

TR020002: Manston Airport

Dear Sirs

My family and I have lived in the hamlet of "Way", just outside of Minster, for over 25 years, and our property is around 500 meters south of Manston's runway. We live in a Grade II listed house and moved here in 1993 when activity at the airport was minimal, so gave us no cause for concern. Over the next few years our children particularly enjoyed the irregular visits by the Red Arrows and Concorde.

BACKGROUND

In 1998 the Wiggins Group bought the airport and a few daytime flights began. But in 2004 EUjet began operating flights to European destinations; beginning very early in the morning, and disturbing us every fifteen minutes thereafter. Coupled with the regular unscheduled night flights, our sleep patterns were severely disrupted by the noise. In addition, when the wind was from the north, we were regularly subjected to the smell of aviation fuel when there were aircraft movements. When there was a heavy snowfall, we further suffered the ceaseless drone of de-icing machines over long periods of time. The purchase of the airport by Infratil in 2005, and subsequent efforts by Flybe, KLM and various freight companies to run regular flights, all led to some noise disturbance; but nowhere near the levels envisioned by RSP if they are successful to the point envisioned. During my time in Thanet, I was for 18 years a teacher in [REDACTED] in the middle of Ramsgate, and have been an exam Invigilator in the same school for the last 9 years. My teaching base used to be in a mobile classroom in [REDACTED] and my lessons were regularly interrupted by aircraft flying directly overhead. Being only 3.5 kilometres from the end of the runway, with aircraft at a little over 200ft above the school, it was a big relief when flights from the airport ended. Even RSP recognises that Clarendon and Chatham Schools, as well as other local schools under the flightpath will suffer "Significant adverse effects".

SAFETY

There have also been other very worrying safety aspects in the past. I have spoken to a local resident who witnessed an aircraft dumping fuel over Clarendon House School. I also recently met two residents of Southwood Gardens in Ramsgate, who had both lost large sections of their roofs in the past, due to vortices created by low flying aircraft approaching the Manston runway. A report in the local press in August 2010 claimed that a KAM Air plane "struck its tail on the runway and the grass surface beyond the runway before becoming airborne during take-off from Manston Airport". With many more flights or this built up area, such instances would only increase.

SUPPORT FOR MANSTON

Manston supporters claim that the majority of locals support the airport, however the evidence they rely on is very suspect. To quote from Craig Mackinlay's (South Thanet MP) website: "The survey for Manston Airport showed overwhelming support for the full return of Manston as an airport. Over 76% of respondents believe that Manston should be an airport. With 77% believing that a re-opened Manston Airport would provide economic growth to the local area". The survey had 5 statements, and people could choose from 5 options regarding how they felt about each one: strongly agree, strongly disagree, agree, disagree, and neutral. Here are the statements:

1. Manston should be an airport.
2. I would rather the site be re-designated as a 'mixed-use' development with housing.
3. A reopened Manston Airport would bring valuable jobs to Thanet.
4. A reopened Manston Airport would provide economic growth to the local economy.
5. Thanet District Council should support Manston reopening as an airport.

The survey was posted on Mr MacKinlay's website for a few months, with letters and emails about the survey (with a link) sent to targeted constituents. The small sample of interviewees, either directly selected or already followers of the website, indicate a bias in the cohort; whilst questions were blatantly framed to provide a prejudiced view towards the airport, with only one anti-airport question.

The only official poll ever undertaken regarding Manston concerned night flights at the airport, and was instructed by TDC and conducted by Moray. Seeking to establish if people in Ramsgate (and Thanet as a whole) wanted night flights, the outcome from the 2,274 people who replied was that 73% in Ramsgate were against night flights, 26% for and 1% not sure. Of the 1,000 residents directly under the flightpath, 89% were against night flights.

RSP's CONSULTATION

Below is an extract from RSP's documentation, which shows that it is aware of the negative effects of a Cargo Hub Airport on our local community. We enjoy the peace and quiet of our location, so aircraft noise is particularly noticeable.

Table E.3 Scope of assessment for adverse effects to heritage significance arising from aviation noise

List Entry	Name	Grade	NGR	LAeq (A) contour ¹	LAeq (B) contour ²	LAeq (C) contour ²	Category	Rationale
Minster			<54	<54	<54	y		This area is the historic core of a large village with a relatively busy main street. The character of the area is defined by the twin focus on the church and former monastic site. Aviation noise has the potential to affect the perception of the rural context of this area and it has been considered for further assessment.
1266887	WAY HOUSE AND WAYBOROUGH HOUSE, AND GARDEN WALL ATTACHED	II	TR 32024 65258	57	54	54	n/a	Heritage assets are located within wooded grounds. Modern background noise is likely to be limited and asset may be sensitive to changes in background noise

Comments on RiverOak Strategic Partners Consultation events.

Having now attended five RSP consultations over the past few years, as well as attempting to read its vast consultation documents and carried out my own research, I would like to make the following comments and observations:

There have been three attempts by different businesses over the last 20 years to run Manston as an airport – all lost money and none came anywhere near the predictions of passenger and freight numbers. RSP is focusing upon freight flights. But, to quote the World Bank Group “The opportunities for establishing a cargo-intensive airport are limited by economics. Without revenues from passenger flights, it is difficult to operate an existing airport, much less develop a new airport.” *Worldbank-Air-Transport-Air-Cargo-Ch3*

Contrary to RSP's claims, evidence has shown that passenger flights are needed at an airport not only to subsidise Cargo movements, but also because the majority of freight is transported as belly hold. There is serious competition within the freight market, so the business plan put forward by RSP involving cargo flights only is therefore incomprehensible. Parsons Brinkerhoff, Falcon Consultancy, Avia Solutions, York Aviation and Altitude Aviation - all of which consult on major air transport projects worldwide, all say Manston as an Airport is unviable as a cargo hub, even with the addition of passenger flights. Although as previous attempts have shown, passenger services from Manston were not economically viable.

Notes on the RSP Consultation held at Ramsgate on 23/01/2018 – please note that all quotations are from audio recordings made at the consultation and available to PINS on request.

I was very concerned at RSP's attitude towards air pollution. Indeed, I was told that there would be “no significant impact from particulates” on air quality, and that “the effects of Nitrogen Oxides are not well documented, but more of a problem ... most of the impact on air quality is from traffic”. However, there would also be a significant increase in HGV movements if the Airport were to return which didn't seem to be taken into account. I was also told that “the efficiency and cleanliness of current aircraft is way more advanced than cars on the ground” which I find hard to believe, given that modern cars have sophisticated exhaust systems to mitigate against pollution, which is something that aircraft engines are unable to have. There is plenty of evidence that living near an airport damages health, but RSP are trying to brush aside the consequences.

Monitors on top of Clarendon House School had regularly recorded an Average (A) of noise of around 85 LMax dBa, which at times exceeded a Sound Exposure Level (SEL) of over 100dB. But the noise contours displayed by RSP show much lower values. Whatever the noise level, the result was an interruption to lessons.

I was informed that there may be grants of around £4,000 per property for sound insulation. But the style of windows in our Listed house (and in many other local listed buildings) would not lend themselves to double glazing or even secondary glazing (even were we to be granted permission); coupled to the problem that we always sleep with windows open. I was also given a variety of sound levels in terms of who would get the compensation: ranging from 65dB during the daytime and 55dB at night to 60dB during the day 54dB at night. According to RSP's noise contours around our house, even at 500 meters from the runway where we are exposed to take-offs, landings and taxiing, we would not qualify for any help whatsoever. Yet, having been woken whenever there was a night-time aircraft movement in the past, and then unable to get back to sleep between flights, we can expect to suffer the same fate were Manston to become a 24/7 airport. It would be intolerable for us to continue living here and yet we would be trapped: not only the value of our property would significantly drop, but we would also find it difficult to attract buyers. Already, the lanes around where we live have had three houses for sale for over two years without a sensible offer. This is as a direct result of the threatened airport. Whilst only Compulsory Purchase by RSP would be acceptable to us, RSP proposes not to compensate us at all.

When asking about night flights, again I was given a variety of responses; noticeably not one person I asked stated categorically that there would be no night flights. One quote was that "There are going to be night flights, but not every night. Some nights there might be a maximum of 8 movements; other nights there may be none". It was also agreed that Sir Roger Gale our local MP was incorrect in saying "there are no plans for night flights".

To quote Niall Lawler (a Director) "we are not contemplating Night Flights for the 7 millionth time. A number of people in Ramsgate, specially ass-holes, distribute a lot of lies and conjecture. We are not considering. By instruction from the Inspectorate to outline a night flight policy. We have put a worst-case scenario in. We put in 8 night flights, from that, scale back what aircraft would be allowed at night, what is the QC count of the aircraft and does it meet it – all detailed there. The reason the PI is mandating in our application is because it's going to come up for Heathrow, for Gatwick, Stanstead, we are being using us as a guinea pig before larger applications come down the line. It doesn't make commercial sense for night flights. It's not our decision, all done by Government Agencies, it's not us. I'm blue in the face saying this to people, blue in the face about people lying. It's down to QC counts, noise contours – modern efficient engines are the only ones coming in – gone way beyond old aircraft." However, the Planning Inspectorate stated that they have not asked RSP to include night flights, to quote:

"The Planning Inspectorate cannot compel an applicant to include particular information in its Preliminary Environmental Information, which is defined in Regulation 2 of the 2009 EIA Regulations (and Regulation 12 of the 2017 EIA Regulations). The Inspectorate's Pre-application service for applicants, which summarises the purpose of applicant meetings, is set out in detail. The Planning Inspectorate has not advised the Applicant to include provision for night flights in its application. All of the advice issued to the Applicant has been recorded and published to the Inspectorate's website in accordance with s51 of the Planning Act 2008".

I also spoke to Dr Sally Dixon at the second Ramsgate consultation, who confirmed that she stood by her predictions of 30,000 indirect plus 4,000 direct Jobs by 20 years time, as well as the 17,000 freight movements and 1.4 million passengers. I find these claims quite ridiculous, and can only assume that they have been manipulated in order to try to persuade the Planning Inspectorate to approve their DCO and to gain local support. I attempted to get Dr Dixon to explain the rationale behind her predictions but ended up perplexed by her confusing "bottom up" explanation.

I was told by RSP representative Rob Grinnell (who has a business background), that the plan was fully funded and that they have their "Limited Investors", but that he had no comment on where the finance is coming from. I would have thought that a large project like this should be more transparent about the source of their finances? Over the past few years firstly RiverOak Investment Corporation, then RiverOak Strategic Partners, attempted a CPO in partnership with Thanet District Council. Both attempts were turned down due to concerns with regards to their finances and business plan.

Rob Grinnell also stated that “Dr Sally Dixon is correct in her predictions. Every other market is growing at 4%, 9% in the world. Cargo flights have flat-lined in the UK due to no additional capacity. It was said that Stanstead and East Midlands have spare capacity, but that’s not the case, we have done our research. I stand by Dr Dixon’s figures. QC allowance is relatively low, much lower than other airports. We are modelling a worst-case scenario. We are planning for 3,670 QCs at night by year 20. We are not planning Night Flights now, but can’t handcuff ourselves. Night Flights will be decided by the CAA. We don’t have exact flight routes, we don’t have our licence. That’s another process we will embark on next year.” Again, a confused, and confusing, picture.

Niall Lawler had these comments to make on housing – “Bunch of horse shit, the leader of the council is a shit, TDC leader burying sites, *(at that time it was the UKIP Leader Chris Wells)* not allowing planning for houses to be built on them. We’ve just conducted a £200,000 housing assessment study approved by the Department for Communities and Local Government which was given to the Council. This was very influential in stopping the attempt to ramrod Manston through. We are always the bad guys because we want to put an airport in”.

RSP’s Aviation spokesperson Richie Hinchcliff stated that when aircraft come into land, “they throttle back so the engines are on tick over – virtually gliding”. He claimed that “new Rolls Royce engines are much quieter, they have petal like feathers which suppress noise”. He also claimed that older aircraft can be re-engined. This would be paid for by the fuel savings due to greater efficiency. However, he could not guarantee older planes would not be used during the day. He admitted that it also may be true that a fully laden Boeing 747 may not be able to take off from Manston, “but with 10% less fuel, no problem”.

CONCLUSION

Ramsgate as a centre for tourism is growing, but the continual noise of aircraft overhead will surely damage this industry.

There are thousands of households near and under the flightpath where inhabitants will be seriously affected. To quote RSP - In Year 20 approximately 10,139 dwellings are forecast to be exposed to maximum noise levels in excess of 80 dB LASmax at night, which would blight the lives of thousands of people. As for us, moving would not be the solution, as the reality is that these houses will either have to significantly reduce their prices, or may remain un-saleable.

In an article reporting a meeting about the airport back in 1999, RSP Director Tony Freudmann, then a director of Wiggins (the then owner of Manston), claimed that there could be 1,000 jobs at the airport (there were 300 at that time) and up to eight flights an hour. Needless to say, his predictions then were false, as soon after Wiggins/Planestation ceased trading. He and his partners are now again making ridiculous predictions which are deliberately misleading people into thinking there will be thousands of local jobs and cheap passenger flights. Dr Sally Dixon also has a past when it comes to predictions at Manston. Around ten years ago she was claiming that there would be 1.2 million passengers flying from the airport, but the airport closed a few years later with heavy financial losses. Indeed, it operated at a loss for several years whilst the then owners attempted to sell; until Infratil was only too pleased to write off its £17 million purchase price and offload Manston for £1 and assumption of its debts. The current proposals by the owners Stone Hill Park represent a viable plan for Manston, developed in conjunction with interested bodies, by a company with a proven track record of developing sites.

I would like to conclude by saying that both the consultation and the associated documentation fall far below the standards I would have expected from such an important proposal. The various expert reports conclude that the airport is not viable, and little consideration has been given as to the effect of a Cargo Hub Airport on the local population.

For these reasons I vehemently object to the development of the Manston site as an Airport.

Trevor Roper, Minster, Ramsgate