

THREE critically important points appear to be at least largely forgotten in the ongoing debate concerning Lichfield's future.

All now need to be urgently highlighted to stop this badly thought-out plan from ever materialising.

Many myths – especially negative ones – tend to surround Britain's airfields, and one of the biggest is that these places are not environmentally friendly. In fact the exact opposite is true.

Airfields with hard runways and associated tracks such as Lichfield vitally improved the landscape through soil stabilisation which not only improved soil quality but in turn drainage to prevent flooding.

It was therefore a disastrous move in later years to rip up disused airfield surfaces as the land would be irreparably damaged in environmental terms.

Simple proof is to drive past any disused site where a runway used to exist and see how the grass or soil is a darker shade of either green or brown: this not only indicates where the runway once was but also highlights the permanently degraded land deprived of soil stabilisation.

And to propose creating an eco-town in an area already with canals nearby could create real long-term problems in years to come.

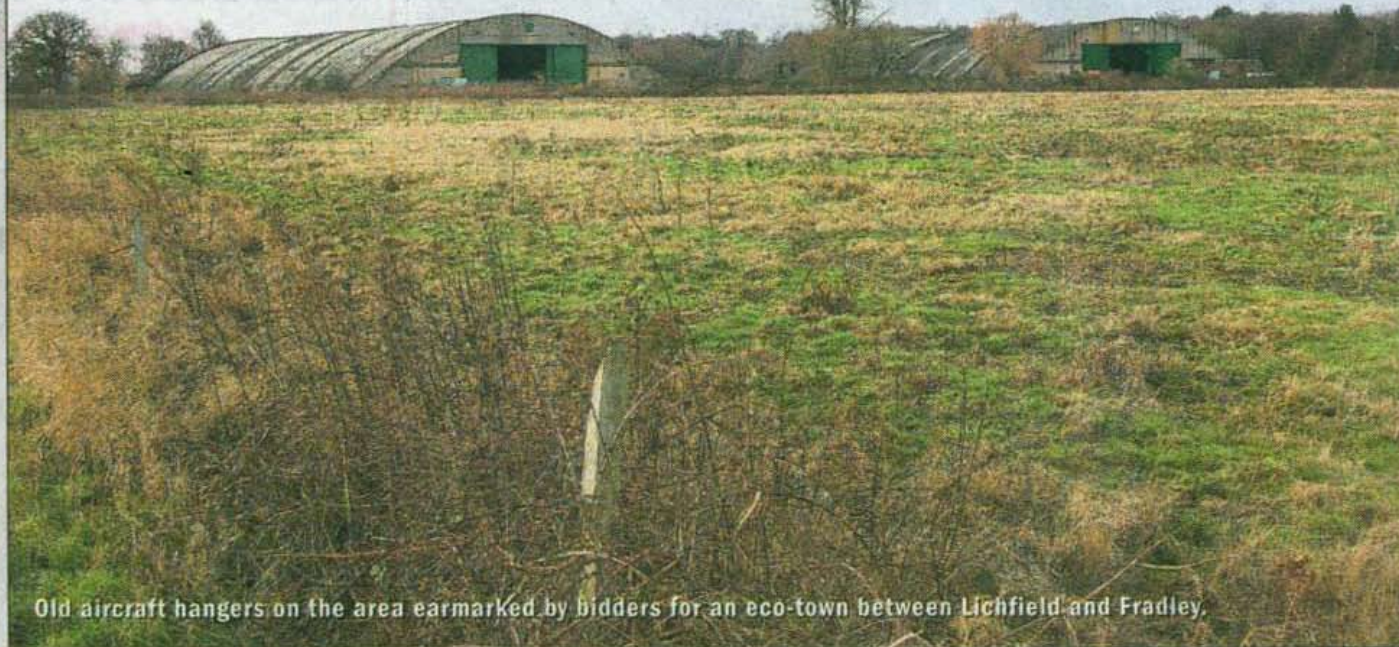
Second point is the phenomenal combined current and future prospects and potential Britain's airfields offer, regardless of whether they are active or disused.

Jobs, facilities, services – you name it, these places can do practically anything.

So it is sheer insanity to just unthinkingly get rid of all the marvellous facilities already available at places such as Lichfield.

As one person said to me some years ago, disused airfields only need to be used, and not necessarily for aviation purposes.

## Old airfields are an important part of our heritage



Old aircraft hangars on the area earmarked by bidders for an eco-town between Lichfield and Fradley.

Therefore why not retain all the facilities here and elsewhere as they can be easily adapted.

This makes complete economic sense alone as to get rid of everything and start again from scratch would actually be far more expensive.

The hangars standing in the general Gorse Lane area continue to give terrific service for industrial purposes and definitely should not be removed but the overall potential involved is virtually endless – provided the airfield is completely left alone. And then there is the mixture of historical importance and popularity. Britain's airfields are widely regarded as the greatest in the world, huge winners and achievers which have

saved their country and revolutionised everyday life.

These places are belatedly now being seen as our top historical relics by increasing numbers of people because they just matter.

People are finally beginning to really think about airfields instead of taking them for granted as our charity can readily confirm.

As for yet another myth that our airfields are unpopular, one only needs to look at the vox pop section of our website [www.abct.org.uk](http://www.abct.org.uk) to see an altogether different story.

I remember even predicting airfield tourism over 30 years ago to some derision but this is now reality.

The airfield story is one of massive

but subtle influence as Lichfield readily demonstrates for, without this place, many of the air traffic control procedures we all now accept as routine might not have reached such levels of perfection.

So, as founder and leader of Britain's first national airfield charity and having visited over 1,700 of these places, let no-one be in any doubt that this eco-town plan is not remotely viable on all sorts of levels.

We can do better than this – for Lichfield and every other British airfield deserves better.

**Kenneth P Bannerman, Director General,  
Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust.**