

**Evidence for Utilisation of the UK's Existing Airport Capacity
and Additional Runway for the south-east of England.**

To further the Airports Commission enquiry into additional UK runway capacity, and in particular the need for additional capacity in the south-east, I have great pleasure in offering a proposal that would convert an existing airfield into a new prestigious gateway for business within the UK and European commercial markets. A new 'regional airport' that could be developed on what used to be London's second airport. A site that is geographically, commercially and environmentally *THE* ideal choice for a new business terminal. Planned on the lines of London City Airport this proposal would result in a new 'low environmental impact airport' serving the transport needs of the vital commercial area that spreads beyond the south-west of London.

Once London's second airport, *BLACKBUSHE AIRPORT* on the Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire borders provides what must be the ultimate location for a new City Airport to serve the expansive wealth generating area to the south and west of London,

The Government have demonstrated their resolve to help us travel more rapidly and consequently conduct business more efficiently, a resolve indicated by projects such as HS2. My submission projects the outstanding opportunity that Blackbushe affords, a key to business being done more efficiently, effectively and economically. *Blackbushe Airport*, a missing link in the south-east's transport infrastructure that could so easily become a major player for tomorrow's business traveller.

The following key factors convey some of the benefits afforded by Blackbushe Airport.

- 1. An established airfield whose geographic and topographic benefits are entirely suited to aviation with an extraordinary 'good weather' record. Built on a natural plateau formed on a vast gravel bed, it is well accepted that Blackbushe is naturally matched to aviation's requirements.*
- 2. No airport so close to London offers better environmental characteristics, with long unobstructed approaches over largely open common and forestry land.*
- 3. Excellent surface infrastructure, just five minutes to the M3 Motorway connection at Junction 4a, providing links to LHR, LGW, Central London and Southampton. Excellent connections to London are also available by rail from nearby Fleet and Farnborough main line stations.*
- 4. Key to its possible future impact, Blackbushe is central to a vast ring of commerce from which it could provide the perfect business air travel solution for UK and European connections. It serves as a hub to a large number of commercially valuable precincts including Maidenhead, Reading, Bracknell, Basingstoke, Andover, Aldershot, Farnborough, Guildford, Woking, Weybridge, and many others..*

5. Currently Blackbushe serves as an operational general aviation airfield. Economically this enhances the Airport's suitability for development, and its location presents the opportunity to be designed into the future south-east airspace development.

6. Until 1960, Blackbushe was London's second airport, serving as a prime fog alternate for Heathrow's diverted air traffic - it's already proven to be fit for the proposed purpose!

The above factors are the ace cards uniquely held by ***Blackbushe Airport***. Conveniently located south-west of London, it would satisfy many aspects of the Airport Commission's remit, capacity, environment, and workable location. Redeveloped on the lines of London City Airport, Blackbushe would provide additional runway capacity for the south-east whilst simultaneously taking account of environmental and noise considerations.

Until 1960 Blackbushe was London's second airport, today it remains an active general aviation airfield. From this we have the basis where a medium size regional "city style" airport could be developed precisely where needed. Developing an existing airfield would minimise legal and political expenditure compared to the implications involved in creating a new 'from scratch' site for future runways. The south-east does not offer an alternative site with better qualifications to become that new regional airport than Blackbushe.

Over the years Blackbushe has been consistently overlooked, and so far has not achieved the necessary recognition for the potential it offers as a small, but effective, regional airport.. Call it, "London City West", a name that signifies how Blackbushe would transform short/medium haul air travel opportunities from the geographic area discussed. This exciting innovative concept would produce a new gateway for the business markets of today, and the future, while helping ease the UK's north/south divide. Unlike the limitations of a new rail venture, this single project would also open easier access to the European market structure for many travellers.

To illustrate the fundamentals of my proposal regarding Blackbushe becoming a new city airport for the south-east, my argument is illustrated in the following sub-sections:-

Rationale

Airport History

Current status

Unique advantages

Commercial significance

Environment

Immediate concerns/objections

Airspace

Surface infrastructure

Level of development required to attain regional airline functionality

Rationale

The expansive area of commerce and industry south and west of London generates a significant requirement for business travel services to both domestic and international markets. Examination of travel facilities in the area comprising Maidenhead, Reading, Bracknell, Basingstoke, Andover, Aldershot, Farnborough, Guildford, Woking, Weybridge etc., shows that flying from this area primarily requires the use of Heathrow, or Gatwick. It seems ironic that passengers from an area of such importance have to experience the frustration and congestion of over-burdened long-haul airports while Blackbushe lies so under utilised.

Rail travel from the described Blackbushe catchment area to destinations north of the capital requires perhaps two train changes including a transit of London via the Underground. Such time consuming routing devalues rail travel or any benefit that the advent of HS2 might bring for travel originating south of the Capital. Rail services to the north avoiding London and routing via Reading most likely involve three train changes. Whether using rail services or travelling by air, the business travel community south and west of London is extremely limited in efficient public transport options that provide the fast, convenient travel necessary for the economic conduct of business. Such a commercially significant area needs a better transport deal...

Modelled on the lines of London City Airport and located in the heart of such a commercially important area, short/medium haul regional services from Blackbushe would provide a solution to the travel needs of this high producing business area. The resultant growth from this exciting innovation would also help relieve a degree of congestion in and around Heathrow and Gatwick as passengers realise the benefits of a new 'City' airport that is far easier to get from and to.

Another benefit this newly created travel facility could provide would be to bring enhanced access to leisure travel markets for residents living amid the ring of towns listed previously. The Airport's excellent location again demonstrates its suitability for regional airline operations.

The rationale behind Blackbushe Airport is that it is located in exactly the right place to provide a travel solution for the high levels of business and leisure movements that originate south and west of London - on a site which is already an airfield. The new "London City West".

Airport History.

Opened in 1942 on the flat expanse of north-east Hampshire known as Hartford Bridge Flats, a location chosen for its suitability as an airfield, and originally known as RAF Hartford Bridge, the new airbase provided a pivotal location for the Royal Air Force plus air forces from a number of allied nations during World War Two.

Post war, the airfield was renamed Blackbushe and transferred to the Ministry of Transport. It soon developed in its new role as a civil airport, becoming the growing heart of British independent airline conception and expansion. Blackbushe became London's second airport under the Ministry's ownership, the United States Navy

recognising the advantages of Blackbushe established a major European base there. Frequently Blackbushe served as a fog diversion for airliners unable to land at fog stricken Heathrow. BEA and BOAC, forerunners of British Airways, regularly made use of the facility offered by Blackbushe for crew training. From the outset of peace, Blackbushe became the spawning ground for post war independent airline growth, witnessing the beginning of the mass travel markets of today.

As wartime land leases at Blackbushe expired the government was investing in the building of a new airport at Gatwick. In the late fifties they took the unfortunate decision to close Blackbushe. The United States appreciating the significance of Blackbushe did not wish to lose their European base. They proposed an expansion of Blackbushe, which by then was London's second airport, with a 10,000' main runway to house part of their strategic bomber force. The plans were rejected, although reportedly the UK government had shown interest in the prospect of this leading to the expanded Blackbushe becoming London's Number One airport in due course. Gatwick's building programme was the pointer toward Blackbushe having to be closed. Home based airlines were extremely reluctant to leave their Blackbushe headquarters, but finally were forced to find new homes. The Government refused to save Blackbushe, hoping instead that the resident airline companies would be driven out toward the newly constructed Gatwick. In May 1960 the last airliners flew out of Blackbushe, and consequently our country lost a great airport and a great asset.

Part of the newly disused airfield was acquired by AVM "Pathfinder" Bennett soon after its closure, and 360 acres of Blackbushe were saved by his forward thinking. Sadly the powers behind the closure ensured the destruction of the Airport's facilities leaving it in a disgraceful and desolate state. Numerous planning attempts by AVM Bennett were thwarted over issues concerning anachronistic Rights of Common issues that block development to this day. British Car Auctions are the current owners of Blackbushe having acquired the site because of the benefits of its excellent location and access... Just two of the reasons why Blackbushe makes an excellent airport too!

Current Status

Owned by British Car Auctions, the Airport continues to serve light and business aircraft as an important centre for general aviation purposes as well as hosting one of the country's largest car auction sites. With a 1339 metre runway, Blackbushe can handle aircraft up to BAe146 size on private flights. The aims of the current owners with regard to the Airport's future development are uncertain, and no plans appear to exist toward further facilities for aviation.

There was serious local opposition to flying being retained at Blackbushe when it was first placed in private ownership. The source of the opposition stemmed primarily from the efforts to preserve ancient Rights of Common across the airfield, and while these rights are still in place, the airfield no longer receives the fanatical opposition experienced in the 1960s.

Unique Advantages

Located in north-east Hampshire, close to the Surrey/Berkshire borders, Blackbushe boasts unique advantages amid airfields in the south of England when it comes to consideration for upgrading to commercial service requirements. Blackbushe enjoys long unobstructed approaches to its main runway from both east and west directions, approaches that are almost entirely over open Common or Forestry Commission land. Very limited numbers of residential properties are likely to be directly affected by increased aircraft movements at Blackbushe. Stemming from its status as London's second airport prior to closure, the runways/taxiways were built to withstand extreme weight and generally remain in good condition. Sadly the cross runways have been closed to air traffic and are showing neglect and erosion. This national aviation asset diminishes accordingly.

Blackbushe is located atop a broad natural gravel plateau. From this the Airport enjoys excellent natural drainage, on a site that is exceptionally flat, and enjoys an excellent 'good weather' record. The plateau on which the Airport is built tends to be above morning mists and fog which is why it served so well as a fog diversion for Heathrow. The plateau also serves to make Blackbushe easily visible for the benefit of approaching aircraft.

The London-Southampton trunk road, the A30, used to run through the Airport. Today the road borders the Airport's southern boundary with the attendant advantages that location on a major highway brings. Fast access to the M3 Motorway is achieved in approx five minutes courtesy of the M3's nearby Junction 4a. Rail access from Blackbushe is also easily made thanks to the nearby main line stations at Fleet and Farnborough. Heathrow and Gatwick are within easy reach, with Heathrow just 26 miles distant via M3/M25.

As discussed earlier, Blackbushe lies in the heart of one of the south-east's prime business/industrial areas. The fact that Europe's number one business jet centre has been established at Farnborough, some seven miles distant, would substantiate that Blackbushe is indeed in a very suitable business area, and ideally placed for future public transport operations.

Commercial Significance

As has already been highlighted, Blackbushe is centrally located within a large area of commercially essential towns and cities. An airport in the midst of such a valuable area offering services to within the UK and Europe would be a massive benefit to the business community therein. Easily accessed without the expense or congestion of having to commute to the major airports. A similar benefit would be felt by our European business partners heading for south-east UK...

The Blackbushe runway is some 1,335 metres in length, very similar to that of London City Airport, but with the advantage of approaches that are over open land, have no obstructions, and few residents beneath them. The significance of a London City type airport located to the south-west of London is apparent when considering London City handles around 3 million passengers annually, with these numbers anticipated to increase to 8 million, and on a runway similar in length to that at

Blackbushe. The popularity of Blackbushe as a new London City is not hard to imagine given the commercial and residential markets that lie within its grasp.

The current public transport options from south-west of London to the wider UK are rail, or the congestion of either Heathrow or Gatwick. Use of these major airports by short haul passengers is time consuming, frustrating and adds to congestion both in the terminals and surrounding road access. Rail travel, while offering broad options of destination choice across the country, requires various time consuming changes of train as passengers move across the country. These time killing changes seriously detract from the use of rail which, compared to air travel, is so much slower and reduces vital customer contact time.

A London City styled airport at Blackbushe would provide developers, backers, regional airlines and their customers a proposition of outstanding commercial opportunity.

Environment

Apart from the commercial advantages that Blackbushe holds for prospective regional carriers and their passengers, its environmental superiority is beyond question. Considering the size of the population to the west of London and its nearness to London, remarkably Blackbushe is primarily surrounded by forest and open spaces. Although it is not possible to please everybody where airport expansion programmes are concerned, a relatively small number of residents might become aware of any increased aircraft movements resulting from a change of use at Blackbushe. Jet traffic is already quite a routine experience for them. *Given its strategic location, a more environmentally suitable location for a regional 'city' airport in the south-east would be impossible to find.*

Blackbushe has no flooding problems, built on a natural gravel base it has excellent drainage properties posing no threat to local environment or communities. The airfield still benefits from the drainage system largely restored from when Blackbushe was London's second airport, although considerable damage was sustained during the attempt to eliminate Blackbushe in 1960.

The open space location enjoyed by the Airport with minimal nearby residences, would ensure aromas and any airport by-products produced by a developed Blackbushe would have the least possible impact on local populations.

Immediate Concerns

Blackbushe is adjacent to major gravel extraction work, worryingly the excavation process continues to move closer to the airfield boundary, especially as the Airport is situate on an expansive natural gravel plateau. The prospect of the great asset that Blackbushe presents to our transport infrastructure being lost due to gravel extraction is unthinkable - the airport **HAS** to be protected at all cost.

While the main runway remains in use, the two 'cross runways' have been closed and currently are falling into disrepair while the entire north side of the airport is allowed to become overgrown. As this large tract of increasingly overgrown land continues to

consume the Airport, it is essential that high level recognition identifies the value locked up in Blackbushe and ensures its availability for the time when its runway becomes an even greater national necessity.

Blackbushe is situate on Common Land, with a small number of residents holding ancient and anachronistic 'Rights of Common' across its acres. These Rights and Common Land issues have blighted planning applications since the sixties, even banning the building of a structure to house the airfield's rescue vehicles. If forward clear thinking recognises the need to develop Blackbushe Airport it would be necessary for Common Land issues to be ameliorated.

The owners of Blackbushe have invested in airport lighting, renovation of the Terminal building, a new control tower and taken the necessary steps to keep the airport presentable. At this point there are no clear indications of further investment in the airfield infrastructure.

Airspace

The public consultation with regard to Farnborough Airport's planned airspace changes is currently under consideration. While Farnborough Airport is only some seven miles away from Blackbushe, the two airfields have operated in complete harmony for many years.

Blackbushe is situate outside of the proposed Farnborough controlled airspace, but nevertheless future air traffic movements from Blackbushe will be affected by the anticipated changes. Given the importance held by Blackbushe as a future regional airport the most serious considerations of its future role should be applied to the redesigned airspace of both Farnborough and London.

In the past concerns were expressed as to Blackbushe having an ILS approach to its westerly runway. It was considered that conflict would occur with the London TMA. Today's navigation and approach equipment is designed for far greater flexibility and higher traffic densities, providing for a more unrestricted 'approach' toward landing aids. A more workable existence between Blackbushe, the London Zone and Farnborough should be achievable compared to that of the fifties. Neither Farnborough or Blackbushe airports are likely to handle very high density traffic volumes, thus the sophisticated air traffic procedures/equipment of today and tomorrow would hopefully manage the two airfields' traffic movements.

Surface infrastructure

Blackbushe is located on the A30 main London to Southampton trunk road, just 3 miles west of Camberley in Surrey. Importantly, the M3 Motorway Junction 4a is just five minutes away. The M3 provides direct Motorway access to London, Heathrow and Gatwick, Heathrow being some 25 miles distant. Central London is 41 road miles from Blackbushe.

Excellent main line rail services are available from nearby Fleet and Farnborough stations.

The current road links to/from Blackbushe are excellent and little additional work would be required to the surface infrastructure were the Airport to be developed in accord with the potential it presents.

A significant step toward harmonising the use of domestic air and rail services, regardless of origin/destination, would be the implementation of air/rail ticketing. With this the traveller would maximise the benefits of both forms of transport and provide the United Kingdom with a far more efficient way of going about domestic business travel.

Level of development required to attain regional airline functionality

Today Blackbushe presents a well located airfield with valuable potential. Developed to exacting civil commercial requirements - and once being London's second airport - Blackbushe has one of the finest all weather runways in the south. Sadly reduced in length after its closure, the runway now equates in length to that at London City, but without any buildings obstructing the approaches which are primarily over open country.

The runway could be extended at both ends to beyond its original length, but only after settlement of Common Land issues. It is understood that holders of Rights of Common would in several cases relinquish them for cash. The eastern end of 'old' Blackbushe is disused and recorded as Common Land. Basically it has become a wilderness, an eyesore under local authority control. Ideally it would be reacquired for aviation use and rejoined to the Airport where it belongs - once again Blackbushe would largely be complete. As it stands, Blackbushe affords significant land that would permit future expansion programmes, hangars, terminal, etc..

As already described, Blackbushe would not require many alterations to the local road structure.

Blackbushe would require a full update of approach aids.

A new terminal and ancillary buildings would be required, the original airport infrastructure having been destroyed in 1960. A significant build programme would be required.

The great thing is that Blackbushe is an operational airfield with runways and taxiways, providing an economical opportunity to develop a 'new' airport without the painful and expensive procedure of establishing new runways.

Currently small business jets operate from Blackbushe, plus flying clubs, and numerous privately owned light aeroplanes.

Conclusions

I have presented the case for developing Blackbushe as a new regional airport in a strategically superior location where environmental impact would be kept to a minimum. I have provided the most outstanding reasons why it should be given the most serious consideration as the new "London City West"...

The suitability of Blackbushe for flying was demonstrated by the United States in the late fifties, hoping to acquire the site for strategic bombers, and building new runways of 10,000 and 7,000 feet in length. The British government did consider this as step toward Blackbushe eventually becoming London's number one airport - and closing Heathrow!! As we know, history did not bear this out.

Today, regional airlines in Europe annually carry over 70 million passengers on almost 2 million flights to over 420 destinations in over 60 countries. They are a vital and integral part of the European economy and its transport structure. The UK needs to maximise its efforts to serve and encourage regional airlines. These carriers are not a luxury, but tools for us to use in pursuit of doing business better, and more effectively. Blackbushe provides the finest possible site to further support regional airline operations in the south-eastern UK.

The Airport's extensive acres, combined with adjoining land, would permit significant future expansion, perhaps allowing the transfer of some short haul services from Heathrow? This would in turn free much needed runway slots at Heathrow for additional long-haul services. This factor alone must be reason enough for Blackbushe to receive urgent investigation from the highest levels.

Gentlemen, I give you forward looking outline plans toward a new air transport facility, a new door essential for many British and European companies so as they may move toward better and more efficient ways to conduct their business.

***Deliverable, affordable, and operationally feasible - Blackbushe Airport.
Given its strategic location, a more environmentally suitable location for a regional 'city' airport in the south-east would be hard to find - there is none better!***

In 2014 it is tragic that the value of this superb national aviation asset remains untapped.

Yours sincerely





**Once London's second airport.....
Blackbushe *the* perfect location for tomorrow's "London City West".**

