Conservation Statement for Stow Maries First World War Aerodrome

Final

May 2014
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Summary

This is a conservation statement prepared over a short period. It is not a substitute for a conservation management plan or a masterplan for the long-term conservation of the site. No original research has been carried out. It summarised the history of the site, identifies significances, discusses issues and sets out policies.

Agricultural land at Stow Maries was brought into use as a Royal Flying Corps aerodrome in the First World War for a flight of 37 Squadron. By 1919 the whole squadron was based there. It moved to Biggin Hill short afterwards and the site was never re-used. After the Second World War some of the buildings were modified for farming and residential uses which can still be traced. Restoration of the building began in 2007 and the site was designated a Conservation Area in 2008. The 24 surviving buildings out of the original 47 were designated II* in 2012 and the site won an English Heritage Angel award in the same year. It was purchased in 2013 by Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome Ltd (SMGWA) with grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and other sources.

Significance

The site is of international significance as probably the most complete surviving evidence of a First World War aerodrome in Western Europe. It is of national historical significance in demonstrating the way that Royal Flying Corps aerodromes functioned, for its association with the Gotha bomber raids in 1917 and for its role in Home Defence. It is probably the only largely unaltered inland First World War military site in Britain and is thus of national commemorative value. Its communal value is expressed in the large number of people who have given their time, skills and money to the site.

Issues

The following issues are discussed:

- The need to define a long-term vision for the site that is agreed by all involved and identifies the intended use and purpose of all restored and replica buildings
- Improved understanding of the development of the buildings in 1914-18 and conserving evidence of later use
- Conforming to the Heritage Partnership Agreement currently being prepared and defining conservation objectives for each building
- The option of leaving some buildings unrestored
- The need for an archaeological survey
• Constraints on internal restoration and new uses
• The need for prompt action and good practice in the erection of replica buildings
• Phasing that reflects conservation and interpretation priorities
• Improved car parking
• Improvements to vehicle access and site management to accommodate increased visitor numbers
• Constraints, standards and opportunities in fitting-out restored rooms as replica interiors
• Long-term objectives for the type and scope of the on-site museum sought.
• Developing a digital archive and the recording of oral history
• The need for professional advice on key topics
• Funding and raising the profile of the site
• The management and decision-making structure for the site
• The pivotal role of volunteers
• Seeking patrons and expanding the expertise of trustees

Policies

The following policies have been prepared. They should all be implemented as soon as possible but those marked in bold are particularly urgent.

• To establish a vision and masterplan for the aerodrome by August 2014 that is agreed by all parties involved in the site’s conservation. This could be supported by a conservation plan developed from this statement.
• To clarify the sequence of development of the buildings between 1916 and 1919
• To retain evidence of post-war agricultural and residential use within restored buildings where this does not interfere with the conservation and interpretation of First World War features.
- To leave First World War renders and brickwork unaltered.
- To investigate post-1918 renders and surfacing. To carry out conservation measures advised by English Heritage and the local authority conservation officer that conserve the underlying First World War fabric.
- To comply with national and local guidance and regulations for historic buildings and the specifications given in the HPA
- To set out conservation objectives for each building
- To avoid over-restoration by following the HPA, the guidance of English Heritage and the local authority conservation officer
- To consider leaving one or more buildings consolidated in their present state as evidence of the unrestored site and its landscape character
- To carry out an archaeological survey of surface and sub-surface features in accordance with a specification approved by English Heritage and the council’s conservation officer as soon as possible
- To obtain accurate information on interior surfaces and detailing and avoid over-restoration of interiors
- To ensure that new uses of standing buildings have no impact on fabric, character and setting
- To put the replica aeroplane sheds and accommodation huts in place as soon as possible, ensuring uses compatible with the vision for the site.
- To develop a detailed phasing programme that reflects conservation priorities building-by-building and minimises the constraints on visitor access around the site
- To comply with the Disability Discrimination Act
- To establish a permanent all-weather car park for users of the buildings and visitors
- To identify and resolve vehicle access issues arising from development of the site
- To develop a visitor management plan which takes account of projected visitor numbers and the other uses of the buildings
- To ensure the security of the site and visitors to it
- To define the number and purpose of the rooms that will be dressed as they were in 1918 and to ensure the accuracy of the display
- To ensure that new uses of standing buildings do not have an impact on their fabric, character and setting
- To develop a collections management plan and become an accredited museum
• To define long-term objectives for the museum and on-site interpretation
• To prepare a fully documented and easily accessible account of the site’s history
• To make full oral history records of the site and to establish a digital archive
• To obtain a high standard of professional services through a transparent procurement process, where they are necessary to meet conservation standards appropriate for the site
• Within the next three months to prepare a programme of grant applications for the period 2014-18 and to implement it as soon as possible.
• To raise awareness of the importance of Stow Maries Aerodrome linking it to First World War events and commemorations
• The management structure in the business plan of a board of directors/trustees with overall responsibility, a management committee drawn from all people involved in the conservation of the site, and a day-to-day site manager should be implemented within the next three months
• To ensure that volunteers represented at all levels of the management structure
• To obtain a prominent patron and expand the number and experience of trustees/directors
1. **Introduction**

1.1 **Purpose and format**

1.1.1 The purpose of this statement is to inform the conservation of Stow Maries Aerodrome. It should be viewed in conjunction with the Heritage Partnership Agreement (HPA) currently being prepared, and is the basis for the development of a long-term vision for this remarkable place.

- Section 2 describes the context and the range of heritage features present
- Section 3 gives a brief account of the site’s history and its conservation history since 2008
- Section 4 sets out significances
- Section 5 discusses issues that have to be addressed to ensure the conservation, good management and interpretation of the buildings and their setting
- Section 6 sets out policies
- Section 7 gives references

1.2 **Limitations**

1.2.1 This is a conservation statement prepared in a very short time, not a conservation plan. It does not contain a gazetteer of the buildings and structures on the site. This is currently being prepared by the Stow Maries volunteers. No original research has been carried out, although consultees have provided information from their own research. A full conservation plan will normally be required by grant-aiding bodies like the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), and is in any case needed to resolve some of the issues identified in section 5.

1.3 **Methods and sources**

1.3.1 The format and content of the plan follows English Heritage and Semple Kerr’s guidance. The sources used for the account of the site’s history are discussed in section 3. Assessment of significance is in line with current English Heritage guidance, but also uses the scale of international, national and regional, which is particularly appropriate for military sites. It is based on an overview of the aerodrome as a whole. The significance of individual features can be assessed when the gazetteer has been completed.

1.3.2 We have used the building numbers given by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in England (RCHME) in its 1997 survey of the site, not those in the English Heritage listing schedule. The names of the buildings are taken from the schedule where they supersede the RCHME ones. Figs 2 and 3 are based on the drawing for the RCHME survey.

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3 English Heritage Advice Note Case Number: 468822 3/9/2011.
1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 We are grateful to the following people who have provided information and advice: Russell Savory, John Etté of English Heritage, Jackie Longman of Maldon District Council, Ivor Dallinger Curator of Stow Maries Aerodrome Museum, Stuart Warburton and Jeremy Lucas of the Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome Ltd trust, and the Stow Maries volunteers generally. Fig 4 was kindly provided by Mr Savory. Jackie Longman and Jeremy Lucas, together with Claire Fidler and Malcolm Starr of English Heritage, have commented on drafts.
2. Setting and Heritage Context

2.1 Landscape and land use

2.1.1 Stow Maries Aerodrome lies 6km to the southwest of Maldon in Essex and 4km to the northeast of South Woodham Ferrers within the North Thames Basin National Landscape Character Area. More locally, it is within a gently-rolling landscape identified as the East Hanningfield Wooded Farmland in the Maldon District Landscape Character Assessment. The setting is one of large arable fields enclosed by boundaries containing mature trees. They lie within a network of narrow lanes and dispersed settlements. The tower of Stow Maries church 2km to the south (Fig 1) is a conspicuous landmark and the church has played a part in the history of the aerodrome.

2.1.2 The site is within a conservation area designated in 2008 (Fig 1). It lies on a broad ridge falling very gently northwards. There are views beyond the aerodrome to landmarks such as the water tower at Great Canney to the east, but the site generally has a remote ridge-top character emphasised by the unobstructed flying field and the large fields to the north and east (Fig 2).

2.1.3 The land is mainly on London Clay with a small area of Head deposits in the north. The heavy clay soil was always a problem when the aerodrome was in use, but land drains have recently been installed and it is now a good quality grass flying field. The ponds on the site (Fig 2) are managed primarily for nature conservation, although they were initially established for water attenuation and as a fire precaution.

2.1.4 Access is via a single track lane with passing places off Hackmans Lane past Flambirds Farm. The track was concreted in the 1960s. The concreted surface extends into the site and overlies the original surfaces around the aerodrome buildings by up to 0.5m. A bridleway called Charity Lane runs down the west side of the conservation area, which is crossed by the two public footpaths shown on Fig 1. There is a farm access track off Charity Lane and a disused access to the aerodrome buildings further south at Strawberry Hill lane.

2.2 The buildings and site layout

2.2.1 The RCHME identified 47 buildings on the site with the aid of an RAF inventory of October 1918 and the Ordnance Survey Map of 1920. Twenty-four of these remain in varying condition and are Grade II* listed. They are shown on Fig 3 and an impression of the character of the site in 1918 is given in Fig 4. In the following schedule the listed buildings are marked in bold. Those in regular font are no longer present, although in some cases there is evidence of footings or surfaces.

1. Twin shed
2. Twin shed

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3. **Workshops**: restored as business premises
4. **Dope Shop**: restored as business premises
5. **Office and Wireless Testing Room**: some conservation work carried-out
6. **Royal Engineers’ Workshop**: used for storage
7. **Ammunition Store**
8. **Blacksmith’s**: conservation work carried-out
9. **Motor Transport Sheds**: used for storage
10. **Ambulance Shed and Mortuary**: conservation work carried out
11. **Store**
12. **Unknown**
13. **Guardhouse**
14. **Unknown**
15. **Squadron Offices**: restored as the museum
16. **Other Ranks’ Mess Hall and Recreation Hut**: restored for catering and functions
17. **Pilots’ Ready Room**: restored
18. **Fuel Store**
19. **Unknown**
20. **Recreation Hut**
21. **Unknown**
22. **Water Tower**
23. **Reservoir**
24. **WRAF Accommodation**
25. **WRAF Accommodation**
26. **WRAF Accommodation**
27. **WRAF Accommodation**
28. **WRAF Accommodation**
29. **WRAF Accommodation**
30. **NCO Accommodation**
31. **Officers’ Quarters**
32. **Officers’ Quarters**
33. **Officers’ Quarters**
34. **Officers’ Mess**
34a. **Toilet block?**
35. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
36. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
37. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
38. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
39. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
40. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
41. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
42. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
43. **Men’s Accommodation Block**
44. **Unknown**
45. **Headquarters Reception Building**
46. **Generator Hut**
47. **Parade Ground Building**

2.2.2 The reasons for designation are given in the listing schedule as follows:

**Rarity**: it is the largest known surviving group of RFC buildings on a WWI aerodrome which, being abandoned in 1918, was not adapted for further military use later in its history. The individual building types are rare survivors; only two other Royal Flying Corps (RFC) Officers’ Messes are listed and there are no designated examples of some of the other building types which remain at Stow Maries, including the Pilots’ Ready Room, Aircrew Mess, Reception Building and Squadron Headquarters.
**Architectural interest:** the continued presence of a wide range of technical and domestic or 'regimental' buildings largely in their original form conveys architectural interest. The buildings display good craftsmanship in their construction; the roof structures, for example, are complex in their arrangement and well-made. Individual buildings retain many original fixtures and fittings.

**Group value:** with the exception of some of the Women's Hostels, the hangars and the temporary buildings which have been demolished, this group of technical and regimental buildings is a complete example of a 1914-1918 RFC aerodrome with the associated infrastructure, parade ground and flying field.

**Historical association:** the base was part of the defence of London against airships and Gotha bombers. Aircraft from Stow Maries flew in defence of the capital during one of the first significant air raids on the capital in July 1917.

2.2.3 The buildings are laid out either side of the north-south track through the centre of the site, with the flying field to the east and a parade ground to the west. The latter has a memorial erected in 2010 to the airmen who died while serving at the aerodrome. In accordance with RFC practice, which remained the standard for post-war expansion period airfields, the buildings were located by function and rank. In the north there were technical buildings clustered behind the two twin aeroplane sheds. These were for storage, transport, repair and maintenance. In the south there were the regimental buildings for administration, catering and accommodation. The site plan and the quality of the accommodation emphasised the distinctions between officers, NCOs and other ranks, and the auxiliary role of women.

2.2.4 The layout and distinctions are more clear-cut than in the plans of Home Defence aerodromes established at the same time at Suttons Farm, Rochford, Goldhanger and elsewhere in Essex, perhaps because the existing track lent itself to this arrangement. But they are very similar to the layout of the buildings at Orfordness, where the unit that became 37 Squadron at Stow Maries was based until 1916, and to Duxford.

2.2.5 All the buildings are single-storey, simple and functional. They have thin brick walls strengthened with piers, some of which incorporate flues for heating stoves. The roof trusses are mostly of timber, some with metal members, and the roofs are covered with slate or asbestos. The original windows are a mixture of a standard timber design and a standard cast-iron glazing unit. After the aerodrome closed, many of the buildings were adapted to farming or domestic use as described below, and some retain features of this time.

2.3 **The range of heritage features**

2.3.1 The site has significant natural heritage value and is in Natural England’s Higher Level Environmental Stewardship scheme. Ponds and a meadow have been created and the land supports declining farmland species such as brown hare, corn bunting, yellowhammer and barn owls, as well as wintering short-eared owls. The site was extensively featured in a recent television series on Britain’s wildlife through the seasons of the year.

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8 Doyle, op. cit., Appendix 5
9 http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/orford-ness/history/view-page/item567155/
2.3.2 An archaeological survey commissioned by Mr Savory has found material on the site dating back to the Elizabethan period. All periods in the history of the site clearly needs further study.

2.3.3 However, this statement is mainly concerned with twentieth-century built heritage and the social and personal histories of people who served at the aerodrome. In this case, the heritage interest centres on the standing buildings and their landscape setting, the sub-surface archaeology of the wartime period, and the documents, records and biographies exhibited at the site museum and archived elsewhere. One aspect which there has not been time to look at, is the memorials and interments at Stow Maries church to the south, and the relationship with the surrounding settlements.
3. History and Management of the Aerodrome

3.1 Sources

3.1.1 Two accounts of the history of the site were published by Doyle in the 1990s. The report of survey of the buildings by the RCHME in 1997 has a historical introduction partially based on one of them.\textsuperscript{10} The county context of First World War aerodromes is also given by him.\textsuperscript{11} However, Doyle’s work on Stow Maries is not referenced and contains contradictions. The only known documents relating to the construction of the aerodrome are an RAF survey of 1918,\textsuperscript{12} the inspections of work in progress by Lt General Ashmore cited below, and standard drawings of structures at the RAF Museum, Hendon. There are also oral history records. This limited information has been interpreted by Russell Savory and Ivor Dallinger using their detailed knowledge of the site. It is the basis for the account given below.

3.1.2 On the other hand, there is wide coverage of German airship and Gotha bomber raids in the period 1915-18, some of which gives good information on the role of Stow Maries and 37 Squadron.\textsuperscript{13} This is supported by the information on individual airmen on the aerodrome website.\textsuperscript{14}

3.2 The need for Home Defence aerodromes and landing fields

3.2.1 The RFC was formed in April 1912 with the intention of combining army and naval air operations in a single air service. Inter-service rivalries prevented this from happening, and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) was formed three months later. There were constant conflicts over areas of responsibility and resources until the Royal Air Force was formed in April 1918. During the First World War the Western Front was always the army’s overriding priority. Home defence and the quality and quantity of the planes available to it suffered as a consequence.

3.2.2 Air defence in and around London began under Winston Churchill’s direction as First Lord of the Admiralty in 1914, with navy aircraft stationed at existing aerodromes, supplemented by emergency landing grounds. The latter were a prominent feature of later home defence. They are now difficult to trace because they were usually just fields without any facilities.

3.2.3 In the following year, the RFC took on responsibility for aerial defence over land, with the RNAS remaining in control of the coast. The RFC came under increasing pressure when the Zeppelin raids began early in 1915: modern aircraft were in short supply and the army in France had first call on those that were available. It was not until February 1916 that more aircraft could be used and momentum began to build for improvements in home defence and for more aerodromes. Some flying units were reclassified as Home Defence squadrons and by September 37 and 39 Squadrons with this classification were based in Essex.

\textsuperscript{11} Doyle, Fields, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{12} The National Archives (TNA) AIR/1/453/15/312/26.
\textsuperscript{13} e.g. C. M. White, The Gotha Summer: German Daytime Air raids on England May-August 1917 (London: Robert Hale, 1986); N. Hanson, First Blitz (Corgi, 2008).
\textsuperscript{14} http://www.stowmaries.com/history1.asp
3.3 The making of the aerodrome

3.3.1 On 15 September 1916, B Flight of 37 Squadron moved to Stow Maries from Orfordness, Suffolk, where it had been attached to the experimental station. A and C Flights of the squadron were based at Rochford and Goldhanger (Fig 5) respectively, and the squadron headquarters was at Woodham Mortimer.

3.3.2 The 118 acres for the aerodrome were requisitioned from the Turner family of Flambirds Farm and the Jones family of Old Whitmans Farm, taking in 12 fields. The site is said to have been first surveyed in August 1916 while it was still incomplete, shortly before B Flight arrived. In the early 1980s Ivor Dallinger interviewed an ex-airman, Bill Medley, who had visited Stow Maries in 1916 and who said that its development was behind that of his aerodrome at Goldhanger. There were no finished brick buildings, only tents and wooden huts. Lt General Ashmore carried out an inspection in late 1917 and stated that there was a substantial Officers’ Mess in place, as well as a good armoury. The state of the aerodrome would ’cost a great number of machines.’

3.3.3 In the RAF survey of October 1918 the technical buildings were described as 85% complete, the regimental buildings as 55% complete and the roads as 45% complete. It is not clear whether this survey related to completion of the site as planned in 1916, or conversion of the aerodrome to squadron headquarters, which had been initiated in June 1918. At first sight it seems very unlikely, for instance, that B Flight would have gone through two years of war with less than half the roads complete. The situation needs clarifying with reference to original documents. Any alterations to the buildings that may have been made during the course of the war should be identified in the gazetteer.

3.3.4 At present, the only change that can be definitely attributed to the period 1916 to October 1918 is that there were originally two Bessoneau hangars, but the RCHME notes that by 1917 there were two aeroplane twin sheds of the type still present at Hainault Farm. These are identified in the RAF survey. Mr Dallinger considers that there was work in late 1917, through the whole of 1918 and into 1919.

3.3.5 Some buildings are known to have been put up late in the day. The NCOs’ Accommodation is not on the 1918 RAF list and the RCHME notes that the WRAF hostel was not complete at the time of the survey. The Headquarters Reception Building may also be a late addition. The Turner family, who re-acquired the site after the war, say that only the footings of the recreation building (20) had been laid and one of the WRAF accommodation buildings was in the same state.

3.3.6 When the RAF survey was carried out in October 1918, the station personnel totalled 219. This included three members of the WRAF.

\[\text{Doyle, Airfield, p.29.}\]
\[\text{Doyle, op. cit., p. 67.}\]
\[\text{Ivor Dallinger, pers. comm.}\]
\[\text{TNA AIR/1/453/15/312/26}\]
\[\text{These are show on a photograph of September 1917 at the museum. See also P. Francis, British Military Airfield Architecture (Patrick Stephens, 1996), pp. 82-3.}\]
\[\text{Ivor Dallinger, pers. comm.}\]
and 12 civilian women who came in daily. Completion was forecast for 15 December 1918, but hostilities ceased on 11 November.

3.3.7 Stow Maries has by far the most complete suite of First World War aerodrome buildings in the UK. The designs of the two main missing features, the aeroplane sheds and the men’s accommodation, are known from contemporary drawings, and Mr Savory has obtained quotes for exact replicas. The nature of the external surfaces partially preserved beneath the 1960s track is also known, so that while there is some conjecture, Fig 4 is a successful visualisation of the site in 1918.

3.4 The operational aerodrome

3.4.1 Stow Maries was first intended to be used for night-time defence. The first official sortie was on 23 May 1917 by two BE12a aircraft, led by the 20-year-old flight commander Claude Ridley, newly promoted to Captain. This was in response to a large Zeppelin raid on London. By this time, the airship raids were on the wane and the operational history of the aerodrome was mainly concerned with defence against Gotha bombers. However, Second Lieutenant L. P. Watkins of 37 Squadron is credited with shooting down the last Zeppelin over England during the early hours of 17 June 1917.21

3.4.2 The Gotha raids, with London as the primary target and the channel ports as fall-backs, lasted from 25 May 1917 to 19 May 1918 with the main period of attacks and 37 Squadron’s involvement being in the first three months. The number of casualties was 836 dead with 1,965 injured. Property damage amounted to about £1.5M.22 The raids were eventually defeated by improved tactics, the availability of modern aircraft, and the fallibility of the bombers. The direct effects were a minute fraction of the casualties on the Western Front and the damage in the Second World War Blitz. But the effect on the public mood, and the consequences, were far-reaching. These included a train of events leading to the formation of the RAF as an independent service as a result of the Smuts report, and changing the name of the royal house from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor.23

3.4.3 Number 37 Squadron, initially flying the out-dated BE2s and BE12s, was central to the defences, maintaining a line across the Thames from Goldhanger to Detling in Kent (Fig 6). The flight path for the Gothas was close to Stow Maries. In a raid on 24 May, the bombers passed directly overhead, but by the time the BEs had climbed to the German planes’ altitude, they were 35 miles away. The squadron had been re-equipped with Sopwith Strutters by June, which gave them a realistic chance of engaging the Gothas. There appear to be references in logbooks now at the aerodrome museum to experimental work by Marconi in the Wireless Testing Room (building 5) at this time. This is credible, since it is known that Marconi equipment was in use in other squadrons, notably 39 Squadron at North Weald from 1917, and some aircraft had Marconi radios from about 191524, but firm evidence has yet to be found.

3.4.4 One of the busiest days for B Flight was 7 July, when a formation of 22 Gothas heading for London was intercepted. Stow Maries pilots scored

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21 Stow Maries website.
22 Hanson, op. cit., p.447; White, op. cit., p.208.
23 Ibid., pp.165-70.
24 R. Savory, pers. comm.
several hits, but several British aircraft were damaged by the effective crossfire of the Gotha formation. Stow’s involvement in the raids ended rather lamely on 22 July, when aircraft were damaged by British anti-aircraft fire.

3.4.5 In July 1917, A Flight was posted from Rochford to Stow Maries, effectively doubling the number of aircraft and servicemen. The complement of Sopwith 1½ Strutters was increased. Sopwith Pups were also provided, but the station’s first commander, Claude Ridley, left shortly afterwards taking the Pups with him to form 61 Squadron at Rochford. Patrols continued throughout 1917 and early 1918 with the last active sortie being carried out on 7-8 March.

3.4.6 The RAF came into being on 1 April 1918 and the squadron headquarters were moved to Stow Maries in June. C Flight from Goldhanger came to the aerodrome on 20 February 1919. The squadron was equipped with SE5as and subsequently a full complement of Sopwith Camels plus a few Snipes. This episode was very short-lived, however, since the squadron moved to Biggin Hill on 29 March and the aerodrome closed.25

3.4.7 There were no casualties from enemy action throughout the life of the aerodrome. But the fragility of the aircraft and the inexperience of the young pilots resulted in deaths. June 1917 saw the loss of Second Lieutenant Roy Mouritzen from Western Australia in a flying accident. In July there was serious injury to Captain E. Cotterill as a result of engine failure. Captain B. Quinan crashed at Woodham Walter on a training flight and was severely injured. He died in July 1918. That year also saw the death of Captain A. Kynoch in an aerial collision at night, Lieutenant E. Nicholls in another flying accident, and Second Lieutenant C. Milburn in an accident near the edge of the flying field. Nicholls, Mouritzen and Milburn are buried at St Mary’s Stow Maries, as is Claude Ridley, who died from natural causes while a Wing Commander during the Second World War.26

3.5 The site 1919-2007

3.5.1 After the war no attempt was made to remove any of the buildings. They were used for storage and agricultural purposes. The surrounds reverted to farmland. All the drainage was left in situ and remains to this day. Traces of the cinder tracks, such as the one leading away from the aeroplane sheds, can still be seen.

3.5.2 Before the Second World War, surveyors from the Air Ministry inspected the site to see if it could be re-opened, but Rochford was upgraded instead. Perhaps with the intention of making it a decoy, no attempt was made to demolish the aeroplane sheds or other buildings, or to obstruct and camouflage the landing ground. It still resembled an operational station, and was bombed. A pair of parachute mines dropped near Flambirds Farm on 20 April 1941, partially demolishing the north aircraft shed, but the sheds were not taken down until 1946. A combat-damaged Hurricane of 242 Squadron was force-landed on 7 September 1940.27

25 Doyle, Stow, p.31.
26 Stow Maries website
27 Essex County Council Historic Environment Record for this entire paragraph.
3.5.3 The site was surveyed again in 1942, this time as the proposed location for a USAAF bomber station, and was even allocated a station number. Land was requisitioned but the project was shelved at the end of the year.

3.5.4 After the Second World War, some of the buildings, such as the Pilots’ Ready Room, were adapted for farm workers’ accommodation. The evidence for this is in the buildings themselves, but also in the reminiscences of local people, which are being recorded for the aerodrome museum. Other buildings were adapted for agricultural use. This resulted in alterations such as the extension to the Motor Transport Shed and removal of one of its pillars, blocking of wall openings, and erosion of brick by grain handling in the Royal Engineers’ Workshop and Officers’ Mess.

3.5.5 The site buildings were surveyed by the RCHME in 1997 at the request of Essex County Council. The agricultural use at the time was recorded.

3.6 The site since 2007

3.6.1 When the site was put up for sale in 2007 in three separate lots. Maldon District Council became concerned about the future of the buildings and designated the buildings, the flying field and the parade ground a conservation area in June 2008. The aerodrome attracted the interest of Russell Savory and his business partner Steve Wilson as work premises and a restoration project. When Mr Wilson bought it the Workshops and Dope Shop were leased to Mr Savory’s company and reinstated by encasing most of the interior and exterior surfaces. Conservation and conversion of the other buildings was initiated by Mr Savory, who invested a great deal of his own time and money. There were further contributions amounting to £75,000 raised by the Friends of Stow Maries Aerodrome and volunteers. The site as it stands today, with the repair of the Workshops, Dope Shop, Ambulance Shed and Mortuary, Blacksmith’s, Squadron Offices (museum), Other Ranks’ Mess Hall and Recreation Hut, Pilots’ Ready Room, the museum exhibitions, and the serviceable flying field, is a result of this work. The achievement was recognised in the receipt of an English Heritage Angel Award in 2012. The 24 standing buildings were listed in the same year. Thirteen of them were placed on the local Buildings at Risk register by Maldon District Council, and subsequently on the national register by English Heritage.

3.6.2 In 2012, Steve Wilson decided to sell the site. Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome Ltd (SMGWA) was formed to purchase it for preservation and public benefit. Grants were received from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and English Heritage. Essex County Council and Maldon District Council provided loans. On 26 February 2013, SMGWA became a registered charity with the following objectives:

- to preserve the fabric of Stow Maries World War One Aerodrome for public benefit
- to advance the education of the public in the history of Stow Maries World War One Aerodrome and the natural history of the surrounding countryside in such ways as may be deemed charitable in law.

The purchase of the site was concluded on 17 December 2013.

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3.6.3 There is one temporary hangar in place housing loaned aircraft, and the trust has recently received a grant for the erection of a second temporary hangar, subject to the granting of planning permission. It will display a collection of flying replica First World War aeroplanes. Further work to the buildings is in abeyance until a Listed Building Heritage Partnership Agreement is in place, probably in July this year.

3.7 **Current management and use**

3.7.1 The appointment of a site manager and assistant mentioned in the property business plan\(^\text{29}\) does not appear to have been made, but Mr Savory has taken on responsibility for the management of the flying field. There is unrestricted access to the site at present, and parking in many locations. There is no permanent car park located away from the setting of the buildings, the museum entrance and the business premises in the workshop, as might be expected on a site of this type. Routine management operations such as grass cutting and building maintenance are undertaken by volunteers who are also preparing the gazetteer of the buildings.

3.7.2 The site is currently open to the public every Thursday, Friday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm and educational groups are taken round by appointment. There were 763 visitors in 2012. There is no public access to the south end of the site at present because of the dangerous state of the unrestored buildings. The restored Other Ranks’ Mess is open for refreshments for volunteers and visitors and is the venue for events, talks and meetings organised by the Friends.

4. **Significance**

4.1 **Historical and geographical context**

4.1.1 At the end of the First World War there were 301 aerodromes in Britain.30 Most, like Stow Maries, had been created within the previous four years. The locations were generally those that have dominated the history of military airfields since: the east coast, East Anglia, outer London, Kent and Oxfordshire. There were also sites around Salisbury Plain remaining from the very early history of the army’s first use of balloons and aircraft. Doyle lists 31 sites in Essex.31 Of the 37 Squadron sites, Rochford has now become Southend Airport. Nothing of Goldhanger remains on the site, but the NCOs’ Mess was relocated as a chapel nearby.32 Other aerodromes, such as North Weald Bassett, were re-used in the next war and subsequently, although a large number of Second World War airfields were started from scratch and many earlier ones were ignored. Individual structures survive on other sites, such as the twin sheds at Hainault Farm. The majority of First World War aerodromes in Essex, as in the rest of the country, have disappeared largely without trace.

4.1.2 Nationally, elements of First World War aerodromes survive on the sites around Salisbury Plain at Upavon and Larkhill/Figheldean, including aeroplane sheds, motor transport sheds, offices and particularly the officers’ mess buildings. The biggest group of designated buildings is at Duxford, including three hangars, a barrack block, stores, workshops and other technical buildings, but the setting has been completely lost beneath later development. Other hangar groups are at Calshot, Henlow, Hooton Park, Lee-on-Solent, Old Sarum and Yatesbury.33

4.1.3 English Heritage considers that Stow Maries is the most intact First World War aerodrome in Europe.34 Its 2000 survey of military aviation sites notes that on mainland Europe unaltered pre-1918 survivals are an extreme rarity.35

4.2 **Evidential significance**

4.2.1 Twenty-four out of the 44 buildings recorded in 1918 survive. Although there is localised decay and instability, the survival of the buildings and elements of the interiors is remarkable. The methods of construction that were used throughout RFC aerodromes can be clearly seen. Roof structures are still evident, the original trusses are in place and still serviceable. Walls remain largely unaltered, and the alterations that have been made can be clearly identified from changes in brickwork. Original external and internal rendering survive in many places, and original windows are still in place. Many interior doors and fire places survive, even dado rails and door fittings.

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31 Doyle, *Fields*, p.5.
34 Dr Simon Thurley, Introduction to the Angel Award on Friends of Stow Maries website http://www.fosma.co.uk/news.html
4.2.2 The principal losses have been the aeroplane sheds and the men’s accommodation. These were largely timber structures for which there are detailed contemporary drawings. Their appearance and exact locations are known so that they can be reinstated with full accuracy.

4.2.3 The external surfaces are largely undisturbed and those immediately in front of the buildings are preserved beneath 1960s levels. The later adaptation of the buildings for farm and residential use can be clearly traced and is itself of heritage interest. Above all, the landscape setting of the buildings is still extant because there was no later development.

4.2.4 The building and landscape evidence is supported by the log books, diaries and other documents of the people who served at Stow Maries which are kept at the site museum.

4.2.5 The extent of surviving evidence is the greatest for any First World War UK aerodrome and may be among the greatest in Western Europe, so Stow Maries is of international significance in this respect.

4.3 Historical significance

4.3.1 The undisturbed layout of the buildings clearly illustrates the two essential arrangements which were central to First World War military aerodromes: the separation of technical, regimental and accommodation buildings; and the arrangement of accommodation and mess facilities according to rank. Technical buildings comprised storage, transport, repair and maintenance. They are clustered at the north end behind the former aircraft sheds which opened onto the airfield, while the distribution of the regimental buildings to the south and south west reinforces the hierarchical nature of military life, with officers and women segregated from other ranks. These arrangements can be seen on many plans and air photographs of other sites, but Stow Maries is the only place where they can be experienced on the ground.

4.3.2 The modifications to the buildings for farming and residential use illustrate the nature of farming and the standards of farm workers’ accommodation in the early post-war period.

4.3.3 There are strong associative historical significances. Stow Maries was central to Home Defence against the Gotha bombers. The raids had far-reaching consequences. They created widespread unrest and led to the symbolic change in the name of the royal house. The Smuts report was produced as a consequence, leading ultimately to the formation of the RAF. Some books describe the raids as the ‘first Blitz’ and the experience certainly influenced the planning of Britain’s air defences leading up to the Second World War.36

4.3.4 In summary, the site is of national historical significance.

4.4 Aesthetic significance

4.4.1 The lack of later changes means that the visitor can fully appreciate the character and nature of a First World War aerodrome. Many features, such as the interior of the Officers’ Mess and the restored Pilots’ Ready Room at

36 See fn 12.
the edge of the flying field, looking much like a pavilion at the edge of a cricket ground, are enduring images.

4.4.2 In its present state, particularly when viewed from the south and west, the aerodrome has an elegiac, remote quality. This is partly given by the relatively small scale of the buildings within such an open landscape, and by their present condition.

4.5 Communal significance

4.5.1 The aerodrome is of distinctive and rare commemorative value. The war graves, trenches and other features of the First World War on mainland Europe commemorate a different and larger-scale aspect of the conflict. Within England, there are war graves at cemeteries such as Brookwood. The main other features are war memorials, airfield memorials and individual buildings, usually lost within later development. There are probably no other sites that had a military purpose and now remain largely unaltered. Interest in commemoration at the aerodrome is evident in the fact that the memorial to pilots who died while serving there was paid for by public subscription.

4.5.2 The story of the restoration and management of the site since Mr Savory began work in 2007, the amount of time, effort and money that volunteers have contributed to the site, and the support that has been received from the local authorities, are very strong evidence of the way that it is valued by local communities.

4.5.3 In conclusion, the site is of national communal value.
5. **Issues**

5.1 **Structure of this section**

5.1.1 This section begins with a discussion of the overriding need to establish a clear and realistic vision for the site. Sections 5.2-5.14 review conservation issues in relation to the significances discussed above, and sections 5.15-5.18 deal with management and communication issues. Section 5.19 tabulates constraints and opportunities.

5.2 **Defining a vision**

5.2.1 Everyone involved in Stow Maries Aerodrome seems to agree that the future of the site lies in conservation of the buildings and their setting, and in interpretative, educational and commemorative use. But there is neither a clear consensus on exactly what this means building-by-building, nor a vision accepted by all involved. Are most of the buildings to be conserved and furnished as exhibition features? To what extent should the site become dependent on income from visitors for its long-term survival? Can some buildings have other uses compatible with their conservation? Could there be an income to maintain the exhibition buildings? Re-use of buildings would be consistent with English Heritage guidance on military aviation sites, although this was prepared with much more robust and larger buildings in mind. Overriding all of these points is the need to conserve the unique character of the site and its special qualities.

5.2.2 Nevertheless, uses compatible with the character of the site and the purpose of its conservation could add to, rather than detract from, its value as a visitor attraction and educational centre. One approach might be to construct the replica buildings so that they are exact copies externally and modified for modern uses internally.

5.2.3 A vision and masterplan that are imaginative, practical and universally agreed are therefore essential. They could be within a full conservation management plan or a separate, shorter exercise and related to the management structure required by English Heritage the end of June 2014 as a condition of its grant for purchase.

5.2.4 This issue must be tackled urgently to avoid losing the momentum that the conservation of the site so far has achieved, losing volunteer enthusiasm, and above all losing opportunities for grant aid and raising awareness of the site during the commemoration of the First World War.

5.3 **Phases of development of the buildings**

5.3.1 The construction sequence over the period 1916 -1918 is not clear from the evidence currently available. The practical implication is that there may have been modification to the buildings now standing on the site as it expanded from one flight, to two, to a whole squadron. This point must be considered in further research into the documentary sources and the inspections being carried out for the gazetteer.

5.3.2 Many of the uses and modifications of the buildings for farming and accommodation are self-evident and can be fully recorded in the gazetteer. Changes such as interior paintwork and woodwork are less

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38 Letter English Heritage to Stuart Warburton  28 March 2013
clear-cut. The reminiscences of people who lived in the buildings are available and need to be taken into account.

5.3.3 The later use of the buildings is a significant part of the site’s history and it can be related to the wider social history theme of the re-use of wartime buildings. Examples where this can traced in the fabric include the fireplace in the Officers’ Mess scarred by grain storage, the pitting of the brickwork in the Royal Engineers’ Workshop resulting from grain handling, and the fractured wall in the south end of the Pilots’ Ready Room. These and other features can be left to illustrate the full story of the aerodrome without impairing the significance of the wartime phase.

5.3.4 The post-war treatment of external surfaces is a different matter. Substantial areas of brickwork appear to have been treated originally with a lime-based render. This survives intermittently and gives a distinctive appearance to several walls. At the other extreme, there is a coarse ‘pebble-dash’ render which was probably applied much later and is breaking away in some places. There are other areas with a finer render which may be contemporary with the buildings or may be later. Later renders may well have been applied because the wall surface was deteriorating.

5.3.5 The retention of original renders and the patina that they give is essential to the character of the site. Removal of late, coarse and fragmenting renders that obscure wartime features or conservation problems may be necessary. A policy needs to be developed for the intermediate ones after a more detailed study of their age and purpose.

5.4 The external appearance and character of buildings

5.4.1 The HPA will cover the following topics:

- Stitching or partial rebuilding of brick walls
- Removal of damaging pointing
- Repointing with hydraulic lime mortar
- Replacement of linear steel binders damaging the brickwork
- Patch repair of shuttered concrete walls
- Repair or renewal of render (see also above)
- Repair or renewal of roof coverings
- Reinstatement of missing rainwater goods
- Replacement of UPVC rainwater goods
- Provision of new rainwater goods
- Repair of exterior doors
- Repair of timber window frames
- Repair of steel window frames
- Reinstatement of ex situ window frames and reinstatement of missing windows,
- Opening of blocked windows and reinstatement of missing frames.
- Repair or renewal of glazing
- Repair of timber doors
- Reinstatement of ex situ doors

5.4.2 For any one building, these measures must be put together in a way that fully respects its significance and its contribution to the character of the site as a whole. In particular, the retention of weathered brick and appropriate roofing materials that match the existing ones are often vital.
The overall conservation objectives for each building should be set out in the masterplan.

5.4.3 Some of the work carried out to date could be regarded as over-restoration in its treatment of external surfaces and the roofing materials used. It would be senseless to unpick this at the cost of delaying work to the buildings that have not been conserved, but it should be avoided from now on.

5.5 **The extent of building restoration**

5.5.1 Consideration should be given to the permanent retention of one or more buildings in their present condition, but consolidated to avoid further deterioration. This would demonstrate what the site and the structures looked like before restoration. It could be taken further by conserving a group of buildings in this state to conserve the distinctive character of the site, and its elegiac and commemorative qualities. The Water Tower could fulfil the former function, and the group comprising the Generator Hut, Headquarters Reception Building and WRAF Accommodation, perhaps, the latter.

5.6 **External surfaces, buried features and services**

5.6.1 There are known to be cinder paths and tracks that served the buildings and the hangars. Some patches survive and others are shown on early air photographs. They are preserved beneath the 1960s track. It would be logical to consider reinstating these at the original levels once the work to the buildings has been completed, although this decision is some distance away. There are also footings for lost buildings and areas of compacted surface. The telegraph poles/electricity service poles remain, but the wiring and connections have been removed. There is the potential for rubbish pits, buried construction materials and other objects of historical value.

5.6.2 The original drainage appears to work alongside recent additions, but new electrical and water supplies will be needed, and perhaps additional foul drains.

5.6.3 There is therefore the need for an archaeological survey with a combination of geophysics and mapping surface features. The buildings could also be plotted to obtain a fully digitised map of the site. The survey should identify areas where trafficking should be avoided, constraints on invasive work, and features that could be considered for excavation.

5.7 **Internal restoration and appropriate new uses**

5.7.1 The HPA will cover:

- Repair or renewal of elements of roof trusses
- Reinstatement of missing partitions, and in-filling of later openings
- Repair or reinstatement of plasterwork
- Reinstatement of ex situ or missing stoves and flues
- Installation of new electrical services and plumbing
- Removal of later agricultural electrical services

5.7.2 Particular care is also needed with wall and wood surfaces. Some of the paint and wall coatings may date from the post-war use, which does not necessarily mean that it should be removed. In other cases, paintwork
may survive only on small areas such as around locks. A survey or surveys by a paint specialist will be necessary.

5.7.3 As a general principle, new uses should avoid invasive work to walls and floors, partitions and wall fixings. In some cases, new elements could be contained in ‘pods’ standing free of the walls. Buildings at aerodromes are quite often used for archives or document storage, sometimes requiring a controlled environment. However, the buildings on the site are generally too small with little room for expansion. Specific uses for individual buildings could be considered, such as a blacksmith at the Blacksmiths and light industrial or craft use in the Royal Engineers’ Workshop.

5.7.3 Some elements of the building interiors restored so far can be regarded as over-restoration. There is nothing to be gained from trying to unpick these in the foreseeable future. Effort should be invested in getting on with the treatment of other interiors, in accordance with the best practice discussed here, in the HPA, and the lessons learned from the work already done.

5.8 **Replica buildings**

5.8.1 Planning permission to put up seven replica Men’s Accommodation buildings was obtained in 2009. This has now expired, although Mr Savory has obtained quotations for the construction of replica buildings. Their use needs to be decided before they are put up, so that the right features can be designed-in. Classrooms for the use of school groups have been suggested, but the capacity and facilities need to be defined. Another use for one or more buildings might be offices for conservation organisations or similar bodies. At least one replica building could be finished and dressed as it would have been in 1918.

5.8.2 The use of temporary units, which will inevitably be out of character with the site, would not be appropriate. Efforts should be concentrated on providing replicas, even if this means that the work has to be done in phases.

5.8.3 The provision of two replica twin aeroplane sheds has been a central proposal for the site for some time. One would house a collection of First World War planes and the second would be leased to a vintage aircraft restorer. The public would be able to view the work from a gallery. Planning permission has yet to be granted for the two temporary ‘blister’ hangars. There is no guarantee that the permission would be renewed if the hangars are not built within the period given in the consent. In the meantime, there is no opportunity to create permanent facilities or generate income. The HLF intimated in January 2013 that it would grant-aid one hangar and would be keen to help in developing the site over there years.\(^39\) It is difficult to understand, therefore, why plans for the permanent sheds are not further forward.

5.9 **The phasing of restoration**

5.9.1 A restoration programme is dependent on achieving an agreed vision and a funding programme. As part of this process, priorities need to be set out as soon as possible. The business plan\(^40\) gives a logical sequence of

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\(^39\) J. Longman pers. comm

\(^40\) SMFWA, *op. cit.*, p.25.
phases based on working from north to south to minimise disruption. However, the availability of funding, and conservation and marketing requirements, may give different priorities. Moreover, it would increase the present interest of the site for visitors if they could safely get closer to the unrestored buildings at the south end of the site.

5.9.2 The possibility of securing unrestored buildings with Heras or similar fencing, and a building-by-building phasing should be considered. This will require good site management.

5.10 **Access**

5.10.1 This section discusses physical access. Intellectual access is discussed below.

5.10.2 The site is likely to present few problems for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. But an access audit is needed. The cost of compliance needs to be fully taken into account in issues such as planning new toilet facilities.

5.10.3 When there are large numbers of visitors for events, there is a one-way system that works successfully, and sufficient temporary parking. However, there is no permanent all-weather car park set away from the buildings for normal use. The result is the risk of damage to surfaces and detraction from the special quality of the buildings and their setting. The clay soil is easily degraded and any form of traffic in wet weather should be avoided. Permanent car parking arrangements that respect the site need to be made.

5.10.4 As visitor numbers increase on ordinary days there will be highway issues that need to be addressed. For example, at the junction with Hackmans Lane there is not enough vision splay to allow vehicles to enter and leave the site simultaneously. This is potentially dangerous. The lane has the national speed limit on it at this location and the access is shared with farm vehicles.

5.10.5 The condition of the concrete surface is not suitable for numerous car movements and its construction does not lend itself to safe and easy access. The north part is not within the ownership of the Trust, which only has an easement.

5.10.6 The trust intends to open up the disused access from the west to improve access for coaches. The quality of road construction for large vehicles and the location of coach parking need to be agreed. The entrance is within a residential area and outside the Maldon District boundary.

5.10.7 There is therefore a need to seek advice from the highway authority, consult with adjacent landowners and Chelmsford City Council, and look into the quality of access routes to cope with more traffic.

5.10.8 As visitor numbers increase, issues such as wear and tear on soft surfaces, poor circulation, and overcrowding in buildings such as the museum may arise. In addition, the Other Ranks’ Mess is now a popular venue for community events, private functions and fundraising events. This use could be expanded. Care is needed to ensure that these uses do not impair the primary purpose of the site or interfere with visitor and volunteer enjoyment. A visitor management plan should therefore be considered.
5.10.9 Site security and day-to-day responsibility for it need to be clarified.

5.11 **Fitting-out restored rooms**

5.11.1 Some of the rooms have already been dressed to a high standard with contemporary objects. Military interiors usually have a standard layout and furnishing, and photographs of the site and artefacts are constantly being donated, so there should be no problem with accuracy. However, by definition, these rooms cannot be changed, so there is limited potential to attract repeat visitors or provide new information. The number and location of the rooms to be fully fitted out is thus an important part of the masterplan.

5.11.2 A distinction needs to be made in presentation of the rooms between contemporary artefacts from the site, those from other sites, and replicas.

5.12 **Collections and exhibitions**

5.12.1 The formation, curating and display of a collection of First World War aircraft and replicas are specialist topics that should be addressed separately.

5.12.2 There is an excellent museum on the site. It concentrates on the history and use as an aerodrome and the biographies of the people who served there. It also displays objects donated and found during restoration. A collections management plan is being prepared. This will address the need to be selective in donations accepted and finding homes for offers that are not appropriate for Stow Maries Aerodrome. Museum accreditation is being sought.

5.12.3 The long-term purpose of the museum and how it relates to other airfield museums needs to be considered. Is it a museum of the site with references to the wider picture of the RFC? Could it be expanded to be a museum of the RFC or early flight or 37 Squadron? Could it be a museum of Home Defence, or one of commemoration for people who served in the First World War?

5.12.4 The unique feature of the site is the survival of First World War buildings. Subject to the need to create controlled environments, the collection could be dispersed through the buildings to the most appropriate setting for each topic.

5.13 **Archives and research**

5.13.1 The on-site archive is increasing with the acquisition of original documents and recording the reminiscences of people who have known aerodrome. It is essential that as much oral history as possible is gathered while the conservation project and the commemoration of the First World War have raised interest in the site. There are now excellent opportunities for volunteers to help with this and other current research. For example, the Council for British Archaeology project supporting community groups researching local places associated with the First World War has just been launched.41

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41 http://www.archaeologyUK.org/first-world-war
5.13.2 At present there are several people with a detailed knowledge of the site and some or all of the documentary sources. But there is no single full, referenced historical account that is easily available on the internet. This would raise the profile of Stow Maries with regional, national and international researchers and would be a basis for further work. The practical implications of this for funding, and the need to do it when interest in the First World War is high, are self-evident.

5.14 **Professional advice**

5.14.1 Volunteers will always be the backbone of work on the site, but some aspects of the conservation repair of the buildings will require professionals. For instance, it is worth considering retaining an on-call conservation architect with a track record in work of this type.

5.14.2 Grant-aiding bodies such as the HLF will require independent qualified professionals such as quantity surveyors to deal with some aspects of projects. There are also specialist subjects where the results of survey are so crucial to the conservation of the site that professionals should be employed. These include geophysics and paint analysis. In other cases professional advice can be obtained through sources such as the County Archaeologist and the County Archivist. Maldon District Council’s Senior Conservation and Urban Design Officer has been instrumental in the conservation of the site since 2007, and her advice on the management of the site, in addition to formal consultations as part of the HPA, is essential.

5.14.2 The business plan states the intention of bringing in experts from the Imperial War Museum at Duxford and the RAF museum at Hendon as trustees/directors or advisors, and this should clearly be followed up.

5.14.3 Selecting professionals and agreeing their terms of engagement should be a transparent process clear to all involved in the site.

**MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

5.15 **Funding and raising the profile of the site**

5.15.1 A number of sources of grants such as the HLF have been identified by SMGWA, but the programme for grant application and the number of bodies approached, are not clear. There has to be urgency in setting out a programme and making application before potential sources develop ‘Great War fatigue.’ For example, match funding will be needed for an HLF bid. Has this been identified? Volunteer work can contribute to this, but is there a system of logging this work that meets HLF requirements, and a volunteer programme? The HLF will need to be assured that there are realistic resources in place to maintain the capital works that it pays for. Is this the case?

5.15.2 It would also be best to tie start and completion dates for projects in to national commemorations in order to maximise publicity. The opportunity presented by the centenary of August 1914 may have been largely missed, but the centenary of the RAF in April 2018 or of the Gotha raids in 2017 have not.
5.15.3 While the grant programme is being considered, an immediate start could be made on raising the profile of the site. This would support funding and attract visitors. For example, looking up the aerodrome on the internet takes you to a very good, but now rather out of date, website. There is a link on the home page to the Friends site. A single site with the banner heading ‘**the best-preserved First World War aerodrome in Europe**’ and text to match would be more appropriate.

5.15.4 There will be many conferences, meetings and exhibitions over the next four years. Surely Stow Maries should be represented at some of these? Might some even be held at the aerodrome?

5.15.5 Longer-term planning is also essential for grants and revenue. For example, the Higher Level Stewardship scheme expires in six years’ time and the site may not be eligible for the scheme that replaces it. The business plan shows considerable revenue from school visits and points out that the First World War is on the National Curriculum. But this in Key Stage 3 deals with teaching about an international conflict, not home defence and the themes at Stow Maries. So how can the site and facilities be presented to attract school groups?

5.16 **Management and decision-making structure**

5.16.1 The present management and decision-making structure for the site is not transparent. The continued conservation of the site and its long-term management require a single body making strategic decisions (identified in the business plan as the board of directors) supervising a management team of paid/honorary staff and volunteers with a single person (identified as the site and collection manager) with overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the site. This is the model that works successfully for multi-purpose sites such as the aerodrome and it is unfortunate that it is not yet in place. When it is, transparency in decision-making and reporting are needed through published minutes, the site manager’s monthly report, etc. The Heritage Partnership Agreement will require monthly meetings and updates with the local planning authority on the conservation repair of the site.

5.17 **Volunteers**

5.17.1 Volunteers have been vital to the achievements at Stow Maries, and their continued involvement is essential to the success of the site. All English airfield sites except Duxford that are being restored and open to the public are volunteer-run. It may be helpful to look at other sites in this respect, and certainly to develop a long-term approach to retaining and recruiting skilled and committed people.

5.17.2 At present, many of the volunteers at Stow Maries Aerodrome feel alienated from management decisions and long-term planning. They have written to the chairman of trustees to this effect, and proposed widening the membership of the Trust to include volunteers. This may be an ideal time to review the scope of the operational management and governance of the Trust as described in the business plan.\(^{42}\) The review could also take on board why there are separate volunteer and friends groups when they are working for a common purpose.

5.18 **Patronage and trustees**

5.18.1 In order to establish the high profile necessary for the continued funding of the site, the Trust should consider seeking a prominent patron, such as a member of the royal family, as soon as possible. An alternative would be a well-known military historian with a high public profile like Dan Snow or Sir Max Hastings. The present trustees were nominated for their skills in strategic management and development. The business plan and the point made above recognise the need to expand their number in due course. The need for aviation historians has already been noted but people with business acumen and local connections should also be considered: Lord Sugar appears on the richest people in Essex list and lives close by at Chigwell.

5.19 **Summary of opportunities and assets**

- A site of international significance with features central to commemoration and interpretation of the First World War
- A current high profile as a result of winning the Angel Award, recent listing and having one of the first Heritage Partnership Agreements
- There are several potential sources of grants for capital works
- Active support of the local authorities
- The high public interest in the First World War for the next four years can be capitalised upon, and the First World War is on the National Curriculum
- The repairs already carried out on the buildings demonstrates the capabilities of people at the aerodrome to potential funders
- There are skilled and committed volunteers
- There are facilities for displays of period aircraft
- There is potential for a financially viable mixture of light industry, tourism and education
- Exact replicas of the major lost structures can be created
- There is an excellent on-site museum with scope for expansion and opportunities to fit out restored rooms in exact period style
- Good facilities for events and meetings
- The site is of significant nature conservation interest and this can be maintained and enhanced
- The site is owned by a charitable trust with the opportunity to bring in patrons and trustees who will contribute expert guidance

5.20 **Summary of threats and weaknesses**

- There is no agreed long-term vision for the site. A clear management structure acceptable to all parties has yet to be put in place
There is poor communication between the trustees, the volunteers and others involved in day-to-day use of the site.

A programme of grant applications is not available and opportunities may be lost.

Revenue may be limited and unstable.

If grants are not vigorously pursued, there may be pressure for temporary structures such as the blister hangars to become the norm, which the local authority will resist.

Buildings and interiors continue to deteriorate and may require temporary works before money is available for full conservation: 13 are on the at risk registers compiled by Maldon District Council and English Heritage.

There have been some instances of over-restoration and this need to be avoided in future work.

There is the risk of damage to structures and finishes if buildings are adapted for new uses.

Many interior spaces are small and potential new uses are very restricted.

Surviving surfaces and sub-surface archaeology may be damaged by traffic and excavation for services.

There is no separate all-weather car park.

Vehicle access is poor and this will need to be resolved to accommodate an increase in visitor numbers.

The issue of re-locating the tenants from Broadacres within the site has yet to be resolved.
6. **Policies**

6.1 **Policy 1 - vision and masterplan:** to prepare a vision, masterplan and management plan for the aerodrome to go to public consultation no later than August 2014. This must be agreed by all parties involved in the site’s conservation.

**Reason:** there are conflicting views about exactly how the site should be conserved, managed and used. It is impossible to set priorities, promote the site and seek funding without a clear vision. It is a condition of the English Heritage capital grant that an appropriate management regime is in place by June 2014.

6.2 **Policy 2 - development phases:** to clarify the sequence of development of the buildings between 1916 and 1919.

**Reason:** the extent to which standing buildings may have been modified during the First World War as the use expanded from one flight to two to a full squadron is not clear. This could have an important bearing on their conservation and interpretation.

6.3 **Policy 3 - post-war changes:** to retain evidence of post-war agricultural and residential use within restored buildings where this does not interfere with the conservation and interpretation of First World War features.

**Reason:** these are an integral part of the history of the site.

6.4 **Policy 4 - external surfaces:** to leave First World War renders and brickwork unaltered.

**Reason:** these are integral to the character of the site.

6.5 **Policy 5 - later external surfaces:** to investigate post-1918 renders and surfacing, and where appropriate to carry out conservation measures advised by English Heritage and Maldon District Council’s conservation officer that conserve the underlying First World War fabric.

**Reason:** renders may be concealing features and problems.

6.6 **Policy 6 - conservation standards and the HPA:** to comply with national and local guidance, policies and regulations for historic buildings and the specifications given in the HPA.

**Reason:** these are nationally-significant historic buildings.

6.7 **Policy 7 - building objectives:** to set out conservation objectives for each building.

**Reason:** this is an essential part of the vision for the site.

6.8 **Policy 8 - over-restoration:** to avoid over-restoration by following the HPA, the guidance of English Heritage and the local authority conservation officer.

**Reason:** some work on the site is over-restoration. The guidance and agreement about to be in place should avoid this arising in the future.

6.9 **Policy 9 - unrestored buildings:** to consider leaving one or more buildings consolidated in their present state as evidence of the unrestored site and its landscape character.

**Reason:** this would be of historical and conservation interest. At a landscape scale it would retain something of the site’s elegiac and commemorative qualities.

6.10 **Policy 10 - archaeological survey:** to carry out an archaeological survey of surface and sub-surface features in accordance with a
specification approved by English Heritage and the local authority’s conservation officer as soon as possible. **Reason:** there is a risk of damage to significant features from trafficking, excavation of service trenches and other operations.

6.11 **Policy 11 - internal surfaces and appropriate restoration:** to obtain accurate information on interior surfaces and detailing and avoid over-restoration of interiors. **Reason:** many interiors are remarkably well-preserved and contain fragments of fine detail allowing very accurate repair. In other cases, less is known and over-restoration should be avoided.

6.12 **Policy 12 - new uses for standing buildings:** to ensure that new uses for standing buildings have no impact on fabric, character and setting. **Reason:** it is possible that sympathetic new uses may be found for restored standing buildings, but great care will be needed in any adaptation.

6.13 **Policy 13 - replica buildings:** to put the replica aeroplane sheds and accommodation huts in place as soon as possible, ensuring uses compatible with the vision for the site. **Reason:** they will make a major change to the visitor experience and produce revenue for the site.

6.14 **Policy 14 - phasing:** to develop a detailed phasing programme that reflects conservation priorities building-by-building and minimises the constraints on visitor access around the site. **Reason:** visitors should expect access to as much of the site as possible consistent with safety. A building-by-building approach to restoration may better reflect funding and priorities than an area-based one.

6.15 **Policy 15 - DDA compliance:** to carry-out an access audit and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. **Reason:** this is a basic requirement.

6.16 **Policy 16 - car park:** to establish a permanent all-weather car park for users of the buildings, volunteers and visitors. **Reason:** the character and quality of the aerodrome landscape and the setting of the buildings must be respected. In addition, ad-hoc parking risks damage to the surfaces and sub-surface archaeology.

6.17 **Policy 17 - roads and vehicle access:** to identify and resolve vehicle access issues arising from development of the site. **Reason:** vehicle access to the site at present is poor and neighbours need to be consulted. The roads and tracks are unlikely to be able to cope with a large increase in use unless changes are made to layout and surfacing.

6.18 **Policy 18 - visitor management:** to develop a visitor management plan which takes account of projected visitor numbers and the other uses of the buildings. **Reason:** this is a quite constrained site, particularly until the building restoration is completed.

6.19 **Policy 19 - site security:** to ensure the security of the site and visitors to it. **Reason:** there is minimal security at present.
6.20 **Policy 20 - fitting out restored rooms**: to define the number and purpose of the rooms that will be dressed as they were in 1918 and to ensure the accuracy of the display.

*Reason:* such rooms will be an important part of the presentation and interpretation of the site, but the locations need to be chosen with care and the constraints that they present understood.

6.21 **Policy 21 - collections management**: to develop a collections management plan and become an accredited museum.

*Reason:* this is a basic requirement and is already in hand.

6.22 **Policy 22 - scope of exhibitions and interpretation**: to define long-term objectives for the museum and on-site interpretation.

*Reason:* there are several roles that the museum and interpretation could take on, or it could just be a museum of the site.

6.23 **Policy 23 - documenting the site**: to prepare a fully-documented and easily accessible account of the site’s history.

*Reason:* this will inform the restoration of the site and raise its profile with historians and the general public.

6.24 **Policy 24 - recording and access to the archive**: to make full oral history records of the site and to establish a digital archive.

*Reason:* it is essential that records are made while people who knew the site are still available, so this policy has high priority. A digital archive would be part of a programme of developing strong links with local and airfield historians.

6.25 **Policy 25 - professional advice**: to obtain a high standard of professional services through a transparent procurement process, where they are necessary to meet conservation standards appropriate for the site.

*Reason:* this is a basic requirement of due diligence and accountability.

6.26 **Policy 26 - funding**: within the next three months, to prepare a programme of grant applications for the period 2014-18 and to implement it as soon as possible.

*Reason:* it is essential that full use is made of current interest in the First World War and the interest expressed by organisations like the HLF.

6.27 **Policy 27 - publicity**: to raise awareness of the importance of Stow Maries Aerodrome, linking it to First World War events and commemorations and beyond.

*Reason:* a major increase in public awareness is essential for the future of the site.

6.28 **Policy 28 - management and decision-making**: Within the next three months, to establish the management structure given in the business plan of a board of directors/trustees with overall responsibility, a management committee drawn from all people involved in the conservation of the site, and a day-to-day site manager

*Reason:* this is essential for clear decision-making and accountability.

6.29 **Policy 29 - volunteers**: in implementing policy 28, volunteers should be represented at all levels of the management structure.

*Reason:* the site cannot function without the work of volunteers, who should be properly represented.
6.30 **Policy 30 - publicity:** to obtain a prominent patron and expand the number and experience of trustees/directors.

**Reason:** a recognised patron is an essential requirement for any successful charity. A wider range of trustees is an objective of the business plan.
7. References

The National Archives
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Essex County Council Historic Environment Record

N. Hanson, *First Blitz* (Corgi, 2008).


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SMGWA, 'Business and Development Plan 2013-2018.'


http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/orford-ness/history/view-page/item567155/


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1. Twin shed
2. Twin shed
3. Workshops
4. Dope Shop
5. Office and Wireless testing Room
6. Royal Engineers Workshop
7. Ammunition Store
8. Blacksmiths
9. Motor Transport Sheds
10. Ambulance Shed and Mortuary
11. Store
12. Unknown
13. Guardhouse
14. Unknown
15. Squadron Offices (Museum)
16. Other Ranks Mess Hall and Recreation Hut
17. Pilots’ Ready Room
18. Fuel Store
19. Unknown
20. Recreation Hut
21. Unknown
22. Water Tower
23. Reservoir
24. WRAF Accommodation
25. WRAF Accommodation
26. WRAF Accommodation
27. WRAF Accommodation
28. WRAF Accommodation
29. WRAF Accommodation
30. NCO Accommodation
31. Officers’ Quarters
32. Officers’ Quarters
33. Officers’ Quarters
33a. Toilets and washroom
34. Officers’ Mess
34a. Toilet block 7
35. Men’s Accommodation Block
36. Men’s Accommodation Block
37. Men’s Accommodation Block
38. Men’s Accommodation Block
39. Men’s Accommodation Block
40. Men’s Accommodation Block
41. Men’s Accommodation Block
42. Men’s Accommodation Block
43. Men’s Accommodation Block
44. Unknown
45. Headquarters Reception Building
46. Generator Hut
47. Parade Ground Building
Reconstruction of the Site in 1918, from the Northeast
FIGURE 5
First World War Landing Sites in Essex
from Doyle, 1997
RFC/RNAS Air Bases and Patrol Areas April 1917

from White, 1986