RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE
RESTRUCTURING OF THE DEFENCE ESTATE:
A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

Rachel Woodward

Research Report

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
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<td>AONB</td>
<td>Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</td>
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<td>BICC</td>
<td>Bonn International Center for Conversion</td>
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<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Base Realignment and Closure</td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Commercial Audit Procedure</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEC</td>
<td>Commission of the European Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPRE</td>
<td>Council for the Protection of Rural England</td>
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<tr>
<td>DETR</td>
<td>Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions</td>
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<td>DoE</td>
<td>Department of the Environment</td>
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<td>DTI</td>
<td>Department of Trade and Industry</td>
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<td>EDC</td>
<td>Economic Development Conveyance</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCDC</td>
<td>House of Commons Defence Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
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<td>NUTS</td>
<td>Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques</td>
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<td>RDC</td>
<td>Rural Development Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF</td>
<td>Royal Air Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Royal Navy</td>
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<td>SRB</td>
<td>Single Regeneration Budget</td>
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<td>TEC</td>
<td>Training and Enterprise Council</td>
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<td>USAF</td>
<td>United States Air Force</td>
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SUMMARY

This report examines rural development and the restructuring of the defence estate. It looks at the issues raised for rural areas in Britain by defence restructuring, particularly the conversion of former military bases. The intention of the research was to undertake preliminary investigation into an under-explored area for rural studies, to highlight the principal factors affecting the conversion of former military sites in rural areas, and to suggest areas for further research. The report examines the economic and social effects of base closure; the factors affecting base re-use, including location, previous use and the role of the former landowner; the scope and limits of the land use planning process; and the role of rural development policy and funding mechanisms. The report concludes by suggesting that base conversion is better conceptualised within frameworks suggested by literature on the political economy of uneven development than with reference to the notion of a ‘peace dividend’. It also suggests areas for policy development and for future empirical research.
PART I RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This report documents the findings of research into the implications for rural areas of the restructuring of the British defence estate. In this section, I introduce the defence estate and discuss why its study is relevant to rural development issues. I also discuss the methodology behind the research.

Britain’s defence estate includes all the land, buildings and infrastructure owned and used by the armed forces for defence-related activities. The most recent investigation of the defence estate, conducted by the House of Commons Defence Committee (HCDC) in 1994, put the amount of land owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) at about 227,000 hectares, with leases on another 16,000 hectares (HCDC, 1994a, p.vii). The majority of this land (66.1%) is used for training. Other uses include airfields (11.6%), research establishments (9.1%), barracks and camps (4.5%), storage and supply depots (4.5%) and telecommunications stations (2.5%). The defence estate has a predominantly rural location because of the space requirements of the activities carried out upon it.

The defence estate is interesting in rural development terms for two reasons. First, the armed forces in Britain (as elsewhere) have, since 1990, been involved in a programme of restructuring first signalled with the announcement of the Options for Change review in 1990 (MoD, 1991). This restructuring is usually explained with reference to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and a re-orientation in defence policy. It has entailed a significant reduction (up to 30%) in the number of armed forces personnel. When this restructuring programme was initiated, many commentators expected the release of significant quantities of land from military
uses, with many social and economic development implications for rural areas (see Woodward, 1996).

Many commentators talk of defence restructuring as a process of conversion, which includes the reallocation of financial resources, the reorientation of Research and Development, the restructuring of industry, demobilisation, base closure and redevelopment, and the scrapping of surplus weapons (BICC, 1996, p.19). The various aspects of conversion have received different levels of attention by researchers in the UK. Much research has assessed the conversion or diversification of the defence industry. In addition, there is growing appreciation the environmental costs and benefits of changes in military land use. Base closure and redevelopment involving the release of lands and the implications for social and economic development in rural areas has received less attention in Britain, and it is base closures that constitute the focus of this research report.

The lack of critical attention may well be explained by the small scale of base closures, relative to the size of the defence estate overall. The HCDC in 1994 noted that the overall size of the defence estate had changed little over the previous two decades; disposals in the early 1990s had not been on a large scale, although there was much potential for release of unwanted lands (HCDC, 1994a, p.xviii). Assessments of the amount of land released from MoD use have varied; Farrington (1995) put the figure at 2,069 hectares for the period 1990-1994. The Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) estimate that up to 4,733 hectares may have been transferred in the period 1990-2000. The British experience stands in stark contrast to that of the USA or Germany. In the USA, by 1995 the Commission on Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) had overseen the
closure of 20% of the US domestic base structure with over 500 domestic sites. The 60 most significant closures released some 212,291 hectares of land (BICC, 1996, p.179). In Germany, following the drawdown of Allied forces, some 328,000 hectares have been released as a result of base closures (ibid.). In the UK the issue is perhaps relatively insignificant.

Or is it? One reason for conducting this research was to establish whether there was merit in talking of defence estate restructuring as a pertinent issue for rural areas. Certainly, for the local authorities affected (and as I discuss below), this is a critical issue. As this research has found, whilst at a national or even regional scale the social and economic impacts of defence estate restructuring have been negligible, for the rural localities affected by it, conversion raises many problems and possibilities for rural social and economic development. This is further complicated by questions as to whether there is empirical evidence to support the rhetoric of a ‘peace dividend’ or penalty—a discourse frequently drawn upon to explain defence estate restructuring— or whether current processes of conversion are better conceptualised as part of a continual process of geopolitical change since the end of the Second World War.

The second interesting point about the restructuring of the defence estate and its impact on rural development concerns the complexity of the issue. Are the problems brought by base closure significantly different to those brought by more general processes of economic change in the countryside? If they are different, what are the implications for rural development policy in affected areas, and for the conceptual framework with which we understand countryside change and rural development?
Many economic and social processes shape the geography and socio-economic structure of rural areas. These processes include the shift from productivist to post-productivist agriculture, counter-urbanisation, the demise of the manufacturing and extractive industries and the growth of new service industries, new patterns of leisure activity, new forms of consumption and shifts in the meaning of rurality. Rather than existing on the margins of social scientific investigation, rural areas are increasingly being seen as spaces in which processes of economic, social and political restructuring have particular outcomes, and their experience is critical to the understanding of change in the political economy and sociology of advanced capitalist economies (Marsden et al, 1993).

The policy responses to processes of countryside change continue to attract academic interest, particularly within the context of rural development. The study of rural development policy is central to the study of countryside change, because of the importance of policy mechanisms in shaping the outcome of processes of social and economic change. Policies influencing the development trajectories of much of Britain include rural development programmes at European Union level (such as Objectives 1 and 5b, LEADER I and II), at national level with the designation of Rural Development Areas and other programmes associated with the Rural Development Commission, and with the conceptualisation of the rural development embodied in the 1995 Rural White Paper. Local policy responses at county and district levels, the work of non-statutory bodies such as the Training and Enterprise Councils and others with a rural development brief are also important here.
Current processes of socio-economic change, and the raft of policy responses, in turn raise interesting questions for the future of areas affected by the restructuring of the defence estate. Are the social, economic and political changes being brought to localities affected by defence estate restructuring idiosyncratic, peculiar or specific in some way because of a former military presence, or are they just part of wider processes of rural change experienced in different forms across rural Britain? This is an important question because of the claims made for the existence of a peace dividend and its impact. It is important because of the conceptual questions that it raises about the relationship between the central and local state, and to which I return below. It is also important because of what it implies for rural development policy, particularly in locating the limits to policy intervention.

This research report documents the findings of preliminary research directed towards these two issues. Three sets of research questions structured the empirical phase of the research. The first set of questions concerned the economic and social impacts of defence estate restructuring in rural localities. In places affected by the closure or restructuring of military bases, what were the expected economic impacts and actual outcomes? What new economic activities were replacing defence or military-related ones? What were the social consequences in terms of impact on local resident communities or the establishment of new communities, especially in areas where housing had been sold? What impact does conversion have on community development? The second set of questions concerned the policy mechanisms which have evolved to tackle both conversion and rural development issues. How was the problem conceptualised, if at all, in rural development policies? Which rural development policy and funding mechanisms were effective in shaping conversion outcomes, and which were not? The third set
of questions concerned the roles played by government and other agencies at the local, national and European level in shaping the process of conversion. How effective could were governmental and non-governmental agencies in the conversion process? What roles did the voluntary sector and community-based organisations play? How were partnerships established and how effective were they in practice?

The research was intended as a wide-ranging exploration of an issue, rather than the more rigid testing of a single research question and the methodology chosen was based accordingly on the need for flexibility. An underlying issue was that the focus of the research—of defence estate restructuring and the consequences for rural development—was itself the subject of conceptual inquiry. In addition to the exploratory nature of the research, the resources available were limited, so a systematic survey of the experience of defence estate conversion across Britain would not have been possible (although as I discuss in the concluding section, this may now be necessary). The methodology chosen was a qualitative one, based on the use of case studies of particular instances of conversion in England, concentrating on the counties of Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire and Norfolk. Post hoc rationalisations of research strategies are always tempting. The sites examined in Lincolnshire, as befits the ‘Home of the Royal Air Force’ were all former airfields. Lincolnshire was chosen because it contained Brookenby, the winner of a Rural Challenge award. Further research into bases in Lincolnshire expanded from that initial contact. Catterick Garrison was examined because of its change of use. Information on sites in East Anglia, also airbases, was gathered as by-product of a separate research project on the progress of the EU’s Objective 5b programme in the region (Ward and Woodward, 1998). In each case study area, interviews
were conducted with representatives from district and county councils, the Defence Estate Organisation (Lands), local development agencies (both private and voluntary), the Rural Development Commission, Training and Enterprise Councils, and individuals at the local level with an interest in this issue. Government and local authority planning and policy documentation was collected. Supplementary material from other examples of base conversion was also used, drawn from published and unpublished academic studies, reports by local authorities and rural development bodies, and national and local media commentaries.

The principal findings from the research are discussed in Part II, were empirical material is linked to current policy and academic debates on defence estate restructuring and base conversion in rural areas.
PART II RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section brings together the main research findings looking at the economic and social effects of base closure; the factors affecting the re-use potential of bases, which include location, past uses and the role of the MoD as landowner; scope and limits of the land use planning process and the role of rural development policy and associated funding mechanisms in facilitating conversion.

The economic and social effects of base closure

In this section, I look at the range of economic and social consequences of base conversion. The term ‘base’ is used here to include a variety of facilities such as airfields, depots, barracks, training centres, research centres and ammunition dumps. Military bases can be significant sources of economic activity and employment generation in rural areas which may otherwise have limited potential for economic activity. In assessing the impacts of base closure, BICC distinguish between the direct employment of both military and civilian personnel on a base, contract employment consisting of the jobs created as a result of tenders put out by base administration, and indirect employment in terms of non-military jobs created by the direct employees’ purchase of goods and services (BICC, 1996, p.175). Current orthodoxy supposes that base conversion can lead to severe economic problems in the localities affected, at least in the short term:

There will be major impacts on local economies as a result of the loss of civilian jobs and military personnel spending, though redevelopment where possible will offset this in the longer term. (Farrington, 1995, p.276).
This is by no means a purely contemporary problem. For example, Network Demilitarized point to the economic consequences of the decline of employment at the Woolwich Arsenal in London from a peak of 80,000 in 1914 to zero in 1994 (Network Demilitarised, 1994, p.9).

The vulnerability of different localities to base conversion will of course be a reflection of the levels of dependency on the military sector. A 1992 survey commissioned by DGXVI of the European Commission examined the dependency of areas (at the NUTS II level) to the defence industry, to military employment and to both. Table 1 shows the UK areas with the highest proportion of the population employed in the defence industry and the military sector, with an indication of each area’s ranking overall in the European Union.

Clearly, the employment offered by military activity, whether for military or civilian personnel, is critical to the economic viability of some areas. Threats of closure generate real fears. James Derounian quotes a study undertaken in 1989 by researchers at the University of East Anglia which estimated that the closure of the USAF bases at Woodbridge and Bentwaters in Suffolk would lead to local economic disaster with the loss of 7,000 annual contracts between bases and local companies within a 25 miles radius of the base (Derounian, 1993, p.12). The fears generated by the news of the closure of RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire are a case in point. The closure of this base was announced in 1994, and scheduled for 1996/7. A report commissioned by Lincolnshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and others in 1994 examined the potential economic impact of the closure and warned of serious economic problems were the closure to proceed:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall EU ranking</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>% employed in defence industry</th>
<th>% employed by military</th>
<th>total defence dependency</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hampshire, Isle of Wight</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>8.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>North Yorkshire</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Cornwall, Devon</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>6.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>East Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EC average</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.82</td>
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The proposed closure of RAF Scampton is likely to have a particularly heavy impact upon the Lincolnshire economy. The area has already suffered as a result of a series of major cuts in the defence sector, including the closure in recent years of 3 major airfields. The cumulative effect of these earlier closures and cutbacks has been the loss of over 3,500 jobs in the defence and related industrial sector since 1990. (Coopers and Lybrand, 1994, p.1)

The report argued that the economic structure of the local economy had already been seriously weakened by these closures and that the loss of RAF Scampton would result in an estimated loss of a further 500 jobs, comprising 330 civilian jobs on the base, 100 off-site contract jobs and a further 70 indirect jobs, with a reduction in Lincolnshire’s income of at least £6.5 million per year. In addition, the state of the local economy also signalled further economic decline for the area if RAF Scampton were to close:

The problem has been further intensified by the reliance of the economy on traditional sectors that have limited growth potential and an under representation of sectors demonstrating long term growth opportunity. The local economy remains weak and vulnerable to market down turns, its ability to withstand further job and income losses is limited. (Coopers and Lybrand, 1994, p.1).

Fears like this, and an absence of available research findings specifically on the experience of rural areas, prompted the Rural Development Commission
(RDC) to commission a survey in 1995 to establish the impacts of defence restructuring on local economies and communities in rural areas. Locating this study squarely within the discourse of the ‘peace dividend’, the study set out to assess the direct and indirect impacts, especially on employment, of the peace dividend in rural areas, and to draw lessons from existing experience on tackling these impacts (EAG/ECOTEC, 1996). The survey estimated 70,000 military and 25,000 civilian job losses as a consequence of UK armed forces restructuring plus the loss of 15,000 US personnel for the period 1990-1995. Case studies were conducted in six localities—Portland Naval Base in Dorset; RAF Sculthorpe, RAF West Raynham and RAF Swanton Morley in Norfolk; RN Monks Park, RN Spring Quarry, the Support Weapons Wing at Netheravon and the Army Vehicle Depot in Ludgershall, all stores bases in Wiltshire; RAF/USAF Fairford in Gloucestershire; RAF Swinderby in Lincolnshire; and the defence and aerospace industry in Pendle, Lancashire. The case studies indicated a variety of experience of employment decline, ranging from 380 jobs lost at RAF Swinderby in Lincolnshire and 3,000 at Portland in Dorset, to indirect job losses in the wider economy at 60 for Swinderby and 1,500 for Portland. There was also evidence of long-term unemployment facing those who had been made redundant, plus evidence for a spate of closures for related businesses.

Severe as these employment losses might sound, the RDC report also argued that:

Whilst the direct impacts of the base closures and run-downs have been substantial, in general it is clear that there is no
“employment crisis” in relation to the sites considered.  
(EAG/ECOTEC, 1996, p.i)

The reasons for this included the relatively low levels of local procurement by the bases concerned; the fact that spending was spread over wider sub-regional economies; the location of the bases studied in generally economically buoyant areas; and the fact that lost spending from military personnel had been replaced by population growth. The economic consequences of conversion were also influenced by the complex nature of changes in the bases over a long time period with some re-use of sites. These findings echo those of the CEC report, which argued that the impact of defence and military employment cuts would depend on the structural characteristics of a region:

Certain specialised and isolated subregions may be more adversely affected by defence cuts as they may be deprived of the certain stabilizing influences which come from being part of a larger integrated economic region. (CEC, 1992, p.18)

The report was rather complacent about the effect of base closures in rural areas:

The impact of a military base in a small rural community can be significant as well, but in general, the data indicate that the number of indirect jobs generated from bases is not as large as the number created by defence companies. (CEC, 1992, p.98)

Even so, they may well make a fundamental contribution to the local economy. For example, Catterick Garrison near Richmond in North
Yorkshire has a resident military population of 9,600 with a further 1,800 living ‘off-camp’. This is an area dominated by a single ‘industry’. The Garrison makes a substantial contribution to the local community—the total income for military personnel in the area is £130 million per year (gross) (Richmond Partnership, 1998, p.10). It is also a significant employer of local labour. Although its future is assured—defence restructuring in this case meant a change of function rather than base closure—changes in MoD tendering policies were having a pronounced effect:

Changes in MoD policy on centralised competitive tendering have meant that services to the Garrison, such as building and maintenance, are now more likely to won by national companies using their own labour than by local companies. Employment prospects, economic confidence and the level of income have diminished. All of this means that people don’t spend, don’t buy houses and don’t stay, which has a knock-on effect on local shops, businesses and services. (Richmond Partnership, 1997, npn)

Initial fears of economic collapse following base conversion may not necessarily be borne out in reality. Reflecting on the closure of RAF Scampton four years later, one interviewee remarked that its closure had gone virtually unnoticed. Economic catastrophe for the area had not occurred as predicted. This remark is indicative for two reasons. First, it shows the importance of emphasising a worst-case scenario. The quotations above relating to RAF Scampton and Catterick Garrison were both taken from funding application documents. There is often merit in emphasising a
point in order to make a case for funding in a competitive environment. The second point concerns emotion. Base closures provoke strong emotions, another reason perhaps for the prediction of economic collapse following conversion. For example, the proposed closure of RAF Scampton precipitated the formation of a ‘Save Our Scampton’ campaign, conducted mostly within the local print media, underpinned by a strong emotional rationale for the saving of Scampton. Scampton had been home to the Dam Busters, the inventor of the Bouncing Bomb, and had played a significant role in the Berlin Airlift. It was symbolically constructed as important not only for the economic benefits it brought, but also for the historical associations which made this place special and linked the locality to world events. Similarly, a local news report on the delays in a decision on the future of RAF Watton in Norfolk was accompanied by a detailed account of the role played by the base in the Second World War and after, under the headline ‘A proud history of sacrifice and top-secret endeavour’ (Eastern Daily Press, 29.11.97). Similarly, in debates about alterations to the use of the Otterburn Training Area in Northumberland, many local people endorsed the MoD’s developments on the (erroneous) grounds that they would boost a local economy that was otherwise lacking in employment opportunities. The experience on Tyneside’s shipyards and Durham’s coalfields which indicated what economic decline could do to an area, gave an emotional boost to these claims (Woodward, 1998).

We should not be dismissive of the fears of those opposing the closure of facilities such as RAF Scampton. Such fears are genuinely held, even if they are often not realised. But it is useful to remember two points about such
opposition. One comes from a local interviewee, who was highly critical that such a campaign had been conducted, because of the energy dissipated by such activity. For this individual, it was surely better to put time and effort into the development of alternative solutions, than to defend the status quo. A second point is made by Barney Warf in his study of the geopolitics and geoeconomics of US base closures. ‘Local opposition to base closures is misguided’, he says; ‘the available evidence indicates that the long-run benefits outweigh short-run losses in economic activity’ (Warf, 1997, p.542). As Farrington pointed out in the quotation at the beginning of this section, redevelopment and re-use will probably offset economic problems in the longer term. Many of those interviewed as part of this research recognised this too, and the remainder of this paper discusses the factors affecting re-use and the strategies deployed to maximise the economic and social potential of former bases.

Before going on to this, it is necessary to make a point about the focus of most studies of base conversion. In assessing the consequences of conversion, the analysts cited above have focused almost entirely on the economic consequences. The ‘peace dividend’ is usually equated with a financial payout. Yet there are also social impacts to consider. These were summarised to the HCDC as including the impact on local school rolls and school viability; a reduced demand for off-base rented housing; the impact of the removal of a section of the local community on such things as sports, art and leisure clubs and facilities; cultural loss; and a possible loss of local sports, leisure and cultural facilities (HCDC, 1994b, p.129). Interviewees in this study found similar social impacts in places affected by base closure.
For example, the closure of RAF Swinderby was thought to have threatened the future of the primary school in the nearby village of Swinderby because of the reduction in the number of young children in the area after the departure of the RAF. There is very little precise information available on the social consequences of base closure, and this is certainly an area for further research.

**Factors affecting the conversion of bases in rural areas**

In this section I examine some of the factors that influence the development of former military bases, in terms of their location, their previous use and the effect this has on development plans, and the role of the (former) owner, the MoD. This neither a sophisticated framework for the discussion of these issues, given the considerable overlaps between them, and nor is it an exhaustive list by any means. The factors discussed here are those most apparent during this research. As Network Demilitarised (1994, 1996) note, there are many others.

*Location*

It is an obvious point, but the location of redundant bases is probably the most important factor in determining the effects of base closure, the formulation of development plans and their ultimate success or failure. As one interviewee put it, ‘What are the three rules of property development? Location, location, location.’ It is also the one factor no policy initiative or development strategy can do anything about.
Location was a factor mentioned by all interviewees in discussing the effects of base closure and the potential for new uses. For the former RAF Bentwaters, its location in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in a remote part in rural Suffolk Coastal District far from main road and rail connections had presented real problems in terms of finding alternative uses for the site. The base had closed in September 1993 following the withdrawal of USAF personnel. A Planning Brief produced by the District Council stated that

...the redevelopment should achieve a community; realise employment opportunities; and create a high quality environment, whilst respecting the location, environmental constraints and policy implications. (quoted in Wills, 1995, p.23)

These are laudable aims. Yet three schemes suggested by three successive potential purchasers were felt by one interviewee to fall far short of these aims, because of where Bentwaters was situated. These included a retreat for the Maharishi Foundation, a business airport and a business park. ‘You can look at Bentwaters on the map and chuckle, really’. Similar problems were reported for the former RAF bases at Sculthorpe and West Raynham, both in North Norfolk District, both isolated sites with very limited connections to the main road network.

Interviewees in Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, when discussing the potential future uses of bases in their localities, all said the same thing: ‘We’re not talking RAF Alconbury here’. RAF Alconbury, it seems, had attained almost mythical status amongst planners and economic development
officers as a redundant base in a prime location just off the A1 in Cambridgeshire. A proposal was emerging at the time this research was being conducted for a combined civilian airport, road and rail freight terminal, delivering a possible 7,000 jobs. The spin-offs in terms of the further economic and social benefits to this rural area were eyed enviously. Yet the development proposals for Alconbury have led to problems of their own, with local protests about the damage to the natural environment through the pollution and noise caused by freight usage, with knock-on effects on house prices and environmental amenity (Harper, 1997). Even so, for local authority officers dealing with the redevelopment of bases in more remote rural areas, the problems of the contested countryside were easily preferable to those of inaccessible rural areas.

An additional facet to the location issue, also emphasised by interviewees, was the possibility or otherwise of matching the needs of an area to the need to reuse a redundant base. For example, an application was submitted to North Norfolk District Council for a proposed development on the site of the former RAF Sculthorpe base. The project included a youth foyer or atelier scheme to provide housing, workshop space and training for young people. One councillor commented that in principle this was a good idea for the site (‘I thought this was a marvellous and innovative idea when I first saw the proposals. There is a need to consider what we will do with these old airfields.’ Eastern Daily Press, 8.11.97). For a local authority officer the location of Sculthorpe, 6 miles from the nearest market town of Fakenham, was thought to render this type of venture entirely inappropriate. The
location of a redundant site relative to the growth centres and infrastructure in a locality is also an important feature.

Interviewees generally agreed that the most appropriate schemes were those where local needs could be met in the location without compromising environmental quality. For example, the proposal to build or refurbish up to 1,000 houses on the site of the former RAF Swinderby was generally endorsed. Situated on the A46 between Lincoln and Newark, in an area with an identified demand for housing, the location was ideal. The Development Brief opens with a glowing testimony to the potential offered by the site’s location:

The former RAF Swinderby offers an outstanding opportunity to provide distinctive homes and work space in an established rural setting, building on and using the existing significant investment made in the site. These qualities are combined with the further advantage of excellent direct road links, to the west via the A46 and A1 to the national motorway network, and to the east into the whole of Eastern England and its vital east coast ports. (North Kesteven District Council, 1994, p.1)

Similarly, the proposals put forward for the regeneration of the housing and technical park (hangars and other buildings) at Brookenby in Lincolnshire (formerly RAF Binbrook which closed in 1987) involved both economic and community development initiatives which were thought to be ideal for this isolated, remote area with poor transport links. Whatever other problems might have ensued at Brookenby (see below), the concept was considered an
appropriate one, given the site’s location. At Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire, a change of use at the base had freed up sites for redevelopment. The economic and social structure of the area dictated certain local needs, particular for employment and skills training, and a bid to the Single Regeneration Budget appeared to have maximised the potential for matching needs to location.

One argument that sometimes appears in debates about the potential use for former military sites is that if location problems are so severe, perhaps the best strategy would simply be the removal of any remaining physical infrastructure and the restoration to agriculture or something approaching the natural environment on the site. For example, the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) local branch argued with reference to the former RAF Binbrook:

It’s isolated location and designation [as AONB] make it inappropriate for further development and MoD’s attempts to sell some of the hundreds of houses have not been a success. [...] In CPRE’s view the site should be dismantled and returned to agriculture. (HCDC, 1994b, p.164)

As Sarah Wills has argued, re-use by restoration to a site’s natural state may be environmentally valuable, but would be of little economic benefit to the MoD or the local economy (Wills, 1995). The 1995 Rural White paper noted that the closure of defence establishments in rural areas could create substantial local problems, but signalled a Government commitment to maximising the potential of redundant facilities for suitable employment and
wealth creation (DoE, 1995). This is a dilemma for many rural areas affected by defence restructuring. Their high environmental quality is valued, yet cannot take precedence over local social and economic needs, particularly as the existence of physical infrastructure may be essential in enabling future economic activity. Planning policies may otherwise be too restrictive in prohibiting development in open countryside, and where existing facilities may be re-used to bring much-needed employment and facilities, a return to agricultural use may result in the loss of opportunity for economic activity. This is also a regional development issue. The return of the airfield and hangars at RAF Binbrook to agriculture, for example, may mean missed opportunities for economic development in a region struggling with high levels of rural unemployment and low levels of services. In rural Berkshire, a boom area in the 1980s, it may be easier to afford the restoration of Greenham Common to open countryside, as proposed by the local authority (Newbury District Council, 1996). The location of a site within a regional economy is an important consideration.

The past dictates the future

A second factor influencing the development of former military bases in rural areas is its past use. Again, this is an obvious point, but it merits examination because of the issues it raises. A base’s former function dictates by and large the possibilities for its future use.

The diversity of types of property and their uses was emphasised by the House of Commons Defence Committee, which talked of the ‘infinitely varied and complex’ nature of the defence estate. This diversity is
maintained in the sites that have, or are being, released from military activity. Some are extremely well-known, such as the former Royal Naval base at Rosyth, with 72 hectares, and buildings with a floor space of 304,800 sq. metres, or the airfield and aerodrome at Farnborough, home to the biennial air show, and now leased to a private company. Others are small and unknown, such as the small radio stations that litter the Lincolnshire countryside. This research did not attempt to assess the redevelopment consequences of sites classified according to type (and again, this might be an area for further research). Rather, the intention was to uncover the diversity of issues that former site function suggests. Airfields, by default, were the main site type under study.

The range of potential uses mentioned for any of the sites in this report were enormous. Take, for example, the case of RAF Scampton, covering 360 hectares. This airbase was opened in July 1917, closed in 1920 and then re-opened in August 1936. Its phased closure was announced as part of the Front Line First initiative; the Red Arrows (the RAF aerial acrobatic team) would relocate to nearby RAF Cranwell, but with the retention of the runway and associated facilities for emergency landing. The housing and related facilities were to be retained by the MoD for use by personnel stationed at RAF Waddington, the other side of Lincoln. The major technical, office and hangar areas were closed in June 1996. This latter part is available for development and comprises offices, hangars, workshops, training facilities, health and leisure buildings and some accommodation, with a total floorspace of 80,000 metres available. The buildings date from
the 1940s and 1960s and vary widely in condition. The Development Brief sounds a warning at this point:

Few of the buildings are modern and a number appear in urgent need of major repair or demolition. The condition of almost all the buildings and the appearance of the area generally, will deteriorate rapidly, unless active uses are found for them in the near future. (West Lindsey District Council, 1996, p.10).

The Brief then goes on to list an exhaustive range of possible re-uses for the site:

It is anticipated that interest could be attracted for a variety of B1, B2, B8 (including open storage), leisure and community uses including offices; joinery, mechanical, light industrial and research and development workshops; storage and distribution uses (including open car storage); film studio; leisure centre; child care centre; nightclub; bowling alley; go-kart racing (indoor and outdoor); Sunday market; land yachting; model aircraft flying; light aviation uses; driver training facilities and recycling facilities, to name but a few. (West Lindsey District Council, 1996, p.12)

An extremely up-beat regeneration proposal, produced by a group of public and private sector interests under the umbrella of ‘The Scampton Partnership’, narrowed the range of suggestions down somewhat. The range of potential lands uses included sites for new industrial and commercial units; the creation and management of a commercial and technology park;
the development of new housing and student accommodation; the re-use of existing recreational facilities; the development of an industrial airport; and the creation of a Bomber Command Museum (Scampton Partnership, 1997).

Current uses of old hangars and buildings at Brookenby (Binbrook Technical Park) include cold storage of BSE-contaminated carcasses, fish processing, saw mill, steam train restoration, financial services company, machine-applied coatings, fork lift truck driver training company.

A big problem for all the sites considered in this study was the inadequacy of the existing infrastructure bequeathed by the MoD. This was a persistent and often costly problem, shaping the pace and scope of redevelopment plans. The House of Commons Defence Committee commented on the particular problems arising from poor standards of infrastructure (HCDC, 1994a, p.xxiii). They noted that existing infrastructure was mostly constructed outside the authority of the then statutory undertakers, to the prevailing standards of the day. It would now only be adopted by local authorities and utility companies if it was brought up to the current standards adhered to by these bodies. This would often involve considerable costs, to be borne either by a prospective developer or by MoD prior to disposal. The Committee noted, for example, that an infrastructure appraisal at RAF Bentwaters in Suffolk suggested that millions of pounds of expenditure would be necessary to bring infrastructure up to adoptable standards, with a new pumping station and new water and gas supplies for the whole area.

Another good example of the problems caused by the inadequacies of existing infrastructure is the situation at the former RAF Swinderby. This base was used by the School of Recruit Training and later the Elementary
Flying Training Squadron until its closure in 1993 (for further details about its military past, see Hancock, 1985). The entire site covers 251 hectares, 60 hectares of which contain a technical site (hangars and maintenance sheds), former barracks and training blocks and some residential accommodation. The rest of the site is covered by the old airfield. The original purchasers of the site sold the airfield to an aggregates company and the technical park to a development company, leaving an area for housing development. Swinderby occupies a good location, and the housing and employment-generating activities proposed for the site were generally endorsed. However, the condition of the existing infrastructure was a big issue in shaping the progress of any future development. The site developers for the portion of the site scheduled for housing development were obliged to provide key infrastructure (a highway junction, gas, water, sewerage and electricity) before selling plots of land to individual housebuilders. One interviewee commented that the site purchasers would be willing to do this if the funds raised from the sale of plots to housebuilders was going to be sufficient to recoup the initial investment in the site. This then raises the questions of the type of development that is enabled.

The cost of infrastructure upgrading was a problem on all of the sites included in this research. The House of Commons Defence Committee estimated a cost of £2.5 million to bring sewerage works alone up to standard at RAF Scampton. Interviewees pointed to this as a significant block in future development proposals for RAF Sculthorpe. This was huge issue at Brookenby. As a winner of Rural Challenge in Round 1 of the Rural Development Commission scheme, great hopes were raised as to the
potential for innovative economic and social development projects on the site. Frustrations were tangible in interviews with those involved in the project at the amount of funding (and sheer effort) that had been expended in getting the infrastructure of the site up to adoptable standard, a prerequisite for further developments. For example, housing on the site had been sold at good prices, yet because at the time of the majority of housing sales the basic services had not been adopted, new residents were having the pay heavily to maintain basic services—up to £200 in some cases. A further quarter of a million pounds had to be spent to upgrade the roads and enable the local authority to adopt them and remove this financial burden from local residents, removing money which could have been invested in the technical park.

The transfer of housing stock from MoD to private ownership, a feature of several of the bases under consideration here, obviously has a considerable impact on future development prospects. The existence of housing estates in otherwise sparsely populated rural areas made bases more attractive as centres for economic activity. Housing transfers also created new communities, shaping community and social development in the areas concerned. At Brookenby, the disposal of the site had released a large number of former MoD houses onto the market. Some 200 properties were sold to a single purchaser, who then re-sold the properties, with about 120 being sold to private owners and about 80 to a private landlord for rental. In effect, a new community was created. This created its own opportunities and challenges. This was a place which, in the words of one interviewee, ‘started with the advantage of having no history’. Even the names changed,
with the new residents choosing to call their new village Brookenby (similarly RAF Swinderby will become Thurlby St. Hughes, and RAF Rissington in Gloucestershire will become Upper Rissington).

The difficulties that had followed the creation of this new community were stressed by a number of interviewees, not as a criticism of the people that lived there, but rather to highlight the difficulties presented for the economic regeneration of bases where this had been poorly planned and poorly managed by new site owners. Housing on the site had been sold in 1990-91 at relatively low cost:

[...] the typical Brookenby resident is somebody who was shaken out of manufacturing industry in the early nineties, had a redundancy payment in their back pocket and used that to buy a house there. And while a lot of the people there come from the North Midlands, there are people from the South West, Scotland and Ulster, and it became known there was cheap housing there on a reasonably pleasant site. (Interview with development worker, Lincolnshire, February 1998)

As we have already seen, the poor condition of the infrastructure had placed a financial burden on the new residents. There were additional problems:

It also created a situation where a number of people who bought into the rural idyll without any real realisation of the drawbacks of living in an area like this. It is very remote, you do need to be able to drive a car, for example. If your partner is taking the car off for the day to take them for work, then you might be stuck
back at home with no transport. Although there’s a school nearby, there’s a doctor’s surgery nearby down in [the village of] Binbrook itself, typical of all these RAF bases in my view [...] is the kind of isolation that we’re experiencing here in Brookenby. (Interview with development worker, Lincolnshire, February 1998)

Furthermore:

...one of the major problems this village does have, on a social level, is there is an area of housing right in the middle of the village [...] which was bought up by a property development company based in Grimsby and that company puts its ‘difficult to house’ families there [...] so if you’ve got a potential tenant coming along who’s claiming benefit, potentially housing benefit and all the rest of it, they would tend to be steered towards Brookenby rather than towards any other properties. So what we’ve got in the middle of the village is a group or a small community there, and many don’t have any of the resources that even people living in other parts of the village have. Maybe they don’t have access to a car. They don’t know what its like to live outside an urban environment, not be able to walk down the pub, not to be able to go to the cinema and there’s a drugs problem. And also, because that housing is so cheap to rent, if people are having problems, say in Barnsley, with the authorities, they can just up stumps and come and live in Brookenby for a bit until the heat dies down. [...] if you look at it, it looks like a run down
inner city housing estate—litter, dogs, abandoned cars, untidy gardens, the lot—and its a problem for everybody. (Interview with development worker, Lincolnshire, February 1998)

Indeed, the image of Brookenby was conjured up in debates on redevelopment schemes in other former bases. For a number of interviewees, if Alconbury was thought to embody all the benefits of conversion, Brookenby constituted one of the worst examples. For example, in arguing for Single Regeneration Budget funding, the Scampton Partnership drew on the example of Brookenby to illustrate the potential problems associated with conversion:

As the units were sold at low prices purchasers were attracted from far afield and therefore had few social contacts in the local area. The problems created have ranged from frequent violent incidents, crime, vandalism, family breakdown and unemployment. (Scampton Partnership, 1996, p.27)

Poor planning the re-use of surplus MoD property was identified as the root cause of many problems. The sale of vacant housing was not in itself a problem, and interviewees dealing in a professional capacity with the re-use of former MoD housing, at Brookenby and elsewhere, were quick to stress that people who had moved into this housing were responsible for the creation of vibrant new communities in places which otherwise would have lain derelict. Housing re-use brings life to an area. For example, at RAF Sculthorpe, two estates of housing had been sold to individual buyers, comprising Blenheim Park with 100 houses and Wicken Green with 210
bungalows. Commenting on the large rise in the prices of these houses, the local press spoke glowingly about the ‘success story of Wicken Green, Norfolk’s newest village’ (Eastern Daily Press, 19.7.97). Development workers at Brookenby were full of praise for the way in which a new community had pulled together and created a sense of community spirit, through communal events (and eventually a Rural Challenge bid, of which more later).

The final issue worth mentioning in this discussion of former uses and their effects on future site use, is that of site contamination. This appears to be an issue for most former MoD lands, however small. For example, although the Development Brief for RAF Scampton recommended further investigation, any contamination from fuel spillages was anticipated as minor. As the HCDC inquiry into the defence estate noted, contamination is almost inevitable on the defence estate, given ‘the range of materials historically used or stored by the Armed Forces, and the very much lower standard of care in earlier times’ (HCDC, 1994a, p.xxiv). They called for more explicit documentation of the extent and nature of contamination on MoD sites. In some areas which are no longer used by the military, this contamination is a pressing problem. For example, the contamination of Holy Loch in Scotland, which had been used by the US Navy submarine fleet, was described graphically on one report:

The three mile stretch of water near the holiday town of Dunoon, which once hosted the most powerful concentration of nuclear weapons in western Europe, is now described by environmental campaigners as one of Europe’s filthiest stretches of water, with
high concentrations of toxic chemicals and a seabed littered with 130,000 cubic metres of debris thrown overboard by the US fleet. The junk includes sunken barges, 60 drums filled with an unidentified substance, nine shipwrecks, filing cabinets, scaffolding, ropes, breeze blocks and six washing machines. (Donegan, 1997).

A row appeared to be unfolding as to whether the toxic materials were best left in situ, or cleared from the site. For some sites, clearance is the only option. A recent television programme found evidence for the existence of buried dumps of mustard gas at the former RAF Norton Disney, near Swinderby, requiring disposal by the RAF (Home Ground, BBC North, 4th June 1998).

The role of the former landowner
A third set of factors raised by interviewees as affecting the re-use of former military sites was the role of the former landowner, the Ministry of Defence, in relation to current legal requirements on the sale of surplus MoD sites, uncertainty over disposals, and the lack of adequate information on the progress of disposals.

A significant problem in the conversion of military bases are the legal and financial rules governing the disposal of surplus MoD sites. The Treasury Rules, set out in 1988 guidelines DAO 4/88 and revised in July 1992, require the MoD to obtain the best possible price on a sale. This was roundly criticised in evidence to the HCDC inquiry, which concluded that the search for capital receipts did not in every case secure for the community the best
long term return. Interviewees endorsed this with reference to the sale of RAF Binbrook, thought to have been sold to the highest bidder with no consideration of the purchasers plans (or otherwise) for the site. The problems that had followed from this sale had been immense. Treasury rules also require surplus land to be disposed of within three years of being so identified. The HCDC in considering the matter recommended faster decisions on the release of land and a more measured process of actual disposal (HCDC, 1994a, p.xxi). Uncertainty over the MoD’s plans for a site was a major issue for most of the sites concerned, and one highlighted by the HCDC inquiry into the defence estate:

Management of the defence estate is affected to an unusual degree by the aura of unpredictability hanging over all defence management at a time of contraction and restructuring, constant reviews and uncertain prospects, aggravated by the prospects for market testing. Many of the individual sites on which we took evidence are affected in this way: and even those apparently cleared for disposal may be reprieved as a knock-on result of other decisions, to add-back forces or repatriate them from Germany. (HCDC, 1994a, p.viii)

A good example of the effect of uncertainty in shaping redevelopment of redundant sites comes from RAF Scampton, formerly used by the RAF acrobatic team, the Red Arrows. The team was relocated to RAF Cranwell, but at the time the Planning Brief was drawn up, it was envisaged that the runway and associated land would be retained as an emergency landing facility who would continue their flying training over the base until 1998 (West Lindsey District Council, 1996). At the time interviews were
conducted in Lincolnshire, there was still uncertainty as to future military requirements for Scampton and as to the date any decision on this would be taken. This was thought to hamper the progress on the formulation of development plans considerably.

Lack of information on the progress of site sales was another problem, with much criticism being made of the MoD. Individuals were not to blame, but rather the structure and bureaucracy of the decision-making process, within a hierarchical organisation, where information flows were also thought to be hampered by vertical segregation between departments. Complaints of uncertainty in the progress of sales were common. In the words of one local authority officer:

We tried to agree a planning brief with the Ministry of Defence, but our planners weren’t able to reach agreement over the content of that document. The site was put up for sale. For a long time we didn’t know what part of the site the MoD was going to sell off. (Interview with local authority officer, Norfolk, November 1997)

Another complained that:

...in the sales process the local authority is completely in the dark and we were not sure who was being sold the land [...] we’re usually the last to know. Which makes it quite difficult for planning purposes. (Interview with local authority officer, Lincolnshire, February 1998).
Similar frustrations were vented in the Eastern Daily Press by two parish councillors losing patience at the lack of any definitive statement on the future of RAF West Raynham, near Fakenham in Norfolk:

‘We do not seem to be able to get any information. We can shout and stamp our feet but it does not make any difference.’

‘Approaches have been made to get some sort of development brief for West Raynham but it is always met with what is, quite frankly, almost a rebuff. It is a shame that very well-built houses are apparently standing empty with no use made of them.’

(Quoted in the Eastern Daily Press, 15.12.97)

Uncertainty and lack of information on the progress of disposals was also compounded for some local authority officers by the problem of now knowing to whom within the Defence Estate Organisation inquiries should be addressed. For one interviewee, the rationalisation of the management of the defence estate within the Defence Estate Organisation, established in March 1997, had only served to compound these problems. Also, there appeared to be a lack of data available on changes within the defence estate. Certainly, the research reported here found that no accessible (i.e. computerised) records exist of changes in defence estate holdings in Lincolnshire, so there was no possibility of accurately assessing year-on-year changes.

In view of criticisms, perhaps, the MoD formed a Regional Policy Unit in 1995 to facilitate inter-departmental and regional communications about defence estate restructuring issues (though no interviewee raised mentioned
this unit in interview). The 1995 Rural White Paper also stressed a number of measures which committed the MoD to improve links with Government Regional Offices in the development of plans for redundant sites, through the implementation of guidelines for joint working. These were agreed in September 1996 and further modified in December 1997. These also commit disposal proposals to take account of the development planning framework, and to this I now turn.

The scope and limits of the land use planning process
In this section, I look at the role of the land use planning system in shaping the redevelopment trajectory of disused sites. The land use planning system is important to conversion because the current system of disposal on the open market gives local planning authority a peculiar role as the only statutory body with a duty to try and shape development plans according to local needs and priorities. Also important here are central Government statements on conversion.

Government guidance on conversion is set out in the 1995 Rural White Paper which established a commitment to using redundant MoD land for economic regeneration and the creation of employment opportunities:

We are committed to maximising the potential of redundant facilities for suitable employment and wealth creation. A range of regeneration programmes is available to help breathe new life into areas adversely affected by defence closures. We will ensure that decisions on disposal and re-use take account of policies for regeneration and land use for the local area. Development plans
should also take account of the potential of defence facilities. We are committed to making the best use of land which has already been developed, in order to reduce the need to build on greenfield sites. (DoE, 1995, p.58)

Also important are Planning Policy Guidance notes which give additional guidance on planning policy on an area and a topic basis. Regional Planning Guidance for the East Midlands states that exceptionally there may be a case for the re-use of derelict land such as abandoned buildings, which are outside the framework of existing settlements, where such development is consistent with the need to conserve landscape and natural environment, and where there are no overriding objections such as increases in traffic levels. It states that redundant military sites might have potential for new settlements where there is good accessibility, but that the existence of a potential site should not be regarded as a reason in itself for the establishment of any new settlement. It goes on to raise the issue of sustainability and emphasises the need for the local provision of essential services in new developments, to ensure this.

The development plan framework set out in Structure and Local Plans is critical. A handbook on the conversion of military sites, produced by Network Demilitarised, puts this most succinctly:

Planning policy has a significant effect on the development opportunities offered by redundant sites. For many authorities this is one of the most difficult issues to tackle as it can often lead to confrontational situations and create tension on the Working
Group. Issues such as remoteness, change of use, environmental impact and scale of development are central to the reuse process. In addition the policy objectives and desires to recycle land adds weight to the sustainability viewpoint. The sudden windfall of a major land allocation, perhaps not always in the desired location, has provided many authorities with an alternative housing or business site which has slowed the necessary release of greenfield sites or prompted a review of strategic planning policies. (Network Demilitarized, 1996, p.4).

These potential tensions between the needs for environmental protection and economic development are visible in the Structure and Local plan statements on the re-use of redundant military sites in Lincolnshire. The County Structure Plan notes that such sites have potential for housing development, and that central and local government policy endorses the maximum use of such land, warns that each case of re-use of these exceptional sites has to be considered on its own merits, and that development should ideally form part of ‘an overall sustainable mixed use development including co-ordinated infrastructure provision’ (Lincolnshire County Council, 1998, p.36). There is a tension, though, between environmental protection and the re-use of derelict sites. They may have potential for economic development, but their existence should not be regarded ‘as a reason in itself for a re-use for employment development’, and warns that:

Lincolnshire already has a number of former RAF establishments, now in employment use, inappropriately sited and providing a poor quality built environment, the latter because it has not
proved economically viable to do anything more than a basic conversion. (Lincolnshire County Council, 1998, p.36)

The Structure Plan advocates the pursuit of proposals for development through the Local Plan process, and accordingly the Local Plans for two of Lincolnshire’s Districts, North Kesteven and West Lindsey, deal explicitly with this issue. North Kesteven dedicated a section of its Local Plan to the issue of disused airfields, stating explicitly that it sees redundant sites as offering growth opportunities:

In particular, the identification of development on the bases is a positive way to solve the problems posed by redundancy. It is also considered that the re-utilisation meets many of the fundamental objectives of sustainable development. The development of these sites also enables less suitable greenfield sites to be protected. (North Kesteven District Council, 1996, p.77)

Special Policy Areas for two airfields (Martin and Swinderby) were designated, setting out the types of development which would generally be approved in development briefs. West Lindsey District Council now follow a similar approach, providing for both housing and economic development at Brookenby and Hemswell Cliff. The need for a planning brief setting out a vision for the redevelopment of a site is now recognised in the guidelines for the joint working of the MoD and Government Regional Offices in the disposal of surplus MoD property (DETR, 1997).
The need for a planning brief was emphasised with reference to the case of Hemswell Cliff, an airbase which had closed in 1963. Two interviewees spoke of the lack of an initial planning guidance in shaping development there with no co-ordination of the re-use of the site. It is certainly a strange place to visit, a mixture of antique traders, antique jobbers, car boot sales, a residential home for the elderly, small catering outlets and a small aircraft museum, nestling against large hangars now used for the storage of grain and BSE-infected cattle carcasses. The Sunday antique market, thought to be one of the biggest in Europe, attracts large numbers of visitors, and herein lay the roots of a dilemma. The site supported many small businesses and patently contributed to the economic health of the area. The cost was sustainability, with large volume of traffic and congestion, air pollution and litter. As with Brookenby, on two separate occasions local authority officers spoke of the need to avoid ‘another Hemswell’ in planning for the redevelopment of their redundant sites.

The point was also made that a certain degree of flexibility is required in the formulation of planning briefs for a site. In the words of one interviewee, ‘planners can get a bit sniffy about these sites, which don’t conform to local plans’. It was thought that exceptions have to be made at times, even if development does not strictly conform to ideas of sustainable development, because ‘if the local authority does not bend its own rules, nothing will happen on these sites’.

Development briefs were thought by some to be crucial to a local planning authority in giving it a degree of influence over site disposal. Contradictory
information was given on this, with some local authority officers talking of the powerlessness in shaping the disposal process, and others talking of the leverage they were able to apply, particularly in avoiding the fragmentation of sites. Fragmentation had been recognised as a key cause of the unplanned, uncoordinated and unsustainable development which had followed the disposal of Hemswell. For example, a Development Brief was drawn up for RAF Swinderby ‘to have some sort of measure of persuasion of the MOD and the sale of the land’. The Local Plan placed considerable emphasis on the need for a co-ordinated approach, stating that without this, several problems would inevitably arise, such as potential decay, dereliction and deterioration of an attractive environment; limited re-use of housing and employment areas without appropriate provision for shops and community services; and no investment in improved services or upgrading or access of lighting (North Kesteven District Council, 1996, p.80). The District Council was concerned that if the site was sold to numerous purchasers, without a clear development brief, it would have a real struggle trying to get any co-ordinated redevelopment to the site which in turn would be both environmentally unsustainable and visually intrusive. Again, in interview, a local authority officer spoke of the lessons learnt from the experience at RAF Binbrook where, according to another interviewee, the lack of a development brief at the time of disposal had meant that no strategic vision had been developed of the area’s needs had been defined ‘and we’re still living with the consequences of that today’.

This research detected considerable frustration at how the lack of a co-ordinated development plan for certain sites had in some senses removed the
very great economic and social development potential offered by redundant
sites for their areas and communities. Considerable criticism was made in
the past about the role of the MoD in the sale of bases, as outlined above.
The lack of consultation had been a particular problem in the past. A
number of witnesses to the House of Commons Defence Committee raised
the issue, with the Local Authority Associations voicing strong criticisms:

There should be close links between local authorities and the
MoD on issues relating to land use planning, in particular the
allocation of land for development in local plans and structure
plans, and on proposals for seeking planning permission for
particular developments. Close and regular liaison between local
authorities and the MoD would benefit both parties and enable the
local authorities to comment at an early stage on the suitability or
otherwise of particular development proposals and consider all
possible options for the use of sites in development plans.
Because most local authorities are currently in the process of
preparing or consulting on their development plans it is essential
that liaison on land use issues takes place as soon as possible.
Local authorities cannot give special treatment to the MoD as land
owners but the Department should be more aware of the planning
procedures. There is solid evidence that the defence land
authority is not familiar with structure plan and local plan
procedures and is reluctant to take part in the consultation stages
of these plans. (HCDC, 1994b, p.147)
One interviewee in Wiltshire was quite concerned that after initial improvement in the early 1990s, the co-ordination of disposals with the local planning authority had deteriorated over the past couple of years. Some might have lain with the establishment of new procedures and a new organisational strategy for disposals with the establishment of the Defence Estate Organisation, launched in March 1997. The implementation of the 1997 guidelines may be slowly improving matters. This is another possible area for further research (see also Herd, forthcoming).

**The role of rural development policy and funding mechanisms**

In this section I assess the potential of rural development policy structures and funding mechanisms in facilitating the regeneration of bases and localities affected by conversion. A number of policies exist, and intention here is to draw together their key features as they affect conversion, rather than attempt a more stringent policy evaluation.

I start with European funding for rural development under Objective 5b Programme and funding for conversion under KONVER. Objective 5b of the European Union’s Structural Funds targets rural economic development issues in spatially-defined areas. Some 82 of these across the EU were granted Objective 5b status for the programming period 1994-99, and eleven of these are in the UK. In some of these, conversion was important in framing the nature of the rural development problem set out in the Single Programme Document (SPD) produced for each Objective 5b area. The SPD for the South West Region talks of the further decline in defence-related employment as a major threat to the economic health of the region,
and notes the continuing dependence of some localities on defence-related employment despite significant reductions in employment in this sector during the 1980s. The SPD for Lincolnshire highlights the dependence of a number of major employers in the area on defence contracts and the vulnerability of the area as a whole to defence restructuring (GOEM, 1994). The SPD for East Anglia puts similar emphasis on the problems for economic development experienced as a result of base closure. One of the four sub-areas designated for the receipt of Objective 5b funds, Central Rural Norfolk, was though to be particularly dependent with a high proportion of the population engaged in armed forces-related occupations—9.1% of the workforce in 1991. The existing and planned closure of four RAF bases in the Objective 5b area was anticipated to involved the loss of more than 1,500 jobs; jobs in the affected bases amounted to about 12% of the total employment in the area (GOER, 1994, p.15). In East Anglia, two interviewees speculated that the designation of the Objective 5b area may have been the result of the expected impact of airbase closures (see Ward and Woodward, 1998, for further information on Objective 5b in East Anglia).

Funding under Objective 5b is determined according to priorities and measures set out in the SPD enabling economic development, and is available on a matched basis. This requires the establishment of partnerships between public, private and voluntary sector organisations. The availability of Objective 5b funds has undoubtedly provided a significant opportunity for economic development in eligible areas, including conversion projects; the possibilities of funding for projects at Brookenby and Scampton had been
explored. However, interviewees with experience of Objective 5b in East Anglia and Lincolnshire both expressed some concern that more use could have been made of this pot of money for conversion. Private sector reluctance the initiate bids was thought to be the reason. In one East Anglian district, it was felt that local authority’s capital resources were too limited to be able to initiate projects on old airfields, and the private sector was understandably reluctant to undertake development when such substantial investment was need in the basic infrastructure. From this, we could conclude that the utility of Objective 5b for conversion is perhaps rather limited, given the natures of the sites concerned.

The European Union provides funding for conversion projects under KONVER, a Community Initiative introduced in 1993 and extended under KONVER II to the end of 1997. KONVER provides support for economic diversification in areas heavily dependent on the defence sector, through the conversion of economic activities to make areas less dependent on the defence sector, and through the encouragement of commercially viable activities in the defence industrial sector. 67 areas were designated in the UK and Gibraltar for the receipt of KONVER II funding for projects worth 20.85 million ECU in the Eastern Region (which includes Mid Suffolk and Suffolk Coastal Districts in Suffolk) and 2.04 million ECU in the East Midlands (which includes North Kesteven and South Kesteven Districts in Lincolnshire) (DTI, 1997). In the UK KONVER has mostly been used for schemes for the diversification of the defence industry (Hooper and Cox, 1996; Brömmelhörster, 1997), but it is also available for base conversion. Funding under KONVER I had been used to undertake evaluation and
feasibility studies of the nature of the conversion problem in Suffolk and Norfolk. Funding under KONVER II had been used for site redevelopment at RAF Bentwaters, and for evaluations at RAF Swinderby. £108,000 had assisted Lincolnshire County Council in the development of Springfield business park under the measure for the rehabilitation of military sites and environmental improvements, £50,000 had been granted to North Kesteven District Council for activities to promote aviation heritage tourism and £62,000 had been granted to Lincolnshire TEC for re-training initiatives (GOEM, undated). KONVER funds are not directed explicitly at rural development issues, but have nonetheless been a significant help to local authorities in defining rural development and conversion issues.

National strategies for rural development include the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Rural Development Commission’s Rural Challenge competition. The SRB was formed under a central government initiative to draw together disparate sources of economic regeneration funding, the distribution of which was to be placed in the hands of the newly-created Government Regional Offices. As part of this process, many ‘urban’ policies (i.e. policies designed for designated problems in urban areas) were ‘de-urbanised’ in that possibilities now existed for more rural areas to bid for SRB funding (Oatley, 1998). Single Regeneration Budget funds have been drawn down for the conversion of redundant lands and buildings at Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire following competition in Round 4 of the SRB (a bid in 1996 to Round 3 was seen as a ‘marginal failure’). The SRB bid was co-ordinated by a body called the Richmond Partnership, bringing together a range of private and public sector institutions and individuals with
an interest in the regeneration of Richmond and the Catterick Garrison parishes of Hispwell, Colburn and Scotton. Funds of £1,067,175 were awarded over a four years period, with a further £6 million to be drawn in from public, private and European sources. The projects to be financed include a new learning and childcare Centre of Excellence, a business park and a community health and recreation centre as capital projects. Funding was sought but not granted for a number of additional revenue projects such as a skills training programme, an adventure project for young people, an employment guidance service, environmental improvements and an out-of-school club). The SRB offers an open invitation to localities to express their needs, defined on the basis of both deprivation and opportunity, and potentially offer a more flexible form of assistance; a number of SRB bids had been submitted for conversion projects in Lincolnshire. One criticism of the scheme is that the funds have tended to be awarded to relatively affluent areas, places which might not necessarily have the most need, but possibly have greater economic power and the resources available to win within a competitive bidding framework. Catterick has benefited from the SRB. Other equally (or more) needy areas may not. An evaluation of the impact of the SRB on rural areas and on conversion projects may well be worth undertaking.

The Rural Development Commission is the statutory body in England for the promotion of economic and social development in rural areas. Various mechanisms exist within designated Rural Development Areas for economic generation. Rural Challenge, a competitive scheme initiated in 1993 marked a significant departure for rural regeneration funding with its emphasis on
competition, partnership and the involvement of the private sector (Jones and Little, forthcoming). It is considered here because a project for developments at Brookenby was a winner in Round 1 of Rural Challenge in 1994. Under Rural Challenge, projects bid for six prizes of up to £1 million, and at Brookenby this sum was match-funded bringing forward a scheme worth £2.5 million for the regeneration of this redundant air base. The project included the redevelopment and marketing of the technical park, providing employment and attracting inward investment. Improvements to infrastructure, roads and street lighting would be undertaken to enable adoption by the relevant authorities and open up development opportunities. A programme of environment improvements was to be carried out to upgrade and demilitarise the settlement. Other elements of the project provided for a family resource centre, a village hall, a youth club and recreational facilities for the residents, the provision of vocational training and adult education and the establishment of a Development Trust for the village.

Funding under Rural Challenge has undoubtedly brought many benefits to this new community with the provision of services and facilities for the residents and the creation of employment (over 60 jobs) on the technical park. However, interviewees involved with the project pointed to a number of difficulties which illustrated both the problems associated with the conversion of military sites and the difficulties inherent in competitive, partnership based development strategies with such great reliance on the involvement of the private sector. A major problem was felt to be a structural weakness in the original bid document. This had been drawn up
on the basis of a community appraisal conducted in the early 1990s. The origins of the bid in community needs was reflected in the objectives for the project, and these were felt to the projects’ major strengths. However, the economic development element involving the upgrading and use of the buildings in the technical park was thought to have involved great difficulties possibly because the contribution of the private sector partner, a development company which had purchased the site from the MoD had not been realistically assessed. The private sector partner, Sun Binbrook Ltd., was generally perceived to be uninterested in active participation in the project, to the frustration and bemusement of project workers (and I return to the issue of partnership below). There were also complications under legislation on state aid to industry, limiting the investment of public money in the private sector, which compromised the use of Rural Challenge funds for the upgrading of the (privately owned) technical park. Another problem was that, in all such projects, funding is drawn against defrayed expenditure; the projects have no cash flow. This had implications for the ways in which development work could proceed. It also caused frustrations within the community:

... this idea of a million pounds coming to the village was very real to people and there was almost an expectation of a mile-high pile of pound notes. And it was a difficult and disillusioning experience explaining how the government works and that it isn’t really like that, and a lot of expectations and illusions were cracked.’ (Interview with development worker, Lincolnshire, February 1998)
Many of the problems experienced at Brookenby were replicated in other Rural Challenge projects; the limitations to this scheme lie in its competitive nature, where competition rather than need determines funding, and where the active involvement of the private sector is so crucial (see Little et al., 1998; Jones and Little, forthcoming).

The partnership issue was also pertinent to all the Rural Challenge projects, and to current government thinking on rural development policy and funding more generally. It is also extremely pertinent to economic and social regeneration of redundant military facilities. Examples of failed and successful regeneration partnership strategies indicate how conversion might best succeed.

The idea of partnerships in economic regeneration is now well-established in urban development policy, and the study of partnerships has generated a significant academic literature (see Oatley, 1998). It is becoming central to both rural development and conversion strategies. For example, the 1995 Rural White Paper emphasises that the government welcomes ‘bids from local partnerships as a way of maximising the benefits of regeneration for local people’. The 1996 report on the White Paper stresses this by illustrating its paragraph on the reuse of redundant MoD land with a picture of Dinton Business Park, which

... opened in March 1996 on the site of RAF Chilmark in Wiltshire. 20 small business units have been provided by a partnership between the local authorities, the Rural Development
Commission and the European Union’s KONVER programme. (DoE, 1996, p. 43)

This research came across a number of partnerships established to deal with the consequences of defence restructuring. SDEP, ‘The Economic Partnership for South and West Dorset’, was formed in response to concerns about the economic impact of the closure of Portland Naval Base and other local defence establishments. Members include the local authority, the RDC, the local Chamber of Commerce, Dorset TEC, local businesses and the Trades Council. Its main activities include the marketing of business and development opportunities, project handling for companies considering investing in the area, and lobbying to the EU and central government for funds under KONVER and the SRB. The 1996 report commissioned by the RDC on the ‘rural peace dividend’ made an important point when it noted that partnerships like this have considerable value beyond the immediate issue of site closure and run-down (EAG/ECOTEC, 1996). Another example is the Partnership for the Regeneration of the Catterick Garrison Communities, co-ordinated by the Richmond Partnership (and itself a partnership of public and private sector interests). The Catterick Regeneration partnership was formed in order to help initiate a number of schemes and grant bids for the regeneration of the Richmond and the Catterick Garrison communities, culminating in the successful SRB bid outlined above. A total of 19 organisations are members of this Partnership, including North Yorkshire County Council, North Yorkshire TEC, Richmond District Council, HQ 19th Mechanised Brigade and Catterick Garrison, Darlington College of Technology, North Yorkshire Health
Authority, Northallerton Health Trust, English Partnerships, Army Welfare Service and Fair Play for Kids and the local parish councils.

The utility of partnerships in rural development varies, of course, according to their composition and synergy. Partners need to have a shared vision of the possibilities of redevelopment. The development brief for RAF Swinderby contains strong words about the necessity for private sector partners to share this vision:

The authority has a clear vision of the site and the assurances which it would expect developers to establish to ensure that the vision is achieved, but it also recognises that the way forward is through partnership with the developers whose investment will be essential. The Council is keen to establish a structure with prospective developers where both sides share a vision about what can be achieved, and the partnership is about getting things done in the best interests of those who will work and live at the site. It may be that this could best be achieved through a joint venture structure with a developer or developers and the Council and possibly other public bodies. The Council would welcome discussions about all types of partnership as long as it is clear that the Council will seek to ensure that its concerns are met. (North Kesteven District Council, 1994, p.2)

Problems can ensue when partners disagree about development proposals, and there were hints that this had happened at RAF Scampton. Partners will not necessarily have the same interests, and this had caused problems at
Brookenby where different members of the development board were felt to have conflicting interest. In the words of one interviewee, ‘how many people on the board can have the overview?’. Partnerships can also be very unequal, again a problem at Brookenby. ‘I missed a vital member of that partnership out’ said an interviewee describing the composition of the project partnership, ‘the private sector. It is sometimes difficult to consider them as being a partner, but they are in theory supposed to be a partner’. Another interviewee thought the private sector partner uninterested in investing in the technical park properties which they owned: ‘I think they just saw this as an opportunity to make some money’. The problems associated with ‘paper’, ‘false’ or ‘opportunistic partnerships are elaborated on elsewhere (Little et al, 1998; Jones and Little, forthcoming; Painter, 1998). Whatever the problems, they are likely to remain part of the redevelopment landscape for the time being.

If partnership is a common issue for rural development, whether or not is it associated with conversion, other issues emphasise the specificity of conversion as a rural development problem. Military bases are unlike other sites because of what they contain, the problems associated with their infrastructure, the issue of contamination and the institutional frameworks in which they sit. The military inheritance is a peculiar one and offers peculiar challenges to rural development strategies. These sites represent significant public investment, yet there are clear limits to the ability of the public sector to invest in them because of lack of resources. These sites are potentially highly attractive to private investors, but the private sector needs to be encouraged to show interest.
These factors were recognised by Network Demilitarised, established as a European network of defence-dependent regions under RECITE, a European Community Initiative, in 1993. One of the Working Groups, devoted explicitly to the issues surrounding base conversion, was chaired by a representative from Wiltshire County Council. Following investigation of base conversion issues experienced in different member states, Network Demilitarised developed a Commercial Audit Procedure (CAP) methodology to assess the best commercial uses of surplus land, buildings, specialised military facilities and infrastructure (Network Demilitarised, 1994). The CAP was developed by drawing on the experiences of sites which had already undergone conversion, and has been presented as a tried-and-tested method for enabling conversion, either through suggestion of appropriate methods for determining re-use, and through identification of the likely problems that can hamper the optimal re-use of sites. The CAP essentially consists of four steps; first, a review of the site and its special characteristic in order to develop alternative development options; second, the testing of these options using a range of variables; third, a comparison of the options which survive the testing state; and fourth, detailed feasibility studies and implementation of the preferred scheme (Network Demilitarised, 1994, p.3). The emphasis throughout is on the need for Working Groups as a means of creating partnerships which have a real interest in the conversion of the base, possibly the most significant step along the conversion path. Other critical issues include the need to establish ownership, the need for certainty from the relevant defence ministry as to the future of the site, the need for community involvement in the formulation of development plans and the
need to take account of existing planning policies and development frameworks (Network Demilitarised, 1996).

The CAP methodology was piloted at RAF Chilmark in Wiltshire, the conversion of which into Dinton Business Park has already been mentioned to illustrate the types of partnerships possible in site redevelopment. The site was bought from the Ministry of Defence by Wiltshire County Council. This is perhaps unusual, but as a representative of the County Council commented, no private developer would have touched the site, given the infrastructure that needed to be installed to bring the site up to standard. A good economic development case could be made to persuade Council members to endorse the purchase, and a funding package was put together using local authority and Rural Development Programme funds to lever in a substantial amount of KONVER funding to carry out infrastructure improvements. It is now a small but viable business park making an important contribution to the local economy. It is also used as an example of the possibilities offered by the Commercial Audit Procedure.

An Economic Development Conveyance model developed for the regeneration of RAF Scampton drew explicitly on the methodology of the CAP and again is underpinned by the notion of partnership. This ambitious scheme drew on a model for base conversion introduced in the United States in 1993, under the Clinton Administration. Again, the emphasis is on partnership in the preparation of development options, as well as their execution; a Working Group would be established to launch the Commercial Audit and define a set of goals and objectives for the reuse of the site,
informed by a comprehensive survey of the base and its facilities. But it goes one stage further. An outline of the Economic Development Conveyance model’s potential for RAF Scampton was given in documentation to support a bid for Regional Challenge funding. Its key component would be the transfer of the base assets to a base redevelopment company (Investors in Scampton) so that the assets could be used as collateral to raise money for the redevelopment process. This is an interesting scheme; time limits on the research, and space here, preclude comprehensive discussion. However, the EDC model at Scampton faced a key problem (leaving aside the question of the uncertainty over the future of the site). Treasury rules on the disposal of sites require sale to the highest bidder in order to maximise receipts, and within a three year period of being identified as surplus (the subject of critical comment by the House of Commons Defence Committee in 1994). Ministerial approval would have to be sought to allow the transfer of assets under a concessionary sale. In fact, the plans for RAF Scampton are (at time of writing) still on hold, but consideration of the site is included here as it raises a larger theoretical problem. This concerns the tensions thrown up between central and local state by the whole conversion process. I return to this point in the concluding section of this report.
PART III  FUTURE QUESTIONS

In this final section, I draw together some of the questions raised by this study of the impact of conversion on rural areas. I look at conceptual and policy issues, and suggest areas for further research.

Conceptual issues
As this report has shown, the restructuring of the defence estate and conversion of military sites raises both opportunities and problems for the areas affected. Whilst at a national level base conversions may not have warranted much critical attention, at the local level the issue is visible and important. Base conversion is also important because of the conceptual issues it raises. There are a number of these, but I limit discussion here to the two most pertinent that appeared during the course of this research. These are the conceptualisation of the conversion process as part of a ‘peace dividend’, and the issues conversion raises for relations between the central and local state.

The discourse of a ‘peace dividend’ has proved a popular one in explanations of the factors which have led to the restructuring of the defence estate. The term acquired currency in media debates following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the revolutions in many East European nation states and the fall of the Berlin Wall. A peace dividend was anticipated; geopolitical changes would result in the slashing of the military budgets of NATO
members and the release of public money for investment in social welfare projects in the fields of health, welfare and housing.

There have undoubtedly been changes in the structure of the defence capabilities of many nation states as a result of these geopolitical changes. In Britain, a programme of change initiated with the *Options for Change* review has seemingly dominated the lives of managers within the services and the Ministry of Defence. This process continues as I write, with changes anticipated as a result of the Strategic Defence Review initiated in 1997 by the new Labour Government, and expected in final form in July 1998. Questions remain, however, as to whether the idea of a peace dividend is appropriate for understanding such changes.

The notion of a peace dividend is certainly an intuitively attractive one, particularly for those at local authority level dealing with the ramifications of base closure. It has provided a convenient explanatory hook onto which discussions of conversion can be hung. For example, the Rural Development Commission’s study of the effect of military restructuring in rural areas (EAG/ECOTEC, 1996) places the discussion squarely within the framework of a peace dividend in its introductory paragraph:

> [...] three waves of [defence] rationalisation and expenditure have resulted, and are still resulting, in the close and down-sizing of a large number of military bases and the restructuring or sell-off of a variety of companies previously working as contractors to the MOD. While in aggregate the benefits to the UK economy through saved public expenditure are substantial—the “Peace
Dividend”—the specific employment and income implications of these cuts for certain regions and sectors are substantially negative. It is the size and distribution of this “Peace Penalty” that forms the backdrop to the present report. (EAG/ECOTEC, 1996, p.1)

Briefings prepared by the founding members of the Scampton Partnership to try and access funding for the redevelopment of RAF Scampton draw on the same discourse. In response to the then Prime Minister’s expressed interest in the issue following a visit to Lincoln, Lincolnshire TEC produced a briefing document entitled *Beating Swords into Ploughshares*:

We hope that [our proposals] find favour with Government so that together we can demonstrate how the problems of military base closures can be turned into opportunities for the whole community, and the ‘Peace Dividend’ can become the reality envisaged by those who took the bold steps to reduce military expenditure, in response to the new world order and the establishment of a safer world for this and tomorrow’s generations. (Lincolnshire TEC, 1994, p.2)

The notion of a peace dividend has probably served most use as a means of getting the issue of base conversion onto the public agenda. However, there are two main difficulties in using it as an explanatory framework for understanding the conversion process. The first, as Oakey (1991) noted with reference to the defence industry, is that given the free-market principles espoused by the then US and UK governments, there were fundamental
legislative obstacles as well as major ideological dilemmas involved. The massive savings anticipated at the time in defence expenditure could not easily be ploughed back into the economy. The difficulties experienced at Brookenby are a case in point, with the limits imposed on public sector investment in privately-owned companies. The second difficulty with the use of the idea of a peace dividend as an explanatory framework is hinted at the quotation from the Lincolnshire TEC, above. For some commentators, the end of the Cold War and the establishment of George Bush’s much heralded New World Order have merely changed the rhetoric behind a continued process of global economic and political dominance by the United States, with the support of the UK (Chomsky, 1992; Wood, 1998). As John Lovering has argued, the idea of a peace dividend is fundamentally flawed in both political and economic terms (Lovering, 1994).

If there are objections to the notion of the peace dividend as an explanatory framework for defence estate restructuring, what alternatives exist? With reference to the experiences in the United States of base closure, where the largest wave of closures occurred between 1961 and 1977, Barney Warf argues that the long history of base closures suggests that

[...] the geography of military facilities should be conceptualized as a palimpsest, as multiple layers of base openings and closures reflecting the accumulation of strategic locational decisions over time under varying budgetary, political and strategic circumstances (Warf, 1997, p.544)
This idea draws our attention away from the idea of base closures as a purely contemporary issue; as the House of Commons Defence Committee noted, interest in the defence estate is currently unusually high, but few of the issues raised to the Committee were felt to be new (HCDC, 1994a, p.vi). The issue of base closures, rather, is perhaps best approached via a focus on the interactions between local and global political and economic processes, which contribute to the restructuring of defence capabilities as much as to rural economic and social change. As this report has shown, the some of the consequences of base closure (such as locational, planning and rural development policy issues) may often best be understood as issues arising out of the geography of uneven development, rather than as a peace penalty or dividend.

A second conceptual issue appearing in this research concerns the questions which the redevelopment of former military sites raises for the relations between the central and local state. This research found evidence for conflicts between central and local government over conversion issues, for example, over flows of information about prospective base closures. Barney Warf, citing the contests in the USA between the national state (Congress, the Pentagon, the presidency) and the local state (county and municipal government, local interest groups) over military facilitates, notes how ‘military base closures illuminate a fascinating contradiction between different levels of the state’ (Warf, 1997, p.544). There are obviously clear contrasts between the experience of the US and Britain, not least in the institutional framework and timescale in which conversion takes place. As numerous commentators on urban and regional policy have noted, however,
institutional differences do not obscure wider similarities between the US and Britain in terms of the insights that can be drawn from theories of state and governance, and this is clearly an area for further theoretical work. Two examples from this research indicate the issues further conceptual work might take up. The first comes from a seemingly throw-away remark made by one interviewee in Lincolnshire, commenting on the reasons for the failure of the Scampton Partnership’s bid for Regional Challenge finance. The bid failed because government money would not be spent on cleaning up the mess made by another government policy. So how are the interests of different departments in central government reconciled? Are there merely procedural blocks at work, or more fundamental divisions over policy development at the central level? A second off-the-cuff comment from a second interviewee raises a further issue here: military bases represent massive investment of public funds and are a public asset, yet the public sector at the local level is usually unable (because of a lack of resources) to invest in these sites in order to enable their re-use. How can contradictions between the central and local state best be overcome? Is this an issue for policy or, as Warf comments, indicative of a more profound set of tensions between the central and local state? This is clearly an area for further theoretically-driven research.

Policy issues
Although this research did not set out explicitly to evaluate rural development policies dealing with base conversions, the study of conversion in rural areas in Britain automatically entails a consideration of rural development policy. A range of policy mechanisms and funding strategies
exist to encourage various forms of economic and social regeneration or development on former military sites. This research points to two related issues which could inform policy debates and policy development in the future, concerning the specificity of base conversion, and the institutionalisation of base conversion within policy mechanisms.

As I outlined in the introduction, one of the questions underpinning the empirical phase of this research was whether there was anything peculiar about former military sites that made them somehow different in rural policy terms from, for example, former coalfield areas or places suffering from agricultural decline. This question could be extended to inquire as to whether there is any difference in former military sites, relative to any other part of the British countryside undergoing social and economic upheavals as a result of wider processes of social and economic change. As one might anticipate, the answer to this is both no and yes. In some aspects, the problems raised by the closure of military sites, and their redevelopment, are nothing special. Economic decline can be expected, but economic development can be encouraged through policy mechanisms. Social change will ensue, and this may be both positive and negative. Land use planning issues have to be resolved, often creatively. Development partnerships have to be formed, which experience the same problems and benefits across the country.

But there are peculiarities to military sites. They often have contamination problems. They are often very large sites. Many sites contain highly specialised structures that are not easy to convert. As the Brookenby Project
Officer put it, “The blast-proof structures turned seemingly simple alterations into major feats of engineering and ingenuity” (RDC, 1996, p.2). There may be on-going security issues on sites (see also Network Demilitarised 1994). Although recognition of the specificity of the conversion problem is discernible at a European level, with the KONVER initiative, there is less evidence of this closer to home. Rural development policy mechanisms and funding strategies have been used for conversion, to varying degrees of success, but there is no specific funding for conversion at a national level. Guidance on the conversion process comes only from statements in response to other topics (for example, the Rural White Paper), and in the form of guidelines for the joint working of the MoD and Government Regional Offices on the disposal of surplus MoD property (DETR, 1997).

The lack of explicit policy directed towards conversion wouldn’t necessarily be problematic were it not for a second point. As a number of interviewees pointed out, and as the Network Demilitarised and Scampton Partnership’s respective advocacy of a Commercial Audit Procedure and an Economic Development Conveyance indicated, so much more could be achieved for rural areas in terms of facilitating economic and social development if specific policy measures, targeted at conversion, were in place. All the interviewees involved in this issue, without exception, expressed exasperation at the difficulties inherent in conversion because of the contradictions between the different policy areas that impinge on this issue. Comparisons were most frequently drawn with the US experience where greater institutionalisation of the base closure process (through the BRAC
Commission) and a number of initiatives since 1993 had made the conversion process more locally accountable, faster and more efficient. Of course, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, and no doubt their American counterparts would have similar grumbles. The point however is that this research showed a need for a greater degree of integration between different policy areas in order to facilitate conversion of defence sites. This is perhaps within the remit of the new Regional Development Agencies, although documentation outlining the shape of the new RDAs makes no mention of defence conversion as a regional development issue. Another suggestion put forward by the Arms Conversion Project suggests that the proposed Defence Diversification Agency, plans for which were published in March 1988, be granted responsibility for base conversion (ACP, 1998; MoD, 1998). This research appears to confirm the need for specific, conversion-orientated development policy.

**Research issues**

A preliminary investigation of this kind inevitably leads to conclusions that further research is needed. The conceptual and policy issues to which further empirical research might make a contribution have been outlined above. There appears to be a lack of published and available information in the following areas:

First, a systemic survey and classification of defense estate lands undergoing conversion would be useful, in order to assess the types of sites disposed of,
the re-use (recycling?) of sites by the MoD and the mechanisms used in disposal.

Second, there has been virtually no research undertaken on the social consequences of base closure, on, for example, housing and welfare service provision. Nor has there been any exploration of cultural issues arising from conversion.

Third, given their importance in the conversion process, it would appear that research into the role of developers in the purchase, management and physical development of sites is long overdue.

Fourth, the use of rural development policy and funding mechanisms could be more closely evaluated, rather than just described as I have done here. Such research is pressing given the establishment of new Regional Development Agencies and their expected pivotal role in shaping the development trajectories of regions affected by base closure.

Fifth, there appears to be scope for research evaluating the operation of mechanisms within the MoD for managing the disposal of surplus property (although there are indications that the Department of Environment may have initiated such research in 1997).
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