

From: Ben Irvine <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 16 April 2019 15:57
To: Manston Airport <ManstonAirport@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>
Subject: Manston Airport - Written Representation of my Oral Submission on March 18th

Dear Sirs

Please find my late submission to deadline 5 written representation of my oral submission on 18th March. Please accept my apologies for this late submission. I have been very busy with work and am now emailing from my 2 week holiday away because I am intent on my business putting across its case on what I feel is a pivotal moment in Ramsgate's future.

My name is Ben Irvine, and my wife, Emma Irvine and myself are the owners of the business Albion House, Ramsgate. Albion House is a building of great historical significance locally. The website can be viewed here: www.albionhouseramsgate.co.uk It was built in 1792 and has been a building which has accommodated aristocracy, middle class benefactors and for over 100 years was the seat of Ramsgate Town Council offices. It has been host to the complete range of our society, locally and beyond and continues to be so.

We have another business, My Seaside Luxury Ltd which can be viewed here: www.myseaseluxury.co.uk

My Seaside Luxury Ltd has in excess of 30 holiday let properties under management. The majority of these properties are in Ramsgate, some are in Broadstairs and we are branching out into Margate potentially. These two businesses are firmly ensconced in the local tourism business. They are thriving businesses.

When I welcome people to Albion House, Ramsgate, the first thing I do is speak of the fact this building used to be home to Ramsgate Town Council. Here is where the chamber was where decisions were made on local matters and here is where the mayor's parlour was. Here is where people came to pay their rates and rent for council housing, and the room in which you are staying, on the top floor, I understand used to be the one of the offices of the council employees who worked in the highways department.

I'm terrified of the thought of a night flight, of a plane of any description or size flying a few hundred feet above my guests as they lie in that top floor bedroom after having paid in excess of £150 for a Saturday night in summer in Albion House. What thoughts will run through that person's mind when for the nth time a cargo flight wakes them with its thunderous path tracking across the rooftops of Ramsgate. Will there be many thoughts other than, 'I won't be returning here if this is the reality of staying the night in Albion House.'

My guests will not simply be disturbed if they are sleeping on the top floor, their sleep will be disturbed whichever room they sleep in. This will have a huge impact on our business.

It would appear to me that our job here is to try to quantify the impact night flights will have upon our business. That's a difficult question to answer, and I think it's important to try to understand the various ways in which the impact will be felt:

Our business and its turnover and therefore its profit.

People will essentially stop staying in Albion House. We have many repeat customers. We have a database of over 5,000 customers we have accrued in over 4.5 years of operation. We market directly to them and they come to stay based on their previous experiences here with us, their love of the town / beach / harbour / our staff / the food they eat etc.

I often ask my staff, 'What's the most important meal our customers have in this hotel / restaurant?' Some say lunch, most say dinner but I always say breakfast. I say breakfast because it is the last experience they have before they leave the hotel. A guest can come and stay, have a great walk on the beach, a beautiful dinner with a lovely bottle of wine, sleep well, be totally refreshed, yet have a bad experience at breakfast and it overwrites so much of what has been brilliant about their stay. Imagine, having been wined and dined and taken in the delights of a stroll on Ramsgate Sands, they are forced to endure a night's rest in a hotel room with numerous cargo flights passing overhead? They would not return. The importance of breakfast would be greatly diminished as they probably would not stay for this first meal of the day.

So what impact does that have on my business? Let's put a percentage on the number of customers to the hotel per year who are repeat customers. Our database estimates would put it at 60%. How many customers do we have per year? Well if we use an industry standard pertinent to our local economy for occupancy rates, we have approximately 3,700 room nights. If we say 60% of those are repeat customers then that represents 2,200 room nights. If the average spend per room per stay is somewhere along the lines of £180 including room, dinner and drinks (we do not have a star rating but have been told by the Kent Assessment Scheme we would receive 4 star plus), then that represents approximately £400,000. If we say even 40% of people do not return after experiencing sleep disturbance then the financial impact for our business is approximately £160,000 per year.

This is a conservative assessment. What we need to consider is what I would then have to do to try to attract more customers. We would need to drop the price of everything. This would further attack the revenue numbers and seriously put the viability of the business under huge pressure.

The impact for staff I employ

Less business, less money to pay for staff. Less staff, less capacity to handle business. In other words, If you employ a smaller staff, you are unable to host big events (weddings), tackle holiday season in quite the same way we do currently including Christmas and New Year or be able to have the degree of flexibility you require in your rota as you would need just the right amount of staff.

This number of staff versus the now newly reduced annual turnover would be significantly reduced. This would damage morale, increase the individual workloads and lastly reduce tax receipts for the inland revenue (which wouldn't be my first concern).

The impact of our online presence being damaged

There are only one or two times of the year when we get knocked off the top spot and some are outside of our control.

Let me give you an example of how sensitive people are - Seagull's nesting - noisy birds protecting their young leads to bad reviews

Just one bad review slows bookings down immediately and this is shown time and time again. Now you imagine planes flying over our bedrooms day and night - not only will we be knocked off TA number 1, it is reasonable to surmise Ramsgate will disappear from the Kent top 10/20 list on TA.

The internet is the operating system for all tourism businesses because your customers are far away, they rely on reviews, influencers, social media photography helps to make the customer's decision. And it's not a matter of deciding on Margate or Ramsgate it's deciding on South End or Norfolk or Margate. People will be off all of Thanet if the internet and their decisions are solely based on what they find online – which is true of many customers looking for a hotel room.

Guest are able to post photos online of things they enjoy, the quality of the bedroom's interiors or even a meal. Can you imagine a negative post with an accompanying photo of a cargo flight plane coming in to land taken by one of our customers and posted on TripAdvisor? Hugely impactful.

Night flights would be like turning off a tap for Ramsgate. It would bring an abrupt end to the years of hard-won regeneration, community led projects, small business marketing campaigns, national press and years of world class hospitality.

Beyond this, Ramsgate offers more development potential than any other area in Thanet, so this decision effects not just what we have but what we could have in the future

The Impact for Growth in Tourism in Ramsgate

In my ten years in Ramsgate, and having been involved in tourism for all of it. We have grown our businesses in line with the increasing demand for short stays in Ramsgate. One can see the development which is in the pipeline for Margate including 120 bed hotels. Margate have great potential with the great beach, the Turner Contemporary and Dreamland. People are

passionate about Margate, but so too are they about Ramsgate; residents and visitors alike.

The issue for me here is that in one town, Margate, we have a town which has significant budgets being assigned for development, both private and projects with local government and central government funding behind it. This is to bring Margate to a whole new level. I applaud that and wholeheartedly support it. However, in Ramsgate, we already have a thriving local tourism industry, one which is doing very well with nowhere near the amount of funding (private or otherwise) being poured into it. We have to look at Thanet as a whole and bring the whole area up. We have a base of strong, well-established small hotel businesses which cater for a large number of visitors, larger than Margate in terms of overnight stays according to Visit Thanet's statistics.

What is the sense in damaging your base, putting a chink in the armour of Thanet's otherwise slow and steady growth. Perversely, this damage to Ramsgate's tourism industry due to fewer visitor numbers from reasons mentioned above will not only harm Ramsgate, but Margate also. Many people view this area as Thanet or as East Kent. When peoples' options of what to see and what to do in the area are limited by something as disruptive as noise disturbance from aircraft it is the deciding factor between visiting and an area or not, not the deciding factor between visiting a town or not.

When customers of ours phone to book, there are a whole variety of questions they ask, but many typical questions surface in the moments before booking. 'What is there to do in the area when I come and stay in Ramsgate?' is often the most common asked question. We will begin to tell the customers on the phone, 'Well you not only have Ramsgate, you have Broadstairs and Margate, even Sandwich to the south.' I mention this because we as a hotel are selling not only the amenities of the town and our hotel, we are selling and promoting the area. We are sending customers/guests to other restaurants, visitor attractions, retailers, small businesses etc. Not only would we be affected by these night flights, but other businesses in other towns would not be immune.

Would Emma and myself have embarked upon investing the money we have, taking the loans (from central government from the regional growth fund a loan to the tune of £350,000), would we have employed the number of people we have, would we have given the years we have to this hotel business culminating in an 18 month period where the hotel sucked in excess of 80 hours per week from each of us almost continually, would we have taken all of these risks if we knew of this potential development of a cargo airport? No.

If on the day in September 2009 we came to Ramsgate and I stood on Sion Hill with Emma and witnessed the beauty of the only Royal Harbour in the country in that sunshine and then saw a huge cargo plane tracking towards

us and thundering overhead, it would have sowed a huge seed of doubt in our minds. We came to Ramsgate to make a life for ourselves and settle and build our businesses. The benefits to us, to the town to the area at large would not have transpired if we had been aware of this cargo airport, had an inkling there would/could be night flights, as this would have informed our thinking and we would not have embarked upon that journey. My one major concern now is whether this journey can continue.

Kind regards

Ben and Emma Irvine