

## Breakfast roundtable discussion on the habitat compensation and mitigation implications of an Inner Estuary Airport Tuesday 22 July 2014



### Summary of the morning's discussions

- Points raised and conclusions include:
  - Even when assuming a conservative 2:1 compensation ratio, the scale and likely distance of identifying and locating compensatory habitat is unprecedented. Even though expansion at Heathrow or Gatwick Airports would also require environmental management, the Inner Estuary option presents a challenge on a completely different order of magnitude.
  - While “technically feasible”, there is significant uncertainty as to whether the creation of any new habitat will be successful, calling into question the deliverability of habitat compensation.
  - In addition to taking account of different species’ preferences and habitat patterns, finding adequate compensation sites is further complicated by the fact that most coastal sites are already developed; and by the fact that a vast majority of sites outside an Inner Estuary Airport’s 13km exclusion zone will likely impact upon an existing airport’s or military airbase’s exclusion zone, raising significant questions of birdstrike and flight management, beyond nature conservation aspects.
  - Compensatory habitat might ultimately have to be found outside of the UK; in Germany or France, with all related implications this brings.
  - Even though it is difficult to imagine that birds “cannot just find another piece of mud”, and some species are indeed more flexible, the majority of birds affected by development in the Thames Estuary is highly site faithful, and comes from long lived populations with low reproduction levels. There is therefore a limited chance of birds taking up compensatory habitat at the sites identified 100-150 miles away; and a greater likelihood of displaced birds simply dying. Examples to date – such as Cardiff Bay, or further afield in South Korea – show that the impact on bird populations is significant.

- While environmental organisations such as the RSPB would do everything possible to achieve the best nature conservation outcome should an Inner Estuary Airport indeed be built, it is very difficult to see how this could become reality, with the overwhelming view being that it is nigh on impossible to see how a new airport in the Thames Estuary would ever fit the various habitats directives and regulations.
- Moreover, identifying and creating appropriate compensatory habitat requires planning consent and long time frames, requiring work on this to commence now, but there is limited willingness to incur financial expense on these matters before any final approval of an Inner Estuary scheme has been made – a conundrum for developers.
- Finally, further work to be undertaken in this area will likely require significant investment of time and resources into detailed modelling work, including e.g. mapping of potential compensatory habitat sites against constraints and bird migration routes, further adding to the current level of uncertainty involved when discussing the displacement and removal of vast bird populations in the Thames Estuary.

### **Press coverage**

- [Evening Standard, 'Huge area of land needed for birds displaced by Boris Island'](#)
- [politics.co.uk, 'Boris Johnson's estuary airport unlikely to be shortlisted by Airports Commission'](#)
- [ITV News, 'Rehman Chishti MP denounces Estuary Airport plans'](#)
- [Kent Online, 'Thames Estuary Airport off Isle of Grain would need land size of Disneyland Paris to re-home thousands of birds, ornithology report claims'](#)