

Future of Historic Air Base

RAF Upper Heyford - once the heart of allied defence against nuclear attack by the USSR - could become a Cold War 'museum'.

Historians want parts of the base to be preserved as a heritage centre that could show future generations the struggle with Soviet communism 'in a way no document can'.

Details of the latest recommendations for Heyford - now being called Heyford Park - have been put forward by English Heritage which has called for measures to prevent demolition of the 'irreplaceable' military remains.

Current thinking comes from a detailed assessment of Cold War infrastructure across England by English Heritage experts. Keith Watson, the chief executive of the North Oxfordshire Consortium who are to develop part of the site for housing, said they were in full agreement with English Heritage's proposals.

He said: "We are quite content with what English Heritage is proposing. It has always been part of our scheme to retain these structures in any event. "We are working with English Heritage to agree a consistent plan for the buildings."

David Went, English Heritage inspector of ancient monuments, said many Upper Heyford features exemplify historical aspects of national importance about the Cold War.

"The sheer scale and bare functionality of the structures on the base can illustrate for present and future generations, in a way no document can, the reality of the struggle with Soviet Communism," he said.

"In our view much of this character would be lost by future ill-thought-out change and there stands an opportunity to ensure this does not happen.

"We recognize that preservation of the whole base exactly as it stands today may not be a realistic option but a sustainable future could be found which balances the need for preservation against other needs."

Mr Went said the English Heritage view was that the future appearance of the base should include the most significant monuments and should:

- keep the open character of the runway area without planting schemes planned by developers

- keep a section of the main runway and the remainder as a grassed avenue
- provide all-weather access to the monuments, preferably by keeping existing base taxiways and perimeter tracks, for visitors or other practical use
- preserve the present landscape balance around the bomb bunkers and quick reaction area.

The English Heritage study, submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in advance of the public inquiry into planning wrangles over the base which started at Bodicote House yesterday, has revealed that much of the Heyford landscape prior to becoming an airbase was open common or heathland - a feature Cherwell District Council planners would like re-established as a local country park.

The council aims to defend the accepted 1,000-home plan which the North Oxfordshire Consortium of developers wishes to extend to over 5,000 homes.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why does English Heritage want to preserve the air base?

A They believe it is still of military importance.

B They think it can show young people something about history.

C There hasn't been proper planning by developers.

2. What do the North Oxfordshire Consortium think?

A They want to build more houses than originally planned

B They say there is some possibility of keeping the base's original buildings.

C They want to call the base "Heyford Park".

3. Which of these proposal does English Heritage oppose?

A Planting trees where the runway is currently.

B Making it easy for people to see the important military buildings.

C Not destroying all of the runway.

4. Which would be the best sub-title to the article?

- A Fight Against Communism Not Over Yet.
- B Historians and Developers Clash Bitterly.
- C Fight to Preserve Historical 'Document'.

A Siberian Winter

It was only minus 28 degrees Celsius when we landed in Irkutsk. But that was cold enough to make breathing an effort - the air felt like ice as it scraped the back of my throat. Five minutes later, I needed a second pair of gloves and pulled my scarf tight over my nose and mouth. I was obviously a beginner at this.

At the petrol station, Mikhail the attendant laughed when we asked if he wasn't freezing. He'd spent the whole day outside with no more than his fur hat and a sheepskin coat for warmth. It was mid-afternoon and icicles were hanging from his moustache like Dracula's fangs. He said he never drank to stay warm - unlike many others.

Vodka

There's a belief in Siberia that enough vodka will insulate you from the cold. It's been proved tragically wrong in the past few weeks. Dozens of bodies of the homeless or men walking drunkenly back from the pub were hauled out of the snowdrifts, frozen or so badly frost-bitten that many will never walk again.

The local hospital in Irkutsk is overwhelmed. Ironically, it's the burns unit that's taken all the frostbite victims - 200 of them in just two weeks in one town. Even here, icicles are hanging down on the inside of the windows, though the heating is on full power. The doctor was too busy performing amputations to talk to us.

Shortages

But we could hear the screams from the operating room. They'd run out of anaesthetic after performing 60 amputations that week. The other patients could hear it too, and one girl in the corridor, clinging to her mother for support, was near to tears.

Nastya is only 16. Last week she missed her last bus home, so she walked instead - seven kilometres through the snow, in temperatures of minus 40. She had no

gloves. Now her hands are bandaged and hang down uselessly. She'll find out soon if they need to be amputated.

She was far from the worst case. In one bed, Nikolai Dobtsov lay quietly staring at the ceiling. Underneath the sheets, blood was seeping through his bandages, from where his feet and hands had been amputated the day before. He was a truck driver, he explained, with a good job delivering wood - and recently there'd been a lot of demand. So he'd set out to deliver a last load upcountry. The weather forecast - just minus 25 in Irkutsk - seemed to suggest that the journey was safe. It wasn't. His truck broke down miles from anywhere, and for 6 desperate hours he fought to repair the axle. He even greased his hands for protection, and finally managed to get the truck going again. Somehow he found the strength to drive himself back and straight to hospital, but it was already too late.

I asked Nikolai what would happen to him now. He just laughed, and shrugged. Nikolai has no wife or family in Irkutsk - and invalidity benefit is a pittance. Life in an institution may be the best he can hope for, and he'll almost certainly never work again.

Resilience

That incredible stoicism is everywhere. In Irkutsk at least, people seem simply to accept that winter is harsh - and this one especially so. It is without doubt the cruellest Siberian winter in living memory. Yet outdoors, everything appears to function normally - even schools re-opened as the temperature rose briefly to minus 25.

The trams and buses are back on the roads, though everyone drives slowly to avoid skidding on the layers of ice below the grit. The main street bustles with people wrapped in layers against the cold. But even indoors, the chill is inescapable. After her shift as a tram conductor, Natasha Fillipova comes home to a freezing house. She shows us the bedroom - where ice has built up on the inside walls. She scrapes it off with her fingers, but that has little effect. One night, Natasha says, she washed her hair before going to bed. When she woke up, it was frozen solid to the wall. The children are doing their homework in the bathroom - the only room warm enough to sit in. Natasha doesn't want to complain. But she is angry with the state and the architects for building shoddy houses.

The flats here are supposed to withstand up to minus 40 degrees. They don't, and her children are ill with coughs and colds. Natasha's anger is brief, and she seems faintly embarrassed about it. Siberians are used to cold weather, she explains. Here,

she tells us, people prefer to rely on themselves - and the knowledge that eventually, spring will come.

QUESTIONS:

1. What do we learn in the opening paragraph?
 - A The author arrived by bus.
 - B The author wasn't accustomed to such cold.
 - C The author wished he had had another pair of gloves.
 - D The author ate some ice when he arrived.

2. What is the local theory about vodka?
 - A If you drink too much, you may never walk again.
 - B If you don't drink it, you may lose your legs.
 - C If you drink it, you may suffer less from the cold.
 - D You shouldn't drink it if you are old.

3. Which sentence is true about the hospital?
 - A It is too warm inside.
 - B They don't have enough supplies and equipment.
 - C The staff didn't want to talk to the journalist.
 - D Most frost-bite victims need to have operations.

4. What happened to Nikolai?
 - He almost lost his hands.
 - He ignored the weather forecast.
 - He had a problem with his engine.
 - He had had to help himself.

5. Houses in Irkutsk...

don't have separate bathrooms.
were built by private companies for profit.
are too cold if the temperature is less than -40°C.
cause health problems for their residents.

Snake Bites Boy

Three-year-old Teddy Lasry was napping yesterday in his cowboy outfit yesterday at his family's Fifth Ave. apartment when he shot up in bed screaming. A 3-foot-long black-and-white snake was coiled around his left arm and had just bitten his pinky.

"The baby-sitter freaked out," said Teddy's father, David Lasry, who, along with his wife, Evelyn, was at work when the reptile showed up about 4 p.m.

The horrified nanny called 911 and the building's doorman. The doorman and two cable TV workers helped pry the snake off the boy's arm and stow it in a garbage bag, Lasry said.

Police rushed Teddy to Mount Sinai Medical Center, where his parents said he spent two hours attached to a heart monitor as a precaution in case the snake was poisonous.

It wasn't. Experts at the snakebite treatment center at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx, where cops took the critter, determined it was a non-venomous California king snake.

But how did it end up in Teddy's bed?

A little sleuthing determined that the serpent had escaped two weeks ago from its cage in the apartment of a doctor whose family lives four floors below the Lasrys. The apologetic owner said his son's pet snake likely traveled up the radiator pipes and into his neighbor's apartment.

"It's a very docile, very harmless snake," he said. "It's handled by our family all the time."

Lasry, 42, a fine arts publisher, said he believed the pet was simply hungry after two weeks of cruising. Teddy's mother, Evelyn Lasry, 37, said her son seems to have

gotten over his fright by thinking of himself as a hero cowboy as he rode in the back of the police cruiser to the hospital.

"I told Teddy he's a pretty snake, a nice pet snake who got out of his cage," Evelyn Lasry said. "But he asked, 'Why did he bite my finger, Mamma?' And I said, 'Because he saw that you are a big boy, Teddy, in your cowboy outfit and he got scared.'"

QUESTIONS:

1. What did the babysitter do?

- A She ran out of the apartment.
- B She took the snake off Teddy's arm.
- C She called for help.
- D She called the television company.

2. What do we learn about the snake?

- A It was poisonous.
- B It had escaped from a zoo.
- C It was about a meter long.
- D It had escaped earlier in the afternoon.

3. Which of these statements is true?

- A Teddy was awake when the snake arrived.
- B Teddy's father was working and his mother was at home.
- C Teddy needed a heart machine to stay alive for two hours.
- D The snake is used to being touched.

4. What does Teddy think now of the snake attack?

- A He was attacked because the snake was scared of him.
- B He was attacked because he was asleep.
- C He was attacked because the snake was hungry.
- D He was attacked because his parents weren't at home.