



FAO Manston Airport Case Team
National Infrastructure Planning
The Planning Inspectorate

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Councillor Trevor Bartlett
Leader of the Council

Direct Line: [REDACTED]
Our Ref: 11/1B/DJD
Your Ref:
Date: 29 June 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

Planning Act 2008 and the Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedure) Rules 2010 Re-determination of the Application by RiverOak Strategic Partners Limited ("the Applicant") for an Order granting Development Consent for the reopening and development of Manston Airport in Kent.

I am responding as an interested party to the letter from the Department for Transport dated 11 June 2021 inviting further representations in respect of the Secretary of State's re-determination of the Application by RiverOak Strategic Partners.

In so far as the question of need is concerned, you will be aware that Dover District Council (DDC) has previously passed a Motion which states:

"That this Council supports the campaign to retain Manston as an operational airport, recognising the role and place it can have in the UK aviation industry, making better use of regional capacity in accordance with the views of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership, while making a significant contribution as one of the strategic priorities for regeneration of the East Kent Area."

This resolution was passed at Council in July 2014 and continues to reflect the Council's current position in support of the retention of Manston as an operational airport. In this regard, I stated in a press release issued in July 2020 that:

"We welcome the decision to grant a Development Consent Order (DCO) for Manston to return to use as an airport.

We have publicly stated our support for the re-opening of Manston Airport and the opportunities that renewed cargo and passenger air links can bring to boost economic development throughout East Kent.

Together with our port infrastructure, and highspeed rail links, this has the potential to create one of the best connected areas of the country for trade and investment.

DDC is already actively involved in discussions about airport-related skills to make sure local people can take advantage of future job opportunities."

Turning to the first matter that the Secretary of State has recently sought views on, namely that:

- the extent to which current national or local policies (including any changes since 9 July 2020 such as, but not limited to, the re-instatement of the ANPS) inform the level of need for the services that the Development would provide and the benefits that would be achieved from the Development;

Notwithstanding DDC's previous support for the retention of Manston, I believe that circumstances both locally, regionally and beyond conspire to substantially strengthen the case for the Development and the benefits that it will bring as the locality seeks to recover.

From a local policy perspective, I am aware that Thanet Local Plan which was Adopted in July 2020 includes the following Policy which effectively leaves the decision on the future of the airport to the DCO process:

"Policy SP07 – Manston Airport Manston Airport as identified on the Policies Map is safeguarded for airport related uses. Whether or not the DCO is confirmed, the future use and development of Manston Airport and/or other policies affected by the outcome of the DCO process will be determined through the early review of the Plan."

The Covid-19 Pandemic, along with the challenges associated with Brexit and Transition through the geographic location of Dover district has brought considerable pressures to the localities in East Kent. Recognising this, DDC published a draft Strategy for Economic Growth earlier in the year with a vision of "...Dover District in 2040 will have a diverse, resilient and highly productive economy that maximises our global gateway location. We will be the first choice location for a variety of sectors at the forefront of innovation, enterprise and new technologies. ..." A key theme in creating economic value indicated that: "We will drive innovation and investment to become a leading destination for high value sectors capitalising on our gateway location...." supporting employment locations such as at Discovery Park.

Unemployment rates in Dover and Thanet currently stand at 6% and 9.4% respectively. Significantly, unemployment rates for 18 to 24 year unemployment also stand at 10.3% and 14.9% respectively. This background, among other matters, has resulted in both Dover and Thanet (along with Canterbury and Folkestone and Hythe) being identified as a Category 1 location for the Levelling Up Fund (LUF). While both DDC and Thanet have submitted applications to the LUF, the Council continues to recognise the importance of strengthening existing and growing future centres of key employment by sectors that can add value to the area. For example, while the leading Enterprise Zone at Discovery Park, Sandwich is situated in Dover district, the current impact and employment reach extends beyond DDC's administrative area. This situation will improve substantially going forward given that Discovery Park, which is currently home to over 160 companies, with 3,500 employees (including the American Pharmaceutical Company Pfizer who are playing a key role in the global vaccine rollout), has recently been afforded Life Science Opportunity Zone status. It is one of only six locations in the UK afforded this status which is designated to attract national and international business and has capacity for significant sectorial growth.

A functional, operational airport at Manston, situated in close proximity to Discovery Park, would provide significant opportunities to support the ambitions of the Life Sciences Opportunity Zone. DDC continues to hold the view that an operational airport at Manston will provide significant employment opportunities in Thanet and beyond. It will enable opportunities for residents of Dover district in the same way that Discovery Park provides employment opportunities for residents of Thanet and elsewhere across east Kent. DDC has therefore actively supported the establishment of the Manston Skills and Employment Board and has been an active participant in this process and has committed to engage at Board level going forward.

It should also be noted that a significant investment in infrastructure – circa £34.5m including contributions from the Local Growth Fund and Getting Britain Building Fund – has been committed to the construction of a new Thanet Parkway Station. This sits midway between Discovery Park and Manston and has recently commenced on site. A key strategic reference in the business case for Thanet Parkway (from the then National Infrastructure Plan) highlighted that:

“Transport infrastructure can have a significant and positive effect on economic growth and can be a key driver of jobs throughout the economy via enhancing connectivity between businesses, goods and people and by encouraging a sustainable, low-carbon economy that is vital for future success and development;”

DDC also stated in response to Thanet Parkway that:

“.....substantial improvements have been made to the accessibility of the East Kent coast in recent years, with the completion of the East Kent Access Scheme, improvements to rail infrastructure including the limited extension of the High Speed Services through to Deal and Sandwich. However, if the full economic opportunities in the East Kent area are to be realised, it is essential that further improvements are made to the rail infrastructure. These include improvements to reduce journey times along with the construction of a new Thanet Parkway Station which would further compliment and support the Enterprise Zone – to the benefit of many of the businesses located there – while providing enhanced facilities for the wider localities.”

I mention the above points as, although they refer specifically to rail infrastructure, I consider the sentiments that DDC expressed in support of Thanet Parkway apply equally to Manston.

At a Regional level, beyond Discovery Park, DDC has a transformational agenda for recovery and growth and is developing a new Local Plan that will provide foundations for the future. While DDC’s Draft Economic Strategy recognises the importance of Discovery Park, the tourism and visitor economy sits at the heart of the future ambitions. A growing vibrant tourism sector, supported by the Port of Dover’s ambitions to reinstate their stake in the UK Cruise market as part of their £250m commitment to the Dover Western Dock Revival Project, can provide much additionality for Manston. Further afield, progress through the Development Consent Order process of the London Resort Theme Park and the Lower Thames Crossing later in 2021 will also add value in terms of visitor growth opportunities together with improved connectivity to East Kent respectively.

Internationally, as the UK moves forward post Transition Government has continued to establish trade relationships across the globe, with some 70 Trade Deals or Trade Agreements now in place or being concluded. It is inevitable that, with this background, the demand for aviation will increase helping to create a range of jobs across multiple sectors. The National Infrastructure Strategy, published in November 2020 indicates among other matters that:

“..... Infrastructure is the backbone of the economy – vital to jobs, economic growth and quality of life for people across the UK. It affects everybody’s daily lives in profound ways. The government’s commitment to unite and level up the UK is more urgent than ever, and infrastructure will be crucial in renewing the fabric of the country. ...”

The National Infrastructure Strategy also highlights:

“...Connectivity for a trading nation International connectivity is important for linking businesses to valuable markets, and to support trade and investment. The UK has the third largest aviation network in the world. Flights into UK hub airports connect the regions and nations of the UK to the world, enabling a more global Britain.

Consequently, it is imperative that all localities across the UK, including the East Kent region, can best connect into this opportunity. Manston will provide such a foundation, with a state-of-the-art facility which will provide additionality to the wider area.

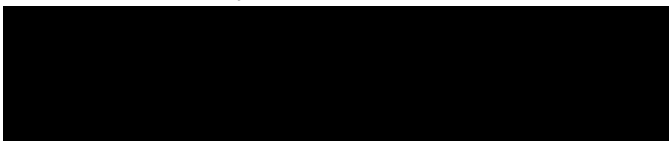
Turning to the regard to the question of the extent of regard that the Secretary of State should have to the sixth carbon budget, this is a matter to be noted in the context of the UK’s wider post Transition trading objectives. It is understood that Riveroak Strategic Partnerships intentions are to create a global exemplar in an environmentally sustainable airport operation.

Finally, I would like to conclude with two further comments.

Firstly, DDC has previously resolved to express concerns about the use of Manston for the parking of lorries which was used as an effective lorry holding area for Port of Dover bound traffic earlier in the year. I am delighted that this arrangement has concluded and will not be extended.

Secondly, I hope that an early Decision can now be made to enable Manston to return as a functional, operational airport. To do anything else would suppress major opportunities in East Kent and result in a “Levelling Down” rather than helping to provide a foundation for much needed future economic growth supporting “Levelling Up”.

Yours faithfully



Trevor Bartlett
Leader of the Council