

RACC Public Domain information

Minutes of a Meeting of the Rochester Airport Consultative Committee (RACC) held at Holiday Inn, Chatham on 24th July 2013 at 17:00

Organisations represented by delegates:

Rochester Airport Ltd (RAL)
Kent County Council (KCC)
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC)
Medway Borough Council (MBC)
Skytrek Flying School (SFS)
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Medway Aircraft Preservation Society Limited (MAPSL)
The Chairman
Minuting Secretary from GASCO

1. Welcome & Apologies

The Chairman opened the meeting at 17:00, welcoming members.
Apologies had been received from individual delegates from MAPSL, RAL, TMBC, MBC, SFS and
MBC, all of which were nevertheless represented by colleagues.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14th December 2012 were accepted and signed as a true record
subject to the deletion of the 3rd paragraph of item 7 as Rochester did not have two flying schools.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes, not covered in the Agenda

The Action to circulate details of airport events had not been carried out and RAL said that this
would now be attended to..

The trial for Runway 02 had been successful and the action on signage had been completed with
new signs on the Bridgewood Manor and Lord Lees Roundabouts.

The Chairman confirmed the website had been amended and now showed a list of RACC
organisations. The meeting considered this a fair representation of what we do and the meeting
had been announced publicly.

4. Progress on Draft Master Plan

RAL confirmed that the Rochester Airport Master Plan was reaching its final stage and was now in
final Public Consultation finishing on 25th September 2013. RAL have agreed terms for the new 25-

year Lease but this will not be signed until (and if) the Master Plan has been adopted. Once the Lease has been executed and the Master Plan adopted we will apply for Planning Permission for the new runway and infrastructure improvements. Should Planning Permission not be obtained agreement has been reached with the Council that the Lease of the smaller footprint will remain with Rochester Airport Limited for 25 years. It is important we protect the airport whatever happens. If we had to appeal it would be very costly and would depend on the chances of being successful. It is not a change of use but only involves intensification on to one runway. RAL said that a peppercorn rent will be charged for that section which will remain part of the Airport until the Council took it back. There were advantages to keeping it.

RAL had been invited by Medway Council to attend the Public Consultation to offer advice on technicalities in respect of the Airport. There had not been a lot of visitors, around 200, with approximately 100 people against the plans with one person drumming up a campaign against them. RAL did not believe 100 to be a significant number. The biggest issue appeared to be noise and the belief that property values would drop by 30%. RAL tried reasoning but did not believe their minds could be changed. The issue of safety was also raised and questions were asked. PB added that the 100 or so householders that are complaining were closely grouped at the end of the runway (City Way, Cloisters Way, Wilson Avenue etc.). RAL believed education was needed as there was a lot of misinformation about and these edges need smoothing off. KCC thought the poor turnout indicated that most people were not fussed either way.

The Chairman said it was important to know the numbers who attended the first Consultation, so as to establish the points that had been raised: how many were for and how many against.

He suggested that a more positive and aggressive presentation needed to be prepared by the Council to take account of the negative points in a straightforward way and recommended that the Council put together a more informative and direct argument in favour of the Plan rebutting some of the misleading propaganda being circulated. MBC had spoken with Council officers and it had been agreed that a joint meeting between the Council and RAL be arranged.

KCC said that a simple positive statement was needed to clear the ground and suggested 'the latest developments have superseded anything that went before, including the TPS, and as a guide to where the future of the Airport lay, as far as movements were concerned.

We should note the highest number of movements the Airport had ever had in its history of operating two runways', that was the figure to be given. It would not be exceeded with one runway. RAL added that the maximum number of take-offs and landings ever recorded at the airfield, since Rochester Airport Limited started, was 46,786, in 2003.

RAL said the timetable being set was disruptive and felt it was being rushed and was rough round the edges due to this.

5. Comments on the Plan

The Chairman pointed out that, since the previous meeting, at which the RACC approved the Council Airport Development Plan; objections from one particular source had been raised and aired in the media. Despite invitations to attend the present meeting, no delegate had come forward.

He therefore urged members to consider all known objections, however received, whether directly or by rumour, as though a representative were actually present. He was anxious that all such objections should be discussed anew at the meeting whether or not they had been considered before.

(a) The plans to invest taxpayer's money in a private company (the Airport) are a waste:

The £12 million of investment required to develop the Airport (as mentioned in the TPS aviation study) is completely unjustified.

Answer: We are realistically talking of £3-£5 million which is small for such a development. More significant, though, was that the TPS Aviation Study was **an initial report with hypothetical numbers based on the idea of a complete refurbishment**. It was based on everything being knocked down and the buildings moved elsewhere. **It related, in effect, to a completely new airport and was therefore not relevant to the present Plan**. The airport owners, Medway Council, had been looking at ways to realise its asset. The 25 year lease worked out at £176,000 per annum.

(b) Increase of air traffic over houses in 02/20 flight path significantly increases risk to people's lives from air accidents:

Answer: It was considered that such risks were miniscule. While a tarmac runway might not reduce that risk, it would allow aircraft to get airborne more quickly. The modernisation of Rochester Airport would definitely not attract aircraft larger than those already operating there. PR believed Skytrek would carry out fewer flights, due to crosswind limitations. RAL added that although this was the case, Rochester would not have to close due to a water-logged runway.

(c) Medway Council should be responsible for a full flight risks and safety analysis on flights before developments are progressed:

Answer: All agreed that this was the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority.

(d) Congestion is already terrible on local roads, more development and traffic will make them impossible:

Answer: RAL said this related to the 1000 or so jobs created by the Master Plan. It opened old wounds with local residents particularly with the Horsted Manor building plot, Marconi Way and the Asda Store, issues that were mentioned during the Consultations. RAL had been disappointed that no-one from transport had attended, as it was not an Airport matter.

(e) There will be more aircraft and far larger aircraft:

Answer: This had already been addressed and RAL said that it had been announced by an individual that the existing flying school at Rochester would be 'driven out' to allow 'far larger' aircraft to fly.

KCC believed that 'far' was misleading, especially as aircraft would not be larger than those already operating.

RAL said the runway will be kept at the same category but will be narrower. At present the runway is 32m wide but the tarmac one will be between 23m to 25m wide. Also, the fire service at the airfield is categorised by the CAA. Rochester is currently the lowest category. To go to a higher category would be very expensive.

KCC further emphasised that it was the length of the runway that determined the size of aircraft that could use the airport and we were definitely not extending the length of the runway.

The Chairman summarised the meeting's conclusion that, in future, there would be no larger aircraft than those that operate at the moment.

(f) You should close Runway 16/34 instead:

Answer: The meeting noted that statistical evidence showed that the right choice had been made.

(g) Plans to develop the Airport will blight my quality of life:

Answer: RAL noted that the airport had been in existence since 1933 with many residents coming in after that date. RAL confirmed that with a tarmac runway and aircraft climbing more quickly, in theory, the noise level should be reduced. KCC added that the tarmac runway will allow aircraft to climb more quickly, so the noise footprint will be reduced.

(h) The value of my house will be significantly reduced by the Airport development plans:

Answer: There was no evidence to suggest this as the airport already existed.

(j) The Council's plans to create skilled jobs are nonsense – it will never happen. The site will turn into another site occupied by plumbers and van couriers:

Answer: RAL said plumbers and van couriers would always be required. MBC believed that any growing business in the Innovation Centre would be able to move into larger more desirable premises.

(J) The Airport should be turned into a park with leisure facilities for the enjoyment of all Medway residents:

Answer: The protestors were no longer taking that line as they wanted the airport to remain as it is.

6. Airport Managers' Report

This had been circulated prior to the meeting.

KCC enquired if there was a way in which to measure noise levels at the airport. RAL had a decibel meter but did not keep a record of noise levels on any given day. It is something we were looking to do. RAL had made recordings of different aircraft on the airfield. KCC said that to have these recordings would allow the airfield to be ahead of the game. If circuits were switched from one runway to the other, would this automatically help alleviate noise? RAL said that circuits were generally carried out to the west of the airfield, as it was a less densely-populated area with fields, if there was a problem.

The Horsted Park Housing Estate had a 24 hour noise report carried out and the noise reported was not from the airport but from the road.

7. Aircraft Preservation Report

MAPSL announced the new MAPS CHAT publication as an experiment to keep the people in MAPS aware of what was going on. The MAPSL Chairman's Annual Report had mentioned many things about the Airport, about which many MAPS members had been unaware. The publication was to give them a quick update. Restoration work was being carried out on the Shorts Scion and funding was being sought for the missing parts.

Project Hector had been used to conceal the name Lysander, which will be the next MAPS project, probably arriving in September. The Royal Air Force Museum had just announced the Lysander, enabling the MAPS chaps to swap one Greek hero for another.

MAPS were relying on the development of Rochester Airport as, among other benefits, it will allow MAPS to take on more than one project at a time and take on more volunteers. It would also open the way for the MAPS vision, of an Aviation and Heritage Centre, to become a reality.

The MAPS CHAT publication could be found on the MAPS notice board.

8. Any Other Business

CPRE requested paper copies of the Minutes and any relevant documents. This was agreed

RAL wished to acknowledge the work of MBC Ward Councillors and TMBC in getting signs put on the Bridgewood roundabout. RAL had handed to KCC the paperwork on motorway (M2/M20) signage that KCC had kindly agreed to support and assist with.

9. Next Meeting

There being no further business, The Chairman thanked the members for their contributions and declared the meeting closed, sine die at 18:40.