

**SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION:  
CORE POLICY 9 OLD SARUM AIRFIELD**

1.0 In previous correspondence English Heritage has already challenged the inclusion of this policy within the Core Strategy attached). This letter is an elaboration of the concerns previously raised and prepared in response to Questions 11.1 & 11.2. We look forward to participating in the Hearing Session on this policy on 11<sup>th</sup> March when further discussion on the points set out below will be possible.

1.1 **Question 11.1, Potential Areas for Development:**

**“On what basis were the potential areas for development shown on Map 5 selected. In particular what assessment has been made of the potential effect, positive or negative, that developing these areas would have on the setting of The Old Sarum Airfield Conservation Area, of listed buildings within that area and of the Old Sarum Scheduled Ancient Monument?”**

**Question 11.2, Aircraft Noise:**

**What potential would the development of these sites have to secure some control over the noise of aircraft using the airfield?**

1.2 In responding to Question 11.1, there is a need to understand the special architectural and historic interest of the Old Sarum airfield in its designation as a conservation area within which is contained a collection of military and other buildings of which the most pre-eminent are 3 WWI Grade II\* listed hangers. The special interest of these buildings and their setting are key constituents of the conservation area but are only part of what defines its character and appearance, its setting and views into and out of it.

1.3 The airfield site, and conservation area as a whole, exists in turn as a single element within the landscape to the immediate north of the current development boundary of Salisbury city, and in doing so shares a wider context which also includes the Old Sarum Scheduled Ancient Monument.

1.4 The rising topography on the northern edge of the city is significant in providing an abrupt delineation to the rural / urban interface. Development along Castle Road, up to a point where it parallels Old Sarum on its western side, is characterised by predominantly 1930s villas and semi-detached houses set in generous plots. Further ribbon development has therefore been constrained for over half a century in recognition of the value played by the open and undeveloped landscape beyond in providing a setting to the city which embraces in specific terms the Old Sarum site. While development to

the south and south-west of Old Sarum has crept up incrementally on the site, any impact on its setting from this quarter has been helpfully mitigated by the retention of Hudson's Field as an open recreational space and the low-lying nature of the surrounding area relative to the dominant and imposing location which the monument occupies.

- 1.5 While land to the north also falls away, its gentle undulations and retention of prevailing rural character foster a sense of extended continuum to the defined scope and character of the Old Sarum site which results in its wider setting. Such definition and understanding of this setting is of as much value in establishing the site's interest and significance as its high visibility from all directions and the long views which are afforded from its ramparts.
- 1.6 This rural context is as important in defining the setting of the Old Sarum Airfield Conservation Area. Created at the turn of the C20 before urban development along Castle Road brought the edge of the city as close to the airfield as it is now, the area would have been even more rural at that time, with only the sparse hamlet at Ford representing any notable level of physical human development. This location, sufficiently removed from the city and any significant community presence, facilitated the principal flying function of the airfield, the need for defence, and close operational relationships with other military establishments in the area. The rural context within which the airfield essentially remains is therefore a key contributory factor to its setting, quite apart from and in addition to any consideration of views into and out of the site.
- 1.7 The retention of a predominantly rural character to the landscape north of the city is therefore key to preserving the setting and historic interest of the city, Old Sarum, and Old Sarum Airfield. Various forms of development have over time taken place in this area, most notably in recent years with the creation of the Beehive Park and Ride site and the residential development to the north of The Portway, with an inevitable shift in the rural / urban equilibrium. At present, the distance from Old Sarum (hill fort) of both these interventions and their scale, character and collective impact or presence is not sufficient to dramatically undermine the rural nature of the area.
- 1.8 Late C20 development within the airfield has been contained largely to previously developed land, and even though business and industrial units on the site of where Hanger 1 used to be could have been more sensitively imposed, their footprint is coincident and aligned with where development has historically been concentrated on the northern edge of the site. In addition, such units and their uses are broadly compatible in functional terms with those which have historically characterised the site and as an evolution do not represent a fundamental change in site character or compromise its principal role and interest as an airfield. The impact on the setting of the airfield of residential development on the north side of The Portway is also

mitigated by development within the airfield providing a physical buffer to, and having a key relationship with, the openness of the airfield to the south.

- 1.9 This distinction, complemented by the physical separation between the sites provided by The Portway itself, the contrast in uses, and the relative lack of military significance of the land historically as reflected in its exclusion from the conservation area, only further serves to illustrate the value of and need to protect the open and undeveloped setting of the airfield to the east, south and west. Even if the airfield site remained as it is now, extensive development all around it, for example, would significantly harm its setting.
- 1.10 The intrinsic interest of the airfield, and that which has underpinned and defined its extent as a conservation area and provides it with significance in a European context, lies in it being the best-preserved (i.e. least altered) flying field of the period up to November 1918, bounded by one of the most complete suites of technical and hanger buildings of the period. The retention of the openness of the airfield, the relationship between this space and its key buildings, and as a consequence the absence of development which has encroached upon and upset the ratio between developed and undeveloped land is a principal factor in maintaining its special interest and in any consideration of its future management and potential for development.
- 1.11 **Enabling Development**
- 1.12 The lack of obvious scope for additional development as a consequence of this defining recognition automatically imposes *enabling development* criteria on proposals for extensive physical change. In accordance with English Heritage's own guidance<sup>1</sup>, which has now been widely accepted as best practice, development should be regarded as an exception and only be deemed acceptable where it helps ensure the sustainable future, and does not compromise the significance of, the heritage asset(s). In this case the asset is the totality of the airfield and its historic integrity, and not just the setting or fabric, for example, of the Grade II\* hangers. The case for development should be justified on the basis of site-specific need and its demonstrable ability to satisfy, appropriately, that need, particularly as the site has not been identified as an area for strategic housing allocation within the Core Strategy. Any wider benefits to the area arising from development are therefore to be considered as opportunistic, and the focus of attention should be on the merits of any proposals as a response to issues generated by the site itself.
- 1.13 In the case of Core Policy 9, new housing will be permitted where it can deliver against a set of pre-determined objectives or outputs. While we understand that an area to the south of the site near Ford has now

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<sup>1</sup> Policy and guidance on enabling development and the conservation of significant places, EH 2008.

been deleted from the draft policy as having development potential, land to the east and, most particularly, land to the west of the existing concentration of on-site fabric, remain as having been so identified. There is no evidence to indicate that these discrete areas have been identified as being acceptable on the basis of any impact from development on the historic significance of the site and English Heritage therefore considers such specific provision within the context of this policy to be lacking in foundation, premature, and incompatible with the principle of *enabling development*.

- 1.14 In any respect, we consider that the issues associated with the site, its management and needs, have not been adequately identified to substantiate a dedicated policy within the Core Strategy or that residential development should be offered as the best mechanism for addressing any issues which might prevail. While we are sensitive to the need for and keen to help establish a sustainable and commercially viable future for the airfield, the absence of an agreed strategy, masterplan or business model makes it difficult to confirm that the principle of residential development should be allowed or that the criteria or objectives upon which such development is conditioned represent a comprehensive checklist of all that should be considered. Even if the principle of devoting currently open airfield space to some form of development could be deemed necessary on *enabling* grounds, we believe that residential development is wholly incompatible with the historic character (functional and physical) of the site and that which defines its value and significance as a heritage asset.
- 1.15 One of the issues currently associated with the site is noise deriving from its use as an airfield. Policy 9 will require reasonable controls over flying activity while at the same time wishing to ensure that flying activity is not compromised. We can appreciate that concerns about noise will emanate predominantly from local residents, and that development north of The Portway will presumably only intensify the imperative for some kind of resolution of this matter. Further residential development within the airfield site will in turn only generate the potential for even further complaint, and must in principle prejudice the policy's ability to satisfy its own objectives and increase the risk of seeing the demise of flying as the historic and ongoing activity which defines the *raison d'être* for and special interest of the site.
- 1.16 Even if residential development as proposed is capable of creating benefits in terms of, for example, improving views into the site, we consider that these are of secondary importance relative to the harm to the integrity and significance of the site which would arise in principle from such development. Development to the western edge of the site would, when considered with current development to the north of The Portway and in conjunction with the proposed allocation at Longhedge, also generate a critical mass of development which would result in a major and undesirable shift away from the rural landscape character of the area and bring a development footprint nearer to and impact

negatively upon the setting of Old Sarum hill fort. Such incremental development, in the absence of an holistic community vision for the area, will result in an urban coalescence whose ad hoc design philosophy and collective impact will result in an overall residential sprawl made up of individual schemes bound only through contiguous co-existence.

In specific terms:

We consider this Core Strategy Policy and the proposed development associated with it is unjustified; is not the most appropriate strategy and; is inconsistent with national PPG 15 *Planning and the Historic Environment* and draft PPS 15 *Planning for the Historic Environment*. The delivery of the Core Policy 9 would be prejudiced as a consequence.

Due to the substantial concerns expressed and having regard to PPS12 we consider the Core Strategy by inclusion of Core policy 9 to be unsound.

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