



14th November 2021

For the attention of the Manston Airport Case Team

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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Proposed creation of a cargo hub airport at Manston, Kent by Riveroak Strategic Partners (TR020002)

In the Sunday Times article on 14th November, it is reported, at length, that the Secretary of State (SoS) for Transport, Grant Shapps, is *'quietly spending public money funding lobbying against the government's own housing plans'* and that his activities are *'secretly pitting him against the prime minister and frustrating efforts to build more homes and tackle climate change'*. These are serious allegations but come as no surprise to those of us engaged in trying to persuade said SoS of the need to dismiss the ongoing application by Riveroak Strategic Partners (RSP) for a Development Consent Order (DCO) at Manston in Kent in order to build a huge cargo hub airport that they, RSP, consider to be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).

The article says that his own personal love of aviation *'has taken up valuable time in a department with a budget of £3 billion'* with heavy national and international responsibilities. Shapps should never have allowed his department to waste time and resource in giving RSP's project for Manston any consideration. This is because much public money has already been spent through the national planning inspectorate to consider this project in the round with expert views being called upon

in addition to a wide range of stakeholders and, most importantly, those most at risk of being affected by such a proposal. The Examining Authority (ExA) declared conclusively that there was no need for such an airport and that it would bring much negative impact to the residents, communities and local economy of Ramsgate. Their recommendation was that the DCO should be declined. The fact that aviation enthusiast Grant Shapps decided **against** following that advice calls into question the whole process, at least it does when one realises that he did so on the basis of no evidence outside of the actual examining process. This was revealed through the judicial review initiated by Ramsgate resident Jenny Dawes. Despite this reaffirming of how the process is supposed to work, still aviation lover Grant Shapps persisted and prolonged making a decision by asking for yet more submissions in case the situation had changed in the intervening period between the ExA's decision and now. Further submissions and still, again, now, we are all in the process of submitting further.

One seriously has to ask whether the private motivations of someone whose leisure interests are getting in the way of their ministerial duty as well as the DCO process which, in the course of this particular application, has been subverted so significantly. He recused himself at the time of the decision, in recognition of his own predilection for aviation, but the Sunday Times article speaks to a department that has a culture sadly influenced by their leader. A department that is undermined in its credibility, that is unable to carry out its very pressing business to the fullest extent and a department that finds itself contradicting government policy and the most pressing need for restrictions with regard to aviation due to climate change. The Manston decision is the easiest decision for this government to make. Not only that, it could have used this as a PR opportunity during COP26. Shapps could have announced the death, once and for all, of this crazy DCO application and spun it as government refusal to agree to the go-ahead of a new airport. Instead, we continue in a process of Jarndyce and Jarndyce longevity and complexity. It is time to stop. Shapps is clearly not fit to make a decision about Manston. His department is, perhaps, fatally flawed in this regard too given the way the culture has been shaped by a minister who is 'obsessed'. No-one in Ramsgate has any faith in this being an objective exercise any more.

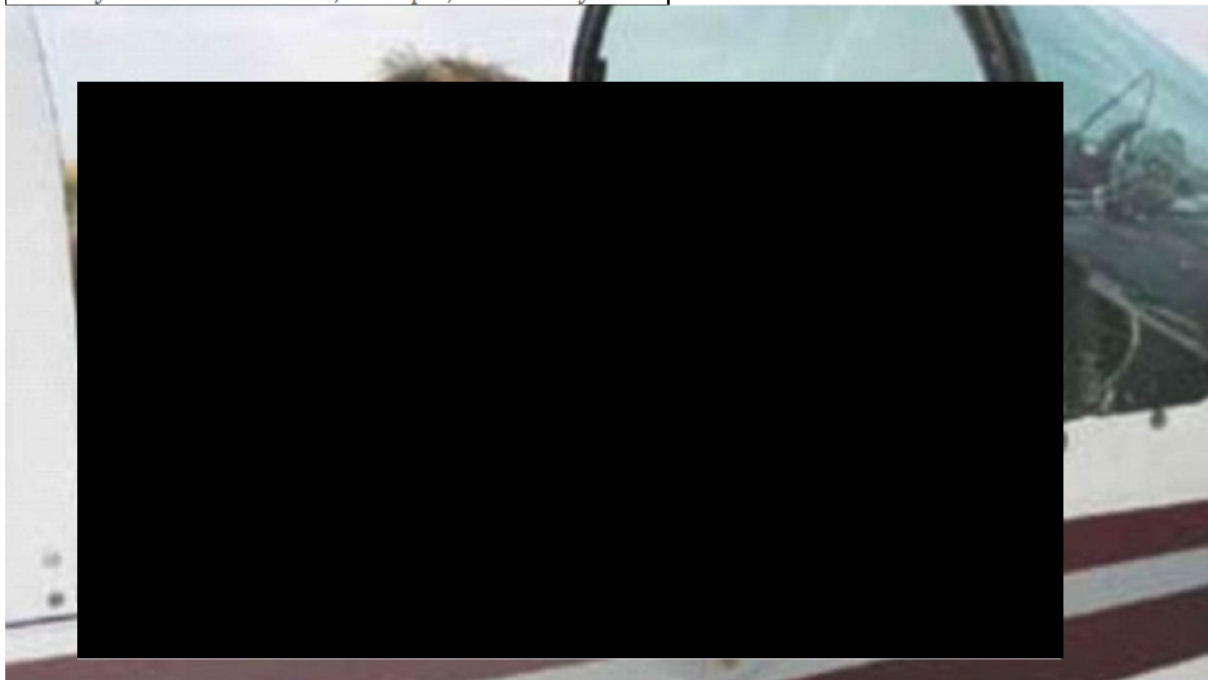
I provide a copy of the article in full below

Grant Shapps, the minister for private jets, is ‘lobbying against his own government’

The aeroplane-owning transport secretary is spending public money on lobbyists opposing the government’s own plans to build on private runways, including one he has personally used

[Gabriel Pogrund](#) and [Emanuele Midolo](#)

Saturday November 13 2021, 10.15pm, The Sunday Times



Grant Shapps’s passion has frustrated efforts to build homes and tackle climate change

In the final days of the parliamentary recess in September, Grant Shapps made an unorthodox journey for a cabinet minister. The transport secretary flew solo in his personal plane from a farm near his Hertfordshire home to Sywell, an aerodrome in Northamptonshire.

Shapps, 53, was there for the rally of the Light Aircraft Association: an annual jamboree for aviation enthusiasts from across Europe. Having obtained a licence in his twenties, he remains a flying fanatic and the proud owner of a £100,000 Piper Saratoga.

Shortly after arriving, he went to chat with the editor of his favourite magazine, *Flyer*, which represents the interests of amateur pilots, including campaigning to block development on Britain's private airfields.

Shapps told him: "Because I was reading your last month's edition, I had sent a message to my office at DfT and asked them to invite you in so you can challenge on some of these things ... to see what else we should be doing." The minister joked: "We'll even have coffee!"

Perhaps it is not a surprise he has brought his boyish enthusiasm for flying into government. It may even appear an advantage, giving him knowledge of a niche and technical area within his remit.

However, it has had far-reaching effects in Whitehall, secretly pitting him against the prime minister and frustrating efforts to build more homes and tackle climate change.

His department is quietly spending public money funding lobbying against the government's own housing plans where development would take place on private runways — including some he has personally used.



A plane belonging to Grant Shapps, with its nose and propeller in the mud

RAY COLLINS

As a result, Homes England, the housing agency overseen by Michael Gove, has already withdrawn plans for a new town with thousands of homes in one of the most housing-stressed areas in the country.

The lobbyists are also battling against plans to build a battery gigafactory on Coventry airport. Boris Johnson has praised the development and it is supposed to deliver thousands of jobs while helping Britain to achieve its net-zero ambitions. According to flight traffic data, Shapps recently flew his plane on to the airfield.

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He has set up a scheme that lets private pilots claim public money for new equipment, and allegedly lobbied against a looming ban on a kind of toxic fuel used by his aeroplane.

His love of aviation has taken up valuable time in a department with a budget of £3 billion whose recent responsibilities have included dealing with post-Brexit trade

disruption, delivering protective personal equipment from abroad, overseeing HS2 and building roads and rail infrastructure.

It is even said to have undermined the government's response during crises such as the collapse of Thomas Cook, which heralded the biggest repatriation since Dunkirk.

At the time of the holiday firm collapse, in September 2019, the then chairwoman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the aviation regulator which belongs to his department, was forced to ask Shapps to stop demanding staff time to discuss amateur aviation. Shapps allegedly “backed off”, and let the CAA grapple with its biggest peacetime crisis.

Tension persisted during the early days of the pandemic, when Shapps was regarded by some civil servants as going awol and dedicating more time to his hobby than the imminent peril facing airlines. It is even claimed the chief executive of one airline considered writing a public letter demanding he focus on the task at hand.

A civil service source said bluntly that he remained “obsessed” with general aviation. The obsession began in 1995 when Shapps, then a photocopier salesman in his early twenties, obtained his pilot licence. He married, bought a printing business, and endured cancer, but remained a devotee of the world of general aviation or “GA”, the recreational use of aircraft.

Since 2005, he has lived in and represented Welwyn Hatfield, a London green-belt Conservative seat with a majority greater than 10,000. For years he lived a 15-minute drive from Panshanger airfield, a former RAF training site.



Shapps obtained a pilot's licence in his twenties and remains a flying fanatic

Under David Cameron, Shapps grew in stature: having seized his seat from Labour, he was appointed to a housing role in the shadow cabinet. In 2010 he became a minister and, in due course, Conservative Party co-chairman.

He found himself in the wilderness once Theresa May became prime minister and turned his political focus to his longstanding love. In 2017, he was appointed chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on aviation, and campaigned relentlessly against the scourge of recreational pilots: planning applications to build on private airfields.

He argued the hobby had reached a “critical point” as “more of our airfields disappear under housing developments and more of our common airspace is closed off”.

Between 2012 and 2018, he submitted a series of objections, often on parliamentary headed notepaper, to proposed development at Panshanger, describing it as a community asset which could “never be replaced”. Homes

England is now selling the site and the lease to the local flying club has been terminated.

Forced to migrate to a makeshift runway on a field near his home, he joined campaigns to prevent other airfields being built on elsewhere.

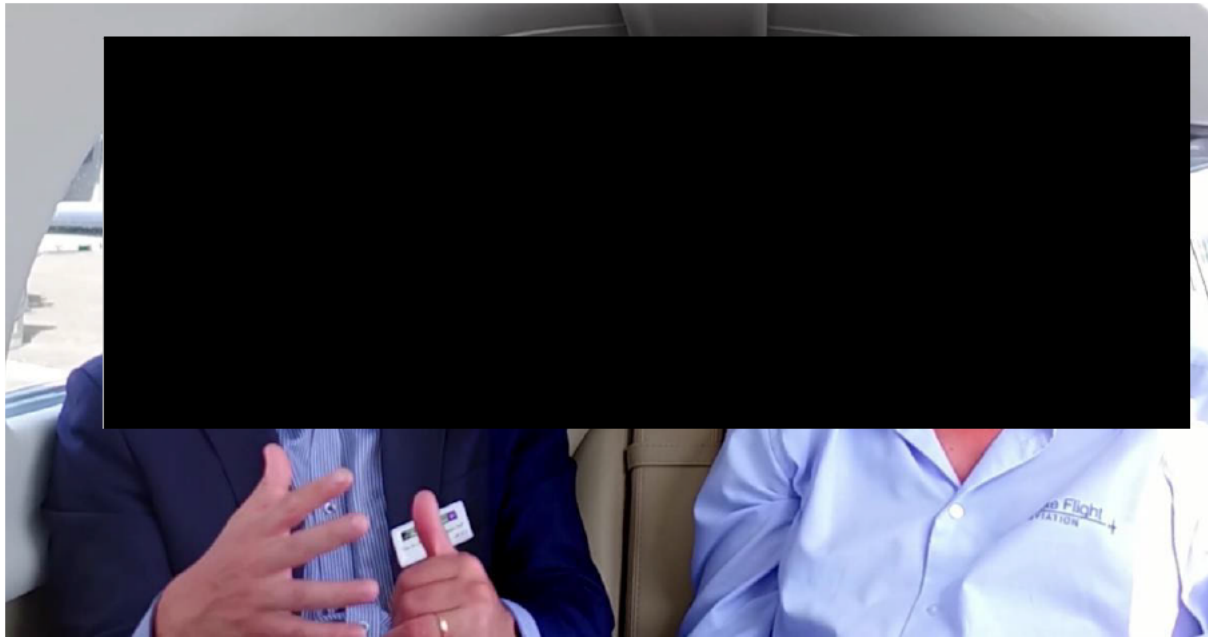
He returned to the cabinet in July 2019, when Johnson became prime minister. Despite voting Remain, he campaigned for Johnson and was rewarded with a plum post overseeing transport.

In a letter to Deirdre Hutton, then chairwoman of the CAA, he said his “key priorities” included “supporting the success of the aviation industry ... including by protecting the network of general aviation airfields” and “proactively advising aerodromes faced with possible changes of use [planning applications] which could constrain future flying”.

Asking a regulator to protect airfields from planning applications was unusual and Hutton told him as much. Shapps disagreed, telling her he wanted Britain to become the “best place in the world for aviation”.

Shapps has since redoubled his campaigning. He has set up and diverted public money to a new team housed within the CAA: the Airfield Advisory Team, which, official documents state, was designed with one goal in mind: helping private airfields lobby against, or “engage with”, the planning system. Shapps has described its work as “crucial”.

The team leaders are private consultants brought in from outside government and given civil service salaries.



Shapps has been accused by civil servants of dedicating more time to his hobby than the peril facing airlines

Around the same time, Shapps created a £2 million fund allowing pilots and airfield operators to get free management consultancy from a Texas-based international lobbying firm, ICF Consultancy Services, on how to, among other things, successfully object to planning applications. He has called it the Airfield Development Fund.

Documents show the new team has lobbied against plans to build homes over private runways and plans put forward by the government. Private lobbyists employed by the government are now lobbying against the government.

In some instances, the lobbying frustrated Johnson's central objective of building homes outside of London. On May 25, 2021, Homes England withdrew plans for 3,000 homes at Chalgrove, an airfield in South Oxfordshire, to "take account [of] comments from the . . . airfield advisory team".

The team had lodged formal objections to the plans, declaring "protection of airfields is a priority for [the] DfT". Last night, Homes England accepted they had pulled the plans while emphasising the urgency of building homes in that area.

Homes are not the only instance in which Shapps's decisions conflict directly with the priorities of the government he represents.

As part of its commitment to tackling climate change, the government have long sought to phase out a highly toxic and dangerous substance, tetraethyllead, which forms part of the fuel used in planes similar to Shapps's. Last April, however, Martin Robinson, head of the biggest group representing aircraft owners and pilots, contracted Shapps asking if the government could extend a transition period before an eventual ban. He says the transport secretary responded: "On it."

Last month, British regulators confirmed they would not place the substance on a list of substances of "very high concern", marking one of the most significant cases of divergence from the EU rules since Brexit.

Shapps has also funded a scheme allowing pilots to claim money for 50 per cent of the cost of buying specialist kit for their planes. Since last year, the DfT, and, in turn, the taxpayer have covered half the cost of purchases of "electronic conspicuity" equipment, which allows planes to see each other in mid-air.

Around the time Shapps started his post, a senior civil servant is said to have asked him what his main priority was. Shapps responded: "Protecting general aviation."

Homes England said the planning application at Chalgrove airfield "has been withdrawn to allow an amended application to be submitted to take account of comments from the Civil Aviation Authority's Airfield Advisory Team".

It emphasised its intention to resubmit plans in light of the "considerable housing shortfall".

A Department for Transport spokesperson said: "It is right that the transport secretary works to promote all aspects of the department's brief including the general aviation sector."

Sources said the Airfield Advisory Team was an “advisory team”, not a lobbying body, that helps to liaise with organisations to ensure “informed decisions can be made by local planning authorities”.

They said Shapps responded to a lobbyist’s requests by emailing his office reminding them he wanted to see “action” on removing lead from fuel. Doing so, the sources suggested, would facilitate a future ban on the dangerous chemical.

The government provided a statement from John Holland-Kaye, the chief executive of Heathrow airport. He said: “The biggest thing aviation has needed in the last 18 months is to get borders open safely again and Grant Shapps has worked tirelessly to deliver this.”