



Aviation: Mayor of London's proposals for a Thames estuary airport, 2008-

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This note deals **only** with the proposals put forward by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson for a new hub airport located on an artificial island in the Thames estuary. For information on the historical background to the idea of building a new airport at or in the Thames estuary, as well as the current proposals for the Marinair site, see [SN4920](#).

For many years there has been an ongoing debate about the amount of capacity needed to meet future air travel demand in the UK – and in particular in the South East of England, near London. While many short term solutions have been proposed to increase capacity, in the longer term more runway space will be required if one accepts the economic case for aviation growth. A third runway at Heathrow and second runways at Stansted and Gatwick would increase capacity at existing airports, but proposals for all of these sites have met with fierce resistance from local communities and environmental campaigners.

In light of this, the idea of building a completely new airport at or in the Thames estuary has been gaining traction. The most notable proponent of such an idea is the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. Since 2008 he has proposed and promoted the idea of a new hub airport located on an artificial island in the Thames estuary. Dubbed 'Boris Island' by the press, the idea has been repeatedly rebuffed by governments in the past and by the Coalition Government in its first 18 months. However, a more conciliatory tone has been adopted recently and it is likely to be one of the options examined in the government's consultation on future expansion of air capacity in the South East, publication of which has been delayed until autumn 2012.

Information on the other airports in the South East and London can be found in HC Library Note [SN2893](#); and there are separate notes on London Heathrow, [SN1136](#) and airports in the UK outside of the South East and London, [SN323](#). These and other briefings on aviation can be found on the [Aviation Topical Page](#) of the Parliament website.

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1 Responsibilities for aviation strategy and planning decisions

The Department for Transport (DfT) is the lead government department on aviation matters, though environmental issues, particularly noise, are issues of concern for Defra and the European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is the responsibility of DECC.

Although Heathrow and London City Airport are the only commercial passenger airports located within the Greater London Authority (GLA) boundary, London authorities have regularly contributed to discussions about airport capacity across the whole of the South East of England. For example, the Greater London Council (GLC) gave evidence to the 1968-71 Roskill Commission, favouring Foulness in Essex as the location for a Third London Airport.¹ Later, it supported the Maplin Sands proposal and recommended its revival in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

Under the [Greater London Authority Act 1999](#), as amended, the Mayor of London is responsible for developing the GLA's strategies for transport, planning and the environment in London and has a range of powers to implement them. The Mayor also approves strategies for economic development and culture. The Mayor is required to ensure that these strategies take each other into account.

Ultimately, it is likely to be the Secretary of State for Transport who would decide whether or not to grant planning permission for an airport in the Thames estuary. Although planning is managed by local authorities, in the case of major infrastructure projects, such as new airports, these are now decided via a process introduced by the Labour Government in 2008 and amended by the Coalition Government in 2011. This involves an examination in public,

¹ GLC wants Foulness as airport", *The Times*, 6 August 1970

replacing what used to be the public inquiry stage. The whole process is designed to reduce the total time taken to reach a decision on this type of project.²

2 Government views on a Thames estuary airport, 2003-

In 2003 the previous Labour Government published a White Paper on aviation, which stood as its main policy in this area until it left office in May 2010. This rejected the idea of constructing a second 'hub' airport in the south east (Heathrow being the first). The government had sought views in the preceding consultation about the value to the UK of having one or more major hub airports in the South East.³ The consultation found very little support for the concept of a second or alternative hub to Heathrow, which most felt was "impractical and would carry high risks". Indeed, many airlines stated that an alternative South East hub would work only if Heathrow were to close. In recognising the value to the UK of Heathrow's status as an international hub airport, the government rejected the case for attempting to create a second hub airport in the South East, "whether or not additional capacity is created at Heathrow".⁴ It also rejected proposals for the development of Goodwin Sands; London Oxford; Marinair; Redhill; Sheppey; and Thames Reach.⁵

The idea of a new hub airport in the Thames estuary did not receive support from the leadership of any of the three main parties represented in the House of Commons before the 2010 General Election, although it was welcomed by the UK Independence Party.⁶

In January 2009 an All-Party Parliamentary Group was established to "promote consideration of a new airport in the Thames Estuary and its potential to meet airport capacity requirements for London and the South-East of England in the most environmentally acceptable way". Press reports suggested that the Group would be re-convened after the 2010 General Election,⁷ but as at 25 July 2012 this APPG is not listed in the [Register of All-Party Groups](#).

The Coalition Government stated in its Coalition Agreement that it "will cancel the third runway at Heathrow [and] refuse permission for additional runways at Gatwick and Stansted".⁸ Before the election, both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats made promises on future airport expansion in the South East. The Conservative Manifesto for the 2010 election contained the same commitment as in the Coalition Agreement to stop the third runway at Heathrow and to "block plans for second runways at Stansted and Gatwick".⁹ The Liberal Democrat Manifesto gave a similar pledge that the Party would "cancel plans for a third runway at Heathrow and other airport expansion in the South East".¹⁰

The government has repeatedly stated that it "has not made any recent assessment of the merits of a new airport in the Thames Estuary. This is not an option the Government are

² further information on the process can be found on the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#) [accessed 25 July 2012]

³ DfT, [The Future Development of Air Transport in the UK: South East, Second edition](#), February 2003

⁴ DfT, [The Future of Air Transport](#), Cm 6046, December 2003, paras 11.12-11.17

⁵ *ibid.*, paras 11.106-11.119; those schemes which proposed developing an airport in the Thames Estuary are considered in further detail in HC Library note [HSN4920](#)

⁶ UKIP press notice, "UKIP backs 'Boris Island' over Cameron", 29 January 2010

⁷ e.g. "HMPs sign up to back Thames airport on 'Boris Island'", *London Evening Standard*, 1 July 2010

⁸ HMG, [The Coalition: Our Programme for Government](#), May 2010

⁹ Conservative Party, [Invitation to join the Government of Britain: the Conservative manifesto 2010](#), April 2010, p23

¹⁰ Liberal Democrats, [Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010](#), April 2010, p42

considering” and that it “[does] not support any proposed airport in Kent or the Medway”.¹¹ However, more recent reports suggest that the government may be, if not warming, then at least thawing, to the idea. For example, at the Airport Operators Association conference in October 2011, the Secretary of State for Transport, Justine Greening, was asked about proposals to increase aviation capacity in the South East. She left open the possibility that an airport in the estuary could be part of the agenda: “There are a number of different proposals that we have to look at. I have no doubt that he will want to raise it with me”.¹²

A report in the *Financial Times* on 19 November stated that that plans for an estuary airport had “won political backing in Downing Street and the Treasury”, with particular backing coming from then policy chief Steve Hilton.¹³ A contradictory report published in *The Times* two days later stated that ministers had ruled out making any decision on calls for a new hub airport in the Thames Estuary until at least the middle of 2012, and even then, “they are unlikely to back the idea because of huge ‘practical difficulties’ that they do not think can be overcome”.¹⁴ Further reports in January 2012 indicated that the Prime Minister “will be supportive of the proposed airport but will make a final decision on the basis of the consultation process” [now delayed until the autumn] and that the Deputy Prime Minister “is said to have an ‘open mind’ over the proposal but is keen to consider the views of environmental campaigners and residents”.¹⁵

In July 2012 the government published its draft aviation policy framework; this is largely a collection of technical changes that could be made to airports to increase capacity, improve efficiency and ensure that aviation growth in the UK is sustainable in terms of noise and environmental pollution. A consultation on future expansion of air capacity in the South East has been delayed until autumn 2012. This will almost certainly involve consideration of a new airport in the Thames estuary as one of the possible options to increase capacity.¹⁶

Labour opposes a Thames estuary airport. The Shadow Transport Secretary Maria Eagle wrote to the Labour Leader of Medway Council in July 2012 stating that it is “the Labour Party’s clear position of opposing any proposed Thames estuary airport” and that she would “ensure that I use my ... speaking engagements at [the Labour] conference to clearly restate our opposition to a Thames estuary airport”.¹⁷

3 A Thames estuary airport: Mayor Johnson’s proposals, 2008-

3.1 Initial ideas, 2008-09

Boris Johnson was not the first London mayor to float the idea of a Thames estuary airport: in 2002, press reports suggested that the then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, was interested in the possibility of developing such an airport.¹⁸ However, Mayor Livingstone ruled this out in a meeting of the GLA’s Planning and Spatial Development Committee on 17 September 2002.¹⁹

¹¹ HHC Deb 19 July 2010, c17WH; and: HHL Deb 16 March 2011, c233

¹² “HGovernment won’t rule out plans for Boris Island airport in Thames EstuaryH”, *Kent Messenger*, 31 October 2011

¹³ “Thames estuary airport plan wins Downing St and Treasury support”, *Financial Times*, 19 November 2011

¹⁴ “Ministers refuse to back plan for airport”, *The Times*, 21 November 2011

¹⁵ “Cameron paves the way for a new London airport”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 January 2012

¹⁶ DfT, H*Draft Aviation Policy Framework*H, July 2012

¹⁷ *Letter from Shadow Transport Secretary Maria Eagle MP to Medway Labour*, 10 July 2012

¹⁸ “Livingstone resurrects plan for £30bn floating airport on Thames”, *The Independent*, 3 August 2002

¹⁹ GLA, H*Greater London Authority Planning and Spatial Development Committee: 17 September 2002*H, Appendix

In early 2008, the Conservative candidate for Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, raised the idea of an estuarial airport as an alternative to the further expansion at Heathrow:

Boris Johnson, the Tories' London mayoral candidate, announced this weekend that Heathrow was a 'planning error' and ministers should consider phasing it out [...] Johnson is calling on the government to re-examine plans for a new airport on artificial islands in the Thames estuary, where planes could take off and land round the clock without disrupting residents [...] "What we don't want to do is entrench a planning error of the 1960s by further expansion at Heathrow. We should look at whether there's a solution to the east, in the Thames estuary" [he said].²⁰

Following his election in May 2008, Mayor Johnson commissioned an in-house desk-top review into the possible siting of an airport in the estuary. The review came to a provisional decision that such an airport would be feasible. The Mayor then established a study group led by the consulting engineer Douglas Oakervee (who had been project manager during the construction of Hong Kong International Airport in the 1990s) to produce a preliminary feasibility report on the practicalities of building an international hub airport with the capacity to accommodate up to six runways and operate 24 hours a day.

In November 2008 Mayor Johnson published a consultation document as a precursor to the formal consultation on his transport strategy. This stated:

We all know that Heathrow is in the wrong place, and no Mayor could accept the greatly increased noise and pollution resulting from a third runway. That is why I have asked GLA and TfL officials to produce an initial report into an island airport in the Thames estuary; and if they think it could work, then I will commission a full-blown feasibility study into an idea already gaining strong support in Parliament and among the public.²¹

At a meeting with the leaders of a number of local authorities in the South East of England in the same month, the Mayor said that while he was not prepared to countenance a new runway at Heathrow, he recognised the need for expansion in airport capacity in the region. It was not his intention to close Heathrow; or to 'wreck' parts of Kent with a massive new airport; rather he wanted to explore other alternatives, including a new airport in the Thames estuary. The minutes of the meeting stated that the forum was 'in broad agreement' that London should investigate an estuarial airport.²²

In January 2009 Mayor Johnson paid a visit to the Thames estuary on a dredger in search of possible locations for the airport and said that the trip had reinforced his belief that an estuary airport should be considered as an option in order to meet London's long-term aviation needs.²³

²⁰ "Boris airs plan for Heathrow-on-Sea", *The Sunday Times*, 10 February 2008

²¹ Mayor of London, *Way to go!*, November 2008, p27

²² *Minutes of the Meeting of the Advisory Forum on Regional Planning for London, the South East and the East of England*, 13 November 2008

²³ "Plane sailing for Boris as Mayor visits Thames estuary in search of new airport site", *Daily Mail*, 24 January 2009; speaking at the Stansted Planning inquiry in 1982, Mr Eldon Griffiths MP recalled visiting Maplin Sands on a cockleshell boat with Sir Frank Marshall, then Chairman of the Maplin Development Corporation, "where we stuck a flag on the sandbank there and we looked at it and that was the place that we believed within ten years would see a modern runway of great pride to Britain" [DfT, *Building a new airport at Maplin: FOI response*, 26 August 2008]

3.2 Oakervee Report, October 2009

Douglas Oakervee, a civil engineer who had been Project Director responsible for the construction of a new artificial island airport for Hong Kong, was appointed by the Mayor in November 2008 to lead the GLA's preliminary feasibility study. He was asked to advise the Mayor on whether to establish a full scale appraisal of the Thames estuary airport option. The report was delivered to the Mayor in August 2009 and was published on the website of the [Thames Estuary Research and Development Company](#) on 19 October 2009.²⁴

The report provided a brief review of the issue rather than an in-depth study. It recommended that a further series of detailed studies and proper consultation should be undertaken. It also stated that the feasibility of developing a new airport in the estuary should be considered as part of wider development and environmental issues in the Thames estuary/Thames Gateway region. Rather than looking at a new airport in isolation, Oakervee recommended that a holistic approach should be adopted. He specified the following elements:

- Climate change/protection of people and property on the Thames floodplain (an outer estuary barrier could be constructed encompassing tidal energy generation);
- Tidal energy generation;
- Transport links;
- Regeneration; and
- Protection of ecology/wildlife.

Oakervee noted a series of potential difficulties including the impact on the environment and obstructions such as the wreck of the [SS Richard Montgomery](#), but said that he saw 'no overwhelming constraints' to the development of a two runway airport (capable of incremental extension to four runways) in the estuary.

The report envisaged a new airport in addition to, rather than as a replacement for, existing London airports.²⁵ The report said an airport in the Thames estuary could be open by 2029 when London airport capacity is projected to be exhausted. The report emphasised the danger and nuisance to residents living under the flight paths of existing London airports, particularly Heathrow, and noted the potential benefits of creating a new airport away from major built up areas. Introducing a new airport in the estuary would not provide immediate relief to these people as Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted would continue to operate. Unlike these airports however, an estuary airport could increase its runways in the future with less damage to local residents.

The report was not able to say when, how or exactly where such an airport should be built, although the most likely location would be in the outer estuary approximately 7-10km north-east of Whitstable. It stated that in order to determine the most appropriate location a series of further studies would need to be undertaken.

Despite press reports describing it as a 'floating airport', the report proposed that the estuary airport should be built on an artificial island (similar to existing offshore airports in Japan) rather than on a floating platform. For a two-runway airport, the platform would be

²⁴ Oakervee, H [Thames estuary airport feasibility review](#) H, October 2009

²⁵ based on forecast demand by the Department for Transport; a discussion of aviation demand figures is set out in section IV of HC Library research paper [HRP09/11](#)

approximately 4,800 metres long x 1,800 metres wide and would be around seven metres above mean high tide level. The material for the platform could come from construction waste generated in the south east and, potentially, also from waste material which would otherwise go to landfill sites or incinerators. Additional material would be needed to provide protection against wave action and ensure stability.²⁶

The cost of building a two-runway airport, plus transport links, was estimated at £40 billion, although the report suggested that this figure could be reduced. In response to a question from Caroline Pidgeon MLA in February 2011, the Mayor stated that:

There are no estimates of cost; nor can there be until the site of the new airport is settled since much of the cost will be in infrastructure required to provide appropriate surface access.²⁷

The Oakervee report focused on engineering issues and so did not address the issue of who would pay for a new airport. However, earlier in October 2009, Deputy Mayor Kit Malthouse was quoted as saying that the mayor had received “an incredible amount of interest from countries such as Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, which have signalled they would like to fund the airport. It is possible we could build it without taxpayers' money”.²⁸

No further information about the nature of this overseas funding has emerged. Other promoters of Thames estuary airports have also said that funding would be available from abroad. For example, in 2003 representatives from the Thames Estuary Airport Company/Marinair scheme told the House of Commons Transport Select Committee that they had backing from foreign investors and that their scheme would ‘not cost the taxpayer a penny’. However, banking confidentiality prevented Marinair from revealing further details about their backers.²⁹ Promoters of other estuary airport schemes have remained similarly reluctant to provide details about their backers.

The report also published a hypothetical timescale for building a new airport, based on an opening date in 2029. The timescale allotted nine years for construction – shorter than the proposed period for consultation, legislation and securing planning consent.³⁰

3.3 Thames Estuary Steering Group scoping report, 2011

In October 2009, the Mayor established the [Thames Estuary Steering Group](#), chaired by the Labour Government’s former Chief Scientific Adviser Sir David King, to:

... oversee further consideration of and studies on the use of the Thames Estuary following the completion of a technical review on the feasibility of building and operating an International Hub Airport within the Thames Estuary. Issues such as climate change, flood management, renewable energy, environment and ecology, regeneration, shipping, road and rail links, and aviation will need to be properly considered when determining any future use of the Thames Estuary.³¹

The Group was allocated £1,000 per annum, plus administrative support, from the GLA budget.

²⁶ op cit., H [Thames estuary airport feasibility review](#) H, pp55-58

²⁷ H [Mayor's Question Time, 23 February 2011, Q0592/2011](#)

²⁸ “H [Sheikhs to fund 'Boris island' airport in the Thames estuary](#) H”, *London Evening Standard*, 7 October 2009

²⁹ Transport Committee, H [Aviation](#) H (sixth report of session 2002-03), HC 454, 17 July 2003, Qq1175-77

³⁰ op cit., H [Thames estuary airport feasibility review](#) H, p61

³¹ GLA, H [Request for Mayoral Decision – MD479](#) H, 16 October 2009

Its first major step was intended to be the commissioning of a scoping study to consider options for the future of the Thames estuary as a whole, rather than simply on a possible new airport.³² Following the scoping study, what Sir David described as “the definitive in-depth study of options for the Thames estuary” would be undertaken. This study would take two to three years to complete and would cost between £5 million and £10 million.

In January 2011, the scoping report was published. It noted that if unconstrained aviation demand were to be met, it could be concluded that there is a need for a new airport to serve London. However, it pointed out some of the economic difficulties:

...airlines and airports are commercial businesses operating in a competitive free market environment not serving just London but the global travel community. There are three primary issues that need to be understood:

- 1) With the exception of Luton, which is locally owned but a private concession, none of the airports are owned by the State with the Golden Share in BAA sold several years ago. In fact all the major airports are owned and operated by non UK based private companies and the majority of movements into Heathrow are foreign-owned airlines. The recent enforced sale of Gatwick by BAA to improve competition between the London airports further underlines the need to understand that whatever is developed has to be in a competitive market. This is further compounded by fact that the Open Skies Agreement means that the State does not have the power to direct aircraft to use any particular airport.
- 2) Demand for slots at Heathrow is driven by its position as an international hub airport. The value of the slots and the yield of routes is dependent on the combination of high yield destination traffic and transfer traffic (38%) from the 180 destinations currently served. Without the high level of transfer passengers that Heathrow as a hub airport supports the level of flying to these destinations would not be viable. Therefore encouraging airlines to leave Heathrow will be very challenging unless there was an overwhelming economic advantage which could be demonstrated.
- 3) State subsidy towards the development of any London airport is not an option due to UK and EU competition rules. Therefore the development of new capacity has to be affordable to the user. Given that BAA, comprising Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, was purchased by Ferrovial for around £10bn the difficulty of funding a new airport in the range of £20-£40bn cannot be understated. The issue of affordability is a critical issue to address.

It is important to recognise that the synergies between airports and airlines to provide services that passengers require predicate against a highly distributed airport system. Spare runway capacity does not itself attract traffic it is the network of services already at airport that does. Therefore building new runways at airports with a low level of use or at a new airport will find it disproportionately difficult to attract network traffic even if nearby airports are operating close to capacity.

Where there has been a successful development of major new airports these have largely been to replace existing airports, for example: Denver Frontier replacing Stapleton; Kuala Lumpur Sepang replacing Subang; Paris Charles de Gaul replacing Le Bourget and Hong Kong Chek Lap Kok replacing Kai Tak. New airports built without

³² HMinutes of Thames Estuary Steering Group MeetingH, 4 December 2009

full transfer of services have often not been successful, in particular Montreal Meribel and Milan Malpensa.³³

3.4 Reports from Deputy Mayor Daniel Moylan, 2011

Also in January 2011, the Mayor published the first part of a report by Deputy Mayor Daniel Moylan on aviation capacity for London. It concluded that there was a strong case for additional capacity to meet the growth in aviation demand. It was more optimistic about the creation and viability of a second hub airport, claiming that the size and structure of London's aviation is unique and that the capital was one of the few cities which may be able to support two hub airports.³⁴

In November 2011 part two of the Moylan report was published, making the economic case for a new hub airport to serve London. It stated that it is "essential that industry actors, stakeholders and the Government now work together on a long-term strategy in a timely manner to ensure the benefits of aviation for London and the whole of the UK are maximised and the harmful impacts of doing so are minimised".³⁵ The key findings identified in the report are as follows:

1: The economic dynamism of London's economy, which is vital to the whole UK, is closely linked to a number of highly internationally-oriented sectors.

2: While all sub-sectors of commercial aviation deliver benefits, business, inbound tourism and cargo generate the most potential for export-led economic growth.

3: A comprehensive network of direct long-haul routes is particularly important for the economy and can only be provided at a hub airport, where demand from all sub-sectors is consolidated.

4: A hub airport needs to serve London and be in the South East. Any lack of capacity there will benefit hub airports on the Continent and their local economies rather than other regions in the UK.

5: High speed rail is mainly a complement rather than a substitute for hub airport capacity. It can provide an alternative for around 10% of Heathrow's flights.

6: An efficient and sustainable hub airport requires adequate take off and landing slot capacity, excellent surface access links and must be appropriately located to minimise adverse local impacts.

7: Heathrow cannot serve the UK's hub airport needs effectively.

8: A fundamental shift to the Far East in the global economy is under way. This will bring tougher competition for resources and in markets for goods and services, as well as great opportunities. London must face the challenge by providing excellent connections to the emerging megacities of Asia and elsewhere if it is to continue to prosper as a global city.

9: If no new runway capacity is created, Heathrow's connectivity will deteriorate by 20 per cent by 2050. A new hub airport could provide world class connectivity in terms of

³³ TESTRAD, H *The Thames Estuary: Needs, Opportunities and Constraints Scoping Review (Summary of Previous Work and Potential Future Studies)*, published January 2011, pp147-8

³⁴ Mayor of London, *HA new airport for London: Part One - the case for new capacity*, January 2011

³⁵ Mayor of London, *HA new airport for London: Part Two – the economic benefits of a new airport*, November 2011

destinations and frequencies to all key business locations as well as meet the other requirements.

10: A new hub airport should become a pillar of the Government's plan for growth and should be integrated into its policies and plans.³⁶

3.5 Other developments

Mayor Johnson has commissioned further reports looking at possible locations for new airport capacity in the South East, including the Thames estuary and the environmental impact of a new airport.³⁷

The mayor has welcomed the proposals from Lord Foster's 'Thames Hub' group for an airport on the Isle of Grain, and from John Olsen's Independent Aviation Advisory Group for an airport on the Hoo Peninsula.³⁸ He has also said that the 'Heathwick' proposal to link Gatwick and Heathrow by high speed train is worth exploring, but that a Thames estuary hub airport remains his preferred option:

I stick to my view that we need to think big, and the place where you could create a 24-hour hub airport that would leave our competitors standing and with the minimum dis-benefits to human beings is in the Thames Estuary. Such an airport would be an astonishing motor for growth in an area that has been left behind for too long, and it would entrench London's lead, for the next 50 years, as the economic powerhouse of Europe. If you look at the history of London and Britain over the last century, you can see how a failure to invest in transport infrastructure was fatal to long-term growth.³⁹

3.6 Responses

Local authorities

Kent County Council and Medway Council, which campaigned against a proposed airport at Cliffe in 2002, have signalled their opposition to the Mayor's suggestion, describing it as a 'pie in the sky' proposal. A campaign website, [Stop the Estuary Airport](#), has been established, along with an on-line petition against the plan.

Medway Council declared its opposition to an estuary airport on the following grounds:

- (i) It is unnecessary and not wanted;
- (ii) The cost of an airport would be prohibitive;
- (iii) The current infrastructure would not cope with huge increases in traffic;
- (iv) The environmental damage would be catastrophic;
- (v) The noise, light and air pollution would be intolerable;
- (vi) The risk of air strike from migrating and nesting wildfowl would be high especially as this is an internationally important site for wildlife;
- (vii) The airport would be disproportionately affected by fog and high winds;

³⁶ *ibid.*, p19

³⁷ *ibid.*, p20

³⁸ further information on both these initiatives can be found in HC Library note [HSN4920](#)

³⁹ "Without a new airport, British businesses will be left behind", *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 2011

- (viii) The airport would lead to blight in the surrounding area including falling property prices and uncertainty for many years about inward investment into Medway;
- (ix) Kent County Council is promoting Manston as an airport destination and this provides a viable alternative.⁴⁰

Kent County Council noted the negative impact a Thames estuary airport would have on the environment. In particular, it questioned whether such an airport would be compatible with the UK's legal obligations under European Directives. It doubted that an airport in the estuary would be economically viable, noting the reluctance of major airlines to switch from Heathrow. KCC also claimed that the transport infrastructure which would be necessary, and the urbanisation which would result from a new airport, would adversely affect the area.⁴¹

Environmental groups

The RSPB has consistently campaigned against all proposals for a new airport in the Thames estuary. The Society said in a critique of the Oakervee Report that siting a new airport in the estuary would be likely to constitute a breach of the UK's legal duty to protect the environment. Further, it rejected Oakervee's apparent confidence that it would be possible to control the risk of bird strike to aircraft without aggressive bird management techniques.⁴²

In December 2009, the Aviation Environment Federation published a briefing paper on the Thames estuary airport proposals, stating its opposition to a new airport.⁴³

Aviation industry

In general, proposals for estuary airports have failed to attract support from the aviation industry. For example, the 1968-71 Roskill Commission report noted the "unqualified opposition of airlines, British and foreign, and of the British Airports Authority to Foulness" and rejected Foulness as a possible location because it would not succeed as an airport, with airlines choosing to fly from other airports.⁴⁴

Similarly, the Mayor of London's decision to investigate the issue has not received backing from major airlines. In March 2010, a survey carried out on behalf of Medway Council (which is opposed to the proposal) stated that 90 per cent of the international airlines using Heathrow were against the idea of building an airport in the estuary.⁴⁵ Willie Walsh, chief executive of the International Airlines Group (including British Airways) has also rejected the idea and has claimed a new hub airport would only work if Heathrow were closed.⁴⁶

Unions representing workers employed at Heathrow have also voiced opposition to an estuary airport claiming it would lead to thousands of job cuts in West London.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Medway Council Cabinet meeting minutes, [HThames Estuary Airport – Feasibility Review](#)H, 5 January 2010

⁴¹ KCC, [HThames estuary airport objections: evidence to London Assembly Environment Committee](#)H, February 2010

⁴² RSPB, [HThames Estuary airport: evidence to London Assembly Environment Committee](#)H, 2010

⁴³ AEF, [HThames estuary airport: position paper](#)H, 3 December 2009

⁴⁴ Roskill Commission, *Commission on the Third London Airport: Report*, 1971, p137

⁴⁵ Medway Council press notice, ["HNinety per cent of the airlines that use Heathrow say no to a Thames Estuary airport"](#)H, 3 March 2010

⁴⁶ ["HAirlines boss Willie Walsh slams Thames Estuary airport plan"](#)H, *New Civil Engineer*, 29 November 2011

⁴⁷ Future Heathrow press notice, ["HHeathrow trades unions criticise Boris 'job cuts' plan"](#)H, 19 March 2008

In April 2012 Richard Deakin, the chief executive of NATS, the air traffic service provider for the UK, said that a proposed airport in the Thames estuary would be the “very worst spot” from an air traffic perspective, directly under the convergence of major arrival and departure flight paths for four of London’s five airports.⁴⁸

Business and other

The mayor’s proposal received support from the Institute of Directors in its response to the Coalition Government’s 2011 consultation paper on developing a sustainable framework for aviation.⁴⁹

The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry has praised the Mayor’s ‘visionary ideas’, though it said that a third runway at Heathrow was only sensible short-term solution to aviation capacity in the south east.⁵⁰ London First has repeatedly stated that London needs more airport capacity in order to grow economically, but it has not backed a Thames estuary airport.⁵¹

The Town and Country Planning Association has maintained its long-standing support for an investigation into the siting of an airport in the estuary.⁵²

⁴⁸ “Thames estuary ‘very worst’ spot for an airport”, *Financial Times*, 14 April 2012

⁴⁹ IoD press notice, “[Government must embrace aviation or UK will suffer, says IoD](#)”, 20 October 2011

⁵⁰ London Chamber of Commerce and Industry press notice, “[Third runway is still most sensible near-term solution](#)”, 21 November 2011

⁵¹ information on London First’s position can be found on [their website](#)

⁵² TCPA, [Towards a sustainable framework for aviation in the UK – consultation on the scoping document](#), August 2011, p4