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Dear Paul,

BOLD STEPS FOR AVIATION: DISCUSSION DOCUMENT (KCC)

Thank you for your letter of 25 May 2012 regarding 'Bold Steps for Aviation'. It is noted that the document is identified as a discussion paper. However, little detail is provided in the document or covering letter on consultation arrangements and no indication is given of whether there is any scope for the document to be amended in the light of the views of other stakeholders. Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) seeks clarification on this point. It is noted that the document sets out very clear recommendations to Government. This appears to be premature in a discussion paper on which KCC is inviting views from stakeholders and communities.

SDC recently responded to the consultation on the Gatwick Airport Masterplan. It noted that the airport plays a key role in the South East economy but identified the Council's primary concerns as being the impact that growth of passenger throughput will have on noise levels and annoyance in the southern part of Sevenoaks District, near Edenbridge, and the impact of more passengers travelling by car to the airport from Kent. The SDC response also suggested that a full assessment of all options to increase capacity for international travel in the South East should be undertaken to ensure that the most socially and environmentally acceptable option is progressed. It was suggested that this assessment needs to be undertaken by Government and should inform a National Planning Statement, following consultation.

SDC believes that it is premature for Kent County Council to identify the development of a second runway at Gatwick as part of its preferred option, prior to a detailed assessment of the impacts of all of the reasonable options. Given that the document identifies that a further runway at Heathrow is a potential option (section 4.1), SDC would like to understand why KCC has chosen to express its support for expansion of Gatwick over this in its recommendations. Nevertheless SDC welcomes the suggestion that options at Heathrow should not be ruled out at this stage.

Notwithstanding the social and environmental issues, in developing proposals for increasing runway capacity in the south east it will be necessary to consider the willingness of the airlines, especially long haul carriers and those which may continue to develop to serve emerging markets, to predominately operate out of any airport other than Heathrow. The assertion on p9 of the 'Bold Steps for Aviation' document that it has been 'shown that nine of the ten major airlines currently based at Heathrow do not want to move' gives an indication of what a significant issue this may prove to be. Whether operators would be willing to locate at Gatwick, even with a high speed rail connection to Heathrow, is an issue that is not addressed in the document.

SDC supports improved rail connections between Tonbridge and Gatwick (via Edenbridge) and has recently endorsed 'The Future of Rail in the South East: A Joint Vision Statement', produced by the Gatwick Airport Operator. The proposal for improved connections between Ashford and Gatwick using existing lines, as set out in section 4.2.1 and figure 1 (which shows the connection continuing to Manston), are therefore supported subject to stops at Tonbridge and Edenbridge being included in the proposals. Given this desire to see rail access to Gatwick improved, the existing and forecast overcrowding on trains operating on the Brighton Mainline (identified in the Sussex RUS) and the congestion that is regularly experienced on the M25 (including between junctions 5 and 7), SDC questions KCC's assertion that road and rail access to Gatwick is good (p17).

Yours sincerely

Jill Davison
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