lower contour level than the airfield. A public footpath runs along the south and west boundary which allows close views into the site.

Proposal: Installation of 2.4m high mesh security fencing (incorporating pedestrian and vehicular access gates).

Relevant planning history: previous applications relating to the conversion of the flying field and Hangars 85 & 86 for Research and Development Facilities.

Issues: impact on the non-designated heritage assets which comprise the hangar and associated buildings, impact on the conservation area.

Information considered/provided: paragraph 194 requires that applicants describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by their proposals, including any contribution made by their setting. The application is supported by a Heritage Statement which provides some basic background and is sufficient to understand the impact of the proposals and is proportionate to their scope in this case. The requirements of the NPPF are therefore met in this respect.

Paragraph 195 also provides for the local planning authority to make its own assessment of impact and the following heritage recommendations are offered on this basis.

Assessment: Prior to disposal there was no routine military flying activity from the airfield and only five of the historic hangars were in use (three on the main barracks site) leaving seven vacant and increasingly at risk from deterioration. Regrettably, the masterplan which has long been advised to guide development, has not emerged and there has been a lock of a cohesive approach in bringing proposals for the site forward. The current application represents a further standalone proposal.

Fencing: It is accepted that the hangar is vulnerable as it is visible and easily accessible from a public rights of way. It is also noted that there is existing security fencing in place although this does not extend across the ends of the hangars and the wide access doorways which connect it to the flying field. The proposal to extend the new fencing across the key main access points to the building will physically and operationally sever the historic functional connections between the building and flying field to the detriment of its significance. It is noted, however, that a fallback of slightly lower fencing on the same line exists.

Summary & conclusion: The NPPF confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It makes clear that any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 202 allows that a level of harm may be offset by public benefits, which could include conservation benefits. On this occasion it is acknowledged that the hangars are vulnerable and that there is a need for security. It is also accepted that a lower fence could be erected without need for consent. It is therefore considered that an appropriate off-setting benefit could be achieved by adding a condition requiring the fencing to be removed when no longer required or in the event that a new use emerges for the hangar which involves the use of the main doorways. Subject to the required condition, the impact of the proposals on heritage assets will overall be largely neutral and the requirements of current conservation legislation, policy or guidance are considered to be met and there is therefore no objection to the approval of the application.