

<b>Item No</b>	<b>Application No. and Parish</b>	<b>8/13 Week Date</b>	<b>Proposal, Location and Applicant</b>
(2)	10/02005/COMIND	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2010	Removal of Condition 6 on planning permission reference No 08/01148/comind – time restriction of 10 years Land at former GAMA site, Greenham Common. Mr Arnold – Flying A Services.

**Recommendation Summary:**            **The Head of Planning and Countryside be authorised to REFUSE planning permission**

**Ward Member(s):**                        Councillors Swift Hook and Drummond

**Reason for Committee determination:**            Called in by Councillor Swift Hook as major site of importance in the District, and set site in context.

**Committee Site Visit:**                    2<sup>nd</sup> December 2010

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## 1. Site History

Application 05/02306/ful – Change of Use of land to external storage – site C – approved in June 2007.

Application 08/01148/comind – Section 73 application to vary Condition 6 of above permission to provide 10 years from date of implementation not the permission date. Approved - September 2008.

## 2. Publicity of Application

Site Notice displayed 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Expiry 4/11/10

## 3. Consultations and Representations

<b>Greenham Parish Council</b>	Objects to the application. Introduction of PPS5 is contrary to the scheme. Open ended permission for a commercial use on the scheduled monument is unacceptable. Example of Upper Heyford site is not appropriate. Application is premature also. GPC wish to see clarification of this application as well. Applicant was made aware of restrictions on site when they purchased the site. Applicant has not discussed scheme with GPC If pp is granted then gross proceeds should be directed to improve the historic asset.
<b>Highways</b>	No objections raised on the basis that since the impact on the highway network for a period of 10 years was acceptable, with the approved highway works, then a permanent use is equally acceptable. Conditional permission is recommended.
<b>Council Archaeologist</b>	Objects to the application. Not convinced by the conclusions reached by the Historic Buildings Assessment - the application site forms an important component of the wider GAMA site and is not subsidiary. All parts of site are of equal significance. The temporary nature of the permission should remain.
<b>Public Protection</b>	If the application is approved a time restriction on deliveries to and from the site should be put in place in order to reduce noise problems in the future.
<b>Defence Estates</b>	No safeguarding objections.
<b>Council Ecologist</b>	The storage of vehicles on site may still cause ecological problems – must be mitigated by conditions to be applied.
<b>English Heritage</b>	Strongly object to the application – a permanent consent to conserve the scheduled monument is not necessary and does not comply with the advice in PPS5. The scheme will cause substantial harm to the significance of the monument, which is unacceptable. This is not the only means by which the monument can be retained.
<b>Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission</b>	Object to the application. The open storage of cars on the site would be highly detrimental to the setting of the monument and the enjoyment of users of the Common. Further English Heritage have objected to a permanent use. Proximity to SSSIs may be harmful as well.

<b>Natural England</b>	The application has the potential to have an adverse impact upon the local SSSI so past conditions must be applied. NE would object if the access road to the site were widened at all.
<b>Hampshire County Council</b>	Object on the basis that the unlimited time consent will harm the safety and free flow of traffic on the A339 and the B4640.
<b>Correspondence</b>	2 letters of objection. Original permissions were mistakes and should not be compounded by granting this application. Detrimental impact on highway network and the ecology and amenity of the Common, in particular Brackenhurst Lane No evidence that the museum will ever be built

#### **4. Policy Considerations**

PPS1, PPS5, PPS9. PPG13.  
West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991 to 2006 Saved Policies 2007.  
Policies OVS2, ENV9, ENV18, ENV38.

#### **5. Description of Development**

- 5.1 The application site lies within the former cruise missile shelter complex run by the USAF during the Cold War period. It was closed in the mid 1990s and scheduled by English Heritage in 2003 - Monument No. 1376616. The site lies immediately to the west of New Greenham Park one of the principal employment zones in the District. It also lies immediately to the south of the open area of Greenham Common.
- 5.2 The application site lies immediately to the south of the main silo complex which housed the missiles. It presently comprises an open area of hardstanding with a number of buildings present upon it. The site is approximately 340m in width [west/east axis] and 240m in depth [north/ south axis] at its maximum point. It is proposed that on this site, the permanent storage of cars is permitted, for the applicants Flying A Services, who presently own the site. Access would be derived via Brackenhurst Lane to the south of the site, leading onto the A339.
- 5.3 As an integral component of the scheme, present conditions of the current planning permission, which is extant until 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011, ensures that highway works are undertaken before any commencement of car storage on site can begin. For clarity, under permission number 08/01148/comind, Condition 6 states that any permission for car storage, once implemented, may not exceed a period of 10 years. This application seeks to remove this Condition entirely, via the Section 73 mechanism, so if the Committee were to approve the application the applicant would then obtain a permanent permission for car storage on the site, once implemented.

#### **6. Consideration of the Proposal**

- 6.1 The application will be considered under the following heading.

Impact on Scheduled Monument and need for the facility to be permanent.

## **Applicant's case**

- 6.1.1 The applicant has submitted a Historic Buildings Assessment [HBA] in order to support their case for permanent storage of cars on site E. This report is very comprehensive and indeed thorough in its overall analysis of the history of the GAMA site to the present day, stating why it has been scheduled for protection by English Heritage, that is, in their words, GAMA is a well preserved and dramatic monument to the latter stages of the Cold War, but since its scheduling in 2003, the applicants have not been successful in persuading the local planning authority to agree a long term sustainable future for the site, which will not only provide a reasonable commercial income for the applicants, but also secure the preservation and future public security of the whole site. Their view is that the only manner in which GAMA can be effectively preserved is through a commercial use on the site, given the very high maintenance costs of the site, particularly in ensuring security from the general public. Further the hard standings and other buildings on site require on going maintenance and repairs to the fences in particular. The writer also makes the point that owners of scheduled monuments are only obliged to not harm the site, but are not required to maintain it.
- 6.1.2 Given the above, and the poor access to the site, it has not been possible to successfully market the site, due to the 10 year planning permission, coinciding with the expensive highway infrastructure works which are required to be undertaken at the site access, in order to accommodate the higher vehicle flows. Indeed Condition 3 of the original s73 permission 08/01148/comind notes the highway works which must be constructed before any cars are stored on site. Apparently these costs may be in the order of approximately £250,000 to complete, or more. The report concludes that because the site is modern, de facto a modern commercial use to support its future is appropriate in the context of PPS5 policy, and indeed car storage is a reversible use on the site. The new use would only have limited indirect impacts on the monument, but its future presence and significance would be preserved for posterity. The storage of cars on site C, being behind the main silo site when viewed from the Common, will not harm the setting of that complex to an unacceptable degree, in their view.
- 6.1.2 Members will note after having read the consultee responses above that both the Councils Archaeologist and English Heritage are maintaining strong objections to the application. The agents for the applicant have prepared further information which they say makes these objections unjustified. They say that the test should be to consider the visual and physical impacts which will arise should the monument not be maintained in its current "good" state which is the future alternative of no economic use on the site, i.e. the fences, bunkers and hard standings will all gradually decline into a poor state of disrepair, which cannot be the purpose of PPS5 advice. GAMA must have a new purpose given the demise of its original purpose, it is argued, which will need to be a new civilian use. Car storage on site would be a logical progression, since this in itself requires security through fencing, and the open areas are ideal for such a land use. The use would provide very little alterations to the monument and would be reversible as already noted.

## English Heritage Advice

- 6.2.1 On the other hand, Council planning officers have received cogent and clear advice from not only the Council's Archaeologist, but more especially English Heritage [EH] that the application should be rejected. The basis for their concerns are noted below.
- 6.2.2 To consider the EH response first. The GAMA site is considered to be one of the key emblematic monuments in Britain of the Cold War. As such its future protection is paramount. When sold on the open market all potential purchasers were told that permanent car storage would not be acceptable. Flying A Services did however buy the site with the intention of setting up a museum on site open to the public. However, the ongoing running costs of the site were greater than anticipated. In recognition of this EH did not object to a 10 year use of the site for storage of cars, and hence, despite officers recommendations to refuse, the principal permission was granted in 2007. [05/02306].
- 6.2.3 EH however maintain that an indefinite use on site would cause substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset. This would not be in accord with advice in PPS5, notwithstanding the applicant's case that the site will otherwise fall into disrepair.
- 6.2.4 The HBA report appears to subscribe a lower level of importance to the hardstanding areas upon which area C is sited, and so this better makes the case for storage. EH do not accept this given that the whole of the GAMA site was designated as a "complex", and thus all components of it are of equal importance whether providing a visual setting or not. Indeed EH go onto state that the large areas of hardstanding had a function as highly secure storage for military vehicles, which the present application would substantially detract from, i.e. it would materially diminish the illustrative historic value of the monument and its wider setting. EH also specifically comment upon the visual impact which officers are equally concerned about, that is, the wider visual impacts of car storage on the Common and its surroundings to which the public have general access at present. It is noted that under the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act of 2002, the public have access, inter alia, around the whole perimeter of the site where the views into the site can be gained.
- 6.2.5 Furthermore EH point out that views within the monument itself, to which there is currently no public access, remain of importance, under PPS5 advice and the legislation. Next EH note that the east gate into the site was the Green Gate the subject of substantial peace protest camps in the 1980s. As such the communal value of retaining views into the complex, which would be disturbed by the car storage, is unacceptable, if on a permanent basis. It should be noted that Area C adjoins the Green Gate access. EH [and officers] then consider the policy position in regard to PPS5 advice. Policy HE9. 2 in PPS5 sets out a range of criteria which must be met, before applications causing substantial harm to a monument might be allowed in principle. It is not accepted that any of these criteria are satisfied, that is, car storage may not be the **sole** manner in which the future of the site might be secured – this could be through a charitable organisation, or indeed a public body [such as the Council] which has not been explored to any great degree. Further, the cost of the potential museum at £2 million appears to be prohibitive in relation to the expected income stream from

the new use, especially alongside the infrastructure improvements to the roads and the ongoing maintenance costs being taken into account in addition, that is, there is no certainty that if the application is approved the museum as a significant public benefit will automatically arise.

## **Council Archaeologist**

6.3.1 The Council's Archaeologist has largely re-iterated the above advice of English Heritage in his response. He is firmly recommending that the application be rejected. He is particularly concerned that the applicants report has not considered the site holistically, subjugating the importance of some parts of the site to others. He is also most concerned about the visual impact issues for the public, with which your officers agree. Finally he notes some helpful quotes from PPS5 which are worth revisiting here – the overarching aim of PPS5 is “that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations”. It is also noted that “substantial harm to or loss of scheduled monuments ...should be wholly exceptional”.

## **7. Conclusion**

7.1 The applicants have set out a reasonably thorough case in support of their application, however their case appears to rest on the basic premise that having purchased the site, it is an ongoing financial liability, and there is no prospect of a commercial profit to be made at present. Hence the need for unlimited time for car storage on the Site C. Whilst the Council may have some sympathy with this position, the protection and conservation of a nationally important scheduled monument must not be compromised at the expense of private interests, even where such interests may, to a partial extent, coincide. This is a basic planning principle espoused within PPS1 and PPS5. Given the very serious concerns of the objectors in this case, with which your officers wholly agree, the application cannot be supported.

7.2 Having taken account of all the relevant policy and other material considerations, including the prospect of the museum should the application be approved, having regard to the strong reasons to object to the proposal, the application is considered to be unacceptable and should be refused.

## **8. Full Recommendation**

8.1 The Head of Planning and Countryside Services be authorised to **REFUSE** the application for the following reason:-

The GAMA site comprises a scheduled monument of national significance in relation to the cold war era. It is also located adjacent to the Greenham and Crookham Commons which is a substantial countryside and open recreational asset for the District and its population. The open storage of cars on site C on a permanent basis would not only be harmful to the understanding and visual setting of the monument, to its overall serious detriment, but also to the setting of the adjacent common and its users again to the detriment of the overall enjoyment of that countryside asset. Accordingly the application is clearly contrary to the advice in PPS5 and policy ENV38 in the West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991 to 2006 Saved Policies 2007 and so should be rejected. DC