

South Staffordshire Council

Wolverhampton Airport DPD

Issues and Options Consultation Outcomes

February 2007

Entec UK Limited

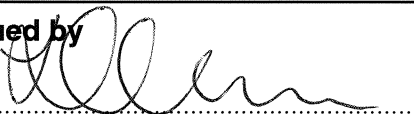
Report for

Paul Collings
Development Plans Manager
South Staffordshire Council
Council Offices
Codsall
South Staffordshire
WV8 1PX


Main Contributors

Lynsey Hunton-Clarke

Issued by


Lynsey Hunton-Clarke

Approved by


Daren Luscombe

Entec UK Limited

Windsor House
Gadbrook Business Centre
Gadbrook Road
Northwich
Cheshire
CW9 7TN
England
Tel: +44 (0) 1606 354800
Fax: +44 (0) 1606 354810

h:\projects\em-260\19000 projects\19919 sd south staffs airport
dpd consult\c - client\workshop outcomes report_final report
07051i1.doc

South Staffordshire Council

Wolverhampton Airport DPD

Issues and Options Consultation Outcomes

February 2007

Entec UK Limited



Certificate No. EMS 69090



Certificate No. FS 13881

In accordance with an environmentally responsible approach,
this document is printed on recycled paper produced from 100%
post-consumer waste, or on ECF (elemental chlorine free) paper

Copyright and Non-Disclosure Notice

The contents and layout of this report are subject to copyright owned by Entec (© Entec UK Limited 2007) save to the extent that copyright has been legally assigned by us to another party or is used by Entec under licence. To the extent that we own the copyright in this report, it may not be copied or used without our prior written agreement for any purpose other than the purpose indicated in this report.

The methodology (if any) contained in this report is provided to you in confidence and must not be disclosed or copied to third parties without the prior written agreement of Entec. Disclosure of that information may constitute an actionable breach of confidence or may otherwise prejudice our commercial interests. Any third party who obtains access to this report by any means will, in any event, be subject to the Third Party Disclaimer set out below.

Third Party Disclaimer

Any disclosure of this report to a third party is subject to this disclaimer. The report was prepared by Entec at the instruction of, and for use by, our client named on the front of the report. It does not in any way constitute advice to any third party who is able to access it by any means. Entec excludes to the fullest extent lawfully permitted all liability whatsoever for any loss or damage howsoever arising from reliance on the contents of this report. We do not however exclude our liability (if any) for personal injury or death resulting from our negligence, for fraud or any other matter in relation to which we cannot legally exclude liability.

Contents

1.	Introduction	1
1.1	Involving People in Planning Policy	1
1.2	More than Consultation	1
1.3	Identifying Key Issues	2
1.4	Reporting Outcomes	3
2.	Workshop Outcomes	5
2.1	The Role of the Airport	5
2.1.1	Restricting the role of the airport	6
2.1.2	Restricting aircraft	6
2.2	Possible Expansion	6
2.2.1	Defining 'expansion'	7
2.2.2	Determining a realistic option	8
2.2.3	'Gentle evolution'	8
2.3	New Development	8
2.3.1	Identifying development areas	9
2.3.2	Developing a 'layered' approach	10
2.3.3	Taking a more proactive approach	10
2.4	Use of Buildings	11
2.4.1	Taking a more proactive approach	12
2.5	Future Use of the Airport Site	13
2.5.1	Returning to agriculture	13
2.5.2	Employment use	13
2.5.3	Leisure uses	13
2.5.4	Alternative uses	14
2.5.5	Setting time limits	14
2.6	Wartime Heritage	15
2.6.1	Alternative suggestions	16
3.	Key Messages and Conclusions	17
3.1	Continuing Current Role	17
3.2	'Gentle Evolution'	17
3.3	Mindful of Site Sustainability	17

3.3.1	Limited new development	17
3.3.2	Acceptance of non-aviation uses	18
3.4	Dual Future Use	18
3.5	Respect for Heritage	18

1. Introduction

1.1 Involving People in Planning Policy

South Staffordshire Council is in the process of preparing a Local Development Framework (LDF), which will replace the existing Local Plan. The LDF will set out policies that will guide development in the District in the future. South Staffordshire's LDF will contain a number of different policy documents, including one for Wolverhampton Airport. The '**Wolverhampton Airport Policy Area Development Plan Document**' will set out policies to define the role of the airport and guide any future development.

The new planning system aims to be more flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of an area over time, as well as providing for more effective involvement of local communities in shaping planning policies. Documents are developed through a process consisting of a number of different stages. Each stage comprises a statutory requirement for involving, consulting and/or informing stakeholder representatives and the local community.

The first stage in the process is to collate existing evidence and information about the site to produce a document that summarises the key issues and the possible options for addressing them (an 'Issues and Options' document). South Staffordshire Council have produced an Issues and Options document for the Wolverhampton Airport Policy Area. It is intended as a starting point for discussion with stakeholders about the potential content of the eventual Development Plan Document.

1.2 More than Consultation

South Staffordshire Council recognises that the support of its community is crucial in the development of policy documents – not only in terms of public acceptance and streamlining the policy development processes, but also to contribute information and ideas regarding the focus and content of policies. This is particularly important where the subject of the document is of significant interest and/or locally-relevant, such as the role and possible expansion of the Airport.

South Staffordshire Council has addressed all previous dialogue regarding the airport in drafting the Issues and Options document. Building on this, the Council are keen to more actively involve stakeholders in the development of the Wolverhampton Airport Policy Area DPD; providing an opportunity not only for people to comment on documents, but also to involve them in identifying issues, shaping priorities and contributing ideas from the early stages of the document preparation process.

To initiate the consultation period on the Issues and Options document, South Staffordshire Council undertook a workshop with key stakeholder representatives on Wednesday 31st January 2007. The aims of this workshop were to gauge opinion regarding the key issues and involve stakeholders in reviewing the proposed options (and suggesting alternatives if appropriate). Representatives with experience from a number of different areas within the Council and externally from a number of different stakeholder organisations were specifically invited (based

on their roles as representatives, their involvement in previous initiatives and those who expressed interest in Wolverhampton Airport). Approximately 35 people attended the workshops, providing a valuable insight into the concerns, priorities and needs of the community and stakeholders.

1.3 Identifying Key Issues

Working with South Staffordshire Council, a programme of activities was developed for the workshop. The programme was designed to:

- Inform the audience about the process of developing the Issues and Options document;
- Inform the audience about the key issues and options presented in the document;
- Inform the audience about the sustainability appraisal process;
- Involve the audience in discussing the key issues and options;
- Elicit stakeholder views and concerns regarding the key issues and options; and
- Inform the audience of the next stage in the process (Preferred Options Stage) and the opportunities to get involved in the future.

As such the following workshop sessions were developed:

- **Presentation** to introduce the new planning system and the history and context for issues and options.
- **Workshop session 1:**
 - Discussion 1a to review the issues and options relating to the role of the airport.
 - Discussion 1b to review the issues and options relating the possible expansion of the airport.
- **Workshop Session 2:**
 - Discussion 2a to review the issues and options relating to new development on the site.
 - Discussion 2b to review the issues and options relating to the use of buildings (and the site).
- **Workshop Session 3:**
 - Discussion 3a to review the issues and options relating to the future use of the site should the airport close.
 - Discussion 3b to review the issues and options relating to the preservation of wartime heritage.
- **Presentation** detailing the next steps in the process and how the information collated would be used.

1.4 Reporting Outcomes

This report sets out the key outcomes from the stakeholder workshop. The notes taken during the workshop have been typed and collated. The information relating to each discussion session was reviewed and the key themes identified where possible. Whilst there will always be an element of subjectivity to the analysis of qualitative information, the review and analysis was undertaken in an independent manner. The key outcomes are presented in Section 2, with supporting quotes and comments made where appropriate¹.

¹ Please note that quotes are taken from facilitators' notes. Whilst facilitators are encouraged to use the terminology of the participants in creating their notes, these may not be direct quotes of participants. They are intended to illustrate the key themes emerging during the workshop discussions.

2. Workshop Outcomes

2.1 The Role of the Airport

Wolverhampton Airport has an established role as a General Aviation airport providing for business, recreation (private) flying and flying training. The Issues and Options document indicates that the Council generally supports the airport in continuing this role. The workshop participants were asked to discuss this proposal and their own views regarding the role of the airport in the future.

There was broad agreement from all groups that the current use of the airport was acceptable:

“We’re all happy for it to continue in its current role – leisure flights and training...business e.g. private small charter...”

The workshop participants recognised that the airport provides valuable employment opportunities and supports the operation of the Police AOP. Several also expressed that they considered the associated impacts were ‘*within acceptable limits in terms of biodiversity, noise, emissions and traffic*’. There was, however, some concern about the definition of ‘business use’. Several participants felt that the current definition was potentially open-ended and had caused some problems in applying aircraft restrictions in the past:

“We need to be more specific over ‘air taxis’”

One group suggested that the role of Wolverhampton Airport as a business-use airport could increase as Birmingham Airport’s commercial services increase. Others, however, felt that business use of private planes was now decreasing as a result of growing awareness of carbon emissions and their impact on climate change.

A number of participants also raised the potential role of the airport as an employment site; suggesting that this was a secondary role but one that was of significant importance to the local economy.

Although there was broad acceptance of the airport’s current role, the over-riding message from most participants was that they did not want to see the airport’s role extended to become a commercial airport, as the previous planning application had proposed:

“I’m generally happy with the status quo. If there were plans to introduce small companies then I don’t see this as a problem. But a big change in line with the previous application would be a disastrous scenario.”

The main issue raised by participants was that the local road infrastructure would be unable to support a significant change in airport role. It was also recognised that the Regional Spatial Strategy also supported the continuation of the airport in its current role. Some participants did, however, recognise that enabling the airport to continue in its current role may require some development of essential supporting facilities over time.

2.1.1 Restricting the role of the airport

The workshop participants were asked to consider whether the role of the airport should be restricted more formally, for example through the development of a master plan.

Participants considered the development of a master plan to be a useful tool to formalise proposals and ‘*set down a marker regarding...expectations*’. It was recognised that developing a master plan would help to remove uncertainties regarding the development of the site in the future.

One group suggested that formal restrictions could be applied to hours of operation of the airport, although there was support for more relaxed rules for the operation of the police helicopter. Other participants identified that any restrictions could not be at the expense of the airport being commercially viable.

2.1.2 Restricting aircraft

Most participants agreed that the current use of the airport by light aircraft was acceptable and they were happy for this to continue. However, several participants felt that there being no clear definition of ‘light aircraft’ presented problems in the interpretation of restrictions. Previous examples of difficulties in distinguishing between different plane types (turbo props and jets) were discussed.

It was agreed that greater clarity was needed regarding aircraft restrictions. Whilst a small number of participants suggested that a better definition of acceptable aircraft be formally included, most participants recognised that this would be difficult.

It was concluded by a majority of participants that restrictions should not be related to a particular type of aircraft (e.g. referring specifically to the Cessna Citation aircraft), but the acceptable limits for noise, environmental impacts and, in particular, capacity of aircraft:

“Should not restrict by type of aircraft but by limits of noise, environmental impacts etc...An Environmental Impact Assessment needs to be undertaken to determine possible levels of restriction”.

“There is difficulty in specifying noise levels because of changing technologies and definitions ... future technological developments of aircraft will be significant. [Therefore] the use of passenger numbers is critical to avoiding technical arguments. The standard should be ‘very quiet and less than 10 passengers’.”

Linking to this, one group suggested that the use of the word ‘restrict’ could perhaps create friction between different stakeholders. They suggested that they would like to see policy ‘*continue to ‘manage’ rather than ‘restrict’ aircraft usage*’.

2.2 Possible Expansion

Recognising the considerable concern locally about the possible expansion of the airport and the potential impacts (positive and negative) on the environment, economy and broader community, the second part of workshop session one was designed to enable participants to discuss their concerns and to consider the different options proposed. Three options are presented in the Issues and Options paper:

1. Allow the airport to expand;
2. Allow only very limited expansion of the airport; and
3. Firmly resist any proposals for the expansion of the airport.

A number of participants felt that there were *'no positive aspects to expansion'*. One group stated that a policy that enabled any level of expansion (even 'very limited') would be of concern. They felt that this would just be *'the thin end of the wedge'* and they would be concerned that 'very limited' expansion could lead to further expansion and growth in the future. Other participants discussed the implications of expansion in terms of negative impacts on local infrastructure, possible increases in environmental impacts and noise.

Two groups identified potential benefits of expansion for the local community in improved access to travel services, aviation-related recreation and benefits for local businesses:

"Better for the broader economy, but not local villages."

Concerns were raised regarding the implications of airport expansion on the viability and future plans of Birmingham Airport (and other regional airports):

"Need to reflect the plans of Birmingham Airport as they will influence the strategy for Wolverhampton Airport. There needs to be consensus amongst all airports about how they specialise."

A number of participants also discussed the need to consider restrictions and/or conflicts in airspace, which may influence the scope of expansion.

2.2.1 Defining 'expansion'

A key outcome from the discussion was the need to define what was meant by 'expansion'. It was recognised that expansion could relate to the expansion of the site or its role (*'expansion can only imply an increase in passenger numbers'*) or to development within the existing scope of the airport's site and role (*'could mean intensification... 'expansion' creates the wrong impression'*).

All groups agreed that they would firmly resist any commercial expansion as well as expansion beyond the existing boundary, for example an extension to the runway as previously proposed. A number of participants suggested that, whilst development of the current airport site to support existing operations would be acceptable, it was felt that this should be limited to the needs and current footprint of the site:

"Limited expansion to ensure that it supports and benefits current uses and associated businesses."

"Expansion should be within current infrastructure (and physical boundaries)."

"Non-aviation [development] should be required to remain within the current footprint."

2.2.2 Determining a realistic option

Whilst there was some support for Option 3 (to firmly resist any proposals for the expansion of the airport), further discussion identified that this resistance was particularly related to initiation of commercial operations and development beyond the existing airport boundary.

A number of participants recognised that it would not be possible to resist ‘all proposals’ as this would be restrictive and detrimental to the success of the airport site:

“It is not feasible to resist all proposals, but due attention should be paid to environmental implications and constraints...”

2.2.3 ‘Gentle evolution’

It was agreed by most groups that the airport was likely to continue in its current general aviation role but that this role would continue to be ‘limited and niche’. Recognising that sufficient and ‘fit for purpose’ infrastructure was required for the airport to be viable, there was general agreement that expansion of the airport within its existing boundaries would be acceptable:

“Expansion is acceptable within the current role of the airport, within current boundaries i.e. enhancement, redevelopment and regeneration.”

Building on earlier comments regarding the definition of ‘limiting expansion’ and the need to be realistic about the development of the site, one group suggested that it would be more appropriate to refer to ‘gentle evolution’ of the site over time:

“Not ‘limit’ but ‘gentle evolution’ and growth within the existing boundaries to support the infrastructure requirements of the airport.”

Other groups agreed that, whilst commercial and boundary expansion would be firmly resisted, ‘gentle evolution’ of the site within its existing role and boundaries would be acceptable.

2.3 New Development

The first part of workshop session two focused on the possible options relating to new development on the site. Participants were asked to consider the benefits and disadvantages of the following three options:

1. Only permit aviation-related development that can be justified as being necessary to meet the operational and safety needs of the airport;
2. Require that priority be given wherever possible to reuse and conversion of existing buildings in preference to new built development; and
3. Require that new built development is located within a defined area.

All of the participants recognised the progressive deterioration of older buildings to be a key issue for the site, along with an increasing problem of building obsolescence. It was suggested by some that current facilities were not ‘fit for purpose’ and it was therefore concluded, and accepted by most participants, that there would be a need for aviation-related development on the airport site:

“We do need facilities if the airport is to remain ... needs to be sustainable and viable site.”

“Currently limited existing facilities, which would need to change. Toilets, lounge, refreshments etc.”

Most participants agreed that maintaining existing facilities, particularly relating to safety of operation, ‘goes without saying’:

“We should give priority to the future needs of airport operators and safety facilities.”

A number of participants stated that they would prefer to see priority given to the improvement and reuse of existing buildings; suggesting that this would be more appropriate for a Green Belt area and would help to ‘clean up’ the site. It was, however, recognised that many of the buildings on site were obsolete and that ‘removal and reconstruction’ may be necessary.

Whilst a number of participants suggested that buildings would be best preserved and maintained by putting them into use, others recognised that it may be difficult to promote conversion:

“It would be difficult to promote conversion on cost and/or environmental grounds. It may be more economical to rebuild and gain ongoing cost and environmental benefits.”

It was agreed by most participants that finding a balance between reuse and new development would be most appropriate. There was therefore general agreement with Option two, although there was recognition that this should not be overly restrictive:

“We don’t want to be too restrictive about the buildings.”

“If there is an opportunity and it’s commercially sensible then yes, but allow new build if not.”

2.3.1 Identifying development areas

Participants were asked to consider whether specific areas where development would or would not be appropriate should be defined. All of the groups agreed that appropriate areas for development on the airport site should be specifically defined. There was further agreement that any development should be within the current developed area of the site:

“Yes, but confined to current areas – the current footprint.”

“Retain area for development within the current footprint of non-airside buildings.”

Two of the four groups defined the possible area for development beyond the current footprint of buildings but within the boundaries of the existing ‘hard tarmac’ areas around the entrance to the site.

“Within the boundary of the existing developed area, including the area to the right that is currently concreted.”

Several of the participants suggested that further investigation regarding the environmental and conservation aspects of the site should be undertaken prior to formally defining an area suitable for development.

2.3.2 Developing a 'layered' approach

Participants identified that, rather than having a particular preferred option, each option presented had merits that would be appropriate for new development on the airport site:

“Options are not mutually exclusive as elements of all three can come into play.”

Building on this, two of the four groups suggested that all three of the proposed options be combined to create an alternative Option four:

“Only permit aviation-related development that can be justified as being necessary to meet the operation and safety needs of the airport. Require that priority be given to reuse and conversion of existing buildings in preference to new built development. If new development is required, it should be located in the defined area.”

2.3.3 Taking a more proactive approach

Participants were also asked to consider whether they would like to see a more positive approach to site development; encouraging new development to support new businesses on the site and proactively seeking the removal and rebuilding of any obsolete buildings to help improve the appearance of the site.

Several participants considered that, although priority should be given to aviation-related development, it should be possible to consider other development appropriate for the site and its constraints. Examples included small-business units. It must, however, be noted that several participants expressed resistance to the site becoming an 'industrial area' as this may bring excessive traffic ('heavy goods vehicles') to the site, which would be inappropriate for the existing infrastructure.

Building on previous comments, a majority of participants agreed that new development should be considered for purposes beyond the aviation-related development required:

“Yes – because the airport has to make a profit. Without this it may be difficult to be viable.”

“We need to ensure a balance between restrictions and operations to allow the business to be viable.”

Some participants, however, were cautious about additional development:

“Ideally no, need to keep development aviation-related.”

“Any replacement buildings should be to encourage aviation usage.”

“Need to ensure development will be compatible with the area – there's a danger of being too loose with the definition.”

All participants were, however, more in favour of demolishing and replacing existing buildings to make the site more attractive. It was suggested by a number of participants that this would be necessary to attract the interest of new businesses:

“The image would benefit from an overhaul perhaps by demolishing and rebuilding.”

“There is an opportunity for further business use and making the site more attractive will attract more interest...to attract new businesses and customers there will be a need for more modern facilities – not currently fit for purpose.”

One group were concerned though, that the site should not be simply cleared as this may present risks through attracting the interests of larger scale developers or risking long term dereliction of the site:

“Not just a ‘clear buildings’ policy but a careful approach to change of use and demolition as it’s needed.”

2.4 Use of Buildings

The second part of Workshop Session Two aimed to build on the initial discussions regarding new development and consider how the buildings on the site should be used. Recognising that there was currently no specific policy regarding the ‘uses’ of buildings and the broader site, this session aimed to discuss how this could be addressed. Participants were asked to consider the following three options:

1. Continue to allow the use of certain existing buildings for non-aviation purposes on a temporary basis;
2. Ensure that existing buildings used for non-aviation purposes are returned to aviation use as soon as is practicable; and
3. Require that all airport buildings be used for aviation only related to the operational needs of the airport.

There were split feelings regarding the uses of buildings on the site. Some participants suggested that allowing non-aviation uses to continue would be necessary to allow the airport to be viable:

“I have concern about whether there’s sufficient demand for aviation uses. Discouraging non-aviation uses may have an effect on long term viability.”

A number of participants suggested that further economic assessment of the site’s activities and businesses should be undertaken prior to determining a policy position. This related particularly to understanding whether the airport could be viable with solely aviation-related activity:

“Would it be possible to do an economic assessment of the Airport and remaining aviation purposes?”

Several participants suggested that an active discouragement of non-aviation uses may be too extreme and that allowing other uses would benefit the local economy; providing local jobs and business opportunities that would benefit the local area and the broader region.

A number of participants expressed their resistance to continuing to allow non-aviation uses on the site:

“The main purpose of the airport should remain as general aviation and ancillary services should not impinge on the future use of the airport.”

“If it becomes an industrial site then there will be transport implications and impacts on the Green Belt.”

Others expressed concern, particularly relating to whether appropriate uses could be sufficiently defined and enforced:

“I would be worried about the implication of non-aviation uses. Current uses are not a problem but if the site is improved or developed then it may get out of hand.”

Although concern was expressed, most participants recognised that requiring all airport buildings be used solely for aviation purposes may be restrictive:

“We would promote priority be given to aviation but would not want it to be so restrictive that non-aviation use be discounted.”

Whilst it was agreed that it would be preferable for all uses to be aviation-related, it was recognised that imposing this restriction would have implications for the airport business or may require more flexibility regarding its aviation role:

“This would require you to be more liberal with the role of the airport and restrictions of use to make this more viable.”

It was agreed that it would be important to ensure that the site is sustainable. With this in mind, the participants suggested that, similarly to the options regarding new development, the options for building uses be combined.

It was suggested that the policy should indicate a preference for aviation-related businesses but that any remaining capacity could be taken up by businesses that are ‘appropriate to the site and surrounding area’. Specific discussions related to limiting the size of business and capacity of units and placing restrictions on businesses that would have impacts on transport, noise and hours of operation.

2.4.1 Taking a more proactive approach

Participants were asked to consider whether a more proactive approach should be taken; encouraging the use of empty buildings on site by local businesses to benefit the local economy.

Building on their earlier comments, the participants again discussed the potential benefits of encouraging non-aviation use to support the viability of the Airport business:

“We need to allow diversity. There will be a limit to aviation use and it may mean that it is beneficial to use additional capacity for economic benefit – but within the constraints already discussed.”

It was generally agreed by all groups that, although aviation-related use would be preferred, it may be necessary to allow certain non-aviation use to support the sustainability of the site. It was indicated by some participants that supporting alternative uses (within the constraints of the

site and area) may be preferable to considering greater flexibility in the role of the airport and its permitted uses.

2.5 Future Use of the Airport Site

Even though it is likely that the airport will continue to operate into the future, it is necessary to determine what will happen to the site should this not be the case. Therefore the first part of Workshop Session three focussed on the possible options for the site in the future. Participants were asked to consider the following options and discuss their own suggestions:

1. Maintain the existing policy which is to ensure that the land and buildings are returned to agriculture or other beneficial use (a use appropriate to the Green Belt);
2. Allow the existing airport buildings to be retained for appropriate employment use; and
3. Allow the site to be used for other uses appropriate to a rural area such as leisure, recreation and tourism.

2.5.1 Returning to agriculture

Initially, the discussion focused on the feasibility of returning the site to agricultural use. It was recognised by some participants that areas on the site could be contaminated and may therefore be inappropriate for agricultural use:

“Is it realistic to have the land returned to agriculture? It’s premium land but wouldn’t it be contaminated?”

Other participants identified, however, that ‘other beneficial’ uses could incorporate a broader range of possible activities:

“Agriculture can be a broader spectrum of activities – it’s currently used for silage but could also be used for forestry or for bio-fuel crops.”

2.5.2 Employment use

Most participants also agreed that the area of the site that is currently developed may be appropriate for employment use in the future, particularly if new development (i.e. small businesses) had occurred as previously discussed. A small number of participants highlighted that it would be important to review the need for employment land at the time:

“I’m happy for this to occur if it’s feasible but what happens if there’s been no development or there’s no interest? Remediation in line with option one would cost considerable money?”

Referring back to previous discussions, the participants also expressed that any continuation of employment use should be in line with the limitations previously discussed.

2.5.3 Leisure uses

Whilst the participants expressed a preference for Option Three (appropriate rural use e.g. leisure and recreation), there was some discussion regarding the appropriateness of the site for this purpose:

“In principle this is OK but are there suitable conditions? You could provide an educational facility for children, a campsite or outward bound centre but the site is not naturally interesting so may need a lot of work.”

Other participants suggested that a leisure centre may be appropriate for the site but recognised that this may have negative impacts on the area:

“If the whole site is developed for leisure there would be a greater impact on nature and conservation.”

It was also agreed that providing a sufficiently detailed definition of ‘appropriate leisure, tourism and recreation uses’ would be difficult.

2.5.4 Alternative uses

It was agreed by all participants that the site should be separated into the currently developed area and the large grassed area (containing runways) and that each of these portions of the site be dealt with differently. It was suggested that, should the airport close in the future, the large grassed area be returned to agriculture or other beneficial use (as indicated by Option One) and the remaining developed area be allocated for employment use or other alternative development.

There were mixed feelings regarding the use of the developed portion of land. Some participants indicated that maintaining the site as a small-business/enterprise park would be an appropriate continuing use; however, other participants felt that provision of housing on this area would be more appropriate for the local community:

“We should build housing in the current area of development. Rather housing than an industrial site.”

“If there is a need for affordable housing or social housing then maybe this should be considered?”

All of the participants recognised that the potential uses of the site were numerous and that including definitions or specific restrictions would be difficult.

Whilst they agreed that defining the separation of the land into two portions would be appropriate, the participants agreed that they would not like to see the sites allocated specifically within the LDF at the current time.

2.5.5 Setting time limits

The participants were asked to consider whether a time limit should be specified within which any future changes should be made. Whilst the participants recognised the benefits of this in ensuring the site did not become derelict and could be put to beneficial use, there was confusion regarding what an appropriate timeframe would be:

“Depends on the economic climate at the time. It would be difficult to estimate what the limit should be.”

Whilst one group suggested a time period of around 5 years, there was not a general consensus regarding what would be appropriate.

2.6 Wartime Heritage

Along with considering the future use of the site, the participants were asked to consider how to deal with the wartime heritage features of the site. The Issues and Options document proposed the following three options:

1. Protect all existing wartime buildings and structures as heritage assets;
2. Allow some or all of the existing wartime buildings and structures to be demolished after they have been recorded; and
3. Seek the restoration/preservation of some of the existing wartime buildings and structures.

Referring back to earlier discussions, some participants felt that seeking to protect all of the wartime buildings and structures would place restrictions on the future use of the site:

“This would be highly restrictive to the future use of the site by businesses. It would greatly affect the ability to use the site effectively.”

It was suggested that, where possible, existing buildings should be ‘preserved through reuse’. However, it was recognised that this may not be possible, particularly for the buildings that seem beyond repair.

One group suggested that Option Two presented the most sensible options for the site; preventing ‘preservation for preservation’s sake’:

“There are plenty of other ‘better’ examples and this presents a sensible option. It wasn’t in operational command and was only a training field.”

Whilst the group agreed that there should be respect for the heritage on the site and that its history should be recorded and remembered, there was a consensus that the heritage was not of such significance that it should be protected.

Other participants indicated that they did not feel in a position to judge the value of the assets on the site:

“It’s difficult to comment on because we don’t know the number, the quality or the value.”

It was also recognised that the assets could have additional value for local wildlife, for example as bat roosts, and that further investigation may be required.

Option Three (to seek the preservation/restoration of some of the structures) was identified to be preferable by the majority of participants, although it was recognised that this might not be feasible for the majority of structures:

“Potentially preserve the control tower but other buildings are not of great value.”

“Could seek to retain the character of wartime buildings (including the pillboxes) that are outside of the main developed area.”

It was agreed that further investigation into what exists on the site would be required to enable an effective decision to be made.

2.6.1 Alternative suggestions

There was limited discussion regarding any alternative options. Whilst it was recognised that there was a need to make the site more welcoming and attractive, and that restoration and preservation of the wartime buildings would be ‘nice’, it was suggested that this would be unlikely to be feasible in practice.

Similarly, the participants considered the idea of a small museum or visitor centre to be a ‘nice idea’ but were unsure as to whether this would be popular or was needed in addition to the existing one at Cosford:

“It would be a duplication of Cosford. You could give the buildings to them to be rebuilt there...”

3. Key Messages and Conclusions

3.1 Continuing Current Role

There was general agreement amongst all participants that the current role of the airport was acceptable and that continuing to operate in a similar role would be reasonable in the future. Similarly, there was agreement that restrictions on the use of the airport by certain aircraft should continue. It was, however, identified that these restrictions should apply to noise, environmental impacts and, most importantly, capacity rather than to specific aircraft types. This would ensure that the most recent technologies could be taken into consideration (perhaps permitting newer jets) but that larger planes would continue to be restricted. Representatives of the local community also requested that restrictions on the hours of operation (limiting night use) should also continue.

3.2 ‘Gentle Evolution’

The participants identified potential problems in defining ‘expansion’ of the airport. It was recognised that expansion could relate to an expanded role, expansion of the site beyond the current boundaries or an expansion of facilities within the existing role and site boundaries. All of the participants stated that they would firmly resist any proposals to expand the role of the airport, particularly in relation to commercial flights (which would bring increased passenger numbers) and large jet aircraft. Similarly, there was resistance to any expansion beyond the existing boundaries of the site (such as the extension to the runway proposed in the recent application). It was, however, recognised that the sustainability of the Airport site was likely to require improved facilities and that it was important not to resist all expansion. It was therefore agreed that ‘gentle evolution’ of the site and its facilities over time (within the existing defined role and boundaries) would be acceptable.

3.3 Mindful of Site Sustainability

All participants recognised the need to be mindful of the future needs of the site in being viable as a business. With this in mind, most participants agreed that new development and permitting some non-aviation uses on site would be acceptable within appropriate limits.

3.3.1 Limited new development

All of the participants agreed that development that was required for the continued operation of the site as an airport was appropriate. They also agreed that, where possible, the preference should be for the reuse of existing buildings on site. However, it was identified that the current state of the buildings and their ongoing maintenance and environmental implications (e.g. for energy conservation) may mean that this is not always feasible. With this in mind, it was generally agreed by the workshop participants that, should new development be required, this would be acceptable within the currently developed portion of the site, with preference given to the buildings’ existing footprint.

3.3.2 Acceptance of non-aviation uses

Most participants agreed that it would be preferable to allow only aviation-related businesses on the site. It was, however, recognised that this may have implications for the viability of the site as this may not sufficiently fill the capacity of the buildings on site. It was therefore agreed by most participants that, if aviation uses can not be found, non-aviation uses should be allowed but that this should be within limits appropriate for the local area. Specific concerns related to limiting transport impacts, hours of operation and noise.

3.4 Dual Future Use

In considering the future use of the site should the airport close, it was generally agreed by all participants that the site should be separated into two distinct portions and that these areas be dealt with differently. The participants identified that the largely grassed area containing the runways should be returned to agriculture or other beneficial use in accordance with the existing policy. They suggested that the remaining developed portion of the site be allocated to development, although there was disagreement as to whether this should continue to be employment-related or housing.

3.5 Respect for Heritage

Although all participants considered the idea of protecting the wartime heritage on site to be a nice idea (and preferable if possible), there was broad recognition that this may not be feasible or appropriate for this site. A number of participants suggested that further investigation of the number, quality and value of the structures on site should be undertaken prior to making a final decision; however others suggested that preservation would be 'for preservation's sake'. It was generally agreed that it would be appropriate to preserve those buildings that can be preserved without restricting the development of the site (in line with the preferences regarding new development). It was also agreed that the heritage should be respected by recording all of the structures, even where preservation or re-use was not possible.