

LAAG Update

Activity

Activity at the airport remains dominated by light aircraft and private leisure owner/operators as it has been for decades. In 2016 there were 509 passengers (assumed flights to Le Touquet) and although passenger numbers have improved this year (December figures are not available) the data so far indicates the level remains below 1000 passengers.

Progress – Lydd Airport Expansion

There appears to be very little progress. As we reported last year the airport has implemented sufficient work (in 2016) to ensure it can claim the runway has been extended from a planning perspective, but it has not been extended physically.

The S106 obligations have clearly not been fully discharged. Natural England has yet to sign off the air quality management strategy (AQMS) following a report produced by Parsons Brinkerhoff (the airport's air quality consultant) in April 2017. The last correspondence on this subject between Natural England and Parsons Brinkerhoff was in October 2017. The airport cannot operate the runway extension "*unless and until the AQMS has been approved by the Council and implemented by the airport Operator*". The Council can only approve the strategy after it has been signed off by Natural England.

As reported last year, HM Coastguard search and rescue (SAR) helicopter operation for the south east operated by Bristow Helicopters now has a permanent base at Lydd Airport.

What does Lydd Airport say?

Lydd Airport claims it remains "100% committed" to the runway extension with work hopefully starting in 2018 and completed during 2019. Issues apparently remain in relation to land which must be purchased from a local farmer before the runway extension can take place. In our opinion this issue would have been sorted out long ago had there been demand for Lydd Airport's new services

Gifts for Councillors

The police investigation into gifts given to councillors ahead of Shepway District Council's decision to approve Lydd Airport's planning application in 2010 remains on-going. Progress has been unacceptably slow and the long delay means valuable evidence is likely to be destroyed as banks and other institutions are only required to hold client information for a set number of years. As we pointed out in the 2016 update, the case was brought to the attention of the police by LAAG in early 2012 (before the government's decision to approve Lydd Airport's development in April 2013). The case was accepted as important and warranting investigation and a case officer assigned, but then, kicked into the long grass until 2014 when another party took the same evidence to the police and pressed for action.

To recap, the case in question arose from a 2011 High Court judgment (Neutral Citation Number: [2011] EWHC 354 (QB) - Case No: HQ09X00332) involving

litigation between the former Managing Director of London Ashford Airport Ltd (Lydd Airport), Zaher Nicola Jeries Deir (Mr Deir) and Fahad Bin Saleh Mohammed Al Athel (Sheikh Fahad al Athel) - the owner of Lydd Airport and associated companies.

There were a number of claims and counter claims by the respective parties in relation to Mr Deir seeking payment of unpaid directorship fees. The substance of the claims against Mr Deir included that he misused his company credit card and incurred excessive expenditure. Some of the items challenged were items that Mr Deir said constituted gifts to councillors. The judgment makes clear that there is evidence available and that the sums involved were material.

Consultative Committee

The government expects all airports to communicate openly with local communities about the impact of their operations. This is achieved through Consultative Committees. These Committees should take place at least three times a year and involve representatives from a wide range of community interests including councils and NGOs.

During the extended planning application phase Lydd Airport conformed to this obligation and held three meetings per year. Representatives were invited from the MOD, British Energy, parish, town and district councils and NGOs such as the RSPB, CPRE and LAAG.

Today, only councils are invited and all other bodies are actively excluded.

Happy New Year!

www.lyddairportaction.co.uk

December 27th, 2017