

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Department for Place

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Dear Sir/Madam

The Inner Thames Estuary feasibility studies – information and evidence check

This response is in respect of the two questions posed as part of the feasibility studies on the Inner Thames Estuary proposals. Southend on Sea Borough Council is keen to ensure that we are active in developing an accurate evidence base to be used in consideration of the Inner Thames Estuary proposals.

This response is based on factual information, which in some cases has already been submitted in written form or orally at meeting by Council Officers, and focuses on:-

- Study 1 entitled Environmental Impacts;
- Study 3 entitled Inner Thames Estuary Airport: Review of the evidence on socio-economic impacts
- Study 4 entitled Surface Access Impacts.

Our response provides a brief summary of the terms of reference for each study, and then seeks to answer the two questions that the Airport Commission is keen to receive a response.

- 1) Is there information in the studies which is factually inaccurate? If so, clarify.
- 2) Is there any new information or evidence that you wish the Commission to consider before it makes its decision?

Study 1 – Environmental Impacts

Aims of Study 1 – the Terms of Reference for study 1 include an assessment of the impacts on the Natura 2000 sites of constructing and operating a new airport at an inner Thames Estuary location, and the feasibility of meeting the legal tests for such development.

Response:

Support the Essex County Council recommendations that "Greater Thames Nature Improvement Area be referenced. To assist the Airport Commission ECC is supplying a Planning Policy Advice Note produced by ECC (2013) to provide more detailed information concerning the Nature Improvement Area, and how it relates to planning and emerging spatial policies.

The Greater Thames Marshes Nature Improvement Area was formally recognised by Defra in April 2012, along with 11 others across England. NIAs are pilot schemes running from April 2012 – April 2015 funded by the Government, aiming to create ecological networks in strategic locations to benefit wildlife and people."

"It is recommended that due consideration is given to the Greater Thames March Nature Improvement Area, and other important environmental designations. Study 1 should determine the impact an Inner Thames Estuary Airport would have on the designated Greater Thames Nature Improvement Area now and in the future."

Study 3 - Inner Thames Estuary Airport: Review of the evidence on socio-economic impacts

Aims of Study 3 - to evaluate the analysis submitted on local, sub-national and national economic and social benefits and impacts of building a new hub airport in the inner Thames Estuary.

Response:Closure of London Southend Airport

The Council notes with concern that the pwc report does not consider the potential impacts on London City and Southend airports in detail "due to the uncertainty about their closure". However in previous papers issued it has been clearly stated that the closure of Southend Airport is extremely likely. Not to include this in the economic impact study seems inappropriate and obviously does not factor in the significant cost of closing the Airport, impact on local economy and compensation. As explained at the face to face meeting in London with pwc, Southend Airport plays a key role in the SELEP Economic Plan and is a driver for much of the economic development and skills training in South Essex. Further uncertainty over this will effect investment as the Council embarks on a significant development of the adjacent Business Park to deliver over 7,000 jobs.

On page 42 of the pwc study there is reference to Southend Airport and accepts that closure would have "a considerable effect on the local area and the growth potential of surrounding business parks and industrial estates"

Both Southend on Sea Borough Council and Rochford District Council have commenced the Examination in Public for the Southend and Rochford Joint Area Action Plan (JAAP). Relevant documents can be found here:-

www.rochford.gov.uk/planning/policy/local_development_framework/london_southend_airport

Rochford District Council's 'Employment Land Study Final Update Report' (December 2009) recognises that the area will be attractive to companies and investors over the long term and that new development within the JAAP area will be a key economic driver for the surrounding area. It also states that the capacity growth at London Southend Airport is likely to be a catalyst for increased employment land demand within its surrounding area. The analysis shows that the JAAP area is well placed to serve the likely increase in demand for B class employment land arising from expansion of London Southend Airport.

Previous development frameworks identified the need for development of a Business Park around Southend Airport which, in turn, is complementary to the provision of office space in Southend town centre. The Business Park will be designated for those organisations that do not wish to or need to be in a town centre location – and for particularly those businesses which require close proximity to the Airport with the maintenance and repair operations which are a key economic growth sector.

Overall, the growth and vitality of London Southend Airport is seen as important to the economic development and prosperity of Southend and Rochford. Local policies support the growth of the airport; prioritise the safeguarding of the important Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) sector; and require the provision of adequate employment land (in terms of quantity and quality) to accommodate future employment needs of the area.

The importance of the airport as a local employment generator is recognised in the Southend Core Strategy (2007). One Strategic objective within the Plan is to secure the regeneration of London Southend Airport to enable it to reach its potential to function as a local regional airport, providing for significant new employment opportunities and improved surface access subject to environmental safeguards. It is acknowledged that along with other locations the airport has the potential to contribute fully to local employment objectives and to provide for a quality environment. The 7,380 new jobs will provide significant employment opportunities for Southend residents, as well as some jobs within the Borough itself, both within the Airport and on nearby employment areas.

It is noteworthy that the South East LEP carried out a significant research study to identify how the airports of the Greater South East can be used more effectively and efficiently and, where possible, grown to accommodate the anticipated increasing demands of air travel. The study concluded that airports in the south east of England make a significant contribution to the economy of the region and to the UK. The following is a link to this Study:

www.southeastlep.com/publications/consultation-responses/149-airport-study

Stobart has invested in London Southend Airport on the basis that it would provide a return on that investment over its full life. Asset life varies according to the type of facility, with runways and aircraft stands typically 100 years (although resurfacing is required at around 20 years), terminal and other buildings 30-50 years, with shorter lives for fittings and mobile equipment. If London Southend Airport closed in 2030, these assets would therefore be only part way through their lives, and compensation would be sought for their residual value. This issue must be factored into any economic appraisal.

Clearly, the closure of London Southend Airport will significantly affect the viability of the Business Parks and associated industry and support companies. Of greater concern at this stage is the uncertainty that will prevail, should the Estuary Airport proposal proceed to the next stage of investigation alongside Heathrow and Gatwick. Whilst the site of the airport could accommodate housing and other industry, this would require a complete revision of the Local Plan and would be subject to consultation and inquiries. No work has been completed in this respect as this would also add to the uncertainty.

In summary, there is in place a credible and balanced plan for the growth of London Southend Airport and the implementation of appropriate policies. Paras 4.283 to 4.291 of the SELEP Strategic Economic Plan set out the aspirations for the A127 Growth Corridor (including the JAAP area). This is supported by SELEP and forms part of the overall plan for employment and housing growth.

It is our view that this study must include the costs and disbenefits of closing London Southend Airport.

Population, housing, labour and employment land

Our observations related to p. 107 of the Inner Thames Estuary Review Report are as follows:-

Under the heading 'Population and Housing' we would suggest that it is more to do with the delivery of affordable housing in a dense, urban authority where there is a lack of available land and large sites rather than just highlighting that there is a lack. The Core Strategy highlights the delivery of affordable housing as an objective but there are 14 other strategic objectives for Southend which looks to create an urban renaissance of the town centre and regeneration of key area through area action plans including London Southend Airport and its environs and these should be acknowledged in relation to the future delivery within Southend. In addition, this reference to 1,300 affordable housing seems to have come from an earlier housing need assessment report.

This document should refer to the latest TGSE SHMA (December 2013) for affordable housing need. We would also question whether there would be little effect on housing demand from the new hub airport as there are good train links to London and the road network from Dartford crossing to Southend.

Affordable Housing: The TGSE SHMA suggest that 350 affordable housing units are needed per annum (7,000 over a 20 year period). The Southend Annual Monitoring Report (2013) reports that between 2001 and 2013, 441 affordable homes have been completed, which equates to 10.9% of the total net dwellings completed during this period (4,033).

Under the heading 'Labour Supply' Southend has historically low skills and high unemployment however much development and regeneration has occurred since then which would influence this situation, especially the development of the University of Essex site, the South East Essex College and a skills academy as part of the innovation hub at business park adjacent to London Southend Airport. Therefore there is and will be opportunity to support new employment opportunities. At the moment the bullet point reads quite negatively as Southend has a developing skills base.

In respect of 'Employment land' there is a new employment site planned at the Airport Business Park with potential for 110,000 square metres of floorspace with good access links. This leads onto 'Surface Access' which states that Southend has the worst congestion of anywhere. We would question whether this is still the case with all the infrastructure and traffic improvements along the A127 and the funding that we have just received through the Local Enterprise Partnership along with our colleges in South Essex to contribute towards reducing congestion and journey times. There is also a new rail station at the airport and there are existing fast links to London from Southend Central and Southend Victoria Stations. So significant progress has been and will be made in improving transport connectivity – all of which is planned to support existing planned economic and housing growth.

Study 4 – Surface Access Impacts Study

Response - Again, Southend Borough Council Officers make reference to and support the Essex County Council (ECC) response, which is repeated below:-.

Aims of Study 4 – The surface access study focusses on four key elements as follows –

- Estimating airport passenger and employee surface transport demand;
- Identifying surface transport measures to meet airport-related demand, accounting for capacity implications related to background growth and non-airport travel demand;
- Assessing the engineering feasibility and high-level cost of the surface transport measures identified to meet forecast travel demand;
- Assessing the environmental cost of the identified surface transport measures.

The aim of the study is to provide guidance to the Airport Commission on feasibility and likely issues associated with the most viable package of surface transport measures. The terms of reference for the packages are defined as –

- An 'opening year' 2030 package consisting of surface access elements designed to provide a reasonable degree of service for airport passengers at a minimum cost;
- A 'mature year' 2050 package consisting of elements designed to provide a high quality degree of service for airport passengers, befitting a world-class 21st century hub airport operating at full capacity.

Response to Study 4 against question 1

ECC/SBC seek to use this opportunity to clarify some of the factual inaccurate assumptions. Chapter 2 of study 4 provides a summary of the key proposals from the main Inner Thames Estuary proposals with regards to surface access.

ECC/SBC wish to highlight issues with the Metrotidal Tunnel and Thames Reach Airport Ltd proposals including –

- Section 2.3.14 refers to the dualling of the A130, it is important to note that this will have an effect on the A13, so an upgrade to the A13 between Pitsea and Saddlers Farm should also be considered.

The London Gateway Airport proposals refer to the recent improvements works on the A13 provided by DP World for the London Gateway Port and associated growth. The information presented by the promoters and outlined in the study assumes the use of this capacity improvement. ECC/SBC consider that the improvements that have been undertaken are to reflect the growth of London Gateway port; therefore an Inner Thames Estuary airport proposal would require additional investment and capacity improvements in excess of those already implemented and planned.

Response to Study 4 against question 2

ECC/SBC wish to draw the Airport Commission attention to the “A127 – Corridor of Growth – An Economic Plan”. The purpose of the paper is to make a joint case from ECC and Southend Borough Council (SBC) to demonstrate the importance of the A127 corridor to the economic growth and financial well-being of the Thames Gateway South Essex region. ECC has attached the full paper for the Airport Commission’s reference, but we think it is important that we outline some of the key messages expressed within the paper that may be of importance to the Commission.

Chapter 3 of the paper discusses the capability and capacity of the A127 route. It states that the A127 is an ageing corridor (originally opened in 1924), but one that is a vitally important primary route for the Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE) area which connects the M25, Basildon and Southend (including London Southend Airport).

From the Fairglens junction to the east of Basildon, the A127 is the main corridor for traffic travelling west / east and from / to Southend. The Fairglens junction is the key link to the A130 and the North and the A13 and Westwards to London. This junction is over capacity and suffers from significant congestion at peak times, and at various intervals throughout the day. It is very sensitive to incidents, not only on the A127, but also the A13, A12 and M25.

The A127 is designated a PR1 Strategic Route, meaning any asset failure on the A127 is likely to have a significant impact on the local economy.

There is an unusually large number of Large Goods Vehicles (LGVs) on Essex roads (over 22% of all LGVs in the East of England are registered in Essex). Although the A13 may be the prime routing for freight deliveries accessing the new London Gateway and Tilbury container ports, with the important commercial destinations along the A127 corridor, freight traffic forms a significant percentage of the movements to destinations such as the Basildon Enterprise Parks and London Southend Airport.

Traffic operations information demonstrates that the Essex sections west of the Southend boundary carry similar flows, between approximately 55,000 and 73,000 vehicle per day, with flows declining towards the end of the route in Southend. There is not a strong trend in the data, but, on average, there is a growth in Annual Average Daily Flows of 0.39% per year, compared to almost no growth on other A-Roads in Essex.

The paper outlines the average travel speeds along the A127 east of the M25. It is important to note that:

- There is a significant reduction in speed over peak periods along almost the entire route. It is more marked in the PM period in the eastbound direction compared to the westbound direction;
- The slowing of traffic on the approaches to on and off slips and at the at-grade junction in Southend-on-Sea;
- The morning peak being concentrated in the 07:00 to 09:00 period and the afternoon peak more spread;
- Geometric delay at the Fortune of War junction and at the junctions in Southend-on-Sea.

ECC has evidence that indicates the A127 is operating substantially over-capacity and the collision types and rates are indicative of this problem. The A127 is generally free flowing in the morning peak flow period on the non-built up sections, but with delays at certain junctions due to the volume of merging traffic. In Southend, there are eastbound delays at Kent Elms in the morning peak. In the afternoon peak flow period, the A127 appears more congested, especially Southend-bound from the A176 to Rayleigh Weir. The coefficient of variation is relatively low, indicating that the A127, whilst it may be congested, is relatively reliably congested on a regular basis.

The route is also experiencing congestion for a greater proportion of the day than just the conventional peak times. This results in flow breakdown, which in turn causes delays and an increased risk of collisions. There is also no means of effectively managing traffic along the route, should the need arise. Managing demand and traffic between the A127 and A13 is required, as well as directing traffic to the most appropriate route in times of congestions and incidents.

ECC and relevant partners are currently researching information and data in relation to Saddlers Farm, and the Fairglens and A130 interchange. This information is currently being analysed and once available ECC is happy to share this with the Airport Commission. ECC considers that it is important that the Commission fully appreciates the current and likely future road infrastructure issues within Essex. Clearly if the Commission is seeking to understand the impact an Inner Thames Estuary Airport may have on surface access the impact it may have on the Essex and Southend surface access network is very important.

It is important to note that any future short, medium and long term plans for surface access improvements do not take into account the Inner Thames Estuary Airport, therefore surface access issues associated with this requires significant additional investment, funding and delivery to mitigate the impact on the Essex living, working, investing and visiting community.

Yours faithfully

[Redacted Signature]

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Major Projects & Strategic Transport Group

