

Preliminary Hearing speech

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Sam Bambridge.

I am speaking as a Thanet District Councillor who was first elected in May 2015. I should add that I was born and spent my formative years here and would like to say a little about the background to the Manston situation to give it some context.

The 2015 district elections were unusual because they were held on the same day as the General Election. Consequently the turnout for the district elections was exceptionally high at 71%. Of the total votes cast, 67% went to candidates who supported the re-opening of Manston and out of the 56 members elected, 51 supported Manston's re-opening.

I campaigned very hard on a pro-airport manifesto, promising to do everything possible to re-open the airport and I feel a responsibility to my voters to deliver on that promise.

When Manston was closed in May 2014, a year before the election, it was the third major blow to the local economy in the space of three years.

In 2011 Pfizer announced the closure of its R&D facility at Sandwich. Coming after the closure of Pfizer manufacturing at Sandwich in 2007, this represented the loss of about 3,000 well paid jobs in four years.

In 2013 the last cross Channel ferry service from Port Ramsgate ceased operation, thus ending over 50 years of regular services at various times from Ramsgate to Calais, Dunkirk and Ostend.

So when Manston was closed in May 2014 by a new owner who had promised to operate it for at least two years there was a local outcry. There were packed public meetings as well as marches and demonstrations in support of the airport re-opening. This was why Manston was such a hot issue at the elections.

Since that time I can say from my work as a ward councillor and from taking part in later election campaigns locally, that support for the re-opening of Manston remains as strong as ever.

So why is there so much support for Manston? The answers are not too difficult to see.

- Manston Airport is in the DNA of long-term residents here. It's been with us for over 100 years. It played a major part in World War II and it has operated passenger and cargo operations as far back as the 1950s.
- Many generations of Thanet Families have worked at Manston and many flew out of Manston on their first holiday to Europe. Indeed Manston was running a double-daily KLM shuttle to Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam with connections to all parts of the globe almost to the day it closed.

- Airports create jobs and career opportunities both of which are in very short supply in Thanet. As well as being a councillor I run a local recruitment agency and I see just how difficult the jobs market is down here. Most local people recognise this and see the airport as a major opportunity to turn our local economy around.
- A related point concerns the aspirations of local school leavers and young people. Many of my voters worry that there is nothing here for them and that our “brightest and best” will leave Thanet and never return. We all see the airport as a realistic way of reversing that, and keeping families together.
- In the past tourism was a vital part of the local economy here. Over the last three decades tourism has declined, as it has for many UK coastal towns. If we have an effective, economically viable airline based at Manston carrying around 1 million passengers a year the likelihood is that 80% of passengers will be outbound and 20% inbound.
- That equates to around 200,000 inbound passengers from Europe and many local people recognise that those numbers could present a huge opportunity for the local tourism industry.

I recognise that there are certain residents who have concerns about such things as noise and pollution. My answer to them is to say that this DCO process, coupled with a further layer of control from the Civil Aviation Authority, is designed to ensure that the Manston project will be subject to a level of scrutiny way beyond anything that we at TDC could have achieved.

In my view the granting of a DCO for Manston on suitable conditions will represent a huge opportunity for this community and the people I represent and I look forward to making further contributions to the process in the next six months.