

## **Committee Report**

Beverley Wilders

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:

**Date Report Prepared: 9 October 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.

This report follows the original report and update report that was presented to the Strategic Planning Board on 30 September 2009. The application was deferred from that meeting to allow Members to fully consider the information and advice contained within the update report and to allow for an additional consultation period.

<b>SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>APPROVE</b>
<b>MAIN ISSUES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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</li><li>• whether the visual impact of the proposal is acceptable</li><li>• whether the access and parking proposals area acceptable</li><li>• whether the noise and disturbance generated by the proposal would result in any significant adverse impact on the amenity of nearby residents</li><li>• whether the ecological impact of the proposal are acceptable</li><li>• whether there are any other material considerations to be considered</li></ul>	

## **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, the details of which have been amended during the course of the application. This would consist of a classroom, briefing rooms, changing and toilet facilities, 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.

This application seeks consent for the use of the part of the site that falls within the administrative boundary of Cheshire East together with the associated operational development within Cheshire East. Therefore Members need only consider issues arising from development proposed within Cheshire East, though the impact of the proposals within Cheshire East may also affect areas beyond e.g. Warrington and Cheshire West and Chester. Cheshire East Borough Council cannot grant consent for any development beyond its own administrative boundary. Therefore even if Cheshire East were to grant consent for the application, the use and/or development of the remainder of the site could not take place without the consent of Warrington Borough Council.

## **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 has resulted in Environmental Health changing their original recommendation to no objections subject to the imposition of a number of conditions to prevent harm from noise and disturbance and to safeguard the amenity of local residents.

**Manchester Airport:** no objections subject to conditions.

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

**Warrington Borough Council:** object to the proposal on the grounds of unacceptable noise impact to the living conditions of occupiers of nearby residential properties, and in accordance with the refusal of planning permission issued by Warrington BC - on this ground - on 16th September 2009.

**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**

At the time of the original report, 22 letters of objection had been received from 21 separate addresses in relation to the application. Subsequently an additional 35 objections have been received, the majority of which have been from residents of Appleton and Appleton Thorn objecting on the basis of the adverse impact on the village. 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
- Question need for new buildings given the existing buildings on the site
- Viewing platform of the new building is a large hospitality area

## 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

- With the exception of dropping performance cars on a Sunday, there is nothing new to emerge from the revised application
- Conditions 35, 36 & 44 of the update report are unenforceable
- Acoustic bunds will not be delivered at the southern perimeter of the site

#### Traffic/Highways Issues

- Proposal would create and 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
- Shell have not regularly used the site over the last several years and little weight has been given by Warrington BC to the Shell consent
- Despite Shell having marketed the site nobody has applied to use it for the same thing

The new consultation period expires on 15 October and any further representations received will be reported directly to Committee.

## **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 22m (400m<sup>2</sup>) 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 and classroom. The proposed new building has been reduced in size during the course of the application following previous concerns relating to Green Belt policy. It is stated that the proposed small scale briefing rooms (to accommodate approximately 8 persons each) are provided as discrete areas to facilitate induction on circuit use awareness and safety protocols to individual groups of users. The larger classroom is provided as a more formal setting for audio-visual presentations by driving instructors, the police and emergency services and vehicle manufacturers where larger numbers of individuals may need to be accommodated. As there may be several uses on site at any given time it was considered important that permanent, rather than flexible, space was provided to enable simultaneous occupation.

The reduction in the size of the building is welcomed and the justification submitted regarding the proposed uses within the building is accepted. Whilst the comments made by objectors regarding the proposed building are noted, it is considered that, taking into account existing buildings on site, the size of facility proposed is reasonable given the proposed wider use of the site. No objections are now therefore raised to the proposed training/conference building.

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 originally incorporated a U section at the access point which has now been removed following concerns regarding the length of new track and the justification for it. It is now proposed to link the new access to an existing track to the south of the access. This results in a shorter length of new track and overcome previous concerns relating to this part of the proposal.

#### 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 operational development proposed. However, this level of operational development is only considered acceptable in conjunction with the wider use of the whole of the site, including land within the Borough of Warrington. Therefore if the Council is minded to grant permission for the proposed use and associated developments, this would have to be subject to a condition, or if necessary, a legal agreement ensuring that no development commences on the part of the site in Cheshire East until such time that consent exists for the use of the site which falls under the jurisdiction of Warrington Borough Council.

### **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 raises 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 is satisfied that the submitted Transport Assessment demonstrates that on the highways element pertaining to Cheshire East there are no traffic implications.

Whilst the numerous concerns raised by local residents have been noted and carefully considered, the Highways department raises no objections to the proposal and accept the findings of the submitted Transport Assessment. Therefore it is not considered that a reason for refusal based on highway issues is justified or could be sustained.

## **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 took place with the applicant's agent and noise consultant resulting in the submission of additional information consisting of a revised indicative weekly schedule of uses and users and a written response to the original consultation response from the Council's Environmental Health department. Specifically the following points were made/confirmed by the applicants.

- There is to be no racing at the facility
- All cars and vehicles to be accepted onto site will be road legal and comply in all regards with British and European law on noise emissions
- Acknowledged that the use of the site is to include driving experiences in performance vehicles, this is proposed to be in the form where a member of the public would book, or receive as a gift, the opportunity to drive an expensive or rare vehicle. By the nature of the use this would preclude high speed driving or heavy braking as the user would be insufficiently experienced and such use would be precluded by the operator on the grounds of cost and insurance

- Existing concrete runway will be resurfaced with a new tarmac which will be formed from porous asphalt or similar material designed to minimise general road tyre noise
- Despite this, recognise Council's residual concerns and as a result no driving experiences will be permitted on Sundays. Sunday use will be restricted to non motorised activities and use by learner drivers
- Agreed that tonal variation of sound was not included within the acoustic calculations and that there are no agreed standards by which such information could be assessed, the susceptibility to tonal variations is personal and subjective and that even if such information was submitted it would be difficult for the Council to interpret as there are no guidelines to define acceptable levels at given frequencies. Agreement made that prospective noise impact would be assessed on the "A-weighted" decibel level
- Concerns that the skid pan would generate tyre squeal and high frequency sound are mistaken. Proposed skid pan is a wet surface area designed to simulate low traction conditions such as ice. In this form there is low to no physical contact between the wheels of the vehicle and the surface hence no appreciable noise is generated as described within the submitted Noise Report
- It has been confirmed by the applicants acoustic engineers that the methodology of calculation and prediction is based on the most conservative estimate of generation (i.e. on a worst case scenario with additional safety margins added. The worst case scenario for each type of activity was taken as being the busiest possible hour of use of the facility) and illustrates that the predicated noise levels will be within recommended standards for all proposed forms in open conditions
- The proposed weekly schedule provides as detailed a description as it is possible to make at this stage as the proposed operators have yet to confirm their contractual arrangements in the absence of planning permission to use the site
- The application of appropriate conditions would provide the necessary surety to the Council and neighbouring residents that the form and format of use together with the hours of operation and prospective noise generation are set at defined and acceptable levels

As stated, based on further discussions between the applicant and Council officers and based on the submission of the above, the Council's Environmental Health department now raises no objections to the application subject to a detailed list of suggested conditions limiting and controlling the use of the site. In reaching this conclusion, regard has been had to the fact that there is an extant consent for the use of the site as a test track by Shell and that whilst this is a personal consent, should another operator wish to use the site for the same purpose as Shell, the Council would have no legitimate grounds to resist this. The extant consent allows for the use of the site between 0800 and 2100, Monday to Saturday and there are no restrictions attached to the consent in terms of noise limits or limitations on use etc, other than limitations implicit within the wording of the description of development. It is considered that, subject to appropriate conditions, what is now being proposed would not result in a use of the site which would be materially worse in terms of its impact on the amenity of nearby residents. As such, no objections are now raised to the proposal on amenity grounds.

Whilst the views of local residents have been carefully considered, for the reasons outlined above, it is not considered that the proposal would cause significant harm to residential amenity.

## **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 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 is 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.

Concerns were also raised regarding the application process and regarding discussions that have taken place between Council officers and the applicants. It is normal practice for negotiations to take place between officers and applicants during the application process in order to secure an acceptable outcome and in this case, the scope of these discussions was outlined within the original report. As a lot of the additional information that has been submitted has been submitted fairly recently, it was decided that additional consultation would



be carried out to allow residents and consultees more time to consider the information and the change to the recommendation.

Some concern has also been expressed regarding the content of the original report and in particular the lack of detailed response to points made by objectors. In this case there have been a significant number of representations received and the points raised by objectors were included within the report and grouped in terms of issues. Issues relating to the Green Belt, noise and amenity and visual impact were all dealt with within specific sections of the report and whilst the views of individual objectors may not have been explicitly referred to, the views expressed were considered as part of the assessment of the proposal. In terms of highways concerns, these were dealt with in the update report and have now been incorporated within the main body of this report under the Highways section. Some concern has also been expressed about the enforceability of some of the suggested conditions. These concerns have been considered and officers are satisfied that the suggested conditions are enforceable.

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 the amended proposal is appropriate development in the Green Belt and that subject to the listed conditions, would not significantly injure the amenity of nearby residents.

The proposal would bring a disused airfield back into use and it is considered that it is likely that the proposed use is one of very few that could utilise this type of site. Additionally the proposal would bring other benefits including a restriction in the hours of use of the site, the introduction of acoustic measures, significant ecological enhancement works and employment creation all of which are material considerations to be given weight in the determination of the application.

## **HEADS OF TERMS**

The requirement to produce and operate a travel plan for the development, which has been produced in accordance with local and national standards, guidance and best practice and has regard to the nature of the development, the accessibility of the site and local transport provision, and the requirement to pay the Highway Authority's costs associated with the monitoring and review of the travel plan. Such a plan (and its successors), which if appropriate, shall be implemented in a phased manner, shall include procedures for monitoring, review, remedial action and enforcement and shall be operated at all times while the development is occupied.

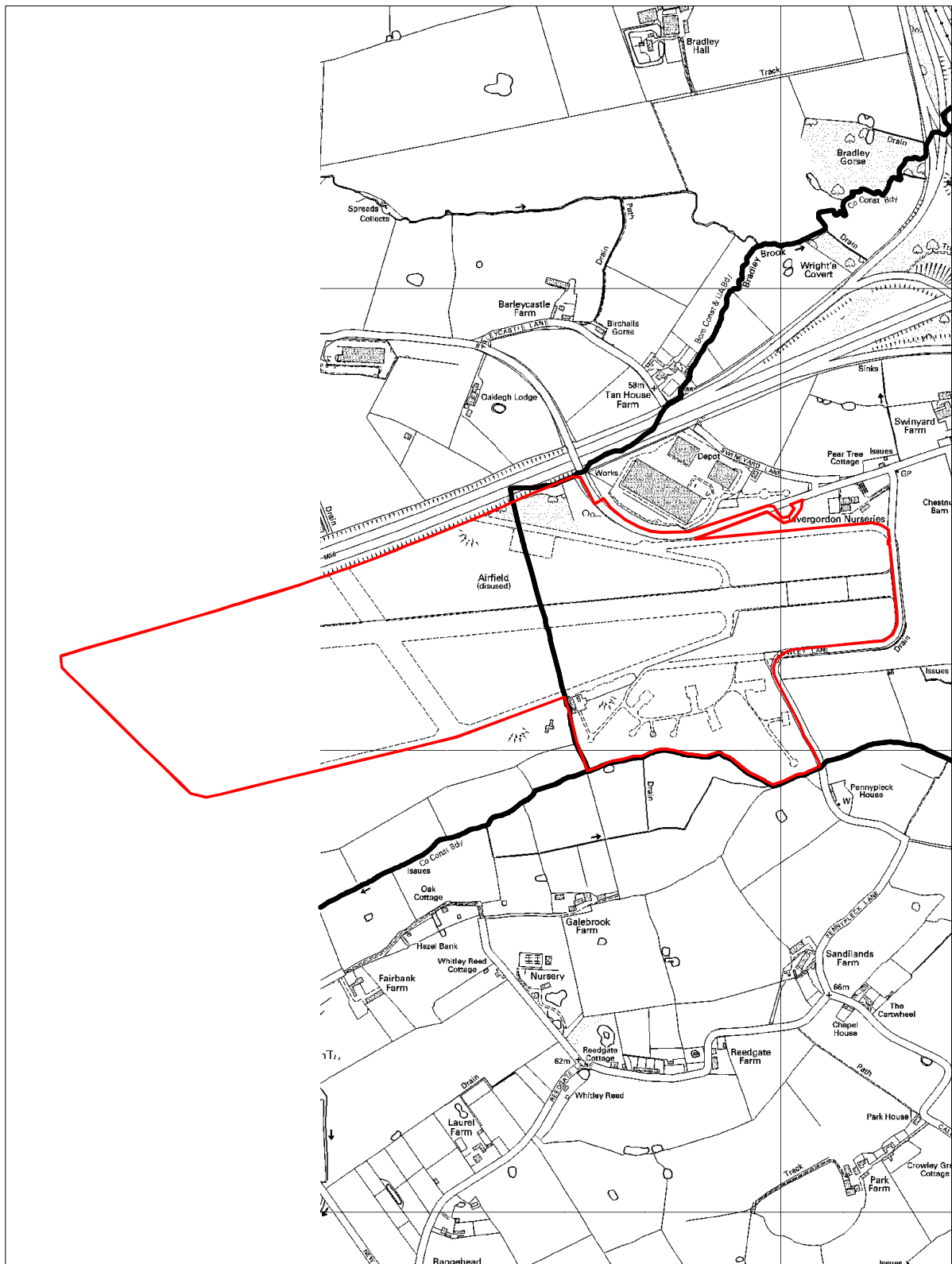
The requirement for the adjacent land owner to enter into a section 106 agreement to ensure that a vehicular visibility splay of 4.5m (x) by 215m (y) is maintained at all times.

## Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to the following conditions

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
3. A02EX - Submission of samples of building materials
4. A08HA - Gates set back from footway/carriageway
5. A01HP - Provision of car parking
6. A26HA - Prevention of surface water flowing onto highways
7. A07HP - Drainage and surfacing of hardstanding areas
8. A08MC - Lighting details to be approved
9. A30HA - Protection of highway from mud and debris
10. A32HA - Submission of construction method statement
11. A01LS - Landscaping - submission of details
12. A04LS - Landscaping (implementation)
13. A12LS - Landscaping to include details of boundary treatment
14. A16LS - Submission of landscape/woodland management plan
15. A01TR - Tree retention
16. A02TR - Tree protection
17. Prior to the construction of any part of the development, the junction of the approved access road with the public highway shall be constructed in accordance with a scheme of details, which have previously been submitted to and approved in writing by the
18. At all times that the venue is open the gates at the access shall remain open.
19. No storage of goods or materials shall take place within Parking/turning/servicing areas/facilities at any time.
20. At all times the venue shall not be permitted use for any competition or rally event.
21. Scheme for surface water drainage system
22. Scheme for disposal of foul and surface water
23. Scheme for roosting bats
24. Proposals for breeding birds
25. Survey for nesting birds
26. Scheme for amendments to proposed ponds

27. Control over planting and fencing of wetland area islands if provided
28. Phase II (contamination) Investigation to be carried out
29. There shall be no motorised events or activities on the track circuit on Sundays, Public or Bank Holidays except for the sole use of learner drivers seeking to pass their road driving test.
30. The use of the track circuit on Sundays, Public and Bank Holidays shall be restricted to the hours of 10.00 to 17.00.
31. The use of the track circuit on Saturdays shall be restricted to the hours of 09.00 to 17.00
32. The use of the track circuit Monday to Friday shall be restricted to the hours of 09.00 to 18.00
33. The existing concrete surface of the track circuit and other areas to be used by motorised vehicles undertaking activities/training on the site shall be resurfaced with porous asphalt or similar material approved by the LPA prior to the use commencing.
34. The skid pan area shall only be used when wet in order to minimise the generation of noise from skidding activities.
35. No members of the Public shall be permitted to use their own private vehicles on the track circuit at any time except for learner drivers seeking to pass their driving test.
36. A maximum speed of 45 mph shall apply to motorised vehicles using any area of the track circuit on Sundays, Public and Bank Holidays.
37. No competition racing or spectator sports shall be permitted for motorised sports activities at any time.
38. Single seater vehicles shall be prohibited from using the track circuit
39. Vehicles used by the Emergency Services using the track circuit shall not use their sirens except in the case of emergency
40. Motorbikes shall be prohibited from using the track circuit
41. Tannoys and audible public address systems shall be prohibited from use on the site.
42. All vehicles to be used on the track circuit and skid pan shall be to a specification suitable for the use on the public highway.
43. No consent is hereby granted for the use of the site by HGV or 4x4 vehicles. The use of the site by such vehicles would require the prior written consent of the LPA.
44. Static road test and drive by test
45. Details of acoustic bunds, barriers and screening to mitigate noise from vehicle operations shall be submitted to, approved in writing by the LPA and implemented prior to the use first commencing.
46. At all times other than in an emergency situation the proposed emergency access shall remain closed in accordance with a scheme of details which has previously been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.
47. The permission hereby granted shall be of no effect if consent is not granted for the remainder of the site.



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