

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Applications by London Ashford Airport Ltd

APP/L2250/V/10/2131934 & APP/L2250/V/10/2131936

Site at London Ashford Airport Limited, Lydd, Romney Marsh, TN29 9QL

CPRE/03/A – Landscape: Cultural Value of Romney Marsh's Tranquillity

Statement by Mr Nicholas Levinson

on behalf of Protect Kent (the Kent Branch of CPRE) on the landscape and tranquillity of Romney Marsh

- 1.1 My name is Nick Levinson and after retiring as a television producer for the BBC Open University, I moved back to Kent with my wife who is from these parts. Earlier in our lives we had grown to love Romney, so we were full of expectation when, five years ago, we chanced on a house for sale in the historic centre of Lydd. Ever since the move, our enthusiasm for such a beautiful, rich and diverse part of the world has grown.

2 LANDSCAPE OF ROMNEY MARSH

Valuing the Marshes

- 2.1 I shall refer to the place as the Marshes. In fact the area commonly known as Romney Marsh comprises the Romney Marsh proper, the Walland Marsh, Denge Marsh and The Guildeford Level. Any evaluation of this area and the effect that Lydd Airport ('the Airport') expansion would have on it must not only deal with these Marshes, but include the high ground around them that once formed the ancient shoreline including the parts of the High Weald and North Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).
- 2.2 On moving to Lydd, we were thrilled to discover the tranquillity of the Marshes with their amazingly rich bird and plant life. A methodology developed by the CPRE and accepted in Government reports, this part of Kent has been shown to be the most tranquil area in the South East of England (See Statement CPRE/02/A on tranquillity). But despite a large part of it being protected by national and European designated sites and zones, we became increasingly aware that its tranquillity and character are extremely vulnerable to inappropriate development. We found that despite major interventions in the last century

- two power stations, road widening and the urbanisation of the coast, the area has kept so much of its character and value, however, a large development such as that proposed by the applicants at would tip the balance and lead to the destruction of what are the real assets of the area.
- 2.3 We discovered an unusually unspoiled area of natural and man-made heritage. You can walk for miles on the wild stretches of shingle beach inhabited only by sea birds where land and sea merge in changing atmosphere. No wonder the painter W.M. Turner said you get more images to paint here in a day than in a week in the Alps. Or you can explore, inland, quiet winding lanes leading to small villages with splendid medieval churches - largely untampered with by the Victorian restorer. Full of diversity, the area boasts the historic towns of Rye, Lydd, Hythe as well as smaller settlements full of character and important architectural and historical heritage. The RSPB bird reserve is a magnet for nature lovers and has excellent facilities for visitors and local bird enthusiasts.
- 2.4 The landscape provides a setting for this rich and varied heritage, preserving ancient sheep pasture intersected by sinuous waterways that drain the Marshes. Old hawthorn hedges and wind-sculpted trees act as wind breaks screening farms and small villages. The landscape is by no means merely an historical curiosity, today it is the site of high quality agricultural activities, as well as the social life provided by attractive pubs, many serving good food and real ale. Farm shops and fishmongers sell excellent local products. The area is often referred to as 'a gift from the sea' and is important for its sea fishing as well as recreational beaches with their attendant holiday camps and caravan sites and popular entertainments.
- 2.5 Since the 1920s the one-third scale Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway runs steam trains between Hythe and Dungeness attracting many visitors.
- 2.6 Dungeness is a big attraction to visitors, artists, photographers, fishermen, walkers and consumers of sea food. It is a peculiar place, quite different from the lush inland pastures as it is composed of the largest shingle beach in Europe, a peninsular built-up over about six thousand years by the sea. Despite being one of the driest parts of the United Kingdom, it is a haven for wild flowers and birds. The Southern tip has a curious colony of black tarred fishermen's huts and winching equipment for hauling their boats up on the beach and the strange little dwellings, often incorporating old railway carriages, erected before the days of planning permission.
- 2.7 Romney Marsh was described in Richard Barham's *Ingoldsby Legends*¹ as: "The World, according to the best geographers, is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Romney Marsh" because of its apartness from other places. It is still appreciated as a special place by a wide range of people: its inhabitants, visiting walkers and cyclists, nature enthusiasts, historians and architectural buffs as well as the coast being popular with holiday-makers.

Cultural value of Romney Marsh

- 2.8 As well as its natural value, the Marshes have an important human and cultural history.

¹ Barham, R. (Thomas Ingoldsby Esq) (1882) *Ingoldsby Legends*, Richard Bentley and Son, London

Writers, artists and historians have celebrated the place and the Marshes continue to attract creative and artistic activities. Much of the landscape that writers and artists have evoked is recognisable today, and can be appreciated in this context. But its survival enjoyment for the future depends on its careful management and conservation, and would be threatened by inappropriate development. The Marshes' literary heritage is an important asset that should be preserved.

- 2.9 In the 16th century, William Camden called the Marshes 'A gift from the sea' in his topographical survey, *Britannia*². William Lambarde³ praised the rich grazing, but warned against the bad air as the Marsh was plagued by the 'Ague' a form of Malaria. In the early 19th century the Reverend Richard Barham, who lived at Snargate, put the area firmly on the literary map. He captured the strangeness of the place and its myths, indulging in fantasies about witches and smugglers in his immensely popular *Ingoldsby Legends*⁴. Rudyard Kipling's showed a great fascination and deep love of the Marshes expresses in his poetry and in *Puck of Pook's Hill*⁵ as well as stories such as *The Dymchurch Flit*. In the poem *The Gentlemen*, he evokes the Marsh's lawlessness and smuggling culture:

*If you wake at midnight and hear the horse's feet,
Don't go drawing back the blinds and looking down the street,
Them that asks no questions isn't told a lie.
Watch the wall, my darling, while the gentlemen go by.*

- 2.10 Henry James lived at Rye and Hillaire Belloc in East Sussex. H. G. Wells lived at Sandgate and set his novel *Kipps*⁶ in Folkestone and New Romney where the atmosphere of the Marsh is evoked to great effect. Dymchurch beach is prophetically the setting for the beginning of his *War in the Air*⁷. Two late 19th century novels, *Ermengarde* by Mrs Hadden Parkes⁸ and *Across the Marsh a tale of Kentish levels* by "C.R.S" set an interest in recreating Marsh life and atmosphere.

- 2.11 Shelia Kaye-Smith's hugely successful novel *Joanna Godden*⁹ is all about life on the Marsh before the First World War and was made into a film in the 1940s starring Googie Withers¹⁰. Kaye-Smith's stories and other works show a deep understanding of the

² Camden, W.(1607) *Britannia*

³ Lambarde, W. (1576) *Perambulation of Kent*

⁴ Barham, R. (Thomas Ingoldsby Esq) (1882) *Ingoldsby Legends*, Richard Bentley and Son, London

⁵ Kipling, R. (1906) *Puck of Pook's Hill*

⁶ Wells, H. G. (1905) *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul*

⁷ Wells, H. G. (1908) *The War in the Air*, George Bell and Sons

⁸ Parkes, H. (1893) *ERMENGARDE A story of Romney Marsh in the Thirteenth Century*

⁹ Kaye-Smith, S. (1926) *Joanna Godden Married and other Stories*

¹⁰ *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947), Ealing Studios

Marshes and surrounding areas in East Sussex. The children's writer E. Nesbit, author of *The Railway Children*, is associated with the marshes where she lived at the end of her life. Some of her stories and work was inspired by her love of the place.

- 2.12 Dymchurch hosts an annual *Day of Syn* to celebrate Russell Thorndyke's popular series of blood-soaked thrillers about the mythical clergyman Dr Syn who doubled as the terrifying Scarecrow leader of a Romney Marsh band of smugglers.
- 2.13 In 2005 the Poet Ben Kaye was commissioned to write *The Fifth Continent – A gift from the Sea* to be set to music by the composer Paul Patterson. Premiered in Southwark Cathedral, the work is one of the most performed pieces of contemporary classical music and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3. It has been performed to packed and enthusiastic audiences in both Lydd and new Romney parish churches.
- 2.14 Artists have been drawn to the Marsh. Turner painted the sea at Hythe and Rye. Paul Nash lived in Rye and Dymchurch, producing powerful stark images of the Marshes and coast. John Piper must have hugely publicised the Marsh with the publication in 1950 of his *Romney Marsh, illustrated and described by John Piper*¹¹ in the popular illustrated King Penguin series. Piper's paintings and drawings are internationally famous and continue to encourage people to visit the Marsh churches, but appreciation of this landscape, and the potential it could bring to green tourism, would be severely threatened by inappropriate development of the area.
- 2.15 Today the Romney Marsh and surrounding area attracts a numerous painters, sculptors, photographers and craftspeople, many coming to live at Dungeness and around the area. Just to mention a few, John Doyle is an artist who is celebrated for his painting of the Marshes and their historic buildings for half a century. The late John Ward settled in the area where he has done excellent and acclaimed work. Fred Cummins is a Royal Academician well known for his work on the coast and marshes with a passion for the area.
- 2.16 The Marsh has been an inspiration for photographers both professional and amateur. The Well-known photographer, Fay Godwin, illustrated the excellent book, *Romney Marsh and the Royal Military Canal*, by Richard Ingrams¹². Photographers are frequently to be seen at work at Dungeness, on the Marshes or at the RSPB Reserve.
- 2.17 The painter and film maker Derek Jarman bought a fisherman's house at Dungeness and the garden he designed – and wrote about – has become a much visited hub of artistic interest. The garden is an intriguing work of art that does something very special for the way we see the shingle peninsular of Dungeness. Jarman's brilliant combination of found objects with Dungeness plants open the visitor's eyes to the sculptural beauty surrounding him in the strange shapes of the decaying machinery and detritus left by fishermen on the vegetated shingle beach. His garden has become a magnet for visitors, many from abroad and Dungeness a paradise for photographers.

¹¹ Piper, J, (1950) *ROMNEY MARSH. Illustrated and described by John Piper*. Penguin Books, London

¹² Godwin, F. and R. Ingrams (1980) *Romney Marsh and the Royal Military Canal*, Wildwood House Ltd

Historical Heritage of Romney Marsh

- 2.18 History in its abstract form cannot be destroyed by airport expansion although material historical evidence can be lost or damaged by careless development. However the total human value of a geographical area such as the Marshes must contain an estimate of its historical worth as well as the surviving material evidence in the form of buildings, artefacts and landscapes. It is therefore understandable that an area rich in historical details and narratives should be protected for the future from unnecessary change. Inhabitants and visitors should be allowed to enjoy an historical landscape as much as a natural or cultural one. If the tranquillity of the settings of the Marsh Churches is lost, much of the experience of visiting the will be lost too. For example, a beautiful medieval church surrounded by arterial roads, like Sevington Church near Ashford, is both a cultural and human loss in our environment.
- 2.19 The area commonly known as the Romney Marsh comprises, the Walland, Guildeford and Denge Marshes as well as the ancient towns of Rye, Lydd and Hythe. This area extends about 25 miles along the coast and inland to a maximum depth of about 10 miles. In this area are 14 important medieval churches, at least 4 ruined ones and numerous ancient buildings. The archaeology of the Marshes is exceptionally rich and has been recorded since 1858 by the Kent Archaeological Society or *Archaeologica Cantiana*. Nationally, as well as locally, important research is also actively recorded and published by The Romney Marsh Research Trust. Their extensive publications cover the history of the Marshes from pre-historical times and their reclamation from the sea, the changing coastline and ancient towns and ports lost to the sea, detailed histories of Rye and other Cinque Ports, their military, commercial and social history. The archaeological value of the Marshes extends from prehistoric times to the recent history of the Marshes in World War Two with the 'Listening Ears'¹³ and 'Dumbo'¹⁴ historical monuments.
- 2.20 With changes that have taken place in our society, by the early 20th century many of the Romney Marsh Churches were falling into decay until rescued, in the second part of the last century, by the Romney Marsh Historical Trust. Not only have the churches' structures been secured by the funds so painstakingly raised by the Trust, but the beauty of their interiors and exteriors are there to educate and delight locals and visitors alike. The recent stunning restoration of New Romney church has been completed with their important contributions.

3 THE PROPOSAL: CONCERN ABOUT THE FUTURE.

- 3.1 An official referendum in May 2007 showed the majority of residents of Lydd and New Romney voting against airport expansion. It is clear from research and surveys which are

¹³ A precursor to radar – concrete dishes that concentrated sound so that incoming enemy aircraft could be heard much earlier.

¹⁴ 'Dumbo' was the codename given to a fuel pipeline laid across Romney Marsh and across the English Channel to France to supply the D-day landings. Its name is pun on the primary pipeline code named 'Pluto' (Pipe Line Under The Ocean).

being presented to this Inquiry by organisations including the RSPB, Natural England, CPRE and the Lydd Airport Action Group (LAAG) that an expanded airport would severely damage or destroy the highly valued elements that we, as residents, enjoy and wish to preserve for future generations.

- 3.2 As well as noise pollution, the development of infrastructure and accompanying industrial and commercial development that would accompany airport expansion is incompatible with the tranquillity of the Marshes and beaches. Such undesirable changes would prevent the potential development of sustainable green tourism that could be a direct economic benefit to the people living in the area. It must be preferable for cash to go into local pockets than profits – if there were any – to be taken out of the local economy by large national or international businesses. With the proposed airport expansion, the loss of jobs provided by tourism, and the lost opportunity for potential increase in employment by developing green tourism, would be extremely unlikely to be outweighed by jobs provided by airport expansion. The net result of the airport's expansion proposals would be economic, natural and cultural impoverishment.

A heritage to preserve or sacrifice?

- 3.3 People who oppose airport development have been decried as NIMBYs and derided as privileged retired people who are not concerned with the need for local employment and who selfishly want to protect their privileged way of life against the need for economic development and employment. As mentioned just now the economic promise is an illusion – and this will be dealt with in more detail by other submissions at this Inquiry. As for NIMBY-ism, it is natural that local people will take the front line in protecting their 'back yards.' The crucial test is whether they are doing it for narrow selfish interests or for the public good. In the case of opposing Lydd airport's expansion plans, it is clear that this opposition is motivated by wanting to preserve the assets of the area not only for the present generation, but for future generations.
- 3.4 If it comes to the worst, NIMBYs, we can sell up and leave, but the birds and plant life that form a vulnerable ecosystem cannot re-locate, they would be lost forever. The value of this extraordinary area must be conserved and protected for future generations – generations that will increasingly need areas of tranquillity and natural abundance to make sense of increasing pressures on life and its natural resources.
- 3.5 The noise, pollution and urbanism that would accompany airport expansion would spoil enjoyment of these valuable assets that form an essential element in the Marsh landscape. Along with irreparable damage to bird and plant life, to the natural, manmade and cultural environment, this loss would detract from encouraging a sustainable development of green tourism to benefit the local economy.

4 CONCLUSION: THE MARSH SEEN AS AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT OR PRESERVATION?

- 4.1 There are a large number of people who want to protect the Marshes. Opposing airport expansion are the RSPB with its 1 million members, The CPRE with its 60,000 members, LAAG with nearly 2,000 and many other people nationwide would loathe seeing the

Marsh's character destroyed. Sadly, despite this, there exists a narrow-sighted view that the Marsh is an empty area ripe for development. They fail to understand that the remaining emptiness and tranquillity of the Marsh is its greatest asset for the future. Sadly the 'emptiness' is now severely challenged and development competes for this valuable space. There are two power stations, an extensive wind farm and the existing small airport. If the airport development with its necessary infrastructure were to be allowed, there would be little of the Marsh's real assets left and not much to distinguish it from areas that have fallen victim to the 21st century's built-over and over-built developments.