

For the attention of the Manston Airport Case Team

1. Introduction

1.1 The Thanet & East Kent Chamber operates in close liaison with the Dover District Chamber of Commerce, established in 1850. These two business support organisations monitor and support profitable trading in East Kent with particular reference to the districts of Thanet, Dover, Canterbury and Folkestone & Hythe.

1.2 We publish regular bulletins on business issues, host events throughout the year and contribute to media broadcasts in the UK and overseas. We publish the East Kent Business Directory. Following the demise of the local Business Link service, we have operated the East Kent Business Advice Clinic for the last eleven years providing targeted guidance to companies trading in the four districts of East Kent. We maintain close links with companies in nearly every sector of the East Kent economy ranging from large multi-nationals to start-ups yet to begin trading.

1.3 Since July 2020, we have developed our on-line communications and have played a full part in the organisation and promotion of The Open at Sandwich which is due to begin next week at Royal St George's Golf Club (RSG). The last Open there in July 2011 produced an economic impact of £77 million [*Royal St George's 2011 Economic Impact Assessment, Sheffield Hallam University & SIRC, 23 November 2011*] with over £12 million spent directly in East Kent. RSG is a member of our Chamber of Commerce and the venue of our own Chamber Charity Golf Day sponsored by Nissan. World class golfers who travel by executive jets like to have an airport where they can land.

1.4 We maintain close relations with transport companies such as Stagecoach, DFDS and On-line MBT. In the last month, we have sponsored business awards at five Further Education colleges in East Kent and can claim a long history of supporting skills development; it was ten directors of the Dover Chamber of Commerce who provided funding for the foundation of Dover College in 1871.

2. Background

We read with close interest the pronouncement of 15 February 2021 by the High Court relating to the decision by the Secretary of State for Transport regarding the application for a Development Consent Order at Manston Airport and understand that The Department for Transport has requested Interested Parties to make further representations before a further decision is made,

3. Changes to national and local policies since 9 July 2020

3.1 We understand that the Airports National Policy Statement outlines policy guidance on airports in our region. We are aware that the government has stated a preference for a new runway at London Heathrow Airport.

3.2 We see no prospect of a new runway at London Heathrow being constructed in time to enter service within the next ten years. The concerted and determined opposition to expansion at London Heathrow is in marked contrast to the support for the revival of aviation at Manston which has the full backing of local district councils, including Manston Parish Council, and by the local business community. We do not see the objections by Ramsgate Town Council as being representative of

business sentiment nor indeed shared by the general public in Thanet. We view the changed circumstances of the last year as further evidence of the need to return Manston to the role for which it was built over 100 years ago.

4. Impact of changes in quantitative need since 9 July 2019

4.1 The greatest changes in the UK and East Kent economy in the last two years have been a direct result of two factors, the Covid-19 crisis and the UK's exit from the European Union.

4.2 The data from the Port of Dover shows an unprecedented fall in coach traffic which declined from 22,081 in Q3 2019 to 1,651 in Q3 2020 and a mere 553 coaches in Q1 2021 [www.doverport.co.uk/about/performance]. HGV traffic has fluctuated at a steady rate in the last reported nine months, Q3 2020 576,615, Q4 2020 640,386 and Q1 2021 491,364 [*Ibid*].

4.3 Tourism is one of the most important industries in East Kent. It has suffered considerably in the last two years for obvious reasons. Although cargo transport is the main consideration of our current deliberations, it is worth noting that a functioning airport opens significant opportunities for future passenger traffic.

4.4 More pertinent to this report are the problems currently experienced by our road transport companies which are currently unable to meet the demands on their services. The Road Haulage Association [RHA] has concluded that:

“We have estimated that the UK is short of around 100,000 HGV drivers, if we're to ensure that goods can get to where they're needed, when they're needed.

“The UK has had too few HGV drivers for years, but the combination of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, and other factors have created a ‘perfect storm’.”

[www.rha.uk.net/news/news-blogs-and-press-releases/news-updates, 7 July 2021]

4.5 The temporary relaxation of driver's hours has not met with universal approval. The RHA's Chief Executive has described the relaxation as a sticking plaster.

4.6. We are aware of the plans to locate a professional training centre at Manston Airport. Discussions with skills providers during the last six months strongly suggest that such a centre could make a significant contribution towards the educational opportunities available to young people as well as offering training programmes for the road transport and aviation sectors.

4.7 It is reasonable to conclude that the need in the UK to transport high-value goods by air has never been greater.

4.8 It cannot be emphasised too strongly what a flourishing cargo airport might do to revive a depressed economy in East Kent. The pandemic and the withdrawal from the European Union have impacted disproportionately on Thanet and in particular on young people aged from 18 to 24 years.

5. Sixth Carbon Budget

5.1 We are aware that the Sixth Carbon Budget of 9 December 2020 aims to reduce carbon emissions before the year 2035 by 78% from the level of 1990 with emissions from aviation to be included from 2033. The location of Manston on the East Kent coast means inevitably that, unlike the London Airports and all other inland airports, there is less likelihood of flights passing over populated sites in the UK.

5.2 Another crucial benefit of Manston is that flights can land directly and promptly at Manston without the wasteful and polluting circling that is such a feature of London Gatwick and London Heathrow when operating at high-capacity levels.

5.3 It should be mentioned also that the revival of aviation at Manston will require new on-site equipment of all types meaning that the airport will benefit from 'leapfrog technology'. We understand that the owners have already investigated using hydrogen power for on-site vehicles. It should also be noted that just off the coast of East Kent is Thanet Offshore Windfarm. On completion this was the world's largest offshore windfarm; a title it lost to its East Kent near neighbour, the London Array. In short, East Kent benefits from a plentiful supply of wind energy which is already linked to the UK's first commercial hydrogen plant which is based at Herne Bay, a few miles away from Manston.

5.4 If we take all these factors into account, it is fair to claim that a revived Manston Airport could be the greenest airport in the UK and set an example to aviation facilities elsewhere in the world.

6. Summary

6.1 We urge the Secretary of State to give a green light to the revival of aviation at Manston Airport for the following reasons:

6.2 A revived Manston Airport will meet the vital and now pressing need for more air freight capacity to promote UK exports and receive vital imports

6.3 A revived Manston Airport will create jobs in a depressed area that currently has the highest youth unemployment in the South East which has not responded to stimuli in the last year.

6.4 A revived Manston Airport will showcase the UK's commitment to the Sixth Carbon Budget and the adoption of green technology.

7. Final Words

7.1 This report is written two days before England faces Italy in the final of the UEFA European Championships. Whatever the result of that match, there is no doubt that the business community and wealth creators in East Kent will be much encouraged by a decision to allow aviation to return to Manston.

7.2 We trust that the Secretary of State will note that a referee's decision in Sunday's match will only be overturned by VAR if there is a 'clear and obvious error'. We maintain that there is no clear and obvious error in giving the green light to Manston Airport. We urge him to keep his red card in his pocket.

David Foley
Chief Executive
Thanet & East Kent Chamber
Dover District Chamber of Commerce
9th July 2021