

I am the former Leader of Thanet District Council I wish to place on record why that experience changed my mind about the future of Manston Airport.

I began believing that a fully functioning airport could provide much needed, well paid, shift work for the local economy. Trouble is, even a cursory glance at airport employment patterns, tells you that significant numbers of jobs are only created by airport passenger traffic. They are in security, parking, transit movement, retail, catering, and all that goes with it. And in spite of the fact that the apologists for Riveroak always include passenger traffic in their presentations, that is not the basis of what is proposed.

What is proposed is a huge freight hub. Huge is an emotive word, but in simple terms an airport with 20+ times the capacity of what was there before is huge by comparison.

I am one of the few people who has negotiated with the proposers of this hub. I will draw some simple examples of that experience.

In 2015 they began with endless complaint about the Falcon Report and that they would be expected to predict a 20 year pattern of business.

They told me that 5 years was the only sensible horizon.

They told me they had put \$2m of their own money into the project.

They told me they would produce a world class business case if I just signed a Compulsory Purchase Order in the Council's name, which they would fund.

They told me the first two years of that process would cost around £19m.

So I tried to keep it simple. In Jerry Maguire's famous Hollywood phrase, I said "show me the money."

The \$2m did exist. It appeared in their solicitors client account. Trouble is it was not their money. It had been raised on the New York unlisted securities market, and I met one of the investors, who had been attracted by the 5 year plan which showed an 8% return from month 17. Given the up front cost of equipping a modern airport, that seemed unlikely. And I could not understand why it was necessary to lie about the source of the money. I asked for the investors brochure they had used. I am still waiting.

So I asked for a credit note, or bank guarantee, of the availability of £19m for that first two years. They left my office promising just that with a letter of credit from a recognised bank. Within days it was being referred to as a letter of comfort; then a letter of assurance. When it finally arrived it was an

expression of interest from a well known name in aviation financing, caveated that no financial reliability could be taken from this expression of interest. To overcome this, it was accompanied by several letters of support, pledging funds, but with all the details of identity of the investors redacted so no checks on their wealth could be run.

In a famous exchange between Nigel Farage and an airport supporter, he was asked if in his business experience he had seen redacted funding letters. He replied very firmly yes, he had a whole filing cabinet full of them. There was a pause whilst the airport supporter treasured the moment, before Nigel added: 'and they have one thing in common....they all come from Nigeria,'

The leading Director of the consortium has a track record of business failure around travel companies and promised airport developments. He told a gathering of Councillors in the Walpole Bay Hotel the accusation that the previous cargo business he had run at Manston had not been profitable was not true. He said, if you take out the CAPEX (capital expenditure) it had always been profitable.

But isn't that a bit like saying my household budget always works if you do not take account of the mortgage payments? I thought the world of finance tried that a few years ago and we are still suffering the consequences. Could that be why investors could be shown a profit in month 17?

Yet those foolish, deluded, councillors applauded him.

So I binned them, both Cllrs and Riveroak, and went looking for new airport investors. In the end we found three.

One, a U.K. pensions fund, commissioned their own viability report, which concluded that the returns were not enough to justify investment.

One turned out to have a track record of 17 offences for theft and dishonesty including accessing finance whilst bankrupt...those are not my words, they are the words of an Appeal Court Judge.

One claims access to millions of \$ but seems to only work via Facebook.

And at some point you have to wonder if no serious investors are interested in the project, does it make sense? But on Manston Airport, common sense has long gone out of the window. Not least from Sir Roger Gale, who revels in his nickname of "the MP for Riveroak".

In a recent column in a local newspaper, comparing himself to veteran Labour campaigner Tam Dalyell.

Dalyell was a campaigning legend in British politics, most famously, on the sinking of the General Belgrano during the Falklands conflict in 1982.

Not quite sure if Sir Roger's campaigning record is quite up to that standard, but there is at least one genuine similarity between them. They both display a weakness which undermines the promotion of their cause.

For Dalyell it was his unfailing, almost rabid, anti American sentiment that often got in the way.

For Sir Roger, it is his unfailing, almost rabid, pro Riveroak sentiment that gets in the way.

According to Sir Roger, Riveroak want no night flights at Manston, just the flexibility to handle emergency, disaster relief, and delayed aircraft. Who could disagree with that?

Well, actually, Riveroak do. Their DCO application states that night flights are a desirable attribute in the Manston offering, and asks for lots of them.

Flights described as carrying "time sensitive cargo with a very specific delivery window" in the application, suddenly seem to require:

no bans or agreements on operating hours;

no cap on the number of night flights;

a noise quota which could accommodate hundreds of night flights each year.

One wonders if Sir Roger has actually read the application?

I have been in local politics continuously since 2003. Served as County Cabinet Member, District Cabinet Member and Council Leader. I have never seen such acts of conscious self delusion as Local Councillors entertain on this subject.

Opinion replaces fact as a matter of course. Some local councillors tell the world they oppose the government imposed housing numbers, but have voted for more greenfield land for building to keep Manston empty. The case for Manston does not stack up, and there is no independent evidence to support the proposals for the freight hub. Indeed Riveroaks own forecasts to support their case has been derided by those on whose work it is based.

I am the only local politician who had the courage to visit Wynyard Park in the north east, the flagship development of the alternative vision for the Manston site, and has thus seen it's success. Stone Hill Park have recently sold their stake in Discovery Park, where they created employment locally, and have money available to invest. And I persuaded them to keep a Heritage airstrip to honour Manston's history.

Time for a little common sense. If it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck it's probably a duck. And in this case a dead or closed one to boot.

Yet there remains the risk this lunatic proposal will get some traction because of that wilful self delusion of supporters and local politicians. My advice to the ExA is put some facts on the record, listen and learn where the weaknesses are. For too long the voice of evidence and reason has been shouted down by those who hide from the truth, and promote a dangerous proposal for our area with a huge cost...in sleep, pollution, green fields and more.

I ceased to be a Council Leader because I would not pursue what I knew to be a poor deal for our area. It was, and remains, a price I was willing to pay in pursuit of the truth. Do not let those who would promote shoddy untruth have their way, when it is the local residents and households across a Ramsgate who will pay the price for their self delusion,

Thank you for listening. Keep listening and make best use of the evidence advice you will hear tonight. And in the immortal words of Dave Allen, May your God go with you.

Sent from my iPad