

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/B – 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

SUMMARY

- 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.
- 1.2 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).
- 1.3 Romney Marsh is an unusually unspoiled area of natural and man-made heritage. For hundreds of years the marsh has been a source of inspiration to writers, artists, poets and, more recently, filmmakers.
- 1.4 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. Since the 1920s the one-third scale Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway runs steam trains between Hythe and Dungeness attracting many visitors.

- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 Romney Marsh was described in Richard Barham's *Ingoldsby Legends* 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.
- 1.7 As well as its natural value, the Marshes have an important human and cultural history. 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 for the 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.
- 1.8 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. The Marsh has been an inspiration for photographers both professional and amateur.
- 1.9 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. His garden has become a magnet for visitors, many from abroad and Dungeness a paradise for photographers.
- 1.10 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, for example, is lost, much of the experience of visiting the will be lost too.
- 1.11 The marsh area contains 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*. The archaeological value of the Marshes extends from prehistoric times to the recent history of the Marshes in World War Two.

- 1.12 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 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.
- 1.13 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.
- 1.14 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.
- 1.15 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.
- 1.16 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.