

RAF West Raynham site

Briefing Paper

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The RAF West Raynham base was vacated by the Royal Air Force in September 1994 and has since been held by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) as a Strategic Reserve site. However, the MoD has recently declared that the base is now surplus to future defence requirements and has therefore instructed Defence Estates to prepare plans to advertise the site for disposal.
- 1.2 RAF West Raynham was established as an airbase in 1939 and has runways and hangar buildings associated with establishments built to support the Second World War effort. The base remained as an operational facility in the period following the War with flying activity continuing from the base until 1976. In the period from 1976 until the base closed in September 1994, RAF West Raynham was used by the RAF Regiment as a Bloodhound missile base and Rapier training site and there are a number of structures on the site where missiles were stored in connection with these activities.
- 1.3 The RAF West Raynham site lies approximately 14 kilometres south-west of Fakenham, at the south-western extremity of the North Norfolk District Council area (48 kilometres from Cromer); with the district boundary with the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council area to the west of the site and the boundary with the Breckland District to the south. Kings Lynn is some 34 kilometres to the west of the site, whilst the town of Swaffham is 21 kilometres to the south.
- 1.4 The base lies within the North Norfolk Parliamentary Constituency; forms part of the Fakenham Electoral Division of Norfolk County Council, The Raynham ward of North Norfolk District Council and lies within two parish council areas – the north-east of the site, including the 130 married quarters houses, barrack blocks and officers mess being within the Helhoughton parish; whilst the main airfield including the runways, hangars, technical and administrative buildings and 42 officers houses are within the West Raynham parish.
- 1.5 The base covers an area of some 277 hectares and has two runways which run south-west to north-east (length - 1845 metres) and west to east (length - 1125 metres), extensive perimeter taxiways and a wide range of buildings / structures within the boundaries of the site. Most of the buildings which include 42 officers houses, 130 married quarters houses

and small family centre/community building, officers mess, barrack blocks, administration and technical buildings and four hangars are concentrated in the north-west corner of the site area; although a large number of bunker type structures, served by internal roads and security lighting exist along the eastern boundary of the site. The majority of buildings on the site date from the period 1939 to 1950; with few buildings developed after this date except for a small community building / family centre located close to the married quarters housing which is understood to have been constructed in the late 1980s.

- 1.6 The areas of housing on the site form two distinct groups / areas. The 42 officers houses lie to the west of the main admin/technical area. These are largely three and four bedroom detached properties set amongst mature beech trees and areas of open space. These properties are separated from the main admin/technical buildings by the officers mess, itself a quite substantial building with an attractive outlook to the south over an area historically used as sports fields. The 130 married quarters houses lie to the north of the main admin/technical area and comprise a mixture of two and three bedroom maisonettes, short terraces and semi-detached properties built at quite a high density and with minimal landscaping / mature trees except for established tree belts to the north and east boundaries of the housing area. Within close proximity to the married quarters houses is a community building believed to have been constructed in the late 1980s.
- 1.7 The RAF West Raynham site occupies a very remote rural location and is poorly served by "C" class county roads, many of which are single carriageway. When the base was in operation it is understood that some form of routing agreement existed where all heavy traffic accessed the site to/from the north joining the A148 road at East Rudham – a distance of approximately 3.9 kilometres. The A1065 Fakenham – Swaffham road lies approximately 1 kilometre from the southern boundary of the site at Weasenham, although access to this road from the main areas of housing and admin/technical buildings at a distance of 5.2 kilometres by road is unsuitable for all but light traffic.

2.0 Position of Ministry of Defence / Defence Estates

- 2.1 In August 1994, prior to the closure of RAF West Raynham at the end of September of that year, North Norfolk District Council was advised by the Defence Land Agent (more recently Defence Estates) that it was to appoint a planning consultant, Leonard Martin of Cambridge, to work with officers of the District Council and Norfolk County Council to develop a planning brief for the RAF West Raynham site, which would be used in support of efforts to market the site for disposal. Leonard Martin

subsequently wrote to the Council (17th August 1994) stating that *“....RAF West Raynham is to close at the end of September. It will then be marketed, and in order to minimise the costs of security and maintenance, our clients intend to sell this site just as soon as is reasonably possible. This means with or without a planning brief, they wish to avoid even one winter of deterioration of the existing high standards of accommodation on this site”*.

- 2.2 However, despite this early suggestion that the site would be marketed for disposal “as soon as reasonably possible” after the closure of the base, the site has remained vacant since 1994. During the ten years since the base closed there has been a marked deterioration in the quality of buildings on the site to a point where it is now believed (by the District Council) that many of the buildings, roads and basic utility / infrastructure services serving the development will require substantial investment if they are to be brought back into productive use in the future.
- 2.3 The District Council understands that since 1994 the Government has considered a number of potential uses for the RAF West Raynham site, including the possible use of the site as a Police Training College. In more recent years parts of the site have been made available for training exercises by local police forces, informal use of the runways for motorsport activities and use of the area for the grazing of sheep. However, despite such activities taking place on the site, the MoD / Defence Estates has not brought forward any detailed plans for the disposal of the site in the period since 1994, preferring instead to hold the asset as one of three “Strategic Reserve” sites, for possible re-use at some point in the future by the MoD.
- 2.4 In October 2002, the local MP Norman Lamb and the District Council made representations to the Ministry of Defence outlining their concerns about the long-term vacancy and deteriorating condition of the residential properties on the RAF West Raynham site at a time of severe housing pressure in the North Norfolk District. At that time, the Minister who was advised by officials from Defence Estates, indicated that whilst understanding the pressures on the local housing market it would not be appropriate to only consider the release of the areas of housing as this might compromise the future use of the remaining areas of the base.
- 2.5 In a subsequent meeting held between officers of the District Council and Defence Estates in February 2003, comment was made that the District Council could fund the preparation of a Development Brief for the site putting the case for its release but that this would not necessarily influence the “Strategic Reserve” status of the site. However, given other pressures on the Council's Planning Policy Team and a lack of financial resources to meet the costs of such a study, the Council indicated that it was not

prepared to undertake such work without some wider understanding of the Ministry of Defence / Defence Estates' future intentions for the site.

- 2.6 The fact that the RAF West Raynham site has been retained for so long might indicate an acknowledgement by Defence Estates that the site has limited redevelopment potential and therefore value to the MoD in terms of generating a capital receipt for the Government. However, with further RAF base closures recently announced (including the proposed closure of RAF Coltishall in the east of the North Norfolk District) where assets would be more readily able to accommodate alternative uses and therefore present more cost effective opportunities for the MoD in terms of the facilities it holds as Strategic Reserve Sites, an announcement was made in October 2004 that the RAF West Raynham facility was now surplus to future MoD requirements and would therefore be advertised for disposal.
- 2.7 The MoD has an objective to dispose of redundant bases for the best market value obtainable within three years of a site being declared surplus. DoE Circular 18/84 "Crown Land and Crown Development" provides guidance regarding the disposal of such assets. Disposals are progressed on behalf of the MoD by Defence Estates which has a duty to obtain the best price for an asset; bearing in mind the nature of the asset, prevailing planning policy context and opportunities for redevelopment. In some cases, where there is uncertainty as to the future redevelopment potential of an asset it is understood that Defence Estates may apply covenants to any sale. This sees the Agency retaining a legal charge interest in the asset, whereby it receives a share of future receipts generated from the onward sale of land / premises where there is a "uplift" in value achieved through the gaining of planning consent for "new" development.
- 2.8 At a meeting held between Defence Estates and the District Council on 11th November 2004, officers from Defence Estates confirmed that the West Raynham facility had been declared surplus to future MoD requirements. They went on to state that Defence Estates was tasked with maximising income from the disposal of such sites and would seek to identify how this could be achieved by preparing a planning brief for the West Raynham asset. Defence Estates would therefore engage planning consultants, Fairchilds of Cambridge, before the end of the year to prepare a planning brief for the site, which would assist in the future marketing of the site. It was hoped that the preparation of the planning brief and disposal of the site could be progressed within a six to twelve month period ie possibly by the end of 2005. It was stated that it was hoped that the District Council would be prepared to support the preparation of the planning brief and discussion was therefore held around the Council's expectations regarding the redevelopment of the site. Detailed comments as to the Council's initial position are provided below.

However, in the absence of being able to reach agreement with the Council about a planning brief for the site within a reasonable time, Defence Estates indicated that it would seek to sell the site “as seen”, with prospective purchasers made aware of the site conditions and liabilities, but without the benefit of any positive planning framework or formal planning permission granted for future uses.

3.0 Position of North Norfolk District Council

3.1.1 During 1994, North Norfolk District Council worked closely with Norfolk County Council and Breckland District Council through the Norfolk RAF Bases Working Party to consider the implications of the closure of four RAF bases in the County – these being RAF Sculthorpe and RAF West Raynham in North Norfolk and RAF Swanton Morley and RAF Watton in Breckland. This Working Party engaged consultants Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW) to consider potential future re-use / redevelopment opportunities for each of the four bases, based upon financial viability, planning policy context and economic objectives.

3.1.2 In presenting their findings SQW studied RAF base closures in Kent, Lincolnshire and Suffolk and concluded that it was important to seek comprehensive re-use of a base in order to avoid vacant land and buildings, blight and dereliction. For this to be achieved it was suggested that a base required a single purchaser with the necessary finance, backing and commitment.

3.1.3 The study also identified three different models for the re-use of redundant airbases:-

- Re-use as the base stands which often results in low cost piecemeal and substandard development
- Extensive refurbishment / demolition and new build which is costly but creates a quality image
- Single institutional use where an organisation takes over and uses the whole base.

3.1.4 SQW then went on to assess potential redevelopment options for each base and concluded the following for the RAF West Raynham site:-

Options	Implementation and Funding
First option – comprehensive redevelopment proposal	

Single institutional user for whole site	Development would be financed and delivered by the single user – probably another public sector use
<p>Second option to include some or all of the following;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale of housing • Demand by single large industrial user • Limited demand perceived by other business users • Leisure uses • Demolition and greening of surplus buildings and site areas 	<p>Finance required through sale of housing to fund services upgrade and asbestos removal to housing area, provision of community facilities and demolition and greening of surplus areas</p> <p>In terms of implementation it was suggested that comprehensive re-use would only be achieved if local authority played a lead co-ordinating role, facilitating cross subsidy and as a mechanism for attracting public sector investment</p>

- 3.2 At this time North Norfolk District Council indicated that it would wish for the Defence Land Agent to apply for planning permission to establish the legal planning use for specific parts of both the RAF Sculthorpe and West Raynham sites in order to have a degree of control over the sale of these assets and to establish in the minds of potential purchasers the type and scale of use which the local planning authority would be prepared to accept.
- 3.3 However, the Council did not reach agreement with the Defence Land Agent over this matter in respect of the RAF Sculthorpe facility where the areas of bungalow housing and technical site area were subsequently disposed of by the MoD with no planning uses established. Whilst this may have allowed a “clean break” for the MoD in disposing of the RAF Sculthorpe facility, lack of agreement over the planning status of large parts of the technical site area at Sculthorpe has created problems for both the purchaser of the site and the local planning authority, with no master plan developed for the whole site area which could have guided the investment required in strategic utility infrastructure serving the site and supported the planned clearance and remediation of buildings which had no conversion potential and remain in a derelict state today, eight years after the sale of the asset by the MoD.

- 3.4 In preparing the North Norfolk Local Plan during the mid-1990s, the District Council identified the two distinct areas of housing on the RAF West Raynham site as a Selected Small Village settlement and this status was confirmed with the adoption of the Plan in April 1998. In this respect, the District Council accepts the established residential status of the two areas of housing on the base.
- 3.5 However, the remainder of the base, including the area occupied by the technical and administrative buildings does not have any special policy status or designation within the adopted Local Plan, except for being covered by the Countryside policy area where most new development proposals are generally resisted. The following text is included within the adopted North Norfolk Local Plan as it relates specifically to the RAF West Raynham site.
- Para 9.21 - "Redundant buildings on the former airfields at and West Raynham, can offer limited opportunities for employment development without detriment to the appearance or character of the rural area. The use of the hangars for bulk storage is particularly appropriate. The buildings represent under-utilised accommodation and their use for employment purposes would provide additional employment opportunities in rural areas that are otherwise sensitive to new development."
 - Policy 75: Former Military Airfields – "The Council will encourage the use of existing buildings for employment generating purposes on the former military airfields at and West Raynham. Development proposals for these buildings will be considered in accordance with Policy 29: The Reuse and Adaptation of Buildings in the Countryside and....."
 - Para 9.26 – "Given their current situations, the Council will prepare a development brief for each airbase (Sculthorpe and West Raynham) in order to guide potential purchasers and developers. These briefs will address the need for improvements to roads, buildings and services as well as the reuse of the existing buildings and land. In particular, given the proximity of the Sculthorpe and West Raynham Airbases to Fakenham, the briefs must ensure that the reuse of the airbases does not prejudice the town's role as a Growth Town. Annex 6: Sculthorpe Airbase provides a general statement which offers further guidance on the preparation of a development brief for that particular area.
- 3.6 In light of the long-term vacancy of the RAF West Raynham site and the lack of any planning brief having been prepared for the site to date, the District Council would wish for Defence Estates to submit planning

- applications to establish the legal use of specific areas of the base (except for the areas of housing) prior to the sale of the asset in order that there is an opportunity for wide consultation with the local community, statutory consultees etc regarding future uses. The District Council believes that this is particularly important given the long period of time the base has now been vacant, reducing the argument which might have previously been made regarding established use.
- 3.7 In October 2002, the District Council supported a lobby made by Norman Lamb MP to the Ministry of Defence, which promoted the release of the housing stock on the RAF West Raynham site. The lobby was based upon concerns at the long-term vacancy and deteriorating physical condition of the residential properties on the RAF West Raynham site at a time of significant housing pressure in the North Norfolk district. The Council was happy to support such the principle of such a lobby, albeit without the benefit of any knowledge at that time as to the costs which might be involved in bringing the houses back into use.
- 3.8 The District Council recognises the existence of the housing on the site and given the strength of the local housing market, where prices are beyond the reach of many local people and first time buyers, believes that there would be strong interest in the housing. The type, mix and standard (in terms of deterioration and need for updating) of housing on the site might also provide an opportunity for some form of partnership project with Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners and/or a development company to create a mixed tenure scheme, possibly with an element of "self refurbishment" as well as social rented; shared and freehold ownership. Following the MoD's announcement of its intention to dispose of the RAF West Raynham asset, the District Council has been approached by a number RSL partners interested in exploring issues relating to the re-use of the housing on the site. This issue is considered further in Section 4 below.
- 3.9 Notwithstanding the above, the Council does have concerns about whether the objective of securing the release of the housing for re-occupation can be achieved at an affordable or realistic cost. This is because of the need to invest in strategic utility and community infrastructure serving the site (particularly mains water and sewerage facilities), as well as issues relating to the future adoption or maintenance of estate roads, areas of public open space etc. These costs would be additional to the investment required to refurbish individual properties to bring them up to a modern and habitable standard through rewiring, provision of modern kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems etc.
- 3.10 Whilst the Council accepts the need to explore the issues / costs involved in securing the re-use of the housing on the West Raynham site, it is

concerned that the level of investment required to support the redevelopment of the technical site area and buildings would be such that it would be unattractive as an investment opportunity / commercial proposition in terms of creating an attractive modern business environment. The Council holds this view for a number of reasons summarised briefly below:-

- Low level of demand for such property given its former specialist uses, age and deterioration through long-term vacancy, need for significant investment and remote location. These concerns are based on the experience of similar sites elsewhere in the country – see comments relating to the former RAF Binbrook site in Lincolnshire below.
- The isolated location of the West Raynham site / buildings, poorly served by single carriageway “C” class County roads meaning that it is seen as being inaccessible – both in terms of being a business location and in the attraction of staff.
- The scale of the buildings and their long-term vacancy means that the structure / fabric of many of the buildings would require significant investment to bring them back into use.
- The historic use of many buildings eg single person barrack block accommodation and ancillary buildings eg dining halls, mess blocks etc means that these buildings have limited potential for re-use.
- Lack of sources of public sector grant funding to support redevelopment – eg at the nearby former RAF Sculthorpe Technical Site the majority of buildings now occupied for business use were refurbished during the period 1996 – 2002 with the benefit of grant funds made available through the Redundant Building Grant Scheme operated by the Rural Development Commission / East of England Development Agency and through the European Objective 5b Programme.

3.11 Based on the above and experience gained in respect of some development at the former RAF Sculthorpe Technical Site Area and the visit to the former RAF Binbrook site in Lincolnshire, the Council is concerned that the industrial / administrative buildings on the West Raynham site will be occupied on a piecemeal basis by low quality business uses. This would almost certainly involve the Council in ongoing monitoring, and potentially pursuing enforcement action, in order to protect the environment and amenity of local residents – including possibly the occupants of the former RAF housing if this were to be reoccupied. In this respect the Council believes that very serious consideration needs to be given to which parts of the technical site area and buildings have redevelopment potential and of the costs involved in achieving re-use in order that some appreciation can be gained through a cost/benefit analysis of whether to support the retention and re-use of the technical site area and buildings or to promote their demolition and clearance.

3.12 At the former RAF Sculthorpe site a number of issues have arisen with regards the disposal of both the housing and technical areas where experience has been gained by the Council and needs to be applied in terms of seeking positive outcomes from the disposal of the West Raynham facility. Examples include the following:-

- In both of the residential areas (ie the Blenheim Park area of approx 130 traditional two storey brick-built houses sold off during the 1980s and the Wicken Green area of 210 “system built” bungalow dwellings sold during 1996), the roads and sewers serving the properties are not adopted. The purchasers of these properties therefore have a long-term liability in meeting the costs of repair and maintenance and ultimately replacement of these assets as it is understood that neither Anglian Water or Norfolk County Council are prepared to meet the costs of bringing the services up to an adoptable standard. This issue is of concern to local residents who have made approaches to both the local MP and the District Council regarding their future financial obligations / liabilities.
- The provision of community facilities to support the Blenheim Park and Wicken Green communities has been achieved incrementally through the hard work of a small number of individuals rather than in any planned way which considers the affordability / sustainability of the community infrastructure in the longer term.
- The development of the technical area has lacked any form of master-plan for the whole site which outlines the strategic investment required in upgrading utility infrastructure; redevelopment of existing properties and clearance of buildings / structures which have no potential for re-use and the level of development which is required to justify the major expenditure required to create a quality business environment. The lack of any master-plan has meant that a number of planning and environmental control and enforcement issues have arisen on the site through unauthorised development and activities at a direct cost to the Council in terms of its statutory duties and in seeking to protect the amenity of nearby residents.
- Utility services provided into the technical site area are provided via the site owner rather than to individual businesses, even where businesses have acquired the freehold interest of their premises. This means that such businesses are having to pay for electricity, water and sewerage services at rates above what could be achieved directly from a utility provider, thereby raising questions as to the security of supply and impacting upon the competitiveness of business performance.

3.13 Given the District Council’s recent experience of issues at RAF Sculthorpe and the concerns it had with respect to the anticipated disposal of RAF West Raynham, a visit was arranged to the “new” community of

Brookenby in Lincolnshire, which has been developed on the former RAF Binbrook site since the mid 1990s. The visit, which was made on 3rd November 2004, was arranged as the RAF Binbrook site had many similarities with RAF West Raynham including:-

- its remote rural location being located in the Lincolnshire Wolds approx 15 kilometres north-west of the market town of Louth and 20 kilometres south east of Grimsby.
- being at the eastern extremity of the West Lindsey District Council area, some 45 kilometres east of the district's administrative "centre" of Gainsborough and lying on the district boundary with the East Lindsey District
- being a remote settlement, approx 2 kilometres from the nearest village – Binbrook - with a range of local services including primary school, doctors surgery, couple of shops; which is within the neighbouring East Lindsey District Council area
- had a similar arrangement of officer and married quarters accommodation (although totalling 300 residential properties rather than 172 at West Raynham) and single airmens accommodation blocks, administrative and technical buildings, hangars and runways etc.
- had received public funding during the 1990s through the Rural Challenge programme operated by the Rural Development Commission, which was an executive agency of the Department of the Environment, to finance the adoption of roads and sewers within the areas of housing and the provision of basic community facilities – ie community hall, shop, bus shelters and street lighting etc.

3.14 The visit proved extremely useful in terms of learning lessons from the perspective of the local community and West Lindsey District Council with regards the disposal by the MoD / Defence Estates of the RAF Binbrook site; summary details of which are provided below:-

- The site was sold to a single "development company" which raised expectations amongst purchasers of the residential properties about how the site would be developed, range of facilities to be provided etc; the majority of which have not materialised.
- The majority of the residential properties were sold to individuals at modest prices over a period of about six years – some in an improved, some in an unimproved state. This part of Lincolnshire has a relatively weak housing market compared to North Norfolk and this may have contributed to the relatively slow rate of sales, in addition there are 130 more properties at Brookenby compared to West Raynham. House prices in Brookenby have risen relatively in line with local market trends – ie prices have risen but are still below the local market average. An "average" two bedroomed terraced or semi-detached former married

quarter home is currently selling for £75,000; three bedroomed properties for approx £85,000; whilst four bedroomed former officer houses are selling for up to £200,000.

- The former officers and married quarters accommodation are separated by some distance, creating social segregation and in effect two separate communities.
- Some of the former married quarters accommodation was sold to a private landlord and is now occupied as private rented accommodation much of which is occupied by households in receipt of benefits and a perception that some of these households had wider support needs. This accommodation was in a very poor state of repair and it was suggested that the occupiers of some of these properties have been the source of a number of anti-social behaviour problems within the wider community.
- There has been inadequate investment in infrastructure, despite the adoption of the estate roads and sewers serving the residential properties being adopted by Lincolnshire County Council and Anglian Water respectively. Ongoing problems regarding the costs of maintaining areas of public open space, which remain in the ownership of the original development company. This company levies a charge on the Parish Council (formerly a community trust), for the maintenance of such areas.
- Brookenby is almost entirely car dependent with only one bus service a day serving the community. On-street parking is a significant problem as many properties do not have adjacent hardstanding and garage blocks are remote from the housing, creating their own management problems. The lack of employment available locally (see comments below) meant that the majority of local people were travelling out of the area to work.
- The community shop has struggled to survive and has closed and re-opened twice. The main community hall building, whilst providing a range of community facilities and events, is a large sprawling building which the community is struggling to maintain and heat etc.
- On the former technical site area, there are a number of large buildings, including two former hangars and a three storey officers mess building, which are in a serious state of disrepair, presenting health and safety and anti-social behaviour issues for residents and which detract from the visual appearance of the wider site area and in terms of potential inward investment by new businesses. Fly tipping had occurred and was causing problems within the former technical area and there were no resources to fund the demolition of derelict or long-term vacant structures.
- The geographical isolation of the site has meant that it has been extremely difficult to attract and retain employment uses to the site; despite investment to refurbish a number of buildings to provide good quality office accommodation. Whilst a number of businesses were operating from sites and premises across the former technical site area,

the majority were low quality, marginal businesses attracted by the relatively cheap rental and easy terms. There was a high turnover of these businesses with the related problems of unauthorised development, enforcement action, non-payment of business rates etc. Having said this there were two units which had been refurbished / redeveloped on a freehold basis which were locally important employers (employing perhaps 100 people between them).

- Utility services were provided into the site via the site owner meaning that users including business occupiers and the community facilities were paying up to twice the market rate for their electricity supply.
- The District and County Councils have had relatively limited involvement in the sale / redevelopment of the RAF Binbrook site and that which they have had had been largely responsive rather than proactive in terms of influencing outcomes. Furthermore the local Parish Council has struggled to address the issues it has faced in embracing a “new” community formed within its midst.

3.15 At the meeting held between Defence Estates and the District Council on 11th November 2004, the Council agreed that there was a need to work with Defence Estates in considering the release and re-use of the West Raynham site. However, the Council expressed its initial concerns as to the level of investment which would be required in the upgrading and adoption of utility infrastructure and the likely level of demand which might exist, particularly for the industrial buildings. The Council therefore acknowledged that in order to meet the costs of improving site infrastructure and bring existing housing and commercial buildings back into use proposals for new development might need to be considered. However, under the current planning policy framework as contained within both the adopted Norfolk County Structure Plan and the North Norfolk Local Plan “remote rural” parts of North Norfolk including this part of the district, are identified for low levels of new residential and employment allocations. The Council further believes that these broad policies of restraint will continue to apply in remote rural areas under the new Regional Spatial Strategy and emerging Local Development Framework being prepared for North Norfolk where new land allocations for both residential and employment development will be concentrated on the existing market towns. The Council therefore believes that whilst a strong case can be made in relation to the re-use of the housing stock on the site, the poor highway access to the RAF West Raynham site compounds re-development opportunities, particularly in respect of the technical site area. In this context it was stated that until the Council had a better understanding of the level of investment required to upgrade infrastructure at the West Raynham site and an appreciation of the likely level of demand which might exist for the technical buildings, it would be difficult for the authority to assess whether it could support additional development on the West Raynham site.

4. NNDC position moving forward

- 4.1 The District Council needs to recognise the existence of the redundant RAF West Raynham facility and the duty of Defence Estates to dispose of the asset on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. However, the Council, as local planning authority and with statutory responsibilities in terms of environmental protection, planning policy and enforcement, also has a duty to its local community in considering the wide range of issues relating to the future use and redevelopment of the West Raynham asset. In this respect there may be a difference of opinion regarding the future use and redevelopment potential of the site between the respective positions of Defence Estates and the District Council as outlined above. The Council therefore needs to formally consider and adopt an initial position with respect to the disposal of the RAF West Raynham asset and communicate this position to Defence Estates as the basis of further discussions. The remaining sections of this paper detail the actions taken by the Council in seeking to take things forward before advising Defence Estates of its position regarding the future development potential of the West Raynham asset.
- 4.2.1 The Council's initial view is that it would be inappropriate to agree to the immediate preparation of a planning brief for the site, as proposed by Defence Estates, without a wider knowledge and understanding of issues pertaining to the site – particularly the level of investment required to bring the housing and/or the technical site area back into productive use.
- 4.2.2 Following the meeting with officials from Defence Estates on the 11th November 2004, Defence Estates has made a number of technical reports available to the District Council to assist the authority develop its understanding of issues relating to the site. These reports include a Land Quality Assessment (reports dated 1997 and 1999), Asbestos Survey (reports dated May 2000), Closure Risk Assessment Report (dated May 2000) and a CCTV survey of drains (dated September 1993). Notwithstanding the above, at a corporate level the Council remains concerned that it has an inadequate understanding of the potential levels of contamination which might exist on the site and is unclear how any contamination would be addressed by prospective purchasers. It is therefore felt that the Council should ask Defence Estates for more details as to the potential issues of contamination on the site in order that it has a clearer understanding of such issues in advance of any sale of the asset being agreed.

- 4.3.1 Following the announcement made by Defence Estates that the RAF West Raynham site was to be advertised for disposal the District Council was contacted by a number of Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners, development companies and private individuals enquiring particularly about the release of the residential properties. In this respect the District Council believes that demand would be expressed for the housing on the site. However, prior to agreeing to support the preparation of a planning or development brief for the wider site area, the Council believes that some assessment needs to be made of the current standard / condition of the residential properties and the costs involved in the refurbishment of the properties and in providing mains water, new sewerage and sewage treatment infrastructure, upgrading the electricity supply serving the site and in the adoption of estate roads, provision of community facilities etc.
- 4.3.2 The Council has therefore written to Anglian Water and EDF Energy to enquire about the costs of providing mains utility infrastructure into the site in order to understand the costs which might be involved in securing the re-use of the residential properties on the base. Discussions are also being held with an RSL partner seeking their provisional advice as to the condition of the housing stock and identifying the costs which might be involved in bringing the accommodation back into use – ie costs of structural and refurbishment works to include – damp proofing, new insulation, replacement windows, rewiring, new kitchens and bathrooms etc. Such an assessment would establish whether, on a unit cost basis and allowing for an element of cross-subsidy between the higher value officer housing and the more modest former married quarters housing, a business case can be made to redevelop the housing units on the site, and/or the scale of any further development which would be needed to generate a reasonable level of return on investment by an RSL and/or a development company; whilst creating a viable mixed community on the West Raynham site as compared to new build development elsewhere in the district.
- 4.3.3 The District Council believes such an assessment is important in considering the redevelopment potential of the areas of housing if the responsibility for meeting ongoing costs of site infrastructure is not to fall on public authorities and the purchasers of individual properties in the longer term, as has been experienced on similar sites. If this assessment identifies that these costs are prohibitive and / or represent poor value for money, this would influence the Council's future position with regards further negotiations with Defence Estates and in the preparation of a planning brief for the site.
- 4.4.1 Related to any decision taken in respect of the areas of housing, which the Council sees as the priority issue / opportunity in terms of the redevelopment of the RAF West Raynham site, a similar study should be

undertaken of the anticipated costs involved in upgrading infrastructure and refurbishing the technical and administrative buildings for future business related / employment use. To date a study of the technical area has not been undertaken, as the Council believes that initial consideration needs to be given to the costs of securing the release of the residential properties on the site.

- 4.4.2 Any study of the technical area would need to not only consider the investment costs required in bringing the technical and administrative buildings back into use, but also an assessment of the potential demand for the mix of buildings given the remote location of the site and its poor accessibility and the potential relationship between the future use of these buildings and the residential properties, assuming the latter were to be re-occupied. Consideration would also need to be given to the financial viability of any redevelopment proposals and the wider implications of agreeing to the release of this site/premises as a General Employment Area given other employment land designations in the Fakenham area. This would include considering the relationship of the West Raynham site with the strategy proposed for promoting more co-ordinated investment in the nearby RAF Sculthorpe Technical Site Area where the Council's Local Plan Review Working Party has previously indicated that it was prepared to support the principle of this site being designated as a General Employment Area in recognition of its need for major investment and its relatively good access to the main A148 road.
- 4.5 To date, Defence Estates have indicated that they do not have any resources available to support the assessments of the housing and technical site areas which the Council suggests are required as detailed above. As it would therefore appear that the Council would have to meet such costs, it is suggested that other than seeking the views of the County Council as to the accessibility of the site for business related uses, no serious consideration be given to assessing the future commercial use of the technical site area until clarification is gained of the issues relating to bringing the residential properties on the site back into occupation.
- 4.6.1 Independent of the above studies, the District Council has sought Counsel's opinion as to the current planning status of the site and of the need for future owners / users of the site to obtain planning permission for their proposed use. The Council has asked for such advice in light of given recent changes to planning legislation where the previous immunity of Crown land from planning control was removed by Section 79(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This legislation inserted a new Section 292A in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 from the 6th August 2004, whereby the 1990 Act "binds the Crown" subject to certain express provision made by the newly amended Part 13 of the 1990 Act.

4.6.2 Counsel has advised that the historical use of the RAF West Raynham site was as a military airfield; a use which technically ceased in September 1994 when the base closed. However, the question of whether abandonment has occurred might be open to debate - as whilst the courts have identified four factors which should be considered in deciding whether abandonment has occurred including:-

- the physical condition of the building(s) or land;
- the period of non-use;
- whether there has been any other use, and
- the owner's intention

all of which the Council could probably argue; the Ministry of Defence might put a contrary position forward based upon its retention of the base as a Strategic Reserve Site in the period since 1994 thereby disputing any claim that the site had been abandoned. This would suggest that the base has a lawful use as a military airfield but that any change of use of the site / buildings or new development on the site would require planning permission.

4.6.3 In respect of the areas of housing on the base, Counsel has advised that as these are recognised within the adopted North Norfolk Local Plan as a Selected Small Village the Council could make a declaration to Defence Estates that it accepts the established use and would not seek to take enforcement action against the re-occupation of the residential properties. Alternatively, Counsel has commented that the Council could ask Defence Estates or future purchasers of the residential areas of the site to formalise the use of the areas of housing as separate planning units. This could be achieved by asking Defence Estates or purchasers of the asset to apply for either Certificates of Lawful Use under Section 191; or Certificates of Lawfulness of Proposed Use under Section 192 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act; or reach Agreement with the Ministry of Defence under Section 297 of the Act that the residential use of the areas identified as a Selected Small Village within the adopted North Norfolk Local Plan are in conformity with the Plan. Given Counsel's advice in relation to the areas of housing it is suggested that the District Council re-affirms its position made in the identification of the areas of housing on the RAF West Raynham site as a Selected Small Village. This accepts the established use of the residential properties on the site thereby allowing their re-occupation without the need for Defence Estates or future purchasers to obtain planning permission for such use.

4.6.4 Notwithstanding the above however, given the remote location of the site and policies contained within the Norfolk County Structure Plan, North Norfolk Local Plan and the draft Regional Spatial Strategy all of which seek to direct residential growth in rural areas to established market towns and village service centres; it is suggested that the Council makes a clear statement that it does not see the West Raynham site as an appropriate

location for new housing development beyond those parts of the site which are currently designated as a Selected Small Village within the adopted Local Plan.

- 4.7 Dependent upon the analysis of the costs involved in securing the future re-use of the areas of housing and any subsequent assessment of the potential of the former technical and administrative site area to accommodate future business use as detailed above, the Council will then need to consider to what extent it feels it is able to support the preparation of a planning brief for the site in conjunction with Defence Estates. Without wishing to prejudice the outcome of this assessment process, the Council believes that the work undertaken by Segal Quince Wicksteed to consider the redevelopment potential of the site back in 1994 remains valid in its recommendations today. This identified a first preference for a single institutional user to take the whole site for redevelopment as a single proposal; with a second option involving sale of the housing, use of the technical site area by a single large or specialist industrial user, possible leisure use and the demolition and greening of surplus buildings and large parts of the remaining site area. Significantly the SQW report suggested that if the second option was to be pursued it would require the significant involvement of the local authority if opportunities to secure cross-subsidy between different elements of the proposals in terms of investment in utility infrastructure for example was to be realised.
- 4.8 Beyond the recommendations of the SQW report the District Council believes that consideration could also possibly be given to the site accommodating uses such as a wind farm, poultry farm, free range agricultural operations. The Council also recognises that currently some occasional use is made of the West Raynham site for motorsports activities; albeit with some objections about such use being made on behalf of local communities through local parish councils. The District Council therefore believes that potential of the site accommodating such uses in the future should be considered further in consultation with local communities adjoining the site.
- 4.9.1 Subject to the above, if the Council considers that the redevelopment of the RAF West Raynham site can be achieved to a high standard at an affordable price and that in supporting further development at this location the wider development strategy of the District is not undermined, it is suggested that consideration should be given to any planning brief prepared for the site being included as a discreet Local Development Document within the Local Development Framework.
- 4.9.2 It is suggested that if the Council is able to reach this position after undertaking the technical assessments previously detailed, that the costs of preparing a Planning Brief for the site be shared between the Council and Defence Estates as this position would potentially increase the capital

receipt generated by providing prospective purchasers of the site with some advance understanding of the position of the Council as local planning authority.

- 4.10.1 If after receiving the technical assessments previously detailed the Council believes that it would be uneconomic for large parts of the RAF West Raynham site to be redeveloped and concludes that the location is not appropriate for major new development, the Council should advise Defence Estates of its position.
- 4.10.2 It would then be for Defence Estates to decide whether it can work with the District Council in trying to identify less intensive uses for the base eg uses such as a wind farm, poultry farm, free range agricultural operations, which would also involve the clearance and remediation of a majority of buildings and structures on the site; or dispose of the site without the benefit of clear planning guidance where prospective purchasers would need to understand that the site had little "hope value" and that there would be considerable liability in relation to the provision of services into the site.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 This report is intended as a briefing paper summarising the current position and issues raised by the proposed disposal by Defence Estates of the redundant RAF West Raynham facility.
- 5.2 It is intended that the report forms the basis of consultation with local parish councils, adjoining district authorities, Norfolk County Council and RSL partners.
- 5.3 This paper is a public document. At 9th March 2005 the document is issued as the basis of consultation with stakeholders, but does not represent Council policy.

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