

Manston Airport DCO response to the Secretary of State July 2021

Benefits – The promised increase in Jobs in the area would be an obvious benefit to the area, but the numbers quoted by RSP have been greatly exaggerated (as noted by the Planning Inspectorate) and most of them would be of a low-grade quality. RSP are claiming 23,235 of which 3,417 would be direct jobs, however, the number of jobs at Manston have never exceeded 200. RSP have also indicated that there are no immediate plans for passenger flights from Manston, so no benefit to potential travellers. Local residence would however suffer from noise and air pollution, and the Local Tourist industry would decline in Ramsgate, that is set against the present increase due to staycations.

Change of need – The effects of Covid 19 on the aircraft industry has been profound. With passenger flight decimated, (down by 75% in 2020 compared to 2019) and although cargo movements have increased by 42.7%, this was due to the reduced bellyhold capacity in passenger aircraft (95% of air freight in the past has been bellyhold). London Airports now have a large increase in spare capacity, and even with travel restrictions lifted, there is no guarantee that the industry will recover to the same level as pre-pandemic. Indeed, there is great uncertainty as to what the long-term effects of Covid may be with the likelihood of new variants emerging in the future. Heathrow are still planning to build a third runway, and with a much more suitable location would inevitably pick up more trade.

The promises of Brexit were that we would become “Global Britain”, but so far, the major result has been a large decrease in trade with the EU and little extra from outside the EU. The long-term effects of Brexit are unclear, so any claim that there will be an increase in air cargo cannot be justified as a clear prediction. Predictions of the most likely effect of both Covid and Brexit on the economy is a recession in the UK, at least over the next few years.

Climate Emergency - with an imperative need to reduce carbon emissions. Thanet District Council passed a motion unanimously in 2019, with a target of being carbon neutral by 2030. The UK Government has also laid claim to being at Net zero by 2050. The 6th Carbon Budget has recently been enshrined in law, therefore to meet a reduction of 78% in carbon emissions by 2030, all flights would need to be reduced. Passenger aircraft tend to be newer and more fuel efficient, there would be lower emissions per ton of cargo so reducing the need for extra cargo flights. Remembering that there is Cop26 in the UK this November, when it would be hoped that the UK would be setting a good example.

In a recent presentation, RSP claim that they would be Carbon Neutral by 2035, but this claim relies on technology which at the present does not exist. This includes shipping and aircraft powered by electricity and/or hydrogen. These are unproven technologies which are still only in the very early stages of experimentation, and the likelihood of long-distance aircraft being powered in this way are unlikely to say the least.

Conclusion - The Manston Airport site has no particular USP, is in the wrong geographical location in a shrinking market. This has been shown by operational losses of over £100m in the previous 15 year operating period. There has been no publicity or evidence of investors or operators who have shown interest in the airport, which tends to undermine the claim for a need. As well as numerous reports by aviation experts all concluding that as an airport, Manston was unviable, with the Planning Inspectorate conclusions being of particular significance. There has been substantial and growing local opposition to the re-opening of the airport, which has been demonstrated in recent Local Elections by the number of Councillors who were elected and who represent the areas most effected in Ramsgate. There are for example now four Green Party District Councillors in Thanet and a majority of Green and Labour Party Ramsgate Town Councillors who are against the airport.

After a lengthy and detailed report by the Planning Inspectorate ExA, they concluded that RSP *“failed to demonstrate sufficient need for the Proposed Development, additional to (or different from) the need which is met by the provision of existing airports, and this weighs against making the proposed order.”* The ExA also determined that there are impacts of the proposed order in terms of Climate Change, Heritage and archaeological assets, Noise Impacts, Operational and Transport issues that weigh against the proposal.

They concluded that *“on balance benefits do not outweigh its impacts”* and recommend that the SoS should not grant the development consent. Changes since the previous DCO submission only reduce the need for Manston as a Cargo Hub Airport, so I urge the SoS to reject the application.

Trevor Roper – Green Party TDC Councillor for the Thanet Villages Ward (which includes the Manston site).