

Planning Application P20/S2134/O – Chalgrove airfield

The John Hampden Society's comments on this application are as follows:

1. Archaeological Potential

The John Hampden Society agrees with the opinion expressed in the Battlefield Trust's response that the proposed scheme of archaeological investigation is insufficient to address the question of whether fighting during the battle encroached into the development area. We support the Trust's proposal that an extensive metal detecting survey be undertaken on the eastern edge of the development site.

In addition, we believe that it is essential that additional archaeological work, using such facilities as ground penetrating radar, metal detecting and field walking, should be carried out within the development site, where the royalist dragoons were deployed and along the route of the royalist retreat with their prisoners and plunder along the Old Oxford Road. Although it is unlikely that any fighting took place in this area it is possible that in the chaos of the retreat artefacts may have been dropped and lost. Any such historic items would add to our knowledge of the combatants who were present and how they were equipped.

The mystery of where the dead of both sides were buried after the battle has never been fully explained, and it is always possible that one or more burial pits might be uncovered close to the route of the Old Oxford Road. Any development work should take account of this possibility.

2. Topographic Integrity

The development as proposed does not directly intrude on the area of the registered battlefield. However, the development will permanently obscure views to the west and south of the battlefield that have remained open and not too different from how it was in the seventeenth century. It is important that there should be no further development of the registered site of the battlefield or areas to the immediate east and north of it.

The John Hampden Society agrees with Battlefield Trust's objection to the construction of a bund. It would change the contouring of the area adjacent to the battlefield and might restrict the scope any future archaeological surveys. We would prefer screening to be achieved simply through the planting of native trees.

The development will impact on the location of the Battlefield Monument which is itself a listed historic monument. This structure has been much neglected and is in need of specialist care and maintenance, and the John Hampden Society believes that it would be appropriate for this work to be added as a condition for the granting of approval for the development.

3. Heritage and Education

We believe that the development presents an opportunity to radically improve the signage and interpretive information provided to the public. Until recently the battle has been seriously misunderstood in terms of its scale and what actually took place. It was only in 1995 that it was placed on English Heritage's Battlefields Register. The fighting at Chalgrove was the climax of a large retaliatory cavalry raid led by the charismatic royalist leader Prince Rupert that impacted on several local towns and villages from Chinnor to Stadhampton. The battle has, of course, always been accepted as being of national and indeed international importance because it was here that John Hampden MP, the great parliamentarian leader, received his mortal wound.