# Government approves housing estate plans for historic Old Sarum Airfield



Plans to convert the historic Old Sarum Airfield in Salisbury, Wiltshire, into a new housing estate have been approved by the Government, leading to significant backlash from local campaigners and councillors. The proposal will see the construction of up to 315 homes, with 25% designated as affordable, along with associated commercial and leisure facilities, including a 'flying hub', vehicle access, car parking, and foot and cycle paths.

Old Sarum Airfield is notable for being one of the oldest operational airfields in the country and is home to three Grade II\* listed hangars, which were constructed by German prisoners of war in 1917. However, the condition of one of these hangars has raised concerns, as it was left to deteriorate and ultimately collapsed during Storm Isha last year. This event marked a pivotal moment for preservation advocates, many of whom claim that the airfield's owners have intentionally neglected historical structures in the pursuit of housing development.

The planning application process has been tumultuous; Wiltshire Council initially rejected the development plans in August 2022, prompting the owners, Old Sarum Airfield Ltd, to appeal. A lengthy planning inquiry conducted in February 2023 culminated in a decision by Government planning inspector Nick Fagan, who has now granted outline planning permission. Fagan stated that the benefits of the development, including the commitment to restore the historical hangar, outweighed the potential harm caused to the significant heritage site.

Local councillors and residents have strongly opposed this decision, asserting that the airfield, rich in military history, did not receive the protection it deserved. Ian McLennan, a local councillor, lamented that "the nation has been let down," asserting that both Historic England and the Planning Inspectorate failed to safeguard this unique World War I airfield and its surrounding conservation area.

Becca Champion, representing the Save Old Sarum action group, articulated her dismay, stating, “I never thought I'd see the day Old Sarum Airfield was sacrificed for yet more soulless housing.” She emphasised the cultural and historical significance of the airfield as a vital link to the past, highlighting its role in local wildlife preservation and community identity. Champion insisted that the legacy of Old Sarum encompasses more than just its physical structures, expressing concerns about the implications of replacing open spaces with residential developments.

Old Sarum's historical relevance is significant; it served as a training depot during the First World War and played a crucial role in the Second World War as a flight training base for army personnel. The site, now closed for leisure flying since 2019, has only been in use by a skydiving company since then.

Grenville Hodge, the managing director of the airfield, had previously promised to invest £3 million in rebuilding the hangar after receiving planning permission. However, an entry on Historic England's At Risk Register in 2020 had already flagged concerns, and the recent storm damage has intensified scrutiny of the airfield's management.

Amidst the ongoing controversy, Inspector Fagan stipulated 37 conditions in his decision, one of which mandates that restoration of the historic hangar must be completed before half of the new homes are occupied. However, there are prevailing doubts from locals regarding the developers' commitment to these promises. Councillor Tom Corbin noted concerns about the operator's significant reduction of flying activities and questioned their intent to restore leisure aviation at Old Sarum.

As the plans advance, community members remain apprehensive about the future of this historically significant site and its potential transformation into a housing estate, viewing it as a detrimental loss of heritage.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://flyer.co.uk/old-sarum-airfield-wins-controversial-planning-appeal/> - This URL supports the claim that Old Sarum Airfield has won a planning appeal for the development of up to 315 houses and a new flying hub. The article highlights the controversy surrounding the approval.
* <https://hellorayo.co.uk/greatest-hits/salisbury/news/old-sarum-airfield-appeal-approved-planning-given/> - This URL corroborates the approval of plans for over 300 homes at Old Sarum Airfield, despite numerous objections, and outlines the involvement of the Planning Inspectorate.
* <https://salisburyandavon.co.uk/hundreds-of-homes-proposed-near-old-sarum-airfield/> - This article discusses the proposed development of hundreds of homes near Old Sarum Airfield, which aligns with the approved plans for a housing estate.
* <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1421945> - Historic England's listing provides details about Old Sarum Airfield's historical significance and structures, such as the Grade II\* hangars, though the specific URL for Old Sarum is not directly available in the search results.
* <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/> - The official Wiltshire Council website would contain information on planning decisions and applications related to Old Sarum Airfield, though specific details may require searching within the site.