

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Planning Committee held in The Epic Centre, Lincolnshire Showground, Lincoln LN2 2NA on 5 July 2023 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Matthew Boles (Chairman)
Councillor Jim Snee (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Emma Bailey
Councillor John Barrett
Councillor David Dobbie
Councillor Ian Fleetwood
Councillor Sabastian Hague
Councillor Peter Morris
Councillor Tom Smith
Councillor Paul Swift

In Attendance:

Sally Grindrod-Smith	Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Russell Clarkson	Development Management Team Manager
Martha Rees	Legal Advisor
Danielle Peck	Senior Development Management Officer
Chris Bradley	Conservation Officer
Julie Heath	Communications Manager
Ele Snow	Senior Democratic and Civic Officer
Andrew Warnes	Democratic and Civic Officer

Also In Attendance: 120 Members of the Public.

Apologies: Councillor Baptiste Velan

Membership: Councillor Paul Swift substituted for Councillor Baptiste Velan.

9 CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

The Chairman advised that the purpose of this meeting was to determine the application for listed building consent as detailed in the Officer's report (and referred to in the following Minute). Members were not present to discuss other plans or arrangements for the site at Scampton. Those who had registered to speak had been advised of the need to remain focused on the details of the application before the Committee, and should it become apparent that any speaker was diverting from the purpose of this meeting, they would be asked to return to the application in question. If any such comments continued to be made which were unrelated to the application, the person speaking would be requested to make

way for the next registered speaker.

Likewise, all those involved in the meeting had been advised that it would not be acceptable for the name of Wing Commander Guy Gibson's dog to be used. Should anyone present choose to name the dog, they would be requested to step down from speaking immediately.

The meeting this evening was taking place at the Epic Centre in order to ensure that the level of public interest could be accommodated. It was important that the Committee made a fully informed decision on this (and for that matter) any application put before it. It was indicated that should there be any kind of disturbance, within this venue or outside of it, that might detract from the Committee's ability to perform its duties or interfered with the decision-making process, the meeting would be adjourned and members of the public asked to leave the hall.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tom Smith referred to his employment by Sir Edward Leigh MP and the fact that he had family who had served at RAF Scampton. However he had not discussed this matter in any way, shape or form with anybody and had come to this meeting with a completely open mind.

Councillor Ian Fleetwood referred to his past membership of the RAF Scampton Working Group in the previous Council but had come to this meeting with a completely open mind and would base his decision on the information presented this evening.

Councillor Sabastian Hague indicated that he had previously been a member of the RAF but that this would not in any way influence his decision which would be based on the information presented this evening.

11 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SCHEME FOR THIS MEETING

The Chairman then introduced the next item, which was an amended public participation scheme, following his decision, that was in place for this meeting only.

With no comment, the amended Public Participation Scheme was **NOTED**.

12 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT APPLICATION FOR DETERMINATION - 146711, HANGER 2 RAF SCAMPTON, LINCOLN, LINCOLNSHIRE LN1 2ST

The Chairman invited the Planning Officer to introduce the report on application no. 146711 for Listed Building Consent to remove the railings, excavate and remove the grave marker and any zooarchaeological material for relocation. This was the site of the grave of the late Wing Commander Guy Gibson's pet dog.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the public participation scheme had been extended for this meeting only, given the widespread public interest and advised that all those registered to speak had been informed about the process.

Hangar 2 had been the base of the then newly formed 617 Squadron, who led by the late Wing Commander, had undertaken the raids on the Ruhr dams in 1943 under the code name "Operation Chastise", now commonly referred to as the "Dambusters' Raid".

The application had been brought before the Committee for determination having regard to the significant public interest expressed in this particular application. The Planning Officer proceeded to report on the nature and extent of the application. The Planning Officer indicated that two further objections had been received since the publication of the report – one from a Councillor and the other from a member of the public. They had been made available on the Council's web site. Neither objection however raised anything new and did not affect the recommendation contained in the written report circulated to Members of the Committee. The report summarised all of the objections received in relation to this application. Members were also advised that references to Section 54 (a) of the Town and Country Planning Act should be replaced by Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The report set out a detailed history of the site and the historical importance of the site and the activities carried out from the base during the second world war.

It was considered by the Officers that the proposed removal and relocation of the grave site would lead to substantial harm, through its historic significance no longer being linked to Hangar 2 and the late Wing Commander Guy Gibson's office. Substantial harm would also be caused to the setting and significance of the principal listed buildings, - these being the Grade II Listed Hangars, and specifically Hangar 2 containing the late Wing Commander's office, as well as causing harm to the heritage value of RAF Scampton as a whole.

The Chairman then invited the first of the public speakers to address the Committee, namely Parish Councillor Mr Tony Somerville of Scampton Parish Council who spoke along the following lines:-

"The applicant, on behalf of the MOD and the RAF, recently assured representatives of all levels of local council, at numerous community engagement meetings, that RAF Scampton's unique and nationally important heritage would be preserved. This memorial and grave is an incredibly important part of our heritage, and it is essential that it remains at RAF Scampton to provide a focus for the future development of a Heritage Centre. To date, 5000 supporters have signed the change.org petition opposing this proposal. Additionally, in accordance with section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, paragraphs 198 and 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy S75 of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, the planning authority should not approve the proposed development".

The Chairman thanked Mr Somerville for his comments and then invited the objectors who had registered their wish to address the Committee. The first to address the Committee was Mr Terry Rumble.

Mr Rumble asserted that to remove the zoological remains would significantly harm the integrity of the remains. The statement progressed to state that relocating the remains would be morally wrong and highly disrespectful to the wartime veterans whose ashes had been scattered in the vicinity of the grave. No attention had been paid to the legislation relating to the exhumation of animal remains. The speaker also stated that to remove the remains of

Guy Gibson's dog, would be a disrespect to the memory of those who lost their lives in "Operation Chastise", and to the history and heritage of Lincolnshire and Bomber Command, alongside the wish for the dog to be buried at the site.

The Chairman thanked Mr Rumble for his statement and invited Alek Yerbury to address the Committee. The speaker stated that this grave was part of the famous Dambusters raid and should not be tampered with, and emphasised the importance of Guy Gibson's contribution to the actions of the British Royal Air Force in the Second World War. The speaker stated that it was a crime against the memory of the late Wing Commander Guy Gibson. The speaker emphasised RAF Scampton had played a huge role in the course of WWII and had important historical significance because of this. The dog's remains was known throughout the political world, and spoke about a separate event organised in nearby Lincoln.

The Chairman thanked Mr Yerbury for his contribution and then invited Mr Peter Hewitt of Scampton Holdings to address the Committee. Mr Hewitt drew attention to the historical importance of the site and the need to protect it for future generations. The site was extremely important within the context of promoting the economic wellbeing of Lincolnshire and therefore the Listed Building consent should be refused. The speaker also stated that the dog was the mascot of that particular group of men forming 617 squadron at that time in history. It had no connection with RAF Marham.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hewitt for his contribution and then invited Mr Keith Batty, Chairman of the Scampton Heritage Group to address the Committee. The Heritage Group had submitted representations along the following lines, concerning which Mr Batty emphasised specific points:-

"The application form submitted by the proposer describes the affected site as the grave of Wing Commander Guy Gibson situated immediately in front of Hangar 2 on the former operational 'water front' of the airfield". It does not refer to Wing Commander Gibson's dog. Wing Commander Gibson's body parts are interred in the municipal cemetery at Steenburgen in the Netherlands.

The single National Heritage List entry 1391594 includes 'HANGARS 1-4 (C-TYPE HANGARS)' at the former RAF Scampton. The dog's grave is specifically cited as being within the curtilage of Hanger 2 by the proposer and is recognised as such by WLDC. Hence, even if the application was meant to reference Gibson's dog's grave, the assertion on the proposer's application that the works do not include alterations to a listed building is incorrect and grossly misleading. Indeed any proposal to relocate the grave and remains would constitute a removal of part of a listed building.

If removed from the Scampton site, Heritage Listing 1391594 would become significantly inaccurate. According to Heritage England, the removal of a significant part of a listed entity constitutes a "Major Alteration."

Although we accept that both are branches of the UK Ministry of Defence, we understand that management of the Scampton site has now passed from the Royal Air Force (RAF) to the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO). We wish to question whether the DIO has given consent for an RAF officer to submit the proposal to WLDC and whether this is permissible under Planning regulations. We further question whether the undertakings given in the Certificate of Ownership section can possibly be correct in these circumstances.

Notwithstanding that the application is to remove Gibson's grave and not his dog's, the Trustees of Scampton Heritage Group dispute with the utmost vigour some of the misleading assertions made in the proposer's "Heritage Statement". Scampton Heritage Group is a charity (Charity Number 1193701) formed by the civilian volunteers who curated and provided guided tours of the Heritage Centre in Hangar 2 at Scampton. The RAF has done virtually nothing to protect the grave in the last two decades. It is better protected by the new owners and the same volunteers who have so lovingly tended it hitherto.

Rather than detracting from the heroism of the personnel who bravely served on 617 Squadron 80 years ago, it enables links to be made between their acts of heroism and the everyday relationships that are as much a part of the story. In no way has the dog's grave ever detracted from the poignancy of the heroism and sacrifice.

It is the explicitly stated objective of our Charity, and that of the likely future owners, to maximise the access of the public to this important heritage site and the stories that underly its past. Although visits have been permitted by the RAF, this has been by prior arrangement and subject to lengthy security checks and narrow visit windows. RAF Marham is the home of the RAF's F35 force and will be subject to even greater security restrictions than the former RAF Scampton. This will further restrict access to this important historical artefact and may even exclude members of the public. Under civilian ownership, the heritage trails at RAF Scampton will vastly improve access to the public and help us all meet our educational aspirations for the site. The dog's grave needs to stay at Scampton to be properly safeguarded and to remain available for public viewing.

The Heritage case makes no mention of the ashes of ten airmen that have also been interred on the site. Over a period of several years, relatives of deceased contemporaries of 617 Squadron personnel have requested the RAF's permission to have their loved one's ashes interred at the unofficial mascot's grave within spiritual sight of the squadron offices that overlook it. Volunteer civilian tour guides have overseen the interments and comforted the relatives.

We consider the exhumation of the remains of a dead dog macabre in the extreme. Moreover, on top of the dog are the ashes of ten airmen who served on 617 Squadron, the exhumation of the dogs remains is offensive to public decency and completely unacceptable.

The late Wing Commander Gibson's dog was his own personal pet. It was a dark brown labrador (not black as the current headstone erroneously states) and was not a squadron mascot. Indeed, although the late Guy Gibson's personal bravery is beyond question, both he and his dog were not well-liked by Squadron personnel. The key link is between the dog and his master, Guy Gibson, and not between the dog and the modern 617 Squadron.

Gibson was never based at RAF Marham, nor was his dog. Moreover, 617 Squadron has been based at RAF Coningsby, RAF Binbrook (briefly) and RAF Lossiemouth as well RAF Marham and has had a least three intervals (1955-58; 1981-1983 and 2014-2018) in which it was disbanded.

The remaining historical evidence presented in the proposer's Heritage Case is also seriously flawed. The Heritage Case presents First World War Plans, Cold War Plans and

Second World War Plans showing concrete/ tarmac runways but Gibson and his dog were only present for a few months in 1943. It was only after 617 Squadron left Scampton in 1943 that hard runways were constructed. The Dams' raid was trained for, and launched from, a grass airfield and Gibson's dog was buried in the curtilage of Hangar 2 on the edge of that grass airfield. 617 Squadron did return in the 1950's but Gibson was killed in 1944 and had no direct association with the Squadron after 1943.

Many people worked hard to ensure that the Central Lincolnshire Plan contained robust protection for RAF Scampton's heritage, developing the mechanism of protection through planning control agreed through extensive consultation. We were aware that disposal, not preservation, was the RAF's primary aim. Against this backdrop, it is unacceptably disappointing that RAF Heritage Branch are the ones proposing destruction that that protection was designed to prevent. In their current location, the "Gibson's office; grave and squadron HQ triptych" has a strong presumption in favour of heritage conservation in the Central Lincolnshire Plan and an equally strong focus on access by the public to a key part of their heritage. The people of Lincolnshire have a long history of support for the personnel of the RAF and have shown that they will not baulk at even the threat of thermonuclear annihilation.

We note that RAF Heritage Branch is described as "... a small department within the RAF with the responsibility of providing the Air Staff, the wider RAF and MOD, and other government departments with RAF related historical support on operational and other matters". (see Air Historical Branch | Royal Air Force (mod.uk)). The proposal submitted by the RAF's Air Historical Branch reaches far beyond their remit".

The Chairman thanked Mr Batty for his contribution and invited Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway, a neighbouring Ward Member, to address the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Brockway emphasised that the removal of the dog's remains was tantamount to the destruction of a national monument which would be lost to future generations. The grave was also a site on which former RAF servicemen's ashes had been scattered and the removal of the dog's grave would result in the desecration of a site on which human remains had been laid to rest.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mrs Brockway for her contribution and invited Councillor Mr Roger Patterson, Ward Member for Scampton to address the Committee. Councillor Patterson affirmed the importance of the site as part of the nation's wartime history. The grave was intrinsic to the Dambusters' story and its removal was tantamount to cultural vandalism. In urging the Committee to refuse the application, Councillor Patterson commended the Planning Officers on the comprehensive report prepared for the Committee's consideration.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Patterson for his contribution and then invited Sir Edward Leigh MP to address the Committee. Sir Edward Stated that he fully supported the sentiments expressed by previous speakers and was attending this meeting to demonstrate his support for the views of the local community. He was and continued to be disappointed at the Government's handling of the future of this historic site and had made these views known to relevant Government Ministers. It was his strong belief that the country should continue to honour the memories of the brave young men who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of their country by preserving the site in its entirety for future generations. He

urged the Committee to reject the application.

The Chairman thanked Sir Edward for his contribution and invited the planning Officer to comment on the representations that had been made. It was noted that reference had been made by some of the speakers to particular legislation and the Planning Officer reminded Members that the application should only be considered within the context of the legislation relating to Listed Buildings. The Committee was asked to concur with the Officers recommendation that the application should be refused for the reasons set out in the report.

The Chairman then opened up the application for debate by the Committee. Councillor Fleetwood having indicated his support for the report recommendation, nevertheless considered that perhaps a site visit should be undertaken prior to the Committee making a final decision.

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being put to the Committee, the motion for a site visit was, by a majority vote, was **LOST**.

Members then proceeded to debate the report before the Committee. A number of Members spoke in favour of the recommendation contained in the report, concurring in the main with the views already expressed by the public speakers and the sentiments expressed within the officers' report. Members made numerous comments, which included the importance of the grave, the history behind it, and the events that led to the application being put in the first place.

Members also echoed comments from the public speakers, including the issue of the scattered human remains on the site, the importance of remembering local history, and the hypothetical issue of the 617 Squadron moving again. In a related query, officers explained that the change for the previous plaque was filled correctly, and that there was no requirement to have an application to do so.

A Member requested and proposed that a recorded vote be taken place, with this being seconded, to accept the Officer's recommendation for refusal.

Votes were cast in the following manners: -

For:- Councillors Bailey, Barrett, Boles, Dobbie, Fleetwood, Hague, Morris, Smith, Snee, Swift (10)

Against:- None (0)

Abstain:- None (0)

It was duly proposed and seconded that the application be unanimously **REFUSED** for the following reasons and that a recorded vote be taken:-

1. The proposal, comprising of the removal and relocation of the grave of the Wing Commander Guy Gibson's black Labrador would wholly remove the heritage value of this Grade II curtilage listed grave site, thus not preserving its special historical interest. Substantial harm would also be caused to the setting and significance of the principal listed buildings, being the Grade II Listed Hangars, specifically Hangar 2

containing Guy Gibson's Office as well as causing harm the heritage value of RAF Scampton as a whole. There are no identified public benefits that would outweigh the level of substantial harm that would arise from the proposals.

2. Having given special regard to the desirability of preserving the building its setting and features of historic interest in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the provisions of paragraphs 198, 199, 200, 201 and 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021), it is determined that listed building consent is refused.

The meeting concluded at 7.38 pm.

Chairman