

## Smaller Airports Inquiry Final Submission

After extensive reviewing the footage of the second evidence session of the Smaller Airports Inquiry, the Supporters of Manston Airport group would like to add further commentary to the below topics. The Supporters of Manston Airport group are happy to give further evidence to the committee or provide proof as necessary.

### Pre-planned closure

Mrs. Ann Gloag and Mrs. Pauline Bradley purchased the airport and took over the running of it on 29 November 2013. On the 19th March 2014 the consultation closure was announced. That's approximately 4 months and 21 days. We would expect that this decision would take some weeks or months to come to, leading many campaigners to believe the closure was pre-planned. The South East Airshow at Manton had already been cancelled in early January 2014.

A customer service supervisor, in an open letter, stated that in a staff meeting in November management assured them that "it definitely won't be turned into a housing estate."

"Staff were told on 19th March that "no jobs will be lost by reason of redundancy until at least 45 days after Collective Consultation begins." Staff believed this to mean the airport would "remain operational until at least 9th May." Yet, an email was circulated to airlines "on the very same day" that management "could not guarantee the airport would remain operation after 9th April." Based on this information, KLM had no choice but to take the decision to stop services after this date.

Passenger operations, due to the amount of investment required, usually take a couple of years to turn a profit. The customer service supervisor went on to say that "passenger figures on the KLM flights were improving week by week."

The supervisor continues by saying that "Decision to enter into a period of consultation was taken without any discussion with the Business Development Manager. Surely he should have been a key figure in discussions regarding the airport's future? Does this indicate an element of secrecy on the part of the directors?" The supervisor also explains that "Financial figures produced by the airport management to prove that the airport would not become financially viable were inaccurate and when queried at a consultation meeting were required to be altered."

A prior member of Manston management (up until closure), believes the 'aviation experts' sent to the airport to turn it around knew little about cargo operations.

The member of staff alleges Mr. Alistair Welch, who was brought in to turn the airport around, "admitted" he knew nothing about cargo in "the first week he was at Manston." This staff member also reveals that a "potential airline that wanted to base initially 2 aircraft at Manston." This deal was estimated to be worth "around £1.4 million a year" with "additional revenue... worth another £1.2 million." These options were "presented to the owners during the so called consultation... but were knocked back" by claims they were not credible. The potential airline has now commenced operations at Ostend instead.

The other aviation expert called in, Mr. Alan Mackinnon, "is a chartered accountant, who by his own admission, is a property developer with retail developments" and has "never been involved in airports in the past."

References in favor of the airport's return by various companies who operated from Manston have been submitted to the committee separately.

It is of interest to note Ann Gloag's previous controversy in re-developing sites shortly after their closure. Ann Gloag is heavily involved in the redevelopment of the former Hall's of Broxburn sausage factory into a housing estate. In this case once again, a company tried to purchase the sausage factory but "felt there was little real engagement" and stated their belief that "the business is not, and has never been, for sale and Vion is hiding behind the rhetoric that 'our bid is not viable'." This rings alarm bells for our organisation, as the same reasons were given for RiverOak's rejected bids.

### Improper Aircraft Teardown

We believe that the destruction of old aircraft on the site by the current ownership may not have been carried out with due care. The Environment Agency were informed of the aircraft destruction, who halted the operation as they had no license. The operation to dismantle the aircraft later resumed again. At this point there were reports of aviation fluid leakages (pictures available upon request) and a serious accident occurred on 3rd February 2015. A man was airlifted to hospital after receiving a serious head injury whilst dismantling an aircraft.

### Viability of Airport

Business plans and extensive research conducted by RiverOak Investment Corp. points to the airport being able to become successful, viable and profitable within a short period of time. They believe this will take just 22 flights a week and no night flights, in combination with other aviation facilities and services.

### Night Flights

Night flights are not popular with passengers and cargo flights can be turned around far quicker in daylight. Cargolux, Manston's biggest cargo airline, have stated they do not need night flights at Manston. RiverOak Investment Corp. have also stated they see no need for night flights. New aviation regulations in the UK require all aircraft to be quieter and more efficient than before – old, noisy aircraft are not permitted at UK airports. This applies to all cargo and passenger airlines who have used Manston, including Cargolux who use the latest Boeing 747-800F freighter aircraft.

A Section 106 agreement between Thanet District Council and the airport governs the permitted activity of the airport. This sets out limitations on night flights until a 'night-time flying noise policy' is prepared in consultation with the council.

Clause 1.1 states: "The Owner agrees not to cause suffer or permit any Regular Night Flying Operations at any time (subject to Paragraph 1.4 below) before a Night-time Flying Noise Policy shall have been prepared and a copy lodged with the Council."

The agreement also sets out many other noise and operational limitations which protect residents. Therefore, oral evidence given by No Night Flights that night flights are allowed at any time is incorrect.

### Support for Airport

Exercises we have conducted constantly demonstrate that the majority of local residents are in favour of the airport, even if they are not in favour of night flights. It is commonly argued that the Nethercourt ward of Thanet is the most vocal in their anti-airport views, and so the Supporters of Manston Airport decided to conduct a survey in this area. This is one such example of exercises we have conducted which lead us to believe the majority of Thanet residents support the airport.

A small group spent a few days going door to door to ask the residents of Nethercourt whether or not they supported the airport and whether they wished to see it re-opened by a new investor.

To date we have covered the whole of Windermere Avenue and Rydal Avenue and the relevant parts of Canterbury Road East in the ward – of course not everyone was at home when we knocked. The demography of the sample cut across age and gender and the geography of the ward.

The residents were asked if they knew who their councillors were – not one person could name them. When informed who their Councillors were and that they were planning to vote against the CPO, and didn't want an airport, the responses were virtually unanimous – raised eyebrows and comments such as 'why am I not surprised'. Asked if they had ever met or spoken to their representatives not one person answered in the affirmative.

In total we spoke to 121 households. 92 households were in favour of Manston Airport reopening, 8 were undecided and 21 were against. This translates to 76% in favour, 7% undecided and only 17% against the airport reopening.

### Flawed nature of Falcon Report

We believe it was incorrect of Thanet District Council to base the CPO requirements on the contents of the Falcon Report commissioned in July 2014. This report was meant to be the first part of a more extensive viability study and was rushed to be completed in only seven working days, starting on 2 July.

The writer of the report also stated himself on BBC Radio Kent that the report was flawed in an interview with Sir Roger Gale MP in July.

Craig Mackinlay, Conservative PPC for Thanet South said "The Falcon report commissioned was the wrong report for the wrong scenario and has to be considered to be a complete waste of opportunity, money and valuable time. It was primarily a viability study for Manston to become a major passenger airport; not surprisingly such an ambition would require hundreds of millions of pounds of investment and a long term business plan to include further major infrastructure. This is not the use proposed by Riveroak which sees an initial more modest business use as a freight hub and high quality engineering centre to include dismantling, recycling and decommissioning of end of life aircraft, a high value and high skills enterprise."

Local resident Brendan Martin said "The Falcon Consultancy report commissioned by Thanet District Council was based on material that emanated from Kent Airport Ltd, the company that closed the airport." Therefore, there is an obvious issue of bias in the creation of this report.

We believe that the study by Falcon was based on the wrong material. It should have looked at mo be based on what a future owner intended to do with the airport, informed by information from the past if relevant.

The Falcon report states "There is a market for Fixed Base Operations in the south-east due to the number of private and corporate aircraft, air ambulances, helicopters and training. An FBO offers services and facilities to this market." This is much more in line with the proposed business plan from RiverOak.

Falcon wrote (and highlighted in yellow) "It is fortunate among regional airports in its location in the south-east so close to London, for, given significant improvement in road and rail links to the capital, it could compete as a London airport."

The report also says "Manston could play a significant role in providing the required capacity even if only in the short term." Falcon then continue that "Kent Airport Ltd did not provide a comprehensive Business Plan to support their decision to close the airport."

Thanet District Council seem to ignore many of the positive points in this report, and instead focus on a negative opinion based on Manston continuing with its current setup:

*“No business plan with a credible investment plan of less than 20 years is likely to define the commitment necessary to rebuild confidence. Phase 1 investment required could be in the order of £100m with no guarantees of success. Political support will be required to attract investors and PR work will be needed to convince the airlines.”*

It is clear that continuing in Manston's current business setup is unsustainable, and proposed partner RiverOak have recognised this in their business plans. We question why Thanet District Council use this statement as the basis for their CPO requirements, ignoring the context of this paragraph and other information in the report.

We recommend reviewing RiverOak's rebuttal to the Falcon Report as well as the original brief for the Falcon Report. We also question why later stages of the viability study were not commissioned by Thanet District Council as originally intended.

### Paul Carter

Paul Carter was complicit in colluding covertly with Imperial College to develop Wye College in Kent (an area of outstanding beauty) into a small oil refinery with 40,000 houses surrounding it. When David Hewson and Justin Williams scuppered the plans and exposed the crooked deals (the story was later turned into a book called 'Saved'), Paul Carter sent a letter to the rector of Imperial College expressing his regret that the development did not go ahead.

With Paul Carter's strong support for Trevor Cartner and Chris Musgrave, we question whether a similar incident may be occurring. This is a particularly worrying possibility when 'secret' meetings between Paul Carter (or representatives thereof) and Trevor Cartner and Chris Musgrave have been discovered, as well as meetings between Paul Carter and Ann Gloag (or representatives thereof).

We would also question the directorships we believe Paul Carter holds in development companies, and why he has shown a lack of care for the airport after his own council passed a motion of support for continuing an airport. The below is a comment by David Hewson (part of the Save Wye movement) on what he has dubbed "Carter's Kent".

*"This is a very interesting illustration of how the county of Kent works under the rule of Paul Carter. Deals are done on a casual basis then foisted on the communities they affect – and possibly ruin – afterwards. This was what they tried with Wye Park and doubtless it is being done in many other areas at this very moment." He goes on to say that "Carter's Kent" is "undemocratic, unprincipled and bordering on the corrupt."*

*Russ Timpson, Lib Dem PPC for Thanet South, asked Paul Carter "if RiverOak can make a credible bid, would you back the CPO?" on 5th February 2015. Paul Carter's response was "No" and he referenced the £100 million in the Falcon Report. We question why Paul Carter has not looked deeper at the Falcon Report and realised that the £100 million figure was for Manston's current setup and not for RiverOak's proposed plan.*

*Russ Timpson believes that "KCC seem totally focused on the development of new housing. To hit the targets they have set themselves, there will need to be several new significant housing developments in Kent."*

Manston Airport seems to have been identified as prime land by Kent County Council and Paul Carter.

### Emergency and Diversion Capabilities

- Potential to be a major diversionary and distress airport. Many commercial and private aircraft have used the airport for this in previous years.

- Manston is often fog-free and uncongested when London airports are unable to land aircraft due to weather conditions. The airport has plenty of space to park aircraft. This may be particularly invaluable in cases of suspected aircraft hijacking where an aircraft could be parked safely, away from built-up areas.
- Bristows would like Manston Airport to be the base of a new Search and Rescue facility for the South East. This will bring further jobs and investment to the site.

## Operational Capabilities

- The runway is very long at 2,752m and extremely wide, capable of landing any commercial aircraft type. After Gatwick, Stansted and Heathrow, it is the longest runway in the South East.
- Before closure the airport was regularly used for flight testing and crew training (for example the British Airways A380 and 787 Dreamliner). The uncongested airspace and airport facilities were favoured by operators, and we understand that some of these training flights are now held in Europe instead.
- In previous years the airport has seen regular use for aid shipments to other countries.
- Manston Airport is one of the few airports in the UK to hold a license for dismantling and recycling aircraft. It is now known that Airbus have shown considerable interest in setting up a repair and recycling base at Manston, and are "concerned" by the delay in returning the airport to an operational state.
- The area surrounding the airport is largely undeveloped, allowing an 'aviation village' to be created with highly skilled employment, training and apprenticeships. This will help to fill national skills shortages in aviation and engineering whilst benefiting the local area.

## Cargo Operations

- Manston was one of the UK's fastest growing cargo airports at the time of closure, just 70 miles from central London and less than 2 hours away from London Heathrow. A report commissioned by RiverOak Investment Corp. shows that Manston is ideally placed to take the strain off Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted during times of severe congestion or disruption. 415 diversions were made from London airports in 2013 and Manston Airport could take a large percentage of these.
- The airport was equipped with a full range of modern freight-handling equipment and could handle anything from livestock to luxury cars. The operational flexibility of Manston Airport meant it was favoured by major cargo companies such as Cargolux. A large state-of-the-art temperature controlled storage for inbound and outbound freight is located adjacent to the freight apron for fast transfer. Manston also has A UK and EU approved Animal Reception Centre, and was looking set to become the leading facility for the safe transfer of horses and livestock before closure.
- The airport offers the fastest road connection to the Port of Dover (less than 35 minutes) for European-bound shipments.

- Lack of congestion and operational efficiency meant the airport could offer 90 minute turnarounds for freight as standard, perfect for perishables and time-critical cargo. Cargo was often on the road before it could be even offloaded at other airports with tail to truck unloading.

## Passenger Service

- A modern terminal building with an annual capacity of 700,000 with six check-in desks and three gates. The airport has a simple layout with short walking spaces and would be suitable for expansion. The terminal allowed extremely fast boarding with many passengers arriving just 30 minutes before departure.
- A 1,000 space car park is sited directly in front of the terminal entrance with low cost parking.
- Manston offered unparalleled service and highly competitive rates, and was able to accommodate many more daily flights and airlines. Manston offered airlines landing, air traffic control, security, cleaning, ground and passenger handling services with significant cost savings to airlines. Manston could offer VIP and executive handling services and boasted a brand new VIP lounge. Regular visitors included the Rolling Stones.
- 3.8 million travellers with an origin or destination in Kent use London airports annually. The airport has a catchment of 1.5 million people who live within a one hour drive to the airport. Just 13 miles away from the historic and popular city of Canterbury and close to many other tourist attractions in Kent and further afield. The airport is far more convenient for many people than travelling to a London airport.

## Transport Links

- Uncongested motorway links to London and less than 45 minutes from the M25. Located on the A299 dual-carriageway which connects straight to the M2 and beyond.
- Ramsgate train station is just 5 minutes from the airport and connects to HS1 with journey time to London just 80 minutes. This is set to be dramatically reduced with rail upgrades and a brand new Thanet Parkway station to be built next to the airport with high-speed services.