

Cambridge Air Base

External FAQs

Why do you need to relocate and build a new base in Cambridge?

For 25 years, East Anglian Air Ambulance (EAAA) has been the difference between life and death for tens of thousands of people caught up in the most serious accidents and medical emergencies across Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Suffolk, Norfolk and beyond.

During the last year alone, the helicopter and medical team based at Cambridge City Airport, otherwise known as 'Anglia Two', brought life-saving care to 962 people.

Since 2007, EAAA and the owners of Cambridge City Airport, Marshall, have worked together to ensure that Anglia Two can swiftly attend local people in their moment of greatest need. However, due to the planned closure of the airport, EAAA must urgently relocate its Cambridge-based operation to be able to continue providing its vital service. Without a new home for our Cambridge-based operation, the provision of advanced pre-hospital care to over 3.2 million people across the region is at risk.

Where will EAAA's new Cambridge Air Base be situated?

Following a thorough review of patient needs and existing critical care and helicopter emergency medical service resources, EAAA's Operations Team concluded that Cambridgeshire remains the optimal location and specifically the area immediately surrounding Cambridge.

Our Operations Team then reviewed dozens of sites within the triangle of major roads surrounding the city. The list was narrowed down based on operational considerations such as drive and fly population coverage, aviation compatibility, land availability, land costs, likelihood of successfully securing planning consent, and existing infrastructure on the site.

This concluded that the most suitable option available to us is land at Shardelowes Farm, Balsham Road, Fulbourn, which is located to the east of EAAA's current Cambridge air base at Cambridge City Airport.

What are the operational benefits of the new site?

The new site is located within a kilometre of the A11, and its closest road connects straight into Cambridge. EAAA's critical care cars will be able to reach a population of 276,000 within a 20-minute drive time from the site, and a 10-minute flight time covers a population of 1,206,000¹.

The site has been audited by EAAA's aviation provider, Babcock, and is highly compatible for aviation. For the D3 H145 helicopter, the site can accommodate a 403 metre Final Approach

¹; EEAAT population: Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk.



and Take-Off (FATO) and allows our pilots to perform a class one clear area departure. It has also been assessed as being highly compatible with Point-n-Space (PinS) approach².

At approximately 10 acres, the site will allow us to build the new air base to our current designs while also helping to futureproof our operation.

The site is further away from Cambridge city centre – won't this impact response times?

The speed of EAAA's aircraft means any difference in response time by air will be negligible. While it is true that the new site is further from central Cambridge by car, we will no longer be on an active airfield and therefore we will not have the delays associated with getting through security and driving airside at Cambridge City Airport. Taking this into account, EAAA's operations team has concluded that response times by car are comparable to our current operation in Cambridge.

When will you be leaving Cambridge Airport?

It is important to note completion of purchase is subject to successfully obtaining planning permission for our proposed development and use. We currently estimate that planning permission will be obtained around July to October 2026, at which point the agreement becomes legally binding. Under this timeline, and subject to successful fundraising, we are still on track to begin construction towards the end of 2026/early 2027 and will work toward a deadline of being operational in the new air base by December 2027.

Will there be limitations to the operations if you are no longer on an active airfield?

During Cambridge airport opening hours (which are working hours, Monday-Friday), EAAA does benefit from Air Traffic Control, which aids deconfliction with other air traffic and provides the Instrument Landing System (ILS) on the runway, allowing EAAA to fly in poor weather conditions.

With the proposed site not based at an airfield, the charity will no longer benefit from the ILS, however, we are exploring an alternative system called the Point in Space (PinS) system, which will allow us to utilise GPS-based navigation for precise landing and take-off in challenging weather conditions.

The hangar at Helimed House, the charity's Norwich base and HQ, can house two aircraft. Why can't both of EAAA's operations be based there?

The hangar at Helimed House was constructed to be large enough to house two helicopters. This was done for both logistical reasons (it makes aircraft swaps much easier, such as when one of our helicopters is going off for routine maintenance) and for future-proofing. However,

² PinS procedures are specialised helicopter protocols that utilise GPS-based navigation for precise landing and take-off. These procedures enable helicopters to be accurately positioned at specified points, effectively avoiding obstacles and ensuring safety in challenging conditions.



while we can accommodate both of our current aircraft within the hangar at Helimed House, there are other considerations that would rule out running both operations from Norwich Airport.

Firstly, tasking times for large parts of the area we cover would be drastically increased. Local people in Bedfordshire, the western part of Cambridgeshire, and the south of Suffolk would have to wait a lot longer for our teams to arrive by helicopter. For example, the response time to Luton from Norwich Airport would be almost three times longer than from the current air base in Cambridge.

Secondly, response by car would be virtually non-existent for patients outside of Norfolk. We currently only respond to emergencies by critical care car at night (7pm – 7am) and at present around 45% of the patients we attend from Cambridge City Airport are reached by car, often because these patients are in urban areas where it will be difficult if not impossible to find close enough sites to land a helicopter. Without a local air base in Cambridge with rapid access to major road networks, it would not be possible to reach these patients in good time.

Will the new air base have a negative impact on local residents due to noise issues and the visual landscape?

EAAA is putting in place a range of mitigation measures to minimise disturbance to the site's neighbours, including conducting noise surveys and establishing designated flight routes to minimise the impact on housing.

A report has been created by capturing the sound of the G-HEMC aircraft carrying out manoeuvres and approaches at Cambridge airport and benchmarking this against the ambient noise at the site. Using the results, EAAA's aviation team have created flight plans that will minimise the impact of noise on local residents, particularly in the hours of darkness.

The initial findings have shown that noise from the helicopter falls below statutory limits in the day.

The charity will initially be operational 7am – 7pm by air and 7pm – 7am by road and the findings have shown that noise from the helicopter falls below statutory limits in the day, and below statutory limits for all but one house at night.

The existing buildings on the site and the similar adjacent buildings have a very similar profile to our proposed plans and would in fact be lower than the current buildings.

Will EAAA's helicopter fly 24/7 from the new Cambridge Air Base as it does from Norwich?

We are always looking for ways to use our resources to serve the community as best we can. In the initial stages of the project, we would focus on the continuation of our existing Cambridge-based service but would also ensure that appropriate facilities exist to enable any service expansion that can be foreseen. Flying 24/7 is not an immediate plan but we will make sure that the infrastructure exists to support that step. As with 24/7 flying from Norfolk, we would



first establish, by thoroughly examining the data, that the need exists, and secondly that we have the resources and funding to meet it on a long-term basis.

How long will the build take and when do you hope to be operational?

Construction projects are complex and subject to obtaining successful planning permission, our current timeline - assuming there are no unforeseen circumstances – suggests we will be operational from the new base in late 2027/early 2028.

Magpas Air Ambulance recently built a new air base, why don't you go there with them?

The new Magpas air base is located at Alconbury in the west of Cambridgeshire. This is a great site for an air ambulance service that covers both the East Midlands and the East of England area, but it is not suitable for EAAA. Since we are only tasked by the East of England Ambulance Service, our coverage from Alconbury would be a semi-circle as the western part of our range would sit over a different ambulance service's region.

Given that our official geographical remit is the four counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk it makes more sense operationally for EAAA and its patients to be further to the east. Furthermore, a major aim of our Cambridge Air Base relocation project is to futureproof our operation for 24/7 services by air from Cambridgeshire, and the planning permission for the Alconbury site prohibits this objective.

How much will it cost to purchase the land and build the new base?

The cost of securing the land and building the new base is estimated at £14 million. To prepare for the airport's closure, EAAA has invested £4.5 million – or a third of the total cost – in a capital fund. To realise this life-saving vision, therefore, we need to raise £9.5 million by the end of 2026.

£14m seems like a lot – don't you just need a helipad and a hangar?

After 25 years of development from a "flying ambulance" to a sophisticated 24/7 mobile intensive care unit, EAAA is now a very complex operation requiring significant infrastructure.

On the operational side, the new air base will require two helipads, a hangar space big enough for two aircraft, garage space for rapid response cars, office and kitchen space for crew and operational staff, a medical store (including provision for the storage of controlled drugs), a training area, and overnight accommodation and resting facilities for night-shift and visiting crew.

For ground staff, we will require space for fundraisers who are currently based in offices in Melbourn, along with storage space for fundraising collateral, a "hub" space for training and educational and community purposes, and a staff kitchen.

Why don't you use some of your reserves to fund the new air base?

EAAA is a charity with diverse and complex income streams, along with significant fixed costs and strategic plans for future investment to develop and improve the life-saving services we can

provide to the East Anglian community. To achieve these plans without disruptions we need to hold reserves, and this is especially important in uncertain times such as these.

Our general reserves are kept for three main purposes: to maintain sufficient funds to cover the day to day running costs of the charity; to mitigate the financial impact of any unforeseen risks or unplanned costs; and to navigate through emergencies and disasters.

As outlined on page 45 of our [2023/24 Annual Report](#), our Trustees aspire to hold a minimum of 14 months of free reserves to protect the charity against unforeseen circumstances and service disruptions which could arise due to short-term lack of funds, and to ensure that the charity can take advantage of strategic opportunities to improve its service. The current free reserves of the charity at the year-end were circa £20m, representing 13.9 months cover of annual operating costs.

However, by investing 25% of income from Gifts in Wills over the past few years, EAAA has also invested in the creation of a “capital expenditure reserve” to support initiatives such as the Cambridge Air Base relocation project. The total funds available in this reserve stand at £4.5m and we have committed these entirely towards the project. So, while we cannot fully fund the new air base from free reserves, we are able to make a significant contribution of a third of the cost.

Shouldn't the government provide the UK's air ambulance service?

The charity model ensures that emergency life-saving care for local people is:

- Independent of political changes and government budgeting
- Fully accountable to the communities who support it
- Efficiently and transparently run for the benefit of local people
- Agile and able to quickly innovate and adopt new techniques to improve patient outcomes

In short, by operating as charities, air ambulance services support the NHS and provide local people with elevated medical care. The charity model brings its own challenges, but in this way – provided we continue to make our case to supporters – critical care can be insulated as much as possible from wider political and economic changes.