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Dear Sirs

Whilst many of the distractors of Manston (Kent International) Airport seem to perpetually dwell on its past failings it cannot be denied that as an airport it still retains a runway capable of handling the largest aircraft currently flying and alas those that are not. (Concorde).

New runways in the Southeast are still many years away from seeing wheels on new tarmac, we are told constantly that we are so short of capacity that businesses and the economy will suffer unless the problem is addressed. That problem is still not being addressed and it will get worse.

By simply allowing the area to be developed, without any real proof of the proposed growth it will bring to the area, we are in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Do we know what's around the corner for air travel? NO, but there are precedents of transport infrastructures that have been "let go" and then decades later have proven to be needed and the original decision: to close, short-sighted.

Dawlish – Railways to the South West closed when the line was washed away in the storms. The Teign Valley Line could be an option to bypass Dawlish. Unfortunately 1967 saw its closure thanks to Beeching, a wasted opportunity and a costly error...in hindsight.

Great Central Railway – whilst we continue to argue about the route and the cost of HS2 the Victorians had already laid a Continental loading gauge track to the North that was eventually proposed to join with a tunnel link to France.

What a cost saving and handy line that would make....in hindsight.

Alton Towers – The largest theme park in the country, attracting over 2 million visitors a year. Are people aware that until 1965 it was served by its own railway station? Imagine being able to travel to the park without the traffic chaos? In hindsight a lost opportunity.

Which bring me onto London Resort Company Holdings theme park, due to open in 2023 and estimated to attract 40,000 visitors a day just 53 miles away from Manston at Swanscombe. It seems obvious that travelling to the park from Manston would be an attractive route for overseas visitors who would not be encumbered with the M25 orbital traffic from either Gatwick (37 miles from the park) or Heathrow (57 miles) even Stanstead (42 miles) and Southend (32, as the crow flies). Thanet already has direct train to Ebbsfleet and the against the tide traffic flows would be a boost to local taxi and coach firms. Fancy Thanet as a base for your visit? The possibilities are there, the new runways in the existing airports will not be. Interestingly enough the London Resort Company Holdings project is pursued by a Development Consent Order (DCO) the legal firm representing the developers are Bircham Dyson Bell. The very same firm that are representing Riveroak in the campaign to reopen Manston by DCO.

It makes you wonder if at last somebody has woken up and seen the massive opportunity that awaits. Let's not allow hindsight to tell us we were wrong once again.

I will leave you with the words of Paul Barber MD of Discovery said the following at a meeting for Inward Investment for Kent in 2013 (PDF copies of the South East Business article are attached)

Paul Barber added: ***"We have companies from all over the world come to us, but it's not an***

***easy place to get to. "They come in from places like Asia through Heathrow – the journey from Heathrow is not a pleasant one and we've actually lost people on route on a couple of occasions, though found them eventually!***

***"What we are now saying to people is that you can fly to Amsterdam, and hop over to Manston and we will pick you up and five minutes later you can be having a coffee with us in Discovery Park House. You can do business from all over the world from Manston. If we are going to promote Kent as a world-wide location and don't have an international airport, then you are at a disadvantage."***

Now is the time.....let's make Manston fly again for the benefit of Thanet and

Kent.

Mark Crutchlow



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# South East Business



## Inward investment into the region remains vital

Features Posted 26/11/13

**Exploring inward economic investment potential for Kent and the wider South East represents many challenges. South East Business chairs a round table with Wilkins Kennedy on this vital issue.**

Establishing effective measures to bring about greater levels of sustained investment to the region is vital to its future economic prosperity.

South East Business teamed up with accountancy firm Wilkins Kennedy and a range of invited guests to explore the core issues that are set to make a difference in generating growth.

The event, held at Canterbury Cricket Club, included a panel featuring Paul Wookey of Locate in Kent, Mark Dance, regeneration cabinet member for Kent County Council, **Paul Barber**,

**MD of Discovery Park**, Lee Heasman, relationship director at Santander, James Herbert, of Thomson Snell and Passmore, Derek Read and Paul Nixon of Wilkins Kennedy, Richard

Morsley, of Turner Contemporary and David Williamson, of the University of Kent.

Firstly, we asked if guests felt the government is doing enough to raise awareness of incentives available to companies?

Mark Dance, of Kent County Council, believed that government funding streams including the Tiger initiative and Expansion East Kent's £35million loans scheme had been instrumental in having an especially positive benefit.

He said: "The Regional Growth Fund (RGF) is the bridge between government and Kent we have been lucky to have the quality of officers to write the bids. We have done pretty well in winning three out of three bids.



Paul Barber added: "We have companies from all over the world come to us, but it's not an easy place to get to. They come in from places like Asia through Heathrow – the journey from Heathrow is not a pleasant one and we've actually lost people on route on a couple of occasions, though found them eventually!

"What we are now saying to people is that you can fly to Amsterdam, and hop over to Manston and we will pick you up and five minutes later you can be having a coffee with us in Discovery Park House. You can do business from all over the world from Manston. If we are going to promote Kent as a world-wide location and don't have an international airport, then you are at a disadvantage."

"The 25 year-old scientists that come to us are interested in the Turner Contemporary, so you have to look at those quality of life issues. I believe regenerating coastal towns is just as important as putting money into businesses."

The investment decisions that people make on where to base their business are based on both their head and heart. People think 'do I want to live here?' What can I do at the weekend?' what are the schools like? Exploring inward economic investment potential for Kent and the wider South East represents many challenges. Neill Barston chairs a round table with Wilkins Kennedy on this vital issue.

Richard Morsley, Turner Contemporary added: "I think it is good for business to see Manston expanding and also good for visitor and cultural offering in terms of getting an international audience.

"At the moment, 4% of business is international and would love to be able to increase that. We are aiming to develop a partnership with KLM and have an incredible international programme. We are big supporters of Manston and want to see it grow."

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He said: "The green shoots are there for us to see and banks have turned a corner. Santander has 6% market share and we are looking to increase that to 15% within the next few years. "I was recruited in July and the team has since doubled from about 10 to 22 and we are opening new offices in Kent so there's investment going in there.

There is also the Breakthrough fund available of £200 million for SMEs that have a turnover of between half a million up to 10 million. That's a fund available between three and seven with years. "It is like a mentoring programme that will take owners of small companies to bigger firms to show them how they have been success. The bank is investing a huge amount of money in this and we've seen that it is working, with people are responding very well to it. But we need to make people more aware of it, which I will be doing."

"The 25 year-old scientists that come to us are interested in the Turner Contemporary, so you have to look at those quality of life issues. I believe regenerating coastal towns is just as important as putting money into businesses."

Paul Barber, Discovery Park

The panel then asked what the relationship was like between Kent and the government's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (headed by Sevenoaks-based minister Michael Fallon)

Mark Dance said: "I think BIS is extremely happy with what we are doing. As an example, Michael Fallon was in Kent recently for a family company that makes machinery (HV Wooding).

He was there standing next to bits they made for the Hadron Collider on the beach in Hythe - there are so many fantastic stories like that. "Where Kent Business does well on an international level is the level of skills we have within the county, which are world class. That's where Kent companies are standing out in the world market and good luck to them."

Improving infrastructure is another major issue, should expansion of Manston airport and its supporting road and rail network be considered?

David Williamson, of the University of Kent, said: "We did some work with our students at Manston and one of the things they identified were the places that Gatwick and Manston were not flying to, which was interesting.

"We should not just be looking at the next five years, but looking ahead 20-25 years, so there's some more work to be done on looking at where we should be flying to from Kent." Mark Dance added: "There's been some development on this question with a planning application the Manston Green project, that will accommodate a new railway station, which is breakthrough

"It's up to us to generate faster links to London by train. We have £5million to sort out railway crossings, some of which need to be more hi-tech. Network Rail is working hard with businesses to get the faster link there.

As for air travel, I think Stansted could be the one for an airport hub, which Boris Johnson has started to talk about."



"We feel we are that bridge between business and government and we are in effect, the government's area office and we have seen some amazing bids." Paul Wookey, of Locate in Kent, felt that while there "was always more the government could be doing," he rated the UK as being in the strongest position it had been for some time in terms of attracting investment.

In his opinion, forging a strong link with UK Trade and Investment had been significant in driving forward engagement with overseas markets.

He said: "From our perspective - it definitely does help to have support from the government, but you are not going to sell the area just on that alone. "The government has recognised what can be done through the RGF. Corporation tax rates are now improving and research and development tax credits are also there. Package these together and the investing environment in UK is much more competitive than it has been for a long time.

"We are beginning to see that with the new projects coming through with investors looking at Kent and seeing it as a serious option. "There's always more that can be done, but the packages that we have expansion East Kent, Tiger, Escalate in West Kent, and Marsh Million - Kent is well blessed with ability to offer financial support."

Paul Barber, MD of Discovery Park in East Kent, felt there were sufficient incentives that would draw a greater range of businesses to the region.

He said: "It's not just a question of grants - they should never be more than just an icing on the cake. "But grants are important, as they put you on the same playing field as other locations. From our point of view, the fact we are an enterprise zone means we have business rates discounts of £55k a year. More importantly, when we talk to government about Discovery Park, they now take us seriously.

"I am confident about East Kent. It has historically been a bit of a backwater - but you can easily produce a map saying it's in the middle of Europe!"

Should we be considering expanding enterprise zones in the wake of regeneration created by Discovery Park?

Mark Dance commented: "You have to be careful with enterprise zones - they are not the be all and end all.

'If you have land and commercial buildings just outside such zones, you're at a disadvantage.

"It was absolutely right that Discovery Park was made such a zone, but there are other areas that it wouldn't work."

Responding, Paul Nixon said: "We found from being based in Ashford that there are certain deprived areas would probably like to be within an enterprise zone. Some clients look with envious eyes towards those that are in a zone.

'I agree that If you expand zones, you would probably lose their area of definition – but I think that may be a price worth paying."

Another core issues has been that of gaining access to finance. Did the panel believe banks should be doing more to help SME's?

Lee Heasman, of Santander, was quick to defend banks' record on lending.