

Dear Sir Howard,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to your recent speech on aviation expansion in the UK. As you are aware, the RSPB is very concerned about the environmental impacts of such expansion, both directly on the natural environment through badly sited new airport infrastructure and indirectly via the increasing contribution of aviation's emissions to climate change. We do not see aviation expansion and climate protection as mutually compatible goals and have written to you separately, as part of a coalition of concerned NGOs, to set out the rationale for this view.

We had hoped that you would take the opportunity to highlight in your speech the need for any new airport proposals to avoid unacceptable damage to the natural environment. However, we were encouraged by your response to the question posed by one of my colleagues at the end of your speech, that your report to Government will include a detailed assessment of the environmental impacts of potential sites and that very damaging sites would not "reach first base". We presume that this would therefore mean an automatic exclusion of any proposals for an airport in the Thames Estuary.

As I had the opportunity to highlight to you on your site visit in the summer, such a proposal would be hugely expensive, cause massive environmental damage, and the risk of birdstrike would be significantly higher than elsewhere in the UK. Indeed, every year, the wider estuarine complex is a hub for 300,000 migrant birds that rely on the area for feeding and roosting. Any damage would have to be compensated for and there is nowhere in the Estuary or arguably in Europe where such large-scale damage could be compensated for adequately.

In addition to the obvious detrimental impacts on local communities, we hope that the highly negative economic, ecological and wider environmental impacts of an estuary airport mean that we can look forward to seeing this excluded from your recommendations in December.

Yours sincerely,



Sue Armstrong-Brown,

Head of Conservation Policy