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BY E-MAIL

5 October 2005

Dear Mr Ellames

Revised scoping opinion for new terminal and runway extension at Lydd Airport

Thank you for consulting the RSPB on the revised Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping report for expansion at Lydd Airport.

The RSPB's detailed comments are set out in an annex to this letter, but in summary, the RSPB is concerned that the scope of the EIA is not sufficient to enable an assessment of the full impacts of the proposed expansion. In particular, we are concerned that the filling in of the internationally designated great crested newt pond for safety reasons is excluded from the assessment, and that the full infrastructure needs associated with 0.5 or 2 million passengers per annum (ppa) will not be assessed. It is vital that the full implications of the development are assessed given that outline planning permission is being sought for a terminal to support 2 million ppa, even though expansion to this level will not be possible without further infrastructure applications.

The RSPB notes that Lydd Airport has recently updated its masterplan. We would be very grateful for a copy of this document, which may clarify the need for the 294m runway extension, plus an additional 150m extension (total 444m?), and the associated infrastructure needed.

The RSPB is also concerned that the scope of the wintering bird survey will not be sufficient to enable an assessment of the impacts of the development on the internationally designated bird populations.

I hope you find the information in this submission useful. Please get in touch if you would like any further information.

Yours sincerely

Alison Giacomelli
Conservation Officer

cc. Emily Spearman, Parsons Brinckerhoff
Jo Dear, English Nature

Revised scoping opinion in connection with a new terminal and runway extension at Lydd Airport

Comments from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

5 October 2005

Introduction

1. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (**the RSPB**) was set up in 1889. It is a registered charity incorporated by Royal Charter and is Europe's largest wildlife conservation organisation, with a membership of over 1 million. The RSPB manages 190 nature reserves in the UK covering an area of over 129,337 hectares.
2. The principal objective of the RSPB is the conservation of wild birds and their habitats. The RSPB therefore attaches great importance to all international, EU and national law, policy and guidance that assist in the attainment of this objective. The RSPB campaigns throughout the UK and in international fora for the development, strengthening and enforcement of such law and policy. In so doing, it also plays an active role in the domestic processes by which development proposals are scrutinised and considered, offering ornithological and other wider environmental expertise in particular in the public inquiry context.
3. The RSPB has a keen interest in development at Lydd Airport. The area is highly important for its wildlife and geology, and has attracted a number of national and international designations to protect these interests. Expansion at Lydd Airport will directly and indirectly affect these wildlife sites in a number of ways. The runway extension will mean direct loss of part of the Dungeness Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated under the EU Habitats Directive. Potential indirect impacts include the risk of bird strike, disturbance to internationally important bird populations from increased road and air traffic and from bird strike hazard management measures, and air pollution.
4. The RSPB Dungeness nature reserve is situated near to the airport. The reserve is around 900 hectares and supports internationally important SAC shingle habitat and wetlands designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EU Birds Directive. As well as being important for wildlife, the reserve is an important visitor and educational resource, attracting over 27,000 visitors annually.

Comments on the revised scoping document

Section 3 – Proposed project description

5. The RSPB is extremely concerned that the full implications of airport expansion will not be addressed by the EIA. The project description only addresses the new terminal and runway extension. There is no mention of the fact that the Civil Aviation Authority has stated that a pond next to the runway may need to be filled in for safety reasons. The pond is designated as a SAC for great crested newt so the cumulative effects of this loss plus the loss of SAC great crested newt habitat due to the runway extension need to be assessed under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (the Habitats Regulations). If this does not happen it will seriously compromise Shepway District Council's ability to determine the impact of the development on the integrity of the SAC under the Habitats Regulations, and so will be a serious omission by the airport management.
6. Similarly, though mentioned as part of the Traffic Assessment, the need for new carparking facilities is not part of the proposed planning applications and so not covered by the EIA. This is despite the fact that expansion to the number of passengers per annum proposed will not be possible without it. I note in paragraph 3.1.7, the Masterplan for the airport has recently been updated, but the RSPB has not seen this copy. However, the previous version showed a new car park on top of part of North Lade Site of Special

Scientific Interest (SSSI), which would effectively destroy that part of the SSSI. Although the site of the new car park has clearly not yet been decided upon, the airport is surrounded by environmental designations. It would be a poor outcome for all parties if the runway extension were allowed, but then expansion of the airport was not possible due to the fact that adequate car parking (or other vital infrastructure) could not be provided because of the environmental designations surrounding the site. Therefore, it is vital that the EIA show whether expansion is possible within the environmental constraints the airport is bound by, and shows the full extent of the implications of expansion.

7. Paragraph 3.2.4, which describes the project location, makes a number of errors about the environmental designations in the area. The Dungeness SSSI and North Lade SSSI surround the airport, covering areas to the north, south, east and west. The two international designations, the SAC and SPA, should be mentioned in this paragraph. It should also be clarified that the Ramsar site only proposed, not yet designated.

Section 4 – Ground Conditions

8. Paragraph 4.1.2 states that further areas near the site are proposed for inclusion in the SSSI because of buried geomorphology. Figure 4.1 looks like it shows the existing SSSIs, so it is not clear what additional areas are proposed for SSSI extensions.

Section 7 – Ecology and Nature Conservation

9. The RSPB is concerned that section 7 makes no mention of providing information to enable Shepway District Council to determine whether there will be an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC or SPA under Regulation 48 of the Habitats Regulations. Determination of impact under the Habitats Regulations is more detailed than the EIA Regulations and therefore requires a more thorough assessment.

Scope of the bird survey

10. The RSPB has a number of concerns about the extent of the bird surveys set out in the revised scoping report. Following meetings with Parsons Brinckerhoff in January 2005, the RSPB and English Nature advised that two years of wintering bird surveys were necessary to give an accurate picture of important areas for birds. This is because there can be between year variations in bird numbers and locations, particularly due to rotations in cropping patterns. These variations in locations of birds in the area were demonstrated at the Little Cheyne Court wind farm public inquiry. It is the RSPB's opinion that the 3 visits made to survey wintering birds in February and March 2005 do not constitute one winter's survey data because a full wintering survey would be carried out once a month from October to March.
11. Figure 7.1 shows an adequate survey area for the land to the north of the airport. However, there is a large area of land to the south of the airport that is not shown on this figure, but which is important for birds. The RSPB has discussed the scope of the wintering bird survey with the bird surveyor contracted by Parsons Brinckerhoff. We advised that the urban areas could be omitted from the survey area, as internationally important bird populations will not be found in these areas. We also agreed that if sufficient data were already available for the designated sites, these could also be omitted from the survey area. However, I would like to reiterate that although the RSPB monitors birds on its nature reserve, it is not responsible for providing that data in a format, structure or to a timetable that is necessarily compatible with the data collected for the EIA. Even if the designated sites are omitted from the survey area, there is an area of Denge Marsh to the south west of the airport that is undesignated but not shown on figure 7.1. This part of the marsh must be included in the bird surveys as it is likely to be subject to the most disturbance from aircraft as it is under the flight path.
12. The wintering birds survey should consist of a Wetland Bird Survey type of count. One survey visit should be made per month from October to March. Vantage points should be used to make accurate counts of all the wildfowl, waders and gulls using the land within a 2 mile radius of the airport.

13. Paragraph 7.2.14 states that the BTO's Common Birds Census methodology was used for the breeding bird survey. However, this methodology requires 10 visits from March to July to accurately map territories, rather than the four visits that have been carried out.
14. The RSPB is concerned that flight lines of birds will not be picked up by the wintering and breeding surveys, which record bird numbers and locations, but not movements. Flight lines are particularly important to determine due to the risk of bird strike. The RSPB has informed Parsons Brinckerhoff of movements of Bewick's swan (an SPA feature) from the RSPB reserve over the airport to feed on Romney Marsh. There are also movements of geese from Lade Pit to Romney Marsh. All these birds would pose a significant threat of birds strike and so steps must be taken to quantify that threat to safety. The RSPB suggests that either radar or vantage point surveys by a bird surveyor would be advisable to assess bird movements during the wintering and passage periods. The advantage of using radar technology is that bird movements can be recorded continuously so that an accurate picture of movements is gathered. It is important to survey at night as certain species, such as golden plover, do feed at night and may pose a risk of bird strike. The drawback to using radar is that it cannot distinguish between species of bird, only size. Therefore, it still needs to be supplemented by field surveys. However, size, rather than species, is the most important factor for assessing risk of damage due to bird strike. Use of radar would also have the added advantage of enabling an assessment of the impact of airport expansion on migratory birds. Dungeness is famous for its studies of bird migration as it is a favoured point for birds making landfall after crossing the English Channel. Though birds migrate on a fairly broad front, it would be very useful to know how many of these birds would pass through the aircraft flight paths, and so be at risk of bird strike.

Section 10 – Traffic

15. The first bullet point under paragraph 10.4.2 states that the potential market catchment for the airport will be identified on the basis of 300,000 and 2 million passengers per annum (ppa). The RSPB assumes that this is an error as the scope is now for 0.5 and 2 million ppa.

Section 11 – Air quality

16. It should be noted that deterioration in air quality has the potential to impact on sensitive plant communities surrounding the airport. These include the SAC qualifying feature of annual vegetation of drift lines (vegetated shingle) and the Dungeness SSSI lichen communities. Paragraph 11.3.3 states that sensitive ecosystems include Dungeness to Pett Level SPA. However, it is unlikely that the bird populations for which the SPA is designated will be significantly affected by air pollution, unless the changes to vegetation result in severe changes to the food chain.

Section 12 – Noise and vibration

17. Paragraph 12.1.6 states that certain non-residential sites will also be identified as receptors of noise. The RSPB suggests that the Dungeness to Pett Level SPA is a sensitive receptor as the internationally important bird populations are sensitive to disturbance.
18. It appears that section 12 is only referring to noise from aircraft. However, it is important that the noise from the increased road traffic associated with expansion is also assessed in terms of impact on people and disturbance to internationally important bird populations.

For more information on this submission, please contact:

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