

# MILITARY BASE CLOSURES IN RURAL AREAS: BEST PRACTICE & CAUTIONARY TALES

## PREPARED FOR THE RAF BOULMER 2012 GROUP

### FINAL REPORT

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## **Executive Summary**

Since 1990, there has been a reduction in requirements for the Defence Estate, leading to the closure of large numbers of military bases across the UK as part of steps to reduce operational capacity. Although some bases have been held as strategic reserve sites, in most cases alternative uses have been sought in order to ensure a continued contribution to the local economy. Plans to close RAF Boulmer and the transfer of facilities to RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire were announced in July 2004. The proposed phased closure of the base will lead to a full decommissioning of the site by 2012. In December 2005, the MoD announced that was to review the situation again in the light of high relocation costs and a final decision is still beckoning.

This report is intended to offer guidance to the Boulmer 2012 group on how to approach the closure and reuse of the base based on a review of current Government policy and evidence of good and bad practice from other examples of military withdrawal. Generally speaking there is not a `one size fits all` to re-use and redevelopment of a military base, with potential options often limited by the prevailing infrastructure and services, local planning policy, conservation and other locational factors.

In disposing of military base, the MOD has to work within Treasury Guidelines which stipulate that:

- Surplus property be disposed on the open market by tender or auction and be sold at the highest achievable price.
- It should be possible to dispose of properties satisfactorily within three years of the closure announcement, although longer periods may be acceptable in certain circumstances.
- Residential accommodation owned by the MoD should be disposed of with 6 months of becoming vacant. That said, the bulk of MoD housing was sold to Annington Properties in 1996.

The disposal of military bases is also subject to the Crichel Down Rules which state that sites bought under compulsion should be offered back to the previous owner at the current value of the sites previous use. However, this is provided that the land has not been materially changed and regard is also given to the cost of restoring it to its original use.

In identifying example of good and bad practice, the InfoNet undertook a considerable literature review and interviewed local authority officers in respect of more recent and current base closures. From the review it is clear that not all bases have the potential to be transformed into high quality business parks, airports or holiday villages, placing pressure on local partnerships to seek pragmatic solutions that will ensure a contribution towards economic development. Furthermore, partners may also need to accept at an early stage that not all of the site will necessarily be re-used.

The MoD has come under fire in the past for the time it takes to bring military sites to the market. There are procedures in place to ensure that the base is surplus to requirements and that there are no alternative uses from other military budget holders. This has created uncertainty for local partnerships in being able to progress the disposal process and does little to fill potential purchasers with confidence. The first priority for the Boulmer 2012 Group should therefore be to seek a **clear statement from the MoD** regarding closure proposals and to **press the MoD for an early decision**. The group needs to pressure the MoD to ensure that Boulmer is not designated as a **Strategic Reserve Site**, as this could result in the base standing vacant and deteriorating over time, reducing the value and marketability of the site. RAF West Raynham was vacated by the Royal Air Force in September 1994 and was held by the MoD as a Strategic Reserve site until 2004, at which point it was declared as surplus to future defence requirements and disposal proceedings were started. Over the previous 10 years, the buildings and services on the site have suffered deterioration, which could affect their attractiveness to potential investors or developers or limit their re-use options.

It is important at an early stage to **determine ownership** of the base and in particular whether previous owners should be offered first refusal for the base under the **Crichel Down Rules**. Following the resolution of land ownership, the next priority is the **formulation of a formal/informal partnership** bringing together stakeholders and individuals concerned with the closure. Whilst rules for disposal do not require the MoD or the local planning authority to have any formal consultation with local communities, it is strongly recommended that the working group **encourage community participation** and input by **sharing with them a number of pre-prepared re-use/redevelopment options**.

Evidence suggests that the most successful base conversions have had **strong local authority involvement** in the process, either by gaining a direct interest in the site (by

purchasing the base or entering into a **joint venture** with a developer or the MoD) or by helping to **develop the planning or development brief** for the site, outlining preferred reuse options. The ability of the local (planning) authorities to influence the reuse and redevelopment of military bases through regulatory land powers is limited, as the constituent parts of the each base can legally be used for activities similar to those carried out while in defence use. Nevertheless, the formulation of a planning brief does provide the opportunity for the district and county councils to help shape future development on the site. It is essential that a **planning framework is developed at the earliest opportunity with the MoD**, possibly with input from the RDA and Government Regional Office. If a planning framework is not developed within a reasonable time frame, the MoD will be free to place the base on the open market and sell it for uses stipulated in the local plan or that reflect activities that were carried out while in defence use.

Given the nature of military activities decontamination is an issue for most MoD sites. The legal responsibility of the MoD is dependent on the nature of contamination and clean up is generally linked to health and safety or environmental concerns, normally involving the removal of ordnance, chemical agents and radioactive materials. **Detailed assessments of contamination** are costly but are essential to a reuse strategy. The time required to complete this work often means that it should be **undertaken in parallel to a review of reuse options** and the results of the two streams of work can then be integrated later. In some cases the cost of clean up may outweigh viable reuse options and the MoD may decide to retain the site.

The transfer of housing stock to private ownership has been a feature of many base closures and has impacted on the prospects for development or re-use of some sites. The existence of housing estates in sparsely populated rural locations has made former bases more attractive as centres of economic activity. However, the creation of new communities has not been without problems. In particular, the **standard of services and other infrastructure** on military bases are not dictated by the local Councils and therefore when this stock is released many utilities must be upgraded to meet modern day statutory requirements. Similarly, given the rural location of military bases, the standard, size and number of roads available for **accessing** the site have also proven problematic and unable to cope with the increase in traffic from a newly formed community. Again, to bring roads up to the standard where the local council would adopt them would require substantial amounts of money. When housing at **RAF Binbrook** was sold the basic services had not

been adopted and resulted in the residents having to pay heavily to maintain them. The Council stepped in to help remove this burden and spent a quarter of a million pounds upgrading the road to an adoptable standard. However, this removed money that could have been spent converting other parts of the base. Binbrook is also a good example of how floating a large number of properties on the market at one time can have adverse consequences. The developer at Binbrook (now renamed Brookenby) bought the entire site and resold 120 of the 200 houses to private owners and 80 to a private landlord. By selling the housing stock quickly and at much less than their market value, they attracted people from all over the country who needed cheap housing, but who had few social contacts in the local area. Many of the occupiers struggled to come to terms with rural life: poor accessibility, low car ownership, few services available on site and poor public transport services.

As a means of identifying potential re-use or re-development opportunities for military bases, Network Demilitarised has developed the **Commercial Audit Methodology**, which takes into consideration local economic conditions, planning policy, conservation measures and other designations, facilities and infrastructure and local community preferences. Testing of the options will help to identify the potential for the site to be **purchased by a single user**; developed through a public/private sector **joint venture**; or whether local partners need to **influence as far as possible the planning or development brief** for the base.

Evidence has also shown that delivering a comprehensive re-use or re-development strategy for Boulmer will not be achieved over night and is a **long term process**. It is recommended that **multiple use solutions** for the base be developed around a **phased re-use strategy**. Whilst there are benefits to be had from introducing **short term land uses** as a means of generating income and helping to maintain the base, interim uses have been known to undermine local commitment to comprehensive reuse.

Overall, without knowing what the future holds for Boulmer from a military perspective and without having discussed potential re-use options for the base in the light of military withdrawal, it is difficult to offer hard and fast recommendations for the disposal process. Nevertheless, this report has gone some way to identifying some of the pitfalls experienced elsewhere in the Country and in flagging up the broad issues that need to be borne in mind in developing and implementing a reuse strategy for the base.

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.0.1 Rapid political changes in recent years have led to widespread reductions in military spending, not just in the UK, but across Europe and the USA. Since 1990 a number of policy initiatives have been undertaken by the Central Government to review defence requirements, including:

- Options for Change (1990)
- Defence White Paper (1993)
- Front Line First (1994) (a defence costs study)
- Strategic Defence Review (1998)

1.0.2 These reviews have inevitably led to a reduction in requirements for the defence estate, resulting in the closure of many military sites across the UK. This has led to a large number of defence establishments seeking alternative uses over the past 15 years, a trend that is expected to continue in the future. The new Defence Estate Strategy 2006<sup>1</sup> outlines the need for a UK defence estate that is of the right size to meet current military needs and outlines a future estate with fewer larger sites in the UK and overseas in appropriate locations and making the best use of available resources.

1.0.3 The phased closure of the base at RAF Boulmer was announced by the Ministry of Defence in July 2004, culminating in full decommissioning by 2012. RAF Boulmer is located near the village of Longhoughton in Alnwick District and has a major impact on the surrounding economy and communities. An in depth assessment<sup>2</sup> of the consequences of the closure that was completed in 2004 found that it would cause severe and sustained damage to this relatively isolated, small and fragile local economy, including:

- The loss of 800 jobs, including 184 civilian posts.
- The loss of £18 million of local income in salaries
- The loss of £1 million per annum maintenance budget of which the overwhelming majority is understood to be locally spent.

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<sup>1</sup> In Trust and On Trust (2006)

<sup>2</sup> *The Potential Closure of RAF Boulmer: A First Review of the Local Impacts*, C.U.R.D.S (2004)

- The loss of £0.5 million capital expenditure budget of which a significant proportion is spent on the wages of locally based construction workers.
- Shrinkage in the local economy, with the potential loss of an estimated 195 further jobs.

1.0.4 The Boulmer 2012 group is tasked with preparing a response to the proposed closure of RAF Boulmer in the Alnwick District of Northumberland. They have commissioned the InfoNet to undertake a review of other military base closures in the UK with a view to identifying examples of good and bad practice in MoD withdrawal from rural areas. In particular, the InfoNet has been asked to comment on the approach adopted in other regions with regard to the following factors of base closure:

- Timing of closure and the MoD disposal process
- Local management of the closure process
- Dealing with decontamination, demolition, sub-standard infrastructure and services
- Planning opportunities and constraints
- Housing stock disposal
- Identifying viable future uses for the site utilising existing buildings and available development land
- Community development / engagement

1.0.5 Examination of the actions taken in comparable rural areas and the consequences of these actions are essential to inform the response to the forthcoming MoD withdrawal from Boulmer, and to minimise the negative impact on local economies and communities.

**Section 2** of the report outlines the **methodology** adopted by InfoNet in delivering this best practice review.

**Section 3** provides an **overview of RAF Boulmer** in terms of size, buildings, other facilities and housing; and draws comparisons with the selected case study base closures, highlighting why these were selected for comparative purposes.

**Section 4** provides an **overview of Government policy** relating to base closure and the disposal of surplus land and buildings.

**Section 5** considers all aspects of base closure and by drawing on experiences from the InfoNet case studies and other identified base closures from the literary review, highlights examples of **good and bad practice**.

**Section 6:** Identifies a best practice approach to managing the potential phased closure of RAF Boulmer.



## **2.0 Methodology**

### **Phase 1: Desk-based research**

2.0.1 Given the spate of closures that have happened in the UK over the past 25 years, there is an abundance of publicly available literature on the re-use and redevelopment of former military sites. This has been accompanied by disposal policy and guidance from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Defence Estates (DE) and Network Demilitarised (ND)<sup>3</sup>. The InfoNet has undertaken a substantial review of literature to:

- Identify current policy relating to military base closure
- Identify other bases that have been closed that are comparable to Boulmer in terms of function, location and economy to form the basis of case studies; and where possible local contacts to follow up as part of Phase 2.
- Uncover experiences in other parts of the UK in terms of approach and final outcome

A full list of documents reviewed as part of this study is included in Appendix 2.

2.0.2 The findings from the desk research have been used in the design of a pro-forma, which provided the basis for further discussion with local authorities involved in the case study base closures. The pro-forma is designed around the factors identified on the previous page and is in Appendix 3.

### **Phase 2: Telephone Interviews**

2.0.3 Using the pro-forma designed in Stage 1, interviews have been conducted with local councils and planning authorities. Semi-structured in nature, the interviews sought to fill gaps in the published case studies reviewed in Phase 1; and to paint a full picture for other identified relevant base closures. Overall, complete case studies have been prepared for four base closures, although these have been supplemented by additional examples of good and bad practice from the literature review. The interviews undertaken by InfoNet have related to more recent military

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<sup>3</sup> A group of Councils, 13 from the UK, 2 from Germany and 6 from France, who work together to provide guidance and best practice from their combined experience of military base closures. First documents published in 1994.

base disposals, as it proved difficult to find local officers that were involved in handling the closure of earlier examples.

### **Phase 3: The Findings**

2.0.4 Drawing on both Phase 1 and Phase 2, the final section of the report sets out a series of broad recommendations for the Boulmer 2012 group. These reflect current central Government policy, the MoD disposal process and the most effective approaches to dealing with closures.

## **3.0 Overview of RAF Boulmer**

### **3.1 Overview**

3.1.1 RAF Boulmer is the North East's only remaining airbase. The base was originally developed as a mock airfield during World War II to act as a decoy to protect RAF Acklington on the outskirts of Morpeth; and by the end of the war was home to three runways and a Battle Training School. After the end of WWII, the base was closed but reopened in 1953 as a Centre for Air Defence Communications Command, a role that it continues to hold today.

3.1.2 The facilities at Boulmer are currently split over 2 sites and within these sites there are several functions:

- 202 Sqn Air Sea Rescue helicopters
- School of Fighter Control
- Radar bunker
- Mobile UK Air Defence Radar System, which has been relocated to Lincolnshire
- Administration, maintenance and catering

3.1.3 The main site is where the administration, support and training functions are located, in what CURDS<sup>4</sup> has described as being a well-maintained and attractive clean site. The 202 Squadron buildings aside, most other buildings are under 20 years old and several, such as the admin block and the sports hall are less than 5 years old. The operations site is where the mechanical activities are performed, including a 5,000 sq.m bunker, a number of workshops and garages, and security infrastructure. Again, according to CURDS, the majority of building stock is either obsolete or of little commercial value.

3.1.4 In addition, the RAF owns a number of buildings within Longhoughton Village which provide support for military families resident in the village. The housing for Boulmer is located off site and consists of 1950's council style properties and 1970's housing. Some of this housing is of a very basic construction. There are currently 800 homes in the village, of which more than 230 are occupied by RAF families and

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<sup>4 4</sup> *The Potential Closure of RAF Boulmer: A First Review of the Local Impacts*, C.U.R.D.S (2004)

210 are directly associated with the base. The RAF housing quarters are owned by Annington Estates, who are more likely to sell the properties rather than retain them for private rental.

3.1.5 In addition to the loss of jobs, revenue and business opportunities highlighted by CURDS, it is anticipated that the closure of Boulmer will have additional negative impacts on the local area. In particular, the decline in the pool of skilled workers will have a damaging long term impact on local business activities and the overall economy. Several businesses from nearby towns such as Alnwick have expressed concern on this specific issue as they depend heavily on the partners of RAF personnel as a source of “reliable, well trained and articulate staff”.<sup>5</sup>

3.1.6 The Minister for Armed Forces, Mr Adam Ingram MP, stated on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2004 that the base would close:

*All Service personnel from RAF Boulmer, with the exception of those employed in support of the Search and Rescue (SAR) tasks and some personnel to maintain the remote radar head at Brizlee Wood will relocate to RAF Scampton / Coningsby by 2012. Number 1 Air Control Centre has already moved to RAF Kirton-in-Lindsey; the School of Fighter Control will relocate from 2010 and the Control and Reporting Centre in 2012. The Station will then remain an enclave site for A Flight 202 Sqn at least until the introduction of a new SAR helicopter.*<sup>6</sup>

3.1.7 It should be noted however that the closure of the base is not yet definite. The future of the base is still under review by the MoD following an admission by the Armed Forces Minister of escalating costs associated with the proposed relocation of operations to RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire.

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<sup>5</sup> “Business States Case for Saving Boulmer”, NECC, 9/1/04.

<sup>6</sup> From the official RAF website.

## **4.0 Government Policy Relating to Disposal & Re-use of Military Bases**

- 4.0.1 The Defence Estate Organisation (DE) is a Government agency which advises the MoD on all estate matters and carries out the majority of property disposals. These disposals are handled by a network of regionally based Defence Land Agents, assisted by private sector consultants and agents. As a Government Agency, DE works within Treasury guidelines when selling property assets. It is usual policy to sell surplus property on the open market by tender or by auction and the site and buildings be **sold at the highest price** (provided that professional advisers consider it reasonable) either as a whole or in lots, whilst also taking onto consideration Government policy on key issues such as sustainable communities and heritage. The requirement for best possible price was criticised during the House of Commons Defence Committee Inquiry (1994), which concluded that the best price did not always result in the best long-term return for the local community. For example, RAF Binbrook was sold to the highest bidder with no consideration of the purchaser's plans for the site. However, as discussed later in this report the problems that followed the sale of Binbrook have been substantial.
- 4.0.2 In respect of large disposals, it is advised that the department consider phasing or timing of the sale (taking professional advice) so as not to flood the market and thereby depress the price. In order to secure a sustainable future for the site, the MoD will ensure as far as possible, that prospective purchasers have the capability and resources to manage the asset appropriately according to its sustainable development value, and that their plans for its use would not be significantly detrimental to its value.
- 4.0.3 The MoD has indicated that it is prepared to retain ownership of those sites that are likely to generate a significant developer profit and to enter into a joint venture with the local authority and/or a private developer to take the reuse and redevelopment options forward.
- 4.0.4 Annex 24.2<sup>7</sup> "Disposal of land and buildings and other land transactions on the open market" provides guidance to departments on selling assets on the open market. According to the Annex, in most cases, it should be possible to **dispose of**

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<sup>7</sup> Government Accounting 2000, HM Treasury

**properties satisfactorily within three years**, although a longer period may be appropriate where disposals involve:

- Very large areas of land which might flood the local market;
- Heavily contaminated sites;
- Sites where the planning position is unusually complex; and
- Where a higher price may be obtained by marketing several properties at the same time.

4.0.5 Even in these cases, disposal should only be delayed after a careful appraisal of the financial implications based on adequate professional advice covering both the current value and the amount likely to be realised by a later disposal. The possibility that prices may rise at some time in the future does not justify delay. Departments must be able to show that:

- Delaying disposal gives value for money;
- A disposal strategy exists for the property; and
- The steps in the disposal process could not sensibly have been taken such that the process was completed within three years of the property becoming surplus.

4.0.6 Government **surplus homes should generally be disposed of within six months** of their becoming empty. If no sale is in progress after six months, the property should be auctioned. The main aim is to bring empty properties back into use and to put the housing to best possible use with no bias towards a particular tenure. Departments are, however, advised to consider the option of sale or lease for social housing as early as possible in developing plans. The majority of the MoD's Married Quarters in England & Wales were sold to Annington Property Limited in 1996 and then leased back by the MoD. As properties become surplus to the MoD's requirements, they are surrendered to Annington Homes Ltd. who in turn, sell or lease them individually to the public.

4.0.7 The **Crichel Down Rules**, dated 30 October 1992, apply to bases where the site was originally acquired under compulsion for military use. Under the Crichel Down Rules, the previous owner must be given first refusal to purchase the site the at the current value of the sites previous use (e.g. agriculture). However, this is provided

the land has not been materially changed in character and regard will also be given to expenditure required to restore it to its original use. For example, the removal of any runways and circulation areas will be expensive compared with the original value of the site and therefore will unlikely be offered back to the original owner.

4.0.8 The Defence Estates Strategy 2006, states that the MoD will work closely with local authorities, statutory bodies and, where appropriate, English Partnerships to seek the most beneficial and sustainable planning solutions in delivering its disposal programme. This will also help to achieve a programmed series of disposals and avoid placing too many major sites on the market at the same time, thus depressing the price.

## **5.0 Identifying Good & Bad Practice**

5.0.1 This section considers all aspects of base closure and by drawing on experiences from the InfoNet case studies and other identified base closures from the literature review, highlighting examples of good and bad practice over the past 15-20 years. Where possible, the case studies refer to bases in similar rural location, of a similar size and with comparable facilities and infrastructure to that at RAF Boulmer. However, experiences of the re-use or redevelopment of bases in more urban or connected areas and overseas have also been drawn upon to illustrate good and bad practice in dealing with certain aspects of military withdrawal.

5.0.2 There is not one all embracing approach to dealing with military base closure, as each site has its own issues and challenges. However, there clearly are problems and issues across many bases that share common characteristics and there are examples of approaches where good practice clearly seems to have worked in challenging situations. In preparing the case studies consideration has been given to the following aspects of military withdrawal and the re-use or redevelopment of a military base:

- Timing of closure and the MoD disposal process
- Length of the closure decision process
- Local management of the closure process
- Dealing with decontamination, demolition, sub-standard infrastructure and services
- Planning opportunities and constraints
- Housing stock disposal
- Identifying viable future uses for the site utilising existing buildings and available development land
- Community engagement

5.0.3 These issues have all been identified as significant considerations from the desk research and literature review conducted as part of the study. From the desk research it is clear that not all military bases have the potential to be transformed

into high quality business parks, airports or major tourist attractions; and that in many instances local partnerships need to seek pragmatic (or novel) solutions in order for sites to contribute towards local economic development. Innovative approaches that are site specific and maximise the potential of existing facilities or are carefully phased and programmed appear (according to Network Demilitarised<sup>8</sup>) to be more successful. Furthermore, partners often need to accept at an early stage that not all of the military base assets facing closure will necessarily be re-used.

5.0.4 Experiences from recent closures would suggest that achieving financial viability for a comprehensive redevelopment may be difficult (and in some cases impossible) to achieve, certainly without major public sector involvement, due to:

- The huge scale of each base
- Remote locations
- Limited alternative demand
- Costs associated with infrastructure, decontamination and demolition

5.0.5 MoD bases in the past have been sold to developers that have been ignorant of the work and cost required to bring roads and services up to date; lacked sufficient capital; and that have been encouraged to take a short term view. Typically, bases have been sub-divided into lots and sold to separate developers; and generally have not resulted in a coordinated, comprehensive or phased re-development. In many cases:

- The housing stock has been sold off at the earliest opportunity
- Bases have lacked quality commercial or industrial reuse potential; and have generally attracted occupiers to the technical areas, administration blocks and hangars that have required low cost premises.
- Open spaces have been used for storage and dumping, creating a major eyesore
- There is incompatibility of uses, with a diverse range of occupiers located in close proximity.

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<sup>8</sup> Military Base Conversion The Lessons from Experience, Network Demilitarised (1996a)

- There has been little new development, either for housing, industrial/commercial or community use.
- Significant parts of bases remain unused and become typically derelict, compounded by a lack of funds for demolition.
- There has been little or no value creation by the new owners making it difficult to use assets as collateral to raise additional development finance.

5.0.6 The remainder of this section will draw on the experiences of a range of domestic base closures and in doing so help to guide the Boulmer 2012 Group in managing the proposed phased withdrawal of the RAF over the next 6 years.

## **5.1 Timing of closure and the MoD disposal process**

5.1.1 The first priority is to secure a clear statement from the MoD as to the extent and nature of the closure proposals. In Britain it has taken an extremely long time to bring many sites to the market as a result of repeated revisions and retesting of options for the distribution of UK forces and alternative defence uses for facilities. This has left many sites in a degree of uncertainty with no clear timetable for sale or disposal after the closure announcement, making it difficult for community groups and public authorities to make any progress and attract investment towards proposals that may change. For example, RAF Chicksands in Bedford was declared surplus to requirements in 1995 and reuse and marketing proposals were being developed by the local partnership when a British military unit departing from mainland Europe requested use of the facility in 1996.

5.1.2 The position is further exacerbated by closures that require sites to be offered back to the original land owner prior to being put on the open market. As mentioned in Section 4, under the Crichel Down Rules, the previous owner must be given first refusal to purchase the base at the value of sites previous use (e.g. agriculture) if it was acquired under compulsion for military use. Thus ownership is one of the first issues that needs clarified following a closure announcement.

5.1.3 Rapid political changes in recent years have led to widespread reductions in military spending, not just in the UK, but across Europe and the USA. This has led to a large number of defence establishments seeking alternative uses over the past 15 years, a trend that is expected to continue in the future. The sheer amount of land

coming onto the market, sometimes concentrated into small geographic areas can place a great strain on local property markets, often exacerbated by economic slow down and uncertainty. This runs the risk of sites lying vacant and becoming derelict.

- 5.1.4 Given the scale and nature of sites involved, it has often been difficult to determine a reasonable timetable for base re-use or re-development, particularly in rural settings which are traditionally characterised by a weak market demand, poor transport links and infrastructure network and lack any local plan designation. These can cause complications in dealing with planning applications and local plan applications. Long lead times can also deter investors and be costly to private developers.
- 5.1.5 The HCDC Inquiry recommended faster decisions on the release of land and a more measured process of disposal in order to minimise uncertainty surrounding the future of the base. Uncertainty was certainly a significant factor at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire, which was announced as surplus to requirements in 1995. At the time the planning brief was drawn up it was envisaged that the runway and associated land would be retained as an emergency landing facility. By 1998, there was still uncertainty over future military requirements for Scampton and it was unclear when a decision was to be expected, which hampered progress on the formulation of development plans. Ultimately, RAF Scampton was retained by the MoD and is one of the bases set to benefit from Boulmer's demise.
- 5.1.6 As part of a review of land release and the disposal process undertaken for DETR, Fuller Pieser Property Consultants (1998) felt that the time taken for a site to be declared surplus to requirements by the MoD has been unsatisfactory. Based on nine case studies prepared by Fuller Pieser (including RAF Upper Heyford, RAF Bentwaters and RAF Finningley) it had taken on average 10 months from the date closure was announced for the MoD to declare the site as surplus to requirements, extending to 16 months in the case of RAF Upper Heyford.
- 5.1.7 According to Fuller Pieser, the speed at which initial decisions and actions are taken are crucial to the planning process. Delays in the release of the site can prevent the DEO from taking part in the development plan process and can create uncertainty for the planning authority. Once a property has been identified as

surplus, the DEO is notified and DEO officers make other budget holders that may have property requirements aware of the pending disposal. At any time during the disposal process a site can be withdrawn if a budget holder has a potential need for it. The process ensures that no sites are sold which could have an alternative military use and avoids any unnecessary purchases of new land by the MoD.

5.1.8 Based on the literature review undertaken by the InfoNet and other commentators (Fuller Pieser, 1998; NAO, 1998), this process has been heavily criticised in terms of the length of time taken and the uncertainty and delays it presents to the planning system. By way of example, RAF Sculthorpe was vacated in June 1992, after which it was withdrawn from the market twice while budget holders considered its reuse for defence purposes. Eventually the Army retained part of the site for training purposes whilst the rest of the site was eventually sold in May 1996, four years after closure.

5.1.9 The National Audit Office<sup>9</sup> has also advised a more rigorous check on the credit worthiness of the bidders before accepting offers for military bases. At RAF Bentwaters, for example, there was a significant amount of interest in the site when it was marketed, but it was clear that none of them had a track record for developing sites of the size and complexity involved. The first two offers for the base that were accepted fell through before being successfully sold at the third attempt.

## **5.2 Local management of the closure process**

5.2.1 Following the resolution of land ownership, the second priority in managing the closure process needs to be the formation of a formal/informal partnership bringing together individuals most concerned with the closure. In addition to providing an opportunity to review possibilities and prepare a reuse strategy, the working group should also set the context for wider community involvement and to provide a vehicle for formulating a development strategy or planning brief for the base. In addition to providing a mechanism for planning the conversion process, the working group approach can also facilitate the sharing of resources and tasks, such as the commissioning of best practice or reuse studies!

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Defence – Identifying & Selling Surplus Property; NAO (1998)

5.2.2 In their Commercial Audit Methodology, designed to offer step by step guidance on managing the closure and re-use of a military base, Network Demilitarised<sup>10</sup> suggest that Stage 1 of the process should include:

- The development of a project team
- Preparation of a site summary outlining basic information on the site (characteristics, facilities, etc)
- Establishment of a working group.

5.2.3 The Working Group is responsible for driving the whole process and should comprise the Local authorities, politicians, counsellors, development agencies, potential private sector partners and community groups. The Working Group should be charged with defining a set of goals and objectives (possibly through a project workshop) and develop some broad options for the site based on the site summary and other existing information. The options should reflect the thinking of all working group members.

5.2.4 Based on desk research and case studies, the most successful re-use and re-developments of former military bases have had strong Local Authority involvement in the process. According to Network Demilitarised, early local authority involvement is essential to help shape a re-use strategy or planning brief that best meets the needs of the local economy; and to ensure that some of the returns from the main asset on each base – the housing – are used to:

- Pay for vital services upgrade to the residential area.
- Assist with the refurbishment and new development of any business space to be offered on each base
- Pay for decontamination, clearance and landscaping of any surplus site area.

5.2.5 That said, the majority of the MoD housing, including the housing at Boulmer, was sold to Annington Estates in 1996. This division of housing assets from the base will reduce scope for internal cross-subsidising during any redevelopment. Housing is discussed in more detail in Section 5.5.

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<sup>10</sup> The Conversion of Military Sites, Network Demilitarised (1994)

- 5.2.6 Once a base is sold, particularly if it is sold in lots to multiple buyers, the ability of the local authority and the wider partnership to influence the re-use and re-development of the site is much more limited.
- 5.2.7 If a suitable single user can be found for the site, such as a government department or viable tourism operator then the local authority need take no direct action, other than to facilitate negotiations. However, in the event that a single user cannot be found and if the local authorities do nothing or seek to adopt a planning brief subject to development restraints, re-use or re-development of the site is likely to be haphazard and generally unplanned and with little direct contribution to local economic development:
- The constituent parts of each base can legally be used for activities similar to those carried out whilst in defence use
  - Based on experience from elsewhere, the housing will likely be sold off at a major discount, attracting financially disadvantaged buyers from all over the Country, creating a new community requiring jobs, local services and upgrades to roads and services to an acceptable level.
  - The remainder of the site will likely be used for unsightly storage and a range of disparate business activities attracted by low cost space. Surplus space will likely remain vacant and fall into decay and dereliction
- 5.2.8 The ability of a local authority to influence the development or reuse of a military site using statutory controls is limited. The only way they can effectively control the re-use of a military base is to gain an interest in the site, possibly through a Joint Venture (JV) with a developer. Gaining a direct role may be possible and effective if a financially viable option is identified. Without this, their ability to have a significant influence will be minimal. If a financially viable option is identified and an interested developer attracted, the local authority may be able to negotiate a JV in which it needs put in only minimal funding.
- 5.2.9 The former West Malling Airfield in Kent was previously used as a base by the RAF and USAF. Located close to a major trunk route in the Kent Channel Tunnel corridor, it is different to some of the other base closures highlighted in this report, in that it is not in a remote location with poor access. However, it provides a good

example of what can be achieved through a local authority/private developer joint venture. The site was bought by Kent County Council from the MoD in 1974. In 1989 a private sector developer – the Rouse Corporation - was approached to form a long term joint venture to produce and implement a master plan for the site consisting of 1,500 houses in three neighbourhoods, a village centre with local facilities (shops, schools, community facilities) and the 224 acre Kings Hill Business Park.

5.2.10 County Council ownership of the site was seen as integral by the Kent County Council economic development team involved in the project, as it allowed them to control the quality and type of development; and helped to secure up front funding for the infrastructure. The base has been developed in phases, with the release of 150 acres to Rouse at the start of the development phase on a 199 year leasehold with no charge. Every time a site was sold or leased to an end user, Kent County Council topped up the land available to Rouse back to 150 acres until the whole 224 acre business park was accounted for. The sale of housing land is a key element of financing development of the rest of the site because the income is used to pay for the offsite infrastructure.

5.2.11 Achieving a comprehensive re-use and re-development strategy of a former military base is a long-term process. During the interim period, benefits can accrue from attracting short term land uses, as the resulting revenues can be used to help maintain the condition of the site and thereby prevent asset deterioration; and assist with the marketing costs of the site, studies and renewing infrastructure.

5.2.12 However, there are also associated costs with a short-term re-use strategy that require active site management, including security, maintaining shared services and infrastructure, site access for users and leasing costs. In addition, short-term uses and solutions to a base closure can undermine the community's overall motivation and long-term vision to achieve a more comprehensive re-development strategy.

### **5.3 Dealing with decontamination, infrastructure and services**

5.3.1 Decontamination is an issue for most MoD sites. The HCDC<sup>11</sup> inquiry into the defence estate noted that "Contamination is almost inevitable on the defence estate

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<sup>11</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee.

given the range of materials historically used or stored by the Armed Forces, and the very much lower standard of care in earlier times.”<sup>12</sup>

- 5.3.2 The legal responsibility of the MoD is dependent on the nature and extent of the contamination and follows the 'Polluter Pays' principle. Current MOD policy on contaminated land is to undertake decontamination where there is an unacceptable risk to health and safety or the environment. For disposal sites, remediation is generally confined to the removal of ordnance and other defence specific contaminants such as chemical agents, radioactive and microbiological materials, where a civilian contractor might not have the relevant experience.<sup>13</sup>
- 5.3.3 Before Defence Estates will accept a property for disposal they require an Explosive Ordnance Clearance certificate or risk assessment, an independent Land Quality Assessment and a Closure Risk Assessment. This will allow the enforcing authority (the Local Authority) to be aware of any remaining site contamination which will inform development decisions.
- 5.3.4 The Defence Estate Guide confirms that there is no legal obligation for the MOD to remove from a redundant site any buildings or works which the planning authority does not wish to remain on the site. For many sites, such as Upper Heyford and Bentwaters the cost of site reclamation and clearance would have been significant and could potentially have resulted in the site having negative value. In both cases, the site buildings were left for the developer to demolish if they wished. With regard to contaminants, the MoD will normally only remediate surplus property to the extent of removing ordnance, explosives, radioactive, microbiological and chemical warfare materials that could not be removed by a civilian contractor. For other types of contamination a Land Quality Assessment is undertaken and passed on to perspective purchasers so that they can take account when bidding for the site.
- 5.3.5 Issues relating to reclamation and selective demolition need to be resolved prior to the transfer of ownership or sale actions are agreed. At present there are insufficient resources available to the public sector to resolve clean up costs. Detailed assessments of contamination can take time and are costly but are essential to a reuse strategy. The time required to complete this work often means

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<sup>12</sup> HCDC 1994, Woodward, 1998, p32.

<sup>13</sup> Contaminated Land Management Land Quality Assessment Management Guide, Defence Estates, Ministry of Defence, August 2004, p4.

that it should be undertaken in parallel to a review of reuse options and the results of the two streams of work can then be integrated later. In some cases the cost of clean up may outweigh viable reuse options and the MoD may decide to retain the site.

## **5.4 Planning opportunities and constraints**

- 5.4.1 The post-closure use of a military base will be determined by the local plan and the specific activities carried out on the base whilst in defence use. For example, housing areas on the base can continue to be used as housing, technical areas for B1/B8 activities and open space within the technical area for open storage, and so on. As the planning authority, the local authority will be powerless to prevent the sell off of housing for housing use, which will therefore create new housing communities on the base; nor to prevent the use of much of the remainder of a base for B1/B8 and open storage uses.
- 5.4.2 Overall, the Local authority is unlikely to be able to influence the reuse and redevelopment of the base through regulatory land control powers. Instead, effective influence, steering and management of re-use/redevelopment are more likely to be achieved through non statutory intervention i.e. by gaining an interest in the site (see section 5.2).
- 5.4.3 Circular 14/84<sup>14</sup> instructs the MoD to agree (or seek to agree) a planning framework with the relevant local planning authority. However, if this cannot be achieved within a reasonable timeframe the MoD will be free to place the base onto the market and sell it for uses stipulated in the local plan or that reflect the activities carried out whilst in defence use. Once on the market, disposal can be achieved in a relatively short time period (6 months) giving insufficient time for the local authority to then formulate and adapt revised augmented strategic and local planning policy relating to the base closure; or to formulate and adopt a planning brief through the regulatory planning system.
- 5.4.4 The planning brief is a summary of the policy position on development matters relating to a site and also provides relevant information for parties with a potential interest. Essentially, it is a starting point for negotiation on planning applications

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<sup>14</sup> Town & Country Planning Act 1984: Circular 14/84 Crown Land & Crown Development, DoE 1984

and should state the type of development required or desired for the site. The need for a planning brief setting out a vision for the redevelopment of a base is recognised in the guidelines for joint working between the MoD and Government Regional Offices in the disposal of MoD property; and according to Woodward (1998) are crucial to the local planning authority by offering them some influence over the site disposal process. According to Fuller Pieser (1998), amongst the nine bases used as case studies in their review of the redundant defence estate, some of the local authorities referred to a lack of communication and information provided to them from the MoD, and some felt unable to develop a policy context without detailed information on the site from the outset. In the guidelines for joint working, the use of a joint working party has been advocated for the disposal of large sites.

- 5.4.5 The importance of a planning brief is clearly illustrated by RAF Hemswell in Lincolnshire, which closed in 1963. The former airbase lacked initial planning guidance in shaping development and coordinating the reuse of the site. It was purchased by a single developer, with no direct involvement from the local authority. Planning on the base has been relaxed almost representing a planning free zone, something like the current enterprise zones. The purchaser retained part of the base and sold the remaining area as lots, either freehold or long leasehold to various owners and sub developers. The site is characterised by a mixture of antique traders and jobbers, car boot sales, a residential nursing home for the elderly, careering outlets, an aircraft museum and grain storage in the hangars. The site supports many small businesses and contributes to the economic health of the area. However, there have been sustainability problems, with large volumes of traffic visiting the Sunday antiques market resulting in congestion, air pollution and litter.
- 5.4.6 Fragmentation of the site was a key cause of the unplanned, uncoordinated and unsustainable development that resulted at Hemswell; whilst the absence of a planning brief at the time of disposal at RAF Binbrook meant that no strategic visions had been developed (see section 5.5).
- 5.4.7 Planning Policy has a significant effect on the development opportunities offered by a redundant site. Issues such as remoteness, change of use, environmental impact and scale of development are central to the re-use process. In addition, policy

objectives and preferences to recycle land add weight to sustainability. Unexpected windfalls of land allocations, sometimes not in a desired location, has provided many authorities with alternative housing or business sites which in turn has slowed the release of green field land or prompted a review of strategic planning policies. For example, according to the latest Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, brownfield land at the former RAF Upper Heyford site is expected to support the creation of a new settlement consisting of up to 1,000 homes, a new primary school, and appropriate community, recreational and employment opportunities.

5.4.8 Short notice closures can distort land allocations and hinder the conversion process either through the delay in updating statutory plans or simply result in over capacity in market terms. In many instances, local plans do not seek to address operational MoD land, often appearing as white land with the assumption that existing use will continue. From case studies, it is apparent that the timing of disposals in many cases has not been well co-ordinated with the development plan process. For example, when RAF Bentwaters was declared surplus in August 1992, the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan was already at post deposit stage. However, this could have been avoided if a quicker decision had been made regarding the site's military future use. Indeed, the USAF had initially advised the MOD that it was withdrawing in May 1991 and representations could have been made when the Deposit Draft Local Plan was published in October 1991. A similar scenario was reported in respect of RAF Upper Heyford, following the USAF announcement in May 1993 that it would be withdrawing from the site.

## **5.5 Housing stock disposal**

5.5.1 The majority of the MoD's Married Quarters in England & Wales were sold to Annington Property Limited in 1996 and then leased back by the MoD. As properties become surplus to the MoD's requirements, they are surrendered to Annington Homes Ltd. who in turn, sell or lease them individually to the public. In general, a military base will have one area of housing for officers, another for families and a third for the remaining personnel. Each of these housing areas offers different types of living spaces. Officer housing is often low density detached houses; family housing is generally high density semi-detached or terraced houses; and general personnel are housed in barracks. The transfer of housing stock to

private ownership has been a feature of many base closures and has impacted on the prospects for development or re-use of some sites. The existence of housing estates in sparsely populated rural locations has made former bases more attractive as centres of economic activity; and has brought life to an area which otherwise would have lain derelict. However, the creation of new communities is not without its problems.

- 5.5.2 The standards of housing and other infrastructure on military bases are not dictated by the local Councils and therefore when this stock is released many utilities must be upgraded to meet modern day statutory requirements. For example, an appraisal of RAF Bentwaters in Suffolk suggested that in order to bring the infrastructure up to the necessary standard several millions of pounds would need to be spent, a cost that would need to be borne by the MoD or the developer before the local authorities would agree to adopt the responsibility for the site.
- 5.5.3 Another issue common to rural sites is the standard, size and number of roads available for accessing the site. Roads are often narrow and in poor repair, and would be unable to cope with the increase in traffic from a newly formed community. Again, to bring roads up to the standard where the local council would adopt them would require substantial amounts of money. This has been a huge cause for concern at Brookenby, formerly **RAF Binbrook**. When the housing was sold the basic services had not been adopted and resulted in the residents having to pay heavily to maintain them. The Council stepped in to help remove this burden and spent a quarter of a million pounds upgrading the road to an adoptable standard. However, this removed money that could have been spent converting other parts of the base.
- 5.5.4 Brookenby is also a good example of how floating a large number of properties on the market at one time can have adverse consequences. The developer at Brookenby bought the entire site, which included many military buildings and hangars as well as the housing stock. The new owner resold 120 of the 200 houses to private owners and 80 to a private landlord. By selling the housing stock quickly and cheaply the intention was to reinvest this money into the remainder of the base to bring the infrastructure up to standard and convert the remaining buildings for sale to businesses. However, by selling the houses at much less than their market

value elsewhere in the area they attracted people from all over the country who needed cheap housing.

5.5.5 Many people found themselves stranded on the site as they were unable to maintain a car, or their partner had used it to go to work, and few services were available on site. It also created other social problems. As the units were sold at low prices purchasers were attracted from far a field and therefore had few social contacts in the local area. The problems created have ranged from frequent violent incidents, crime, vandalism, family breakdown and unemployment.<sup>15</sup>

5.5.6 The problems at Brookenby were exacerbated during the 1990s by an area of housing in the middle of the village owned by a Grimsby-based property development company, which was intent on placing “difficult to house” families there. According to Woodward (1998) this policy has created “...a run down inner city housing estate – litter, dogs, abandoned cars, untidy gardens, the lot – and it’s a problem for everybody.”<sup>16</sup>

5.5.7 The re-use of military housing at RAF Bentwater has been more successful through careful management and a renting application process that opens the eyes of applicants to living in a remote rural location. The base has two distinct elements:

- The main base in MoD ownership, where housing has been sold to individual purchasers.
- Ancillary housing area built by private developers for rent to MoD personnel.

5.5.8 The main base has demonstrated all the same problems as Binbrook, but the ancillary housing has been a success and example of good practice.

5.5.9 The ancillary housing was built in the early 1990s by a private developer which went into receivership following the closure of the base. The receivers, KPMG, appointed Wherry Housing Association to manage the two sites as a private sector manager rather than as a social landlord. The housing is of a high standard ranging from two bed semis to 3 and 4 bed detached houses all with gardens, plus estate roads of a sufficiently high standard that they have been adopted by the Highways

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<sup>15</sup> Scampton Partnership, 1996 p27; Woodward 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with development worker, Lincolnshire, Feb 98, Rural Development and the Restructuring of the Defence Estate: A preliminary Investigation, Rachel Woodward, 1998.

Agency. Overall, there are 293 houses, of which one has become an office for Wherry and the other a community house.

5.5.10 The application procedure for renting one the properties tends to exclude some potential applicants, by first of all making them aware of what it is like to live in a remote rural location with the nearest local shop 2 miles away; 5 miles to the nearest dentist and two miles to the nearest primary school, all served by one bus service a day! The application procedure is lengthy and consists of more than simply completing a form. The idea is to try and achieve the right social balance, so even if people seem eligible and passed through all other hurdles, they could be turned down if there were too many similar people already renting on the complex. By 1998 there had been 125 lettings from 500 enquiries for the 300 properties.

5.5.11 Wherry has helped to establish a working party with representatives from all of the local services and a community development worker jointly funded by the County, Districts, Suffolk ACRE and Wherry, who also provide office accommodation. The appointment of the community development worker has already led to improvements, including:

- Post box
- Improved bus service, with hourly services in the morning to Woodbridge and Ipswich; and a two hourly service to Wickham Market.
- The community house and working party have set up sub committees to look at lobbying, adult entertainment, youth entertainment, toddler facilities and using the community house.
- A public telephone box
- Litter bins on the estate.

5.5.12 The estate has been carefully managed by Wherry, with improvements to the gardens to increase privacy; and tenancy agreements have been enforced diligently, allowing for garden sheds but no internal alterations to the properties. The main lesson from Bentwater (now renamed Watersfield Park) seems to be the need not to isolate any of the housing as purely social housing, thereby creating a rural ghetto; and that good onsite management is essential.

## **5.6 Identifying viable future uses**

5.6.1 In Phase 2 of its Commercial Audit Methodology, Network Demilitarised suggests that each of the potential options for re-use identified in Phase 1 be tested under six broad headings:

1. **Economic factors** – are there any economic factors that will encourage or rule out any potential re-use options (e.g. labour supply and demand, local skills base)?
2. **Property Market** – is the re-use of the whole or parts of the site commercially viable and what types of used could be sustained (housing, office, retail, industry, leisure)?
3. **Planning and Policy Context** – are there any planning or policy factors likely to influence re-use possibilities?
4. **Environmental Factors** - are there any environmental factors likely to influence re-use possibilities? (any protective designations, ecology, fauna etc)
5. **Community Priorities** – Does the proximity of existing communities limit re-use potential? Does the community have a preferred re-use strategy? Are there any gaps in community facility provision?
6. **Site Facilities and Infrastructure** – Are there any site characteristics that will prevent or facilitate commercial re-use? Are there any special/large scale uses looking to locate within the area? Are there any items of military infrastructure which lend themselves to commercial re-use?

5.6.2 As iterated earlier, land use planning powers provide little solution on their own and the potential success of reuse or redevelopment proposals for any base are intrinsically linked to implementation and financial feasibility issues.

5.6.3 According to SQW (1998), who undertook a study to identify re-development options for four redundant airbases in Norfolk, there are two essential processes to achieving full implementation of the preferred re-use strategy:

- That comprehensive re-use of a military site will only be achieved by developing and implementing a phased re-use and redevelopment strategy. The scale of many military sites and facilities is often huge compared with typical industrial

estates and complexes and may also be well dispersed across the site. In such circumstances, any reuse strategy will need to develop multiple use solutions and will require an appropriate phasing strategy.

- Profitable parts of the base (housing and where appropriate, new development) should be used to cross-subsidise any requirement for services upgrade and re-use or demolition of technical areas and barrack blocks.

5.6.4 For example, Fort Devons, USA covers 40 sq.km. Development is being phased over a long period to produce a variety of uses including a federal prison in the former army hospital, an intermodal transport terminal and a mixture of housing, industrial and commercial development, as well as a wildlife reserve.

5.6.5 According to SQW, full implementation of the preferred re-use or re-development option is most likely to be achieved either by finding an institution or major tourism operator willing to take the site as a whole; or through the purchase of the site as a whole by the local authority or by a JV comprising the local authority and a private developer. Public and private sector partnerships or joint ventures would appear to offer the most practical route, as it leverages in private finance and expertise; allows local authority greater influence than reliance on land use planning; and the phased planning brief is implemented fully and asset stripping is avoided. Generally speaking, the private sector developer will be attracted to the site as a whole, leaving the local authority to provide local confidence, part of the finance and other guarantees.

5.6.6 The key to a comprehensive reuse and development scheme is financial viability. The cost of road and services adoption should be identified through specialist surveys and ideally the financially viable options put forward in the planning brief will generate sufficient income to cover the cost of road and services adoption and demolition. Financial viability can be ensured by the inclusion of sufficient new development to minimise the call on public sector financial assistance.

5.6.7 Military sites provide specialised facilities and, depending on their nature, can represent major assets for a base conversion strategy. These include airport facilities, logistic and storage facilities. Located in Kent, west of Margate, RAF Manston closed in 1999 and is now a civil airport that handles both freight and charter passenger flights. Most of the buildings are being used and there has been

some investment in new hanger space. There are plans to build a new terminal to allow more passenger flights to pass through the airport.

- 5.6.8 However, many of the buildings on military sites are specialised by nature and not easily suited to civilian occupation, making conversion to viable commercial or community use difficult to achieve and can prove to be difficult to market to the private sector. For example, specialised underground storage facilities at RAF Corsham, Wiltshire had limited reuse options and required a targeted approach to site marketing to potential users/buyers. The situation is often exacerbated by variable quality of the buildings and differing levels of maintenance. On sites where there is to be a phased release of land and buildings there is a need to ensure that the entire site is continuously maintained. The same is true for sites where there is a phased withdrawal as this would result in parts of the site becoming vacant before the last man leaves. Failure to do this can lead to partial dereliction which may delay or discourage new investment. It is important that a pro-active stance is adopted for the interim management of a site subject to phased release following closure.
- 5.6.9 Location of military sites and the nature of the surrounding land uses can have an impact on reuse strategies. Site access arrangements and infrastructure capacity, which tend to be a function of the location, will also impact on future use and market value. In many cases, military bases are in rural locations not adjacent to other forms of economic activity or settlements, which can exacerbate the difficulties of finding suitable commercial uses. For example, an application was submitted to North Norfolk District Council for a development at the former RAF Sculthorpe base to include a youth foyer to provide housing, workshop space and training for young people. However, the base is located some six miles away from the nearest population centre (Fakenham) and the proposal was therefore rendered inappropriate due to inaccessibility problems for the target population.
- 5.6.10 In addition, in rural areas it is often necessary to achieve a balance between generating new employment opportunities and maintaining the rural character of an area. This can be further compounded by any conservation or environmental protection policies which could limit the scale or nature of commercial development. For example, at RAF Chilmark in Wiltshire the scenic and conservation value of the

area signified by environmental protection policies restricted the range of viable development on much of the site; whilst limited access further discouraged many options.

5.6.11 Where locational issues are severe, arguments have been made to remove the military infrastructure and restore the site to agriculture or something approaching the natural environment on the site. For example, following the closure of RAF Binbrook the Council for Protection of Rural England (CPRE) local branch argued that:

*“Its isolated location and designation [as an AONB] make it inappropriate for further development and MOD attempts to sell some of the hundreds of houses have not been a success. In CPREs view the site should be dismantled and returned to agriculture.”* (House of Commons Defence Committee 1994<sup>17</sup>)

5.6.12 However, whilst restoration to a sites prior natural state may be environmentally viable, it would be of little economic benefit to the local community. The 1995 White Paper signalled the Governments commitment to maximise the potential of redundant rural facilities for suitable employment and wealth creation. Thus, whilst environmental quality is valued, it cannot taken precedence over local social and economic needs. Thus the return of the airfields and hangars at Binbrook to agriculture would have been a missed opportunity to create employment in an area that was characterised by high rural unemployment and a low level of services.

5.6.13 Infrastructure has also caused problems in the past in identifying reuse options. In many cases services were designed to operate as part of an integral system that does not readily support site parcelisation. As a result any short term use of the site requires the whole of the service network to operate and site values are linked to finding one purchaser for the site.

5.6.14 According to HCDC (1994), existing infrastructure on former military bases was constructed outside the authority of the then statutory bodies and to the prevailing standards of the day. Infrastructure will only be adopted by the local authorities and utility companies once it has been brought up to current standards, often at considerable cost to a prospective developer or the MOD prior to disposal.

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<sup>17</sup> HCDC First Report on the Defence Estate: Minutes of Evidence and Memoranda (1994)

Infrastructure upgrade requirements have frequently impacted on the scope of development plan slowed down the pace of disposal. At RAF Bentwaters, an infrastructure appraisal suggested that millions of pounds of investment would be required to bring infrastructure back up to an adoptable standard, requiring a new pumping station and new water and gas supplies for the whole area; whilst at Upper Heyford the development of a new 1,000 dwelling settlement will be used to fund infrastructure and environmental improvements, and to secure heritage interests.<sup>18</sup>

5.6.15 At RAF Swinderby, whilst potential for housing development in the area was identified, the inherited infrastructure was a big issue in shaping development. The site developers of the housing land on the 250 ha base were obliged to provide key infrastructure before selling plots to house builders, although the cost of investment was expected to be recouped from the sale of the plots. Residents of former MoD housing at RAF Binbrook were less fortunate. The majority of MOD housing was sold before basic services had been adopted, leaving residents to foot hefty maintenance bills.

## **5.7 Community engagement**

5.7.1 Community involvement in the process is achieved by elected councillors and politicians being involved on working groups; through public meetings to gather views and disseminate information on opportunities/constraints of the site; and through public consultation for site development briefs.

5.7.2 Community engagement varies considerably at different sites. The rules for disposal of a military base do not require the Armed Forces, or the Council who is responsible for the site, to have any formal consultation with local communities. However, many local authorities have in the past engaged in small, informal consultations in an effort to ensure the new land use is well received, and any newly formed “villages” are accepted into the wider community.

5.7.3 Network Demilitarized has recommended that partnerships or working groups are the best way to involve all the necessary and interested parties:

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<sup>18</sup> Upper Heyford has been recognised by English Heritage as a site of national importance as a Cold War airfield and in 2006 was designated by the district council as a Conservation Area.

*In order to build a consensus on the future use of the base there is a need to develop dialogue at an early stage between public authorities, military, local community and private sector groups which can then develop into real partnerships to progress longer term proposals. This is a difficult and time consuming task which is central to the approach outline in the Commercial Audit Procedure and has been clearly shown to pay dividends in a large number of cases.<sup>19</sup>*

- 5.7.4 These partnerships have in the past included District and County Councils, local community members, interested individuals and professionals, and representatives from the MoD. Working together in workshops and study groups they have tackled a number of issues: determining the reuse strategy; setting of options for conversion; evaluation of options; and goal setting.
- 5.7.5 Whilst partnerships can often be very time consuming and difficult to sustain, the benefits can be far reaching. The most efficient way of encouraging local communities to participate has in the past been to have a number of options for conversion already prepared. This allows interested parties to prepare a response and may encourage participation from the public by allowing them to see how the base conversion is relevant to them.
- 5.7.6 In some areas communities take it upon themselves to involve themselves in the development of a redundant military base. New legislation<sup>20</sup> in Scotland means that partnerships including the local communities will have first refusal when buying the estate. This removes the option of a bidding war that could quickly push the price beyond the reach of a local community, whilst still attaining the market value of a site for the Armed Forces. In April 2006, villagers from Boddam in Aberdeenshire were given first refusal to buy the RAF Buchan site<sup>21</sup>. A steering committee comprising 15 local people, with support from MP Alex Salmond and Tenants First Housing Association, looked at ways in which they could buy the base, including funding from the Scottish Land Fund and Highlands & Islands Enterprise. Although the committee has no firm ideas of what they will use the site for, they are adamant that the local community will benefit from the sale of the base and affordable housing has been touted as a possible option. The committee expects to lease

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<sup>19</sup> Military Base Conversion: The Lessons From Experience; Network Demilitarised 1996

<sup>20</sup> Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 Part II

<sup>21</sup> The Buchan Observer, 20 April 2006

some of the facilities to private businesses and re-invest profits into making other parts of the base attractive.

## **6.0 Approaching Reuse and Redevelopment at RAF Boulmer**

- 6.0.1 As mentioned in section 5.0, there is not one all embracing approach to dealing with military base closure, as each site differs in terms of marketability, accessibility, infrastructure, services and also in terms of local planning policy that influences potential re-use or re-development options. To re-iterate a point made earlier, not all military bases will be suitable for redevelopment as business parks or airports, and there is a need for working groups to develop solutions that best meet local economic, housing, environmental and conservation requirements. In some cases this may involve the development of new communities and employment opportunities, whilst in others it may involve removing military infrastructure and either returning the site to its former use or blending it into the surrounding countryside.
- 6.0.2 Nevertheless, there clearly are problems and issues across many bases that share common characteristics and there are examples of approaches where good practice clearly seems to have worked in challenging situations. These are summarised below under the seven headings set out in section 5.0.

### **6.1 Timing of closure and the MoD disposal process**

- 6.1.1 The first priority is to secure a **clear statement from the MoD** regarding closure proposals. In the UK, the MoD has been strongly criticised in the past for the time it takes to bring sites to the market, with procedures to a) identify whether the base is surplus to requirements; and b) whether the site could potentially be used by other budget holders. This has created uncertainty for local partnerships in being able to progress the disposal process and does little to fill potential purchasers with confidence. To a large extent, this phase of the disposal process is outside the control of the planning authority and other local partners, but the case study material referred to in the previous section should be used by the Boulmer 2012 Group to **press the MoD for an early decision**. The group needs to pressure the MoD to ensure that Boulmer is not designated as a **Strategic Reserve Site**, as this could result in the base standing vacant and deteriorating over time, reducing the value and marketability of the site. RAF West Raynham was vacated by the Royal Air Force in September 1994 and was held by the MoD as a Strategic Reserve site

until 2004, when the MoD declared that the base was surplus to future defence requirements and approached Defence Estates to start disposal proceedings.

## **6.2 Local management of the closure process**

6.2.1 It is important at an early stage to **determine ownership** of the base and to determine whether there may be a claim from previous owners to be offer first refusal for the base under the **Crichel Down Rules**. Following the resolution of land ownership, the next priority is the **formulation of a formal/informal partnership** bringing together stakeholders and individuals concerned with the closure.

6.2.2 Evidence suggest that the most successful base conversions have had **strong local authority involvement** in the process, either by gaining a direct interest in the site (by purchasing the base or entering into a **joint venture** with a developer or the MoD) or by helping to **develop the planning or development brief** for the site, outlining preferred re-use options. As has been illustrated at Hemswell, no local authority involvement can have dire consequences, with an absence of planning across the base leading to incompatibility of uses, dereliction in used parts of the base and unadopted services and infrastructure. In contrast, the purchase of the West Malling Airfield by Kent County Council and the formation of joint venture with the Rouse Corporation has led to a successful housing and business park development. That said, the base does differ from Boulmer in that it was located in a growth area (the Channel Tunnel Corridor) with good links to the road network.

6.2.3 Delivering a comprehensive re-use or redevelopment strategy for a military base is a **long-term process**. Whilst there are benefits to be had from introducing short term land uses as a means of generating income and helping to maintain the base, the working groups should not rest on its laurels as interim uses have been known to undermine local commitment to comprehensive reuse.

## **6.3 Dealing with decontamination, infrastructure and services**

6.3.1 By the nature of military activities, decontamination is an issue for most MoD sites. The legal responsibility of the MoD is dependent on the nature of contamination. Decontamination is generally linked to health and safety or environmental concerns

and largely limited to the removal of ordnance, chemical agents and radioactive materials.

6.3.2 **Detailed assessments of contamination** can take time and are costly but are essential to a reuse strategy. The time required to complete this work often means that it should be **undertaken in parallel to a review of reuse options** and the results of the two streams of work can then be integrated later. In some cases the cost of clean up may outweigh viable reuse options and the MoD may decide to retain the site.

#### **6.4 Planning opportunities and constraints**

6.4.1 Although it is generally accepted that the ability of the local (planning) authority to influence the reuse and redevelopment of military bases through regulatory land powers, the formulation of a planning brief does provide some opportunity for the district and county councils to help shape future development on the site. This planning framework will need to be in line with the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Local Development Framework, or reflect the previous use of the site whilst under military use, e.g. hangers used for open storage.

6.4.2 It is essential that a **planning framework is developed at the earliest opportunity with the MoD**, possibly with input from the RDA and Government Regional Office. If a planning framework is not developed within a reasonable time frame, the MoD will be free to place the base on the open market and sell it for uses stipulated in the local plan or that reflect activities carried out while in defence use.

#### **6.5 Housing stock disposal**

6.5.1 The housing stock linked to RAF Boulmer is located within the village of Longhoughton and is owned by Annington Property Limited, so the potential to use money from the sale of properties to funding any infrastructure or environmental improvements is nil. According to CURDS (2004), given experiences at other former bases, Annington is more likely to sell the housing stock than to retain it for private letting; and if the experiences at other former bases have set the precedence, they are like to be sold at less than current market value.

- 6.5.2 Housing disposals in other military locations have resulted in substantial problems, particularly relating to infrastructure, services, the influx of families seeking cheap accommodation, and problems with adjusting to living in a remote rural location. However, CURDS have warned of a different scenario for the village of Longhoughton (the location MoD housing). In particular, the potential for the disposal of housing to stock to contribute to the transformation of Longhoughton into a commuter village or holiday home village; changing the social and demographic profile and creating a local population that is "...less embedded, less dependent upon local services and less committed to village life," (CURDS 2004)
- 6.5.3 Given that the sale of housing stock is a separate and shorter term proposition to the future disposal of the base, and that it is embedded into an established community, the main problem facing the local partners is likely to relate to retaining the current level of service provision in the area, particularly if the CURDS scenario is correct. The situation is likely to be exacerbated by the potential closure of local social, community and welfare services associated with the base, but used by the wider community including the health centre, community centre and crèche.

## **6.6 Identifying viable future uses**

- 6.6.1 In identifying potential re-use or re-development opportunities for RAF Boulmer, it is recommended that the Boulmer 2012 group follow the **Commercial Audit Methodology** developed by Network Demilitarised to test the viability of preferred options, taking in to consideration local economic conditions, planning policy, the AONB and other designations, facilities and infrastructure and local community preferences.
- 6.6.2 Testing of the options will help to identify the potential for the site to be **purchased by a single user**; or whether any of the options have sufficient financial viability to encourage a public/private sector **joint venture**. As mentioned earlier in the report, the ability of the local authority to influence future use around local economic need is maximised by the council taking a direct interest in the site. If this is not pertinent, Alnwick District Council will need to ensure that they **influence as far as possible the planning or development brief** for the base.

6.6.3 Evidence has also shown that delivering a comprehensive re-use or re-development strategy for Boulmer will not be achieved over night and is a long term process. It is recommended that **multiple use solutions** for the base be developed around a **phased re-use strategy**.

## **6.7 Community engagement**

6.7.1 Whilst rules for disposal do not require the MoD or the local planning authority to have any formal consultation with local communities, it is strongly recommended and according to Network Demilitarised, has been shown to pay dividends.

6.7.2 It is recommended that the working group **encourage community participation** and input by **sharing with them a number of pre-prepared re-use and redevelopment options**.

## **6.8 Summary**

6.8.1 Overall, without knowing what the future holds for Boulmer from a military perspective and without having discussed potential re-use options for the base in the light of military withdrawal, it is difficult to offer and hard and fast recommendations for the disposal process. Nevertheless, this report has highlighted some of the pitfalls experienced elsewhere in the Country and flagged up the broad issues that need to be borne in mind in developing and implementing a reuse strategy for the base.

**APPENDIX 1**

**CASE STUDIES**

## **RAF Hemswell, West Lindsey District Council.**

RAF Hemswell opened in 1936 as a bomber command station, and closed in 1967. It is located on the A631 and is 10 miles from the M180 and Lincoln.

Hemswell was released from defence use in the late 1970s. It was purchased by a single developer, with no involvement from the local authority from a planning or joint venture perspective. The purchaser retained part of the base and sold the remaining area as lots, either freehold or long leasehold to various owners and sub developers.

The original purchaser established a management company responsible for maintaining and improving the roads and services and was able to levy an annual service charge for the privilege. The site owner was unaware of the scale of work and cost required to bring infrastructure and services up to an adoptable standard; and was unable to raise sufficient funds to resolve access and servicing problems. Thus, whilst occupiers were attracted to the base because of the low occupancy costs, they could ill afford the substantial service charge levied by the management company later.

The site is now 80% occupied and provides low cost accommodation for businesses:

- The other ranks housing and officers married quarters remain in MoD use. Several of the H Blocks have been fully refurbished and extended and now used as homes for the elderly.
- In the technical area a refurbished/extended building houses an indoor antiques centre. There is also a Sunday market on the former parade ground and together the two outlets attract as many as 20,000 people on a weekend, causing congestion on local B roads. Other technical buildings (marginally refurbished) are used for related antique/furniture trading.
- Approximately 80% of the technical/H block area has been reused, although three barrack blocks remain empty and are in a derelict condition. Hangars are used for EC grains storage and 3% of the airfield is used for open storage or scrap/second hand machinery, industrial pallets and ground drying plant. The rest has been returned to arable farming use.

## **RAF Binbrook, West Lindsay District Council**

Now known as Brookenby, RAF Binbrook was bought by a single property developer in the early 1990s during the property boom and at a premium price. The developer engaged in asset stripping by selling the housing as it stood for 50% of their market value. This discount reflected uncertainty regarding road and service adoption, management costs and to attract a speedy sale. 80% of the housing was sold over the following 18-24 months and attracted the following types of purchaser:

- Repossessed
- Divorcees
- Unemployed
- Several people who had sold property in major towns and bought one or two of the larger detached houses on the base for retirement and as an investment.

However, road and servicing maintenance costs have returned to haunt all of the house purchasers as the developer was unable or not prepared to invest any capital in the base, with no chance in the near future of roads and services being adopted by the highways agency and utilities. Whilst the house sales have resulted in the formation of an established community at the base, there is a lack of support services and infrastructure. In spite of requests for the developer to release adjacent parts of the base for use as a community centre, dental and medical facilities and local shops, by the end of the 1990s only a local village shop in temporary rent free accommodation has emerged.

Across the rest of the base, some of the better technical buildings have been offered for rent and marketed as a technical park, although 80% of the buildings remain empty. The owner is unable or unwilling to invest any capital to undertake any demolition or clearance; nor to provide upgrades to services, access and infrastructure. It is unclear whether a comprehensive refurbishment or reuse of the base will ever be achieved.

## **RAF Ash, Dover District Council**

RAF Ash, near Sandwich, is a former RAF Air Defence radar station. Its last full year of operation was in 1995 and has since been sold to A.L. Digital for use as an ultra secure hosting and data storage, called "The Bunker".

The base is ideally suited to this industry since it has 60,000 sq ft of space situated 300 feet below ground in a nuclear blast proof bunker. It has five tonne blast doors, gas-tight doors, high pressure airlocks and a cool air system. It also has its own sewage works and can function without any assistance from outside the base.

Demand for this type of secure IT housing and data storage is seen as a secure way to protect information and systems in a growing e-business environment.

Use of the site in this way has allowed all its facilities to be put to best use. Since it is owned by one company that has not sold off the site piecemeal, it has meant that the infrastructure and road networks around the site have not been a problem. Any inadequacies in the facilities have been addressed by the company themselves and to a standard suitable to their needs. This has meant the local council does not need to invest in the site in order to prevent it becoming waste land.

## **RAF Chilmark, Salisbury District Council**

Is located 20km from Salisbury in Wiltshire. The base is approx, 120 ha and is located in a rural landscape setting. The site was proposed for closure in 1995, depending on the clearing of the base, decontamination procedures and making it secure.

Part of the site was to be developed into a business and training centre, utilising existing large brick storage/workshop buildings. Storage buildings on another part of the site were to remain in storage use, whilst land closest to existing housing at Dinton Village was gradually to be developed as low income/affordable housing.

With regards to best practice, development of the site has been phased, with short term and long term development solutions enabling a more realistic re-use strategy. There was a realisation from the outset that large parts of the site would not be developed and would remain wooded or in rural use.

## **RAF West Raynham, North Norfolk District Council**

The RAF West Raynham base was vacated by the Royal Air Force in September 1994 and has since been held by the MoD as a Strategic Reserve site. However, in October 2004, the MoD declared that the base was surplus to future defence requirements and approached Defence Estates to start disposal proceedings. Between November 04 and December 05 the Defence Estates and North Norfolk Council discussed the issues of disposal of the site and the position of the Council with regards to the future use and potential development of the site. In December 05 the Defence Estates instructed commercial property agents to market the site to enable disposal before April 2006.

The base covers 227 hectares of land and has two runways. Buildings on the site include 128 married quarter houses, 44 officer houses, barrack blocks, officers mess, hangers, and technical and administrative buildings. Most of these buildings date from 1939 to 1950 with the exception of the married quarter housing which was constructed in the late 1980's. The housing on the base has been mothballed since the closure of the base in 1994, with no temporary occupation during the interim period. As a result the housing stock has deteriorated and is now in a poor state of repair. The site occupies a very remote rural location and is poorly served by C class county roads, many of which are single carriageway. The base lies 34km east of Kings Lynn and 21 km north of Swaffham.

The redevelopment of RAF West Raynham will have to be in compliance with the Regional Spatial Strategy, Norfolk County Structure Plan, and the North Norfolk Local Plan, soon to be replaced by the Local Development Framework. These documents indicate that new development in rural parts of North Norfolk is generally resisted, limiting the potential uses for the site. The Council does not believe that, given the remote rural location and poor highway access to the base, that the West Raynham site has significant potential to accommodate large scale redevelopment proposals, where large numbers of new housing or intensive employment uses are proposed. Furthermore, whilst the housing stock at the base could be re-used easily, there are concerns amongst officers and members that the problems experienced at RAF Binbook could be repeated.

The North Norfolk Local Plan recognises the established residential status of the two areas of housing at the base, and the principal of civilian re-occupation or re-development of the properties. However, the remainder of the site and most significantly the area occupied by the technical and administrative buildings is covered by the Countryside policy area where

development proposals are generally resisted. However, the Local Plan does state that the council will encourage the reuse of existing buildings for employment purposes at West Raynham; and that redundant buildings can offer limited opportunities for employment development without detriment to the appearance or character of the local area.

Since the site was on Strategic Reserve status for over 10 years the buildings and services on the site have suffered deterioration. In addition, since the site was built more than 50 years ago, the utilities are not up to current standards/regulations. There are particular problems with the water supply, which is via a borehole and is contaminated. It is estimated that £6 million investment is required to bring infrastructure up to date, whilst the site itself is only valued at around £1 million. In addition, local authority officers are also concerned that there are no plans in place to remove the military security lighting and fencing around the site, which could prove to be an eyesore.

The preference for the site, as highlighted by SQW, was for a single institutional user to take the whole site for redevelopment as a single proposal. The second involved the sale of housing, use of the technical site area by a separate single large or specialist industrial user, and finally the demolition and land reclamation of surplus buildings and large parts of the remaining site.

North Norfolk District Council has been critical of Defence Estates disposal process. Following the closure of RAF Sculthorpe 10 years ago, Defence Estates wanted the site to be used for housing, which the district council did not regard as appropriate and was not consistent with the local planning policy. The technical area was sold to a developer, who subsequently bought the housing stock on the base. The technical areas have subsequently been let, but nothing has yet been done with the barracks or infrastructure. The site has been sold at least twice, has not been well maintained and is now the subject of a fraud investigation. During the sale of West Raynham, North Norfolk District Council worked more closely with Defence Estates and officers met with a number of potential users for the site. In all 13 submissions were received, the majority of which provided little information, had not provided a business plan and showed no evidence of community involvement in re-use proposals. The local authority is yet to meet with the successful bidders, but they are seemingly only interested in the housing and possibly the technical area.

## **USAF Bentwater, Suffolk Coastal District Council**

RAF/USAF Bentwater is located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in a remote part of Suffolk. Far from the main road and rail networks, Bentwater presented real problems in respect of finding alternative uses for the site. The base closed in September 1993 following the withdrawal of USAF personnel.

The former USAF base has two distinct elements:

- The main base in MoD ownership. Some of the housing has been sold to individual purchasers and the rest has been mothballed pending sale.
- Ancillary housing area built by private developers for rent to MoD personnel. The developer went into receivership after the base closed, after which the administrator chose to offer the housing for rent through a local housing association.

The main base has demonstrated all the same problems as Binbrook, but the ancillary housing has been a success and example of good practice.

The ancillary housing was built in the early 1990s by a private developer which went into receivership following the closure of the base. The receivers, KPMG, appointed Wherry Housing Association to manage the two sites on a 3 year contract as a private sector manager rather than as a social landlord.

The housing is of a high standard ranging from two bed semis to 3 and 4 bed detached houses all with gardens, plus estate roads of a sufficiently high standard that they have been adopted by the Highways Agency. Overall, there are 293 houses on the two sites, of which one has become an office for Wherry and the other a community house.

The application procedure for renting one the properties tends to exclude potential applicants, but first of all making them aware of what it is like to live in a remote rural location with the nearest local shop 2 miles away; 5 miles to the nearest dentist and two miles to the nearest primary school, all served by one bus service a day! The application procedure is lengthy and consists of more than simply completing a form. The idea is to try and achieve the right social balance, so even if people seem eligible and passed through all other hurdles, they could be turned down if there were too many similar people already renting on the complex. By 1998 there has been 125 letting from 500 enquiries for the 300 properties.

Wherry has helped to establish a working party with representatives from all of the local services and a community development worker jointly funded by the County, Districts, Suffolk ACRE and Wherry, who also provide office accommodation. The appointment of the community development worker has already led to improvements:

- Post box
- Improved bus service , with hourly services in the morning to Woodbridge and Ipswich; and a two hourly service to Wickham Market.
- The community house and working party have set up sub committees to look at lobbying, adult entertainment, youth entertainment, toddler facilities and using the community house.
- A public telephone box
- Litter bins on the estate.

The estate has been carefully managed by Wherry, with improvements to the gardens to increase privacy; and tenancy agreements have been enforced diligently, allowing for a garden shed but no internal alterations to the properties. The main lesson from Bentwaters (now renamed Watersfield Park) seems to be the need not to isolate any of the housing as purely social housing, thereby creating a rural ghetto; and that good onsite management is essential.

## **West Malling Airfield / Kings Hill Business Park, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council**

West Malling is a 650 acre former airbase located close to a major trunk route in the Kent Channel Tunnel corridor – a prime growth location. Whilst it is different to some of the other base closures highlighted, in that it is not in a remote location with poor access, it provides a good example of what can be achieved with local authority/private developer joint venture. The site was bought by Kent County Council (KCC) from the MoD in 1974. It had some existing office space and hangars on site, but little in the way of housing. The original intention had been to develop the base as a commercial airport, but resistance from the local population led to the site being developed as a business park and housing site. A developer was approached to form a long term joint venture to produce an implement a master plan for the renamed Kings Hill Business Park.

Interest from developers was strong due to the bases strategic location close to the M20 and M25. A joint venture agreement was signed with the Rouse Corporation, a US based developer, in 1989. The master plan and development brief produced by Rouse was for 800 houses (later increased to 1,500) in three neighbourhoods, a village centre with local facilities (shops, schools, community facilities) and a 224 acre business park.

County Council ownership of the site was seen as integral by the KCC economic development team involved in the project, as it allowed them to control the quality and type of development; and helped to secure up front funding for the infrastructure.

The base has been developed in phases, with the release of 150 acres to Rouse at the start of the development phase on a 199 year leasehold with no charge. Every time a site is sold or lease to an end user, KCC topped up the land available to Rouse back to 150 acres until the whole 224 acre business park is accounted for. Rouse is responsible for both on site and offsite infrastructure, which it has secured private finance for on the back of the land lease arrangement with KCC and the guarantee that KCC will pay off a second loan using income raised from housing land sales.

Serviced housing land has been sold in tranches to developers by KCC, although Rouse is responsible for overseeing housing development to ensure that it conforms with the master plan. The sale of housing land is a key element of financing development of the rest of the

site because the income is used to pay for the offsite infrastructure. By 1992/93 26 acres of housing land had been sold and the first housing completed in 1993.

By the late 1990s the business park had been less successful than the housing schemes, with just three sites sold. This is partially the result of a weakening property market outside of London, which in turn has prevented Rouse from developing premises on a speculative basis.

The existing office accommodation inherited from the airbase has been let with around 20 businesses in occupation, attracted by the low cost but perfectly adequate accommodation.

## **RAF Manston, Kent County Council**

The base is located in Kent, west of Margate and has a flight path over Ramsgate. There is no direct public transport and the roads are small and narrow. The nearby population exceeds 100,000 and there are other significant population centres in the area.

The base's main feature is its very long runway which is long enough to allow jumbo jets to take off. It closed in 1999 and is now a civil airport that handles both freight and charter passenger flights. The original purchaser of the site, and operator of the airport, went bankrupt but was able to sell it on to another operator. Activity at the base is modest and does not put undue strain on local communications.

When the original operator bought the site the base was in general in good condition, but they did upgrade the lighting and runways. Crichel Down rules did not apply because the base had fundamentally changed.

Prior to closure there was a lot of uncertainty over the future of the base and the local authority was critical of the time taken by the MoD in ensuring that there was no other alternative military use for the base.

There was no joint venture at the start of the closure process. The County and District authorities did work together to produce supplementary planning guidelines, and these emphasised the intention to keep the base use as an airport. Since then the County Council has invested in the development of a purpose built business park at the base, which is home to airport related businesses.

There was no contamination on site that required clean up. Whilst there will have been some remnants of its previous use through oil/fuel storage, the base was to continue operating as an airport/airbase so the contamination was not an issue. However, had the site been used for housing development or workshops then some clean up/decontamination would have had to be done.

The infrastructure of the site is not an issue at present, although if it expands, or business activity increases (possibly through more passenger flights) then the road linking the base to the A road (Ramsgate/Margate corridor) will have to be improved. Kent County Council already has plans for this. Utilities on site are sufficient at present and there are no plans to upgrade them.

There is a national fire training facility on the base that was present before the base closed and is still in use due to its specialist nature. They primarily focus on training for responding to airport emergencies.

Most of the buildings are being used and there has been some investment in new hanger space. There are plans to build a new terminal to allow more passenger flights to pass through the airport.

All housing is owned by Annington Ltd and the local authorities have had no influence over its use after the closure. Most of the housing is occupied and there are no big regeneration issues surrounding it.

There is the potential for the site to increase its passenger flights to justify a passenger terminal, especially through its potential use as a jumbo jet terminal (thanks to the long runway length). Interest is already growing to make the site a base for fly-cruise holidays. The site is convenient for Margate and Dover and good business relationships already exist with these ports (for freight haulage).

However, the flight path over Ramsgate already creates issues with residents with concerns about health and the environment. This issue will need to be handled if air traffic increases. In addition the local village of Manston often complains of noise and traffic. A consultation committee is run by the airport, along with the District and County authorities, businesses and locals to manage this issue.

## **RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire County Council**

RAF Scampton is located 4 miles North of Lincoln. It was the home base of the Dam Busters and was used in the early 90s as a training base for many squadrons including the Red Arrows. It has 400-500 personnel and is close to a major A road.

Closure of the base was announced in 1995, following which communication with the MoD was solely through the property agents, who were motivated by selling the 'hard to sell' property. Communication directly with the MoD was very difficult. The County Council attempted engaging the locals but they remained uninterested. The Government Office was involved and they were helpful but very non-committal, partly due to an internal reorganisation that left responsibilities undefined, although they did agree to help with upgrading the infrastructure of the base. The district council was involved, but purely from a planning perspective.

The Learning & Skills Council, Lincolnshire County Council and West Lindsey District Council worked together to attain KONVER status for Lincolnshire, a EU fund designed to help areas that have suffered from cuts in defence spending. They were successful due to the fact that Lincolnshire has several bases closing and there is a significant supply chain based in the County. The closure of the bases had a big effect on the economy in the county as there is not a lot of other economic stimulation apart from military services/industries.

The KONVER grant received in 1994 for around £2.5 million. This was used for 3-4 large projects where it was felt they would have the most benefit:

- The purchase of the B-Mark site. B-mark was a business that used to produce missiles that closed soon after bases started closing in the county. The grant was used to convert the offices to high spec offices suitable for multiple small units, and the warehouses were demolished and replaced with high tech units. This scheme was developed by local businesses and facilitated by the County Council.
- Business Advice Program which was designed for businesses who had lost contracts through military closures. The main clients were businesses in the hospitality sector.

Money was also used to recruit a property developer who was employed to develop a case for the MoD to gift the site to the County Council on a collateral bases, as it is one of the few places in Europe currently capable of landing a jumbo jet in an emergency. There also developed a case for the MoD to gift the housing to the Local Authority to develop or sell, with any profits being used for regeneration.

The MoD did not have the opportunity to respond to these cases as RAF Scampton was subsequently retained.

## **RAF Upper Heyford, Cherwell District Council**

The base was originally opened during the first World War and after the 2nd war, when it was no longer required it was leased to the United States Airforce remaining operational until the end of 1993 when it was handed back to the RAF.

It remained in care and maintenance for several years and although still owned by the MOD, the airfield side has been converted into a large industrial estate, Heyford Park, while much of the domestic side is in mothballs awaiting future development. 300 houses on this side have however been sold and this part of the base is open and easily accessible.

In 1998, planning policy for the base was established through adoption of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011. This included a new settlement of about 1000 houses, a primary school and appropriate community, recreational and employment opportunities as a means of securing necessary environmental improvement and the re-use of some existing infrastructure.

In the absence of approved development proposals for a lasting arrangement for the future of the airbase, the District Council has permitted temporary uses of land and buildings at the former airbase in accordance with supplementary planning guidance (SPG), which it has adopted and revised from time to time following public consultation.

English Heritage conducted a survey of 20<sup>th</sup> Century military bases across the country and concluded that the former RAF base at Upper Heyford was of national importance as a Cold War airfield. English Heritage has asked the Council to designate the former RAF base as a Conservation Area. A Revised Comprehensive Planning Brief is also being produced to take account of recent work on the historic interest of the site, the new Structure Plan policy for the base, the conclusions of the Planning Inspector at a public inquiry into a planning application on the site, and the changes to the way in which planning guidance must be produced, including the need for a Sustainability Appraisal and the consideration of alternative options for securing a lasting arrangement for the future of the base.

In 2005, the new Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 was adopted by Oxfordshire County Council. Policy H2 of that Plan provides a framework for development as a means of enabling environmental improvements and the heritage interest of the site as a military

base with Cold War associations to be conserved, compatible with achieving a satisfactory living environment.

The Structure Plan requires:

- a new settlement of about 1000 dwellings;
- necessary supporting infrastructure including a primary school and appropriate community, recreational and employment opportunities;
- conservation of resources and improvements to landscape and biodiversity;
- the encouragement of walking, cycling and use of public transport rather than travel by private car;
- improvements to bus and rail facilities and measures to minimise the impact of traffic;
- a scale of development appropriate to the location and surroundings.

**APPENDIX 2**

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**APPENDIX 3**

**INTERVIEW PRO-FORMA**

## **RAF BOULMER: IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICE IN DEALING WITH MILITARY BASE CLOSURES**

Hi, name is \_\_\_\_\_ from the Northumberland InfoNet. RAF Boulmer in Alnwick, Northumberland is facing closure by 2012, which is expected to have a significant impact on the local economy. We have been asked to undertake a review of other military base closures in the UK over the past 30 years and how the sites have been re-use/re-developed to the benefit of the local economy, community and environment. The purpose of the review is to identify how closure and the withdraw of the military has been dealt with locally and to identify examples of good practice in relation to local management, use of housing, planning implications and community engagement. Would you have 20 mins to spend to answer a few questions?

### **ORGANISATION**

### **INTERVIEWEE**

### **DATE OF INTERVIEW**

### **OVERVIEW OF SITE**

Name of Base

Location

Use of Base

Facilities of Site (hangers, technical areas, etc)

Number of MoD Houses (Annington Estates)

Nearest Population Centre/Distance

Accessibility – proximity to nearest main/trunk road

When was the base closure first announced?

When did the base actually close?

## **TIMING OF CLOSURE**

Had there been speculation regarding closure prior to the announcement? How long did it take for the MoD to give a firm statement on their intentions? Was the base ever designated a strategic reserve site?

Did this period of uncertainty have any impact on:

- a) how the sale/re-use/redevelopment of the site was managed locally
- b) the condition/market value of the base
- c) interest from potential purchasers

How well co-ordinated was the closure announcement with local development/structure plan processes? Was the site recognised in the (then) latest local development plan/structure plan as a potential development site? If no, how was this dealt with by the planning authority?

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## **MANAGEMENT OF THE CLOSURE**

Was a local partnership/working group established to oversee or influence the closure? Who was involved? In particular:

- a) was there any involvement from the Government Office or RDA?
- b) How was the local community represented?

What was the remit of the group?

Did they prepare a re-use strategy or planning brief for the base?

Was this prepared prior or after the sale of the site by the MoD was completed?

What were the preferred re-use/re-development options for the site in the strategy/planning brief? How were these options arrived at?

Was the site originally bought for military use using compulsory purchase? Y/N

If Y, was the site offered back to the original owner (Crichel Down Rules)? Y/N

If N, why? (e.g. expenditure to restore the site back to its previous use was too high)

How was the site sold? (to a single user such a govt dept, to a single developer or in plots). Was the site sold within the 3 years of closure as stipulated in Annex 24.2?

If no, why not? (e.g. the local market was flooded, contamination, planning issues, held on mkt for a higher price)

Were any interim uses for the site put in place? What were these? Were there any implications of interim uses on maintenance of the site, security etc. Did the interim uses impede the ability of the partnership to achieve a comprehensive re-use strategy for the site?

Evidence has suggested that ability of LA to influence future uses of the site through statutory means (local plan/structure plan) is limited and that the planning authority is powerless to prevent similar uses to those undertaken whilst in military use (e.g. technical areas to be used as workshops, open areas as open storage etc). With this in mind, what

role was played by the local authority (s)? Was the LA part of a JV (with a developer) in developing the site, or did it try to influence the re-use/re-development of the site through other means? If JV, who was this with? Was the decision to gain a direct role/ownership in the site driven by the perceived financial viability of the preferred re-use options in the planning brief? What was the extent of the financial commitment in the site relative to that of the developer?

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## **DEALING WITH CONTAMINATION, INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES**

MoD policy on contamination states that the ministry will undertake decontamination where there is an unacceptable risk to H&S or the environment. Similarly, the Defence Estate guide confirms that there is no legal obligation for the MoD to remove redundant buildings or structures that the planning authority does not wish to remain on the site.

What were the reclamation, decontamination and clearance requirements at the base? Was a contamination audit commissioned prior to the sale of the site? Did contamination or clearance requirements:

- a) delay the speed at which the site was placed on the market
- b) impede developer interest or influence the market value of the site
- c) affect the end uses of the site

What improvements were required to:

- a) infrastructure
- b) services

What improvements are still required to

- a) infrastructure
- b) services

Have services/infrastructure been adopted by the highways agency/utilities etc

If no, what implications have there been for occupiers/owners and local residents?

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## **PLANNING**

Given the scale of the base (refer to number of ha on p1), did the release of the base onto the market a) have any impact on the local property market (e.g. over supply causing property prices to drop) and b) reduce the need to release Greenfield land for industrial/commercial/housing development?

How has the site been developed?

Has the site been developed in phases – were there any early wins (e.g. admin block used as office development). How has this evolved? Has the site been zoned? Has the partnership been able to prevent any bad neighbour uses (e.g. open storage on run ways etc)

## **HOUSING**

Did the base have a military housing stock on site or nearby? If yes, how many units and where were they in relation to the main base?

What has happened to the housing? (sold to individual purchasers/leased/sold to housing association)

If sold:

a) Were they disposed of within 6 months of vacancy (an MoD requirement)? Y/N If N, what happened after 6 months? Were they auctioned?

b) were the properties below market value? Has this had any impact on the local property market? For bases sold before 1996, how were proceeds from the house sales used? (e.g. to tackle decontamination, improve services or infrastructure)

Has the sale of the housing created a new community? What is the profile of the community – has it been sold to local people in nearby towns or has the low price attracted interest from further a field?

How has the new community dealt with the lack of community facilities and neighbourhood services (shops, post office etc)?

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## **IDENTIFYING FUTURE USES**

How did the partnership identify appropriate and viable options for re-using the site or plots on the site?

How were these options tested?

Has the cost of road and service adoption affected the options selected in the planning brief?

What were the options? Have these been successfully implemented? Has a comprehensive re-use/redevelopment of the base been achieved OR is expected to be achieved. Was or will any of the base merely be replanted due to a lack of a viability?

Have uses on site been limited by:

- a) rural location (i.e the need to retain rural character)
- b) conservation or environmental protection

How was this dealt with by the partnership/working group?

Were there any specialist facilities on the base e.g. airport facilities, bunker etc

How were these facilities marketed to potential occupiers/purchasers (i.e. was the marketing targeted). What are these facilities currently used for?

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

How has the local community been involved in the sale/re-use/re-development of the base? (e.g. elected councillors/MPs on working group, public meetings to discuss re-use options, public consultation on the strategy/planning framework)

Did the local community voice any objections to the proposed options for re-use?

How will the local community benefit from site redevelopment/re-use? E.g. employment opportunities on site, community facilities, a new local centre (shops, G.P, enteratinment etc), additional housing (in excess of MoD housing).

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## **THE FUTURE**

What % of the development site is currently in use?

Which former MoD buildings are currently occupied? What rent has been achieved – is it a low cost option for local businesses?

How do you envisage this changing over the next five years?

Has a comprehensive re-use/re-development of the base been achieved? If no, how soon do you anticipate it being achieved? Do you perceive any problems in selling/redeveloping the unused buildings/development site in the future?

Overall, would you say that the re-use of the base has been a local success? Have aspirations been realised?

Finally, are there any individuals with other local organisations (GO, RDA, community groups, the current owner(s)) who may be work speaking to as part of the study?



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