

Friends of the North Kent Marshes

‘Woodlands’

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17 May 2013

## **Discussion Paper 03: Aviation and Climate Change**

Response from Friends of the North Kent Marshes 17 May 2013

Friends of the North Kent Marshes is a voluntary group, formed in 2004 out of the No Airport at Cliffe Campaign Liaison Group, following the successful fight against the proposals for an airport at Cliffe. The North Kent Marshes stretch from Dartford in the west to Whitstable in the east and include the Hoo Peninsula, the River Thames, the River Medway, the Swale and Isle of Sheppey. They are some of the most unspoilt landscapes in Kent and are very rich in wildlife. Our aim is to promote the Marshes and the ways in which everyone can enjoy them. We work both with the local communities that live on and around the Marshes, and with groups such as the RSPB as they develop flagship visitor sites here. The area faces many threats as pressure for land and development in the southeast continues. We welcome the opportunity to make our voices heard in this important debate by taking part in this discussion about Aviation and Climate Change

### **Summary**

We are wholly opposed to the construction of an airport anywhere in the Thames Estuary because of the immense damage it would cause to the area's internationally important wildlife and the wider environment. The whole issue was exhaustively investigated in the run up to the publication of the previous Government's Aviation White Paper (2003). All the key players, including the aviation industry, contributed, and the idea of an airport in the Thames Estuary was ruled out. In addition to the unprecedented environmental damage and the resulting legal implications, the investigation found that an estuary airport did not make economic sense, would not meet the requirements of the aviation industry and presented a significantly higher (up to 12 times greater) risk of 'bird strike' than at any other major airport in the UK. It would potentially be the single biggest piece of environmental vandalism ever perpetrated in the UK. The Government would have to recreate any lost or damaged habitat elsewhere BEFORE work on the airport could start and even then only if they could prove there is no alternative site for the expansion and it is in the overriding public interest. They would face a legal battle, which could last for years. Recent statements and proposals by London Mayor Boris Johnson, Norman Foster and others in favour of an estuary airport, do nothing to alter these findings. The threats and risks remain the same. An airport in the

Thames Estuary is unrealistic due to the ecological, environmental and economic impacts it would cause. An estuary airport would destroy whole communities and adversely impact many others on both sides of the Thames estuary.

We do not support aviation expansion be it anywhere in the Thames Estuary, Lydd or elsewhere. We believe that the demand for flights should be managed and the current Government policy on airports should be revised away from the 'predict and provide' expansionist approach of the last decade that threatens the climate and important wildlife sites. There must be a moratorium on air travel expansion until it can be demonstrated that significant increases in emissions from air-travel can be accommodated within a UK cut of 80% in emissions by 2050, as enshrined in law by the Climate Change Act (2008). Without this, the scale of the cuts required in the rest of the UK economy to offset a continuing rise in aviation emissions would be potentially crippling. Instead, demand for flights should be managed by encouraging the use of lower carbon modes of transport and the removal of the substantial subsidies that the industry currently enjoys including tax-free fuel, and the absence of VAT on all aspects of aviation.

We do not believe that the case for extra capacity/new runways has been made and even if the Government ever came to the conclusion that it had, a Thames estuary airport should not be included as a viable option in any new Government strategy. Economically, environmentally and ecologically it would be a complete disaster plus it would be the most dangerous major airport in the UK due to the risk of bird-strike.

## **Aviation and Climate Change**

Climate change remains the greatest threat to mankind and biodiversity and we believe that there should be no further airport expansion. We do not support aviation expansion be it anywhere in the Thames Estuary, Lydd or elsewhere.

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The construction of a massive new airport in the Thames Estuary will have impacts that extend far outside the immediate area.

Emissions from aircraft are one of the fastest increasing sources of greenhouse gases. Unchecked, climate change may see up to a third of land-based species committed to extinction by regional climate change effects by 2050. The impacts of climate change on wildlife in the UK and abroad are already being felt. A report by DARA Climate Vulnerability Monitor 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition ( <http://daraint.org/climate-vulnerability-monitor/climate->

[vulnerability-monitor-2012/](#) ) estimates that climate change causes deaths on average each year today, of 400,000 people per annum and that together the carbon economy and climate change related losses cost the global economy \$1.2 trillion every year.

Emissions need to be slashed across all sectors if the 80 percent target is to be achieved, but emissions from aviation are rising rapidly – doubling between 1990 and 2000. Further airport expansion should be prevented until it can be demonstrated that significant increases in emissions from air-travel can be accommodated within a UK cut of 80% in emissions by 2050.

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The WWF ‘1 in 5 Challenge’ has had huge success in reducing business flights. While it is the case that business leaders need face to face contact, to forge new partnerships and trade, once those relationships are in place, demand for flights can be reduced significantly by the use of new technology. It is vital that the Committee understands the pace with which super fast broadband and new communication technologies and tools will impact upon future business demand for flights. There is real potential here to reduce business flights, saving firms time and money and to help to reduce aviation emissions.

Helping companies fly less - good for business, good for the planet.  
[http://www.wwf.org.uk/how\\_you\\_can\\_help/get\\_your\\_business\\_involved/one\\_in\\_five\\_challenge/](http://www.wwf.org.uk/how_you_can_help/get_your_business_involved/one_in_five_challenge/)

In a low-lying area like the Thames Estuary, the threat of climate change is particularly significant and it is foolhardy to consider building an airport that would only contribute to the underlying problem.

Successive governments have stressed the importance of sustainable development, particularly in the Thames Estuary. The recent announcement of the Greater Thames Marshes Nature Improvement Area suggests that the estuary is still seen as very important in environmental terms. Such importance would be disastrously undermined if the airport became a reality.

Future generations will never forgive us if we simply let wildlife and climate change slip through our fingers

Communities in North Kent have been here before and stood shoulder to shoulder with RSPB and many others as it fought its largest ever campaign against a proposal to site a new airport on Cliffe Marshes. The successful ‘No Airport at Cliffe campaign’ brought a greater awareness of the Thames Estuary & its marshes, why they are so special and why they are protected under local, national & international law. These proposals, which were part of a Government review of airport capacity in the South East, were eventually rejected. The review also considered the option of siting an airport in the Thames Estuary. These proposals were also rejected. A new hub airport anywhere in or around the Thames Estuary would potentially be the single biggest piece of environmental vandalism ever perpetrated in the UK.

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There is a strong sense of community among those that live alongside the marshes. We share the vision of the RSPB Greater Thames Futurescapes project and look forward to a sustainable future and a healthy environment where development happens to benefit wildlife and people.

**We strongly urge the Airports Commission not to include a new Thames estuary airport as a viable option in any new Government strategy and to rule out building a new hub airport anywhere in or around the Thames Estuary at the earliest opportunity.**

*Ours is the marsh country down by the river, within, as the river winds twenty miles of the sea and we will never give up the fight to protect our globally important wildlife sites, our natural and cultural heritage and our communities here in the Thames estuary.*

We thank you for reading our submission and trust that our grave concerns will be taken into account.

Yours faithfully

George Crozer, Joan Darwell, Gill Moore  
Friends of the North Kent Marshes

