

Thank you for allowing me to speak at this hearing.

I support the re-opening of Manston as an individual, a pilot and a business owner.

It is as a resident of Thanet that I would like to start. I live on the southern edge of Birchington overlooking the extended centre line of the runway and for over 20 years enjoyed seeing aircraft climbing out and approaching to land at the Airport from my home. The versatility of the airport is evident as you see aircraft evolve from the days when Concorde visited along with the old 707s and Buccaneers to the Boeing 787, Airbus A380, Tornado and Typhoon.

Because of my proximity to the extended centre line the opening of the airport will have an impact on me but it is important to recognise that aircraft today are designed and built to be much quieter.

Thanet District Council through their local plan have a requirement to build houses to provide for the projected need for the people of Thanet. However, without the jobs to support mortgages the people of Thanet will not be in a position to acquire those houses. I believe that the re-opening of Manston as a Cargo hub will provide the type of employment that will support a mortgage.

Manston over the years has provided inspiration and a place to train to a generation who are now flying with major airlines, as corporate pilots and with the military. I understand the inspiration Manston brings to the area as I was inspired and helped by display pilots who through the summer would base at Manston when displaying in the South East and now I too hold a display authorisation for a vintage bi-plane.

Since the airport closed two iconic teams, The Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, the Red Arrows and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF) can no longer visit Manston. Two iconic teams that both inspire and bring history to life. I would add that Manston with its long wide runway was favoured by BBMF and the Red Arrows as it gave greater safety limits for the Lancaster and fighters and it allowed the Red Arrows to perform formation take offs into relative clear airspace.

As well as being able to see aircraft locally schools also used to visit Manston and take pupils flying, they have now lost the opportunity to reward pupils and inspire them in this way to follow aviation careers be it as pilots, engineers, air traffic controllers or the many other career paths and airport provides.

Moving on to more general matters.

Given the very nature of an airfield, you have a large open space with brown field designation which means that many airfields across the country are under threat of closure for, in the main, housing, something that the All Party Parliamentary Group for General Aviation has become very aware of.

When you look back over many years and consider the growth in aviation both general and commercial you have to wonder where in the future runways will be built if we continue to allow the closure of those already available. Especially ones with runways as long and wide as the one at Manston.

Recent events at both Gatwick and Heathrow involving drone activity has highlighted the vulnerability of airfields and whilst the DCO is for primarily a cargo hub at Manston, having additional capacity for emergency situations close to this Countries major airports make good sense, especially as it has the road and proposed rail links to London.

It seems somewhat ironic that prior to the decision to build an additional runway at Heathrow, people living close to Gatwick Airport lived under the threat of compulsory acquisition of their home to build an additional runway (and that may still go ahead with private funding ) whilst a perfectly good airfield here at Manston was being closed with a view to building houses!

It is therefore very hard to understand how the closure of a 2752m long runway can be justified, especially as it will be years before a further runway becomes available at Heathrow, if ever.

Kent has only two airfields now operational with a hard runway, Biggin Hill has already closed its cross runway to allow extra space to accommodate commercial traffic and it now only accepts based General Aviation (GA) aircraft for training.

Lydd, whilst hoping to extend their runway, will still not be able to accept larger cargo and passenger aircraft.

When BA were carrying out their proving flights and crew training for the introduction of the Boeing 787 and A380 to their fleet they chose Manston. Training can not take place at airports such as Gatwick and Heathrow because the slots are not available, but Manston is ideal given its facilities, proximity to London and relatively clear airspace.

Finally moving on to my position as manager of TG Aviation and a display pilot.

As I have already stated there are now only two airfields in Kent with a hard runway – Biggin Hill and Lydd. TG Aviation was established as a flying school at Manston in 1982 and continued to operate there until its closure in 2014. Following the closure the Flying School was moved to Lydd where it remains today.

My round trip is now approximately 100 miles and takes 2 ½ hours a day travel time, time which should be spent with my family. We only go to Lydd on days when there is flying booked and the weather is suitable but we are looking at in excess of 100 days per year. Based on the government figure of 45 pence per mile for business travel (something I can not claim as they deem my place of work to be Lydd) that equates to £4,500 mileage cost and at £20 per hour labour cost a further £5,000. In total £9,500. When you consider that my journey to work from Birchington to Manston took less than 5 mins and cost maybe £2.00, a day the closure of Manston has had a massive impact on my life and finances.

The physical damage due to stress and tiredness cannot be measured.

At a time when we wish to reduce emissions and congestion on the roads closing a local airport really does not make environmental or financial sense.

There is a pilot shortage both in this Country and abroad, if we continue to allow airfields that accept general aviation to be closed there will be a knock on affect on pilot training. The question is already being asked – Can the flight training industry cope with demand? At present there are schools in Europe that benefit from better weather conditions and financial incentives that accept a lot of pilots for commercial training, however, no one has any idea what the effect BREXIT will have on those schools.

As a flying school we are already struggling with a lack of hard runways during the winter months to complete qualifying cross country flights where, as part of the training, students must land away at two other airfields. At present we use Shoreham and Southend but if either of those is not available the flight cannot go ahead.

Airspace is getting busier, especially in the southeast, but despite this, following the closure of Manston, there is no radar coverage for this corner of the country and the Channel. Farnborough Lower Radar Service (LARS) covers us to the west and Southend to the North but approaches into Lydd in cloud are procedural only and based on accurate position reports from other aircraft in order that air traffic can provide separation. Bearing in mind the closing speed of even two small light aircraft is going to be 180 kts (over 200 miles per hour) the lack of a radar service is a big concern.

During the consultation for the possible closure of the airport there were three emergency diversions into Manston with radar available to them all. The Tornado (a swept wing military jet) suffered a bird strike and landed safely at Manston but did not fly again. The two other aircraft were able to land safely and undergo maintenance before further flight. Due to the length of their runways Lydd certainly could not have accepted the Tornado and I am not sure Southend could either.

In summary, Thanet has both an airport and a sea port that if used to their full potential could bring massive benefit not only to the people of Thanet but to the Country as a whole. We have already lost the contract to host Search and Rescue at the preferred location of Manston and they have now completed their purpose built facility at Lydd.

You have stressed the need for the DCO to follow correct procedure so that in years to come, whatever the outcome, when future generations look back they can see the procedure was correctly carried out. We also need to consider what future generations will think if we allow a runway of Manston's potential to remain closed and, more importantly, lost forever.

Manston has served us well in the past and as was pointed out it has a noble history. I hope that it will once again serve this Country and the people of Thanet as an airfield.

Thank you

