

Application No: 09/1869M

Location: APPLETON AIRFIELD, CROWLEY LANE, HIGH LEGH, KNUTSFORD, CHESHIRE

Proposal: USE OF FORMER AIRFIELD AND ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS AS A MOTORSPORTS AND ADVANCED DRIVING ACADEMY INCLUDING THE CREATION OF NEW ACCESS, CONFERENCE BUILDING, PARKING, LANDSCAPING AND WETLAND HABITAT.

Applicant: MR RICHARD COE, APPLETON AUTODROME LTD

Expiry Date: 22-Oct-2009

Date Report Prepared: 21 September 2009

REASON FOR REPORT

The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement and is therefore required to be determined by the Strategic Planning Board under the Council's scheme of delegation.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION	REFUSE
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MAIN ISSUES

- Whether the proposal is appropriate development in the Green Belt and if not, whether there are any very special circumstances to warrant approval of the application
- whether the visual impact of the proposal is acceptable
- whether the access and parking proposals area acceptable
- whether the noise and disturbance generated by the proposal would result in any significant adverse impact on the amenity of nearby residents
- whether the ecological impact of the proposal are acceptable
- whether there are any other material considerations to be considered

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site extends to 72.49 hectares and falls within the administrative boundary of both Cheshire East Council and Warrington Borough Council. The area of the site that falls within Cheshire East extends to 32.4 hectares and is the area of land between Crowley Lane and the existing buildings on site. The Cheshire East part of the site falls within the parish of High Legh with the nearest residential properties within Cheshire East being located on Crowley Lane, Intack Lane and Swineyard Lane to the east of the site. Residential properties

within Warrington Borough Council and Cheshire West and Chester are located to south and west of the site. The site is bounded by the M56 motorway to the north. The site is relatively flat but rises up from Crowley Lane towards the existing buildings on site.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

Planning permission is being sought for the use of a former airfield and associated buildings as a motorsports and advanced driving academy including the creation of a new access, a conference building, parking, landscaping and wetland habitat.

The existing runway is to be used as a long circuit, a secondary circuit and for driving instruction areas. A skid pan is proposed at the eastern end of the site, to the west of Crowley Lane. A submitted indicative weekly schedule indicates usage by Bentley to test, appraise and demonstrate vehicles, by the police to carry out training in procedures and car handling, by manufacturers to launch new products, by advanced and learner drivers for training, by those wanting driving experiences of more unusual cars and by the public who want to learn how to drive their car and learn driving skills e.g. how to handle icy conditions. A large amount of the site would be retained for agricultural use. The existing control tower and auxiliary buildings are to be retained and refurbished as a circuit marshalling facility, administration and course management centre. A new training and conference facility is proposed to the south east of the existing buildings. This would cater for up to 150 people and would consist of a conference room, observation terrace and platform. Parking for 151 vehicles would be provided to the east of the proposed conference facility with a wildlife area and wetland habitat to be provided to the south and east of the training/conference building and parking areas. A number of landscape bunds and fencing is proposed for acoustic measures together with proposed new planting and retention of existing planting.

Vehicular access to the site is to be from a new access off Swineyard Lane to the west of Invergordon Nurseries. The existing access off Crowley Lane is to be retained for emergency use only.

As originally submitted, it was proposed for all uses to be operated Monday to Friday 0900 to 1800, Saturday 0900 to 1730 and Sundays and Bank Holidays 0900 to 1600 with an additional 1.5 hours for opening and closing of the facility each day. However during the course of the application, the applicants have now agreed that whilst the hours of operation remain unchanged, the use of the site on Sundays would be limited to non motorised activities and learner drivers.

It is stated that approximately 50 staff would be employed at the circuit, including 12 full time staff and 38 part time staff.

RELEVANT HISTORY

08/2275P

Full Planning

CHANGE OF USE OF AIRFIELD AND ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS TO MOTOR SPORTS AND ADVANCED DRIVING ACADEMY INCLUDING THE CREATION OF NEW BUILDING, ACCESS AND PARKING WITH ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING AND WETLAND HABITAT. APPLETON AIRFIELD, CROWLEY LANE, HIGH LEGH, KNUTSFORD, CHESHIRE

Withdrawn 04.03.09

96/2051P

Full Planning

INSTALLATION OF TWO REFRIGERATED CONTAINERS

FORMER STRETTON AIRFIELD SWINEYARD LANE HIGH LEGH

approved with conditions 08.01.97

96/1449P

Full Planning

EXTENSION TO EXISTING WORKSHOP

FORMER STRETTON AIRFIELD SWINEYARD LANE HIGH LEGH

approved with conditions 09.10.96

42188P

Full Planning

CONTINUANCE OF USE AS TEST SITE FOR THORNTON RESEARCH CENTRE

STRETTON AIRFIELD APPLETON HIGH LEGH

approved 12.09.85

38357P

Full Planning

FORMER RUNWAY TO BE USED AS A TEST TRACK AND FACILITIES FOR PRODUCT TESTING

STRETTON AIRFIELD APPLETON CHESHIRE

approved 19840917 Withdrawn 17.09.84

34995P

Full Planning

FORMER RUNWAY TO BE USED PERMANENTLY AS A TEST TRACK AND FACILITIES FOR THE TESTING OF MOTOR VEHICLE PRODUCTS

STRETTON AIRFIELD HIGH LEGH

approved 14.10.83

31114P

FORMER RUNWAY TO BE USED PERMANENTLY AS A TEST TRACK AND FACILITIES FOR THE TESTING OF MOTOR VEHICLE PRODUCTS

STRETTON AIRFIELD HIGH LEGH

approved 13.10.82

26300P

Pre-Planaps application (Jan 77-Apr 82)

(RENEWAL) FORMER RUNWAY TRACK TO BE PERM. USED AS TEST TRACK MOTOR VEHICLE PRODUCTS

STRETTON AIRFIELD APPLETON HIGH LEGH

approved with conditions 17.06.81

POLICIES

Regional Spatial Strategy

DP1 Spatial Principles
DP2 Promote Sustainable Communities
DP4 Making the Best Use of Existing Resources and Infrastructure
DP5 Manage Travel Demand; Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility
DP7 Promote Environmental Quality
RDF4 Green Belts
L1 Health, Sport, Recreation, Cultural and Education Service Provision
RT2 Managing Travel Demand
EM1 Integrated Enhancement and Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets
EM5 Integrated Water Management
MCR1 Manchester City Region

Local Plan Policy

NE11 Nature Conservation
NE17 Nature Conservation
BE1 Design Guidance
BE21 Archaeology
GC1 New Buildings in the Green Belt
GC8 Reuse of Buildings
T2 Integrated Transport Policy
DC1 New Build
DC3 Amenity
DC6 Circulation and Access
DC9 Tree Protection
DC13 Noise
DC14 Noise
DC17 Water Resources
DC33 Outdoor Commercial Recreation

Other Material Considerations

PPG2: Green Belts
PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
PPG24: Noise

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Highways: no objection subject to conditions and subject to a S106 legal agreement regarding a travel plan, visibility at the proposed new access and the control of the access onto Crowley Lane.

Highways Agency: no objection as it is considered that the proposal would have a negligible impact on the trunk road network.

Environmental Health: initially recommended refusal. Concern regarding the adequacy of the submitted noise information and draft noise management plan and concern that the proposal would be likely to cause a serious loss of amenity to local residents. Since the original submission, a meeting has taken place with the applicant's agent and noise consultant in an attempt to address officer concerns regarding noise. Subsequent to this, additional information regarding the proposed uses and suggested methods of control/management of the uses and associated noise have been submitted. This additional information is currently being considered by the Environmental Health department and any additional comments will be reported directly to Committee.

Manchester Airport: no objections subject to conditions.

Natural England: no objections subject the imposition of suitably worded conditions.

Warrington Borough Council: no comments received to date though Warrington Borough Council refused an identical application that was submitted to them at their Committee on 16 September. The application was refused due to concerns regarding noise and impact on the amenity of nearby residents.

Cheshire West and Chester: raises two areas of concern relating to the proposal, noise and whether the proposal constitutes appropriate development in the Green Belt. There are concerns regarding the submitted noise report and the methodology used to derive its conclusions. Recommend that this application be refused because it contains insufficient information to enable the impact of noise upon local residents to be fully assessed. Concern that the buildings and associated development may not meet the requirements of PPG2.

Public Rights of Way Unit: appears unlikely that the proposal would affect nearby public rights of way.

Environment Agency: no objections subject to conditions.

Cheshire Police: no comments received to date.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

High Legh Parish Council: concern regarding non-compliance with Green Belt policy, impact on residents in High Legh from noise and environmental issues such as drainage and traffic, increased demand for utilities, use of local road network to access the site by high performance vehicles and HGVs (weight limit applied for on Swineyard Lane) and environmental impact of using and recycling water from on site ponds/wetlands for the skid pan.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

To date, 22 letters of objection have been received from 21 separate addresses in relation to the application. Copies of the letters are available to view on the Council's website with the main areas of concern summarised below.

Green Belt

- Will be considerable movement of soil, fencing and tarmac this will result in a change to the physical characteristics of the site
- New buildings cannot be considered as essential to the development and certainly not related to the sporting criteria
- Building will clearly be visible and obtrusive
- Concerned about potential precedent
- What is being proposed is a commercial development and would not in real terms provide any leisure facilities for residents of the area
- Site is a key threshold site forming a dominant part of the North Cheshire ridge, its elevation and openness do not provide a suitable location for a driving circuit. Such things are better contained in forests, natural bowls or undulating ground
- Adverse impact on openness from proposed bunds and fencing
- Changes to the site necessary to bring about the proposed uses involve significant engineering works, fences, access road and a new building, the cumulative impact of these changes is detrimental to the green belt and none of the works are essential to the very limited outdoor sport and recreation on the site
- Application is for a major new access which provides for two lanes of traffic and appears to be similar in dimension to Swineyard Lane. It crosses green belt for approximately 300m before it joins the existing runway and is out of proportion with whatever limited sporting activity is taking place
- Inadequate information submitted about the amount of work proposed to the runways

Noise

- Proposal would undoubtedly permanently change for the worse the noise characteristics of the location
- Noise report appears at best unscientific and designed to fit the plan rather than pursue a meaningful balance of noise prediction
- Completely unacceptable that any operation can be for 7 days including Bank Holidays
- Use of high speed performance cars will significantly alter existing noise climate and are completely inappropriate
- An acceptable level of noise should be defined and set by the Council
- Confusion in relation to whether noise bunds are proposed
- Concern about data anomalies
- A noise trial should be carried out to the satisfaction of local residents
- Concern about tone and pitch of noise created and the ability of the proposed mitigation to adequately control this
- If approved, remote automatic noise monitors capable of constant readings should be insisted upon to ensure compliance with any agreed timings and noise levels. Without such equipment would like to know how the approval and conditions would be enforced
- At the public meeting, the applicants were loath to carry out a demonstration trial run to prove their point regarding noise levels
- Most affected property was not monitored as part of the noise report
- Noise from the site would cause unnecessary stress to young stock that graze in the adjacent field

- If any application is to be granted careful consideration would need to be given to the noise generated
- Difficult to see how any notion that little abatement is necessary can be defended as there are no natural features to assist, this is an exposed site visible, and no doubt therefore also audible for many miles
- Restricted permission with conditions does not work for this type of activity. Noise excesses are difficult to monitor and require dedicated enforcement procedures which given the resources available and the time of transgressions, will just not be met
- If considered acceptable, appropriate bunding should be installed
- Suggest that performance cars be restricted as should number of days allowed for visiting performance cars
- Visiting cars must be pre booked and pre prepared, no car preparation should be allowed on site
- Concern about noise from off road driving
- Concern about impact of reversing warnings from commercial vehicles
- Noise management plan is inappropriate, it should take account of the intermittent nature of the noise and limit the noise generated over a five minute period and not an average over an hour
- Unacceptable to grant a planning consent without a detailed noise management plan prior to the granting of consent
- No account is taken by the applicant of the lower background noise level at weekends and bank holidays
- Performance car element should be restricted to weekdays
- Amended noise report has not dealt with the fundamental criticism raised by all parties
- Account needs to be taken of the importance of wind direction

Traffic/Highways Issues

- Proposal would create an increased amount of traffic and would create the potential for high speed cars having come from a racing environment, driving at high speeds along lanes in the area. This would impact on the safety of road users from the local community
- Potential increased number of HGVs would also bring with it an increased risk of accidents
- Traffic to and from the west will add to existing traffic levels through Appleton Thorn
- Main access to the A50 would be via Swineyard Lane, a minor road that has become very busy with cars and HGVs, endangering the many cyclists, dog walkers and horse riders who use it. Lane is used by slow moving agricultural vehicles and this will cause problems with the fast traffic which will be generated by this site
- Visibility on Swineyard Lane is already poor due to hedgerows not being properly maintained
- A50 is a dangerous road, particularly when turning into Swineyard Lane and Heath Lane, where there have been 4 fatal accidents in recent years
- Proposed priority junction does not address the issue that Barleycastle Lane is unsuited to a heavy traffic load

Visual Impact/Landscaping

- Proposed acoustic fence would be unsightly and not in keeping with the rural character of the area

- More landscaping is required than is proposed
- Unwanted areas of tarmac and other structures not to be used as part of the proposal should be removed
- Bunding will produce abnormal landscape features on this very prominent ridge site
- Landscaping plan should be prepared to include tree and bush planting
- Concern about visual impact of lighting

Drainage/Flooding

- Water table in the area is generally high and concerned about the effect of the wetland area and flooding facility on the proposed skid pan on flooding in the area
- Drainage requires careful consideration, especially if septic tanks are installed

Wildlife

- Development would be catastrophic to the outstanding amount of wildlife flourishing on the development site
- Opposed to intrusion of development of the conserved amenity area to the south of the M56, being Whitley Green and its environs

Other matters

- Has the applicant provided a business plan showing how the proposed use would generate income? Once gained approval could be manipulated on business grounds to justify additional high speed use
- Council should consider their own commitment to the environment and their policy on reducing carbon emissions
- Modifications made to the original application are of a cosmetic nature and do not address the underlying concerns of residents regarding safety on surrounding roads and environmental pollution
- Resubmission of the application during a holiday period reinforces the sense that the applicants intend to force the development through despite resident protest
- Site should be returned to agricultural use
- Oulton Park in the next local authority area provides all the facilities Appleton Autodrome Ltd would offer, this is well established and close by
- Application is for a composite use so the component activities will fluctuate in their intensity from time to time but not informed what the composition will be
- Pressure will be for increased hours (e.g. evenings) additional minor yet incremental development and increased activities so that the grant of the initial permission will eventually be seen as opening the gate for a major complex
- If the business fails, the site will be left encumbered by the vast new works
- Site has been dormant for some time & believe that this would have continued however the empty property tax applied in the form of Business Rates from April 2008 inevitably prompted Shell, the freeholders to do something. It is probable that a refusal of inappropriate development would be sufficient to support an application by Shell to have it removed from the Valuation List
- Any permission granted should be to the applicant and should cease to apply if there is a change in ownership

- Should be no workshop facilities and no pre-event tuning. A limited on-site maintenance area to deal only with technical problems arising on the day would be adequate
- Special event days under any guise should not be allowed
- Concern about potential for light pollution and suggest that facility should be allowed to operate in daylight hours only
- Existing bunds are incorrectly shown on the master plan and the master plan red edge does not correspond with the red edge shown on other plans included in the application
- Previous consent granted to Shell were for a significantly less intensive use
- Formation of the bunds would require in the region of 40,000 cubic metres of material or 4000 lorry loads
- Applicants have no proven record of operating this type of facility
- Request that two remaining aircraft dispersal pens are retained for posterity purposes

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

A large amount of supporting information has been submitted with the application including:

- Design & Access Statement
- Noise Impact Assessment
- Draft Noise Management Plan
- Transport Assessment
- Ecological Report
- Statement of Community Involvement
- Environmental Impact Statement (including non-technical summary)
- Land Quality Statement

Full copies of these documents are available to view on the Council's website.

The Design & Access statement states that the Appleton Advanced Driving Academy and Autodrome has been conceived to provide opportunity for outdoor sport and recreation and, as importantly, a regionally significant driver training facility for the police, commerce and industry and the emergency and diplomatic services. Beyond these operations it is proposed that the facility accommodates the needs of the motor industry in the testing and presentation of new vehicles and components. As an example of this, Bentley Motors have expressed significant interest in the use of the circuit and conferencing areas.

The Green Belt status of the site has been at the forefront of the design process and has provided the guiding principles of minimum new development, maximum re-use of existing facilities and environmental enhancement which have resulted in this amended and revised design. Consultation exercises with the Local Authorities, Elected Members and the local community following the withdrawal of the earlier application have strongly influenced the form and operation of the proposal. Whilst it was never intended that the facility would be used as a racing circuit this point is now re-emphasised. The noise levels to be permitted at the facility have been considerably reduced from those proposed under the previous application.

The changes to the character of the use have meant that the originally proposed acoustic mitigation landscaping is now functionally redundant. It is however to be included as

landscaping to the perimeter of the site was considered by the local community to be an important element of the scheme.

Believe that the revised scheme not only accords with the land use requirements of development within the Green Belt but improves the environmental credentials of the site through providing a development form which actively contributes to the objectives of Green Belt designation and the wider objectives of sustainable recreation and ecological habitat creation.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The site lies in the Green Belt where policies seek to restrict development in order to protect openness. In some circumstances, the change of use of land and the carrying out of operational development within the Green Belt can be appropriate, with inappropriate development requiring very special circumstances.

Green Belt

Local Plan policy GC1 permits the construction of new buildings for a limited number of purposes including essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it. This policy mirrors advice contained within PPG2. Local Plan policy GC8 permits the reuse of existing buildings in the Green Belt provided that the listed criteria are met. There should be no materially greater impact than the present use on openness, the building to be reused should be of permanent and substantial construction capable of being converted without major or complete reconstruction, the building should be in keeping with its surroundings and respect local building styles and materials and the extension of reused buildings and the associated uses of surrounding land must not reduce the openness of the countryside.

As previously stated, the site is a former military airfield and contains the former runway and associated tracks and areas of hardstanding and a number of existing buildings and structures. It appears that following the decommissioning of the airfield the site was acquired by Shell who used the site as a test track for fuels and associated products. The use of the site by Shell had been the subject of a number of temporary consents until a permanent consent, albeit personal to Shell, was granted in 1985 (42188P). This consent limited the use of the site to 0800 to 2100 Mondays to Saturdays inclusive, and did not allow the site to be used on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The use of the site by Shell appears to have been fairly intermittent and ceased in 2004. No noise conditions are attached to this consent.

This application seeks to use the site predominantly for motorised vehicle related activities e.g. vehicle testing and demonstration, driver training and driving experiences. The indicative weekly schedule indicates that whilst some of the proposed uses could be considered to be outdoor sport and recreation, that this use would not be dominant. However, all of the proposed uses would involve outdoor use of the site, primarily involving the use of the former runway and surrounding tracks/areas of hardstanding. Some training would take place within the proposed new building in conjunction with the use of the track and skid pan. It is

considered that the use of the site for the purposes proposed would be compatible with Green Belt policy provided that all of the associated development required to facilitate the proposed use is considered essential and acceptable in terms of its visual impact.

The operational development required to facilitate the proposed use of the site includes the construction of a new training/conference building, a small timber gatehouse, the reuse and alteration of existing buildings, the formation of a new vehicular access point and associated access track, the formation of parking areas, and the erection of bunding and fencing. Each of these elements will be dealt with in turn.

Training/Conference Building & Gate House

The proposed new training and conference building would be located to the south east of the existing buildings/structures on site. It would be single storey and measure 18.2m x 32m (459m²) reaching a maximum height of 2.8m (excluding railings to viewing platform and glazed entrance porch). Various facilities are proposed within the building including reception, 3 briefing rooms, male and female changing rooms and toilets, a kitchen, bar and dining room and a function room. Limited information has been submitted with the application to explain/justify the need for the proposed facilities. Whilst the need for a reception, briefing room facilities, toilet and changing facilities and some hospitality facilities are accepted, it is not clear at this stage why the scale of facilities proposed are essential for the proposed use of the site. This issue has been raised with the applicants who have acknowledged that as the proposal has changed since the previous application, not all of the facilities currently shown within the building are required and therefore they are willing to look at reducing the size of the building and will submit further information to justify the need for the reduced size building. However, in the meantime, the proposed new training and conference building is considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Very special circumstances are therefore required to justify its approval. No such circumstances have been set out by the applicant.

The proposed timber gate house is modest in size and no objections are raised to it.

Reuse of Existing Buildings

The site contains a number of existing buildings and structures that are to be reused as part of the proposal and used as a circuit marshalling facility, administration and course management centre. There are two buildings, a part two-storey, part single storey control tower/workshop and a single storey garage building. Additionally a refrigerated container is on site.

The submitted site plan indicates that both buildings and the container are to be retained and reused in association with the proposed use though no existing or proposed elevations or floorplans have been submitted with the application. The applicants state that the retained buildings are merely to be refurbished with no external alterations proposed. A structural report has been submitted for the control tower/workshop building and confirms that it is structurally sound. The Councils Structural Engineer is satisfied that the buildings are structurally sound and on that basis no objections are raised to the reuse of the existing buildings/structures.

New Access

A new vehicular access is proposed to the site off Swineyard Lane as the existing access off Crowley Lane is not considered suitable for the proposed use. The access would be located to the north of Invergordon nurseries and a new access road is also proposed to link the access to an existing track within the site. The new track incorporates a U section at the access point and the length of new track extends to approximately 175m in length. Whilst the need for the new access is accepted, the need for the U section and the length of track proposed is not clear at this stage as it appears that a shorter length of track would be required if the new access were linked to an existing track to the south of the access. Further clarification on this is currently being sought from the applicant's agent and any update on this will be reported directly to Committee. In the meantime the amount of engineering works proposed in order to form the new access is considered excessive and this part of the proposal is also considered to be inappropriate development.

Parking Areas

Parking is proposed for 151 vehicles and is to be sited to the east of the existing and proposed buildings on site. The parking is generally proposed to be located on existing areas of hardstanding, albeit some of which is currently overgrown with a new area of grasscrete parking proposed. The Highways Department notes that the master plan actually shows 148 spaces and considers this to be acceptable given the scale of development proposed. On that basis, and given that the majority of parking will be located on existing areas of hardstanding, no objections are raised to the parking proposed.

Bunding/Fencing

A number of bunds and lengths of fencing are proposed as part of the proposal, predominantly to provide acoustic measures. Whilst the bunds and fencing would have a landscape impact and would to some extent reduce openness, the level of bunding and fencing proposed is considered acceptable in Green Belt terms given the nature and scale of the proposed use.

In Green Belt terms the proposed use of the site is considered acceptable as is the majority of the operational development proposed. However there is concern regarding the proposed training and conference building and regarding the proposed access track. These elements of the proposal are considered to be inappropriate development and no very special circumstances have been demonstrated to justify their approval. Whilst the applicant's agents have suggested that further information will be submitted regarding the access and building, and whilst the building is to be reduced in size, in its present form the proposal is not considered to be acceptable. Should the above information and amendments be received prior to Committee, the Green Belt objection to the proposal is likely to be withdrawn.

Design & Visual Impact

As stated, a number of developments are proposed to facilitate the proposed change of use including new buildings, parking areas, new access and associated track and new fencing and bunding. The Council's Landscape Officer notes that from a landscape design perspective, the proposals take sufficient account of the existing features on the site, and are

extensive and appropriate enough to provide a suitable landscape setting and infrastructure for this scheme. Given the location and the extent of new planting, the visual impact of the scheme on the surrounding area is acceptable. Some amendments to improve the design are required, but can be dealt with by landscape conditions which should include a requirement to provide a 10 year landscape management plan. The general design of the proposed new building is acceptable as it has been sited and designed so as to minimise its visual impact.

Highways

A Transport Assessment has been submitted in support of the application. This concludes that the new priority junction off Swineyard Lane is the most appropriate and safest form of access available for the site taking into account the characteristics of Crowley Lane. The Assessment also concludes that the site proposal will generate low levels of traffic flow during peak periods and throughout the day and that the impact of the development on the wider local highway and strategic trunk road network will be minimal.

The Highways Department raise no objections to the application subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions and subject to a S106 legal agreement regarding visibility across third party land and regarding the submission of a Travel Plan. The Highways Department are satisfied that the submitted Transport Assessment demonstrates that on the highways element pertaining to Cheshire East there are no traffic implications.

Amenity

Whilst the site is located in a fairly isolated rural location, albeit adjacent to the M56 motorway, there are a number of residential properties located to the east, south and west of the site. Letters of objection have been received from a number of these properties who are concerned about the impact of noise associated with the proposed use.

A Noise Impact Assessment has been submitted in support of the application and concludes that the airfield is located well away from major residential areas with only isolated houses in the rural areas to the south of the airfield. Noise from the nearby motorway dominates the ambient noise climate of the area. Various types of uses are proposed at the Autodrome and therefore noise levels will vary according to the activities taking place at any one time. Noise calculations have been carried out for a number of scenarios for the anticipated busiest periods of use and including the noisiest activities and these are low levels of noise that would not be expected to give rise to any demonstrable harm to the amenity of local residents. The applicant's noise consultant concludes that the noise impact of the proposed Autodrome can be controlled to an acceptable degree subject to appropriately worded planning conditions covering issues such as hours of use, prohibition of tannoys, vehicle sirens etc and the implementation of a Noise Management Plan.

The Council's Environmental Health department have been consulted on the application and initially recommended the application for refusal due to concerns regarding the submitted noise information and regarding the potential adverse impact of the proposal on the amenity of nearby residents. Subsequent to this recommendation, a meeting has taken place with the applicant's agent and noise consultant resulting in the submission of additional information regarding noise including a more detailed indicative weekly schedule. The applicant's have

now agreed that the use of the site on Sundays would be limited to non motorised uses with the exception of use by learner drivers.

The Environmental Health department is currently considering this additional information and any additional comments received will be reported directly to Committee. In the meantime the application is recommended for refusal due to insufficient information being submitted regarding noise and due to the adverse impact of the proposal on the amenity of nearby residents. However, should the Environmental Health department consider that the additional information adequately overcomes their concerns, subject to the formulation of appropriately worded conditions, the noise and amenity objection to the proposal is likely to be withdrawn.

Ecology

An ecological report has been submitted in support of this application and concludes that generally the habitats and vegetation recorded are of limited nature conservation importance. In terms of mitigating for animals, data from the survey indicates that there is likely to be no significant impact upon any specifically protected species.

The Council's Nature Conservation Officer has been consulted on the application and is satisfied that the applicant has made all reasonable efforts to determine the status of protected species on and adjacent to the site and recommends that the submitted report is acceptable to assess the ecological impacts of the proposed development.

The most important habitats on site will not be affected by the proposed development. There will however, be some loss of habitat of a lower value and also some potential adverse impact upon bird species associated with more open habitats. However, provided suitable wetland/pond creation and appropriate management of the site can be agreed, this together with the benefits provided for bats through the additional woodland planting and the creation of features for breeding birds and bats should mitigate for any adverse impact associated with the development. It is considered that all of these issues can be dealt with by the imposition of appropriate conditions.

Other Matters

A number of other matters have also been raised by objectors including cars going to/from the site driving at high speeds, flooding and drainage issues, possible future development on the site should consent be granted, lack of business plan, possibility of a personal consent being granted and the importation of material to for the bunds.

With regard to these other issues, whilst some of these are material considerations to be taken into account when determining the application, it is not considered that any of these issues either on their own or in conjunction with the other issues raised, with the exception of Green Belt and noise issues, would warrant refusal of the application. With specific regard to flooding and drainage, information on drainage was submitted with the application and this was considered by the Environment Agency who are not objecting to the application subject to the imposition of conditions regarding surface water drainage, disposal of foul and surface water and the installation of oil and petrol separators. In this instance it is not considered appropriate to grant a personal consent to the applicants given that the application involves much more than a change of use of the land and given that the proposal would involve a

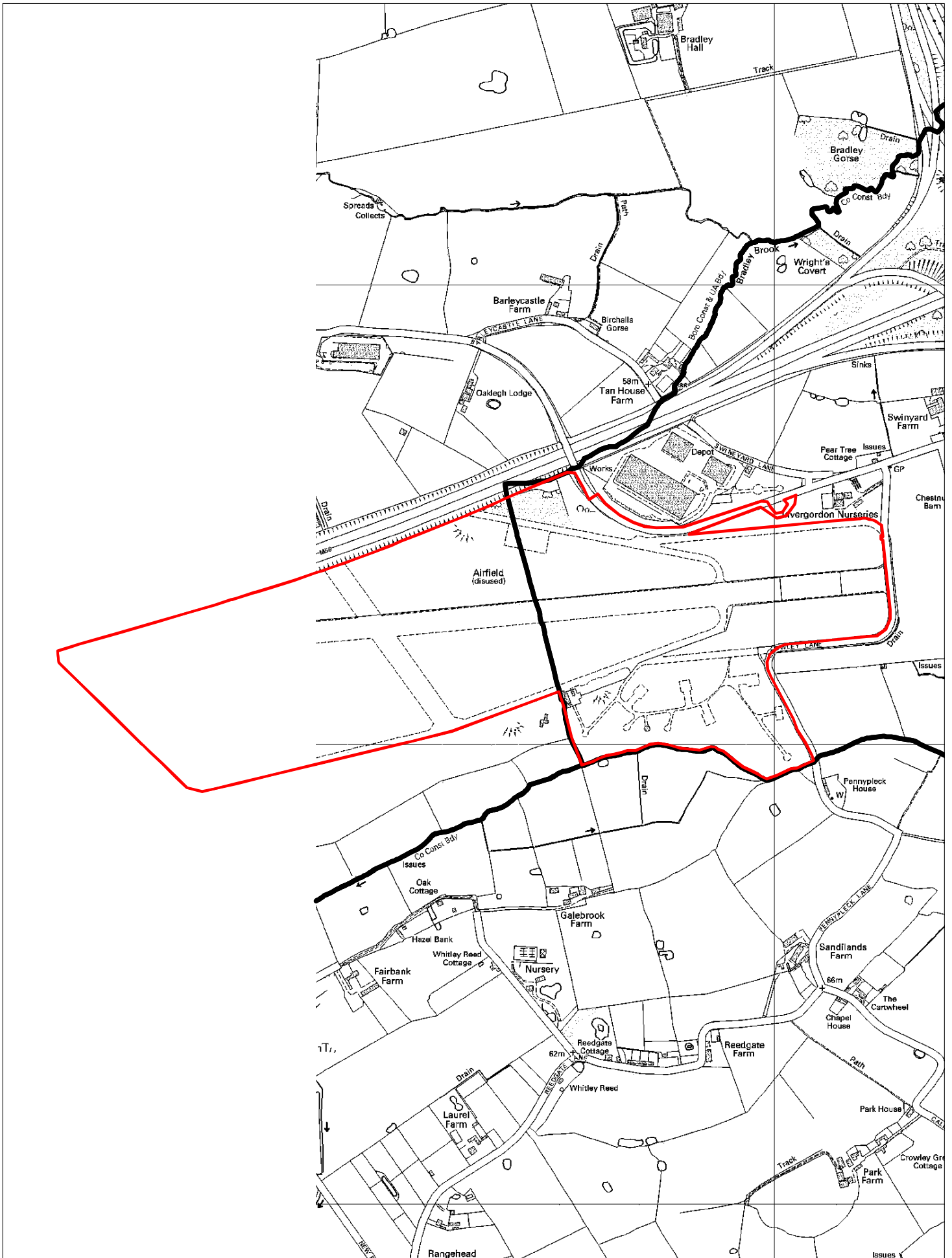
significant amount of investment from the applicants. Whilst the submission of a business plan would have been useful, a significant amount of supporting information has been submitted with the application and it is not considered that the submission of a business plan is essential in this case. It is considered that the method and detail of the construction of the bunds could be dealt with by condition.

Another material consideration is that the proposal would involve the redevelopment of a brownfield site. It would bring a disused airfield back into use and it is considered that it is likely that the use proposed is one of very few that could utilise this type of site. Additionally it is stated that approximately 50 jobs would be created at the site and the proposal would involve extensive landscaping works and significant ecological enhancement works all of which are benefits of the scheme.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

The site lies in the Green Belt where policies seek to protect openness. It is considered that in its present form the proposal involves inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the proposed training/conference building and the proposed access track, and that no very special circumstances have been put forward to justify approval of the development. Additionally, at the time of writing, officers are not satisfied that sufficient information has been submitted regarding the noise that would be generated by the proposal to adequately demonstrate that the proposal would not adversely affect the amenity of nearby residents. Additionally as the application is currently recommended for refusal, two further reasons for refusal are required to cover the matters that would be controlled by a S106 legal agreement were the Council minded to approve the application.

The submission of further information and amended plans from the applicants and the further consideration of additional noise information prior to Committee may result in a change in recommendation to approval subject to appropriate conditions and subject to the prior completion of a S106 legal agreement to ensure adequate visibility at the new access and the submission of a travel plan.



09/1869M



Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse for the following reasons

1. R12LP - Contrary to Green Belt / Open Countryside policies
2. R04MS - Insufficient information
3. R07MS - Unneighbourly use
4. R02HW - Inadequate visibility
5. Absence of mechanism to ensure submission of a Travel Plan