



Aviation: proposals for an airport in the Thames estuary, 1945-2014

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Since the 1940s, there have been numerous proposals to build an airport in or near the Thames Estuary. In September 2012 an [Independent Commission](#), the latest in a long line of official bodies tasked with examining UK airport capacity and making recommendations to Government, was established; ten separate Estuary schemes were submitted to it. In December 2013, the Commission produced an interim report which ruled out all estuarial locations apart from the Isle of Grain in the Inner Estuary – further investigations will be carried out and a decision on the credibility of this location will be taken in the second half of 2014 – a final report will be produced in 2015. This note outlines the most significant estuary schemes over the past seven decades. However, **it does not deal with Boris Johnson's support for an airport based on an artificial island in the Thames Estuary. The Mayor of London's investigations in this area are detailed with in a separate note, [SN6144](#).**

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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10 separate Estuary Airport proposals were submitted to the Airports Commission in 2012/2013.

INNER ESTUARY, CLIFFE, KENT
[International Aviation Advisory Group;](#)
[London Medway Airport](#)

INNER ESTUARY, ISLE OF GRAIN, KENT
[Foster & Partners;](#)
[Thames Reach;](#)
[Mayor of London](#)

INNER ESTUARY, THURROCK, ESSEX
[London Thames Global Airport/private individual](#)

ARTIFICIAL ISLAND/OUTER ESTUARY, 6-10km OFF HERNE BAY, KENT
[Mayor of London;](#)
[Testrud/Gensler](#)

OUTER ESTUARY, FOULNESS ISLAND/MAPLIN SANDS, ESSEX
[Euro International Britannic Airport/private individual;](#)
[Maplin Sands/private individual](#)

No individual estuary airport scheme was shortlisted – though the Isle of Grain option will be studied further by the Commission.

1 Introduction

In 1958, Mr Richard Harris MP (Con, Heston and Isleworth), noting that aircraft noise was “now becoming intolerable for about a million people in South-West Middlesex”, asked the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation to consider removing what was then London Airport [Heathrow] to “a coastal area which is much better fitted to take some of these new, screaming monsters which frighten the life out of our constituents.”¹ Fifty years later, the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who had earlier described the development of Heathrow as a ‘planning error’, announced a feasibility study into the development of a new hub airport in the Thames estuary.²

Although the [Maplin Sands project](#) abandoned in the 1970s is the most well-known example, there is a long history of different proposals to site an airport in or around the Thames estuary.

Estuary airport plans have shared certain characteristics

- Promoters have stressed their relatively benign environmental aspects. In the period before aircraft emission levels were raised as a serious policy concern, this was usually couched in terms of lower levels of noise pollution and impact on local residents.³ In 1972 Eldon Griffiths MP (Con, Bury St Edmunds), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, referred to the Maplin Sands scheme as the “world’s first environmental airport”.⁴ In 2008, Mayor Boris Johnson said that it was “ever more urgent that we investigate the possibility of a long-term solution, in the form of a new and more eco-friendly international airport at a site in the Thames estuary”.⁵ The 2009 Oakervee report referred to a ‘green airport’ in the estuary⁶ and Testrud described its project as providing the most efficient and environmentally beneficial airport in the world.⁷

- They have emphasised the safety advantages of having planes take-off and land over water rather than major built-up areas.

- In order to address the perceived inaccessibility of the area, the schemes have often included plans for high speed rail links to connect passengers to central London. Older schemes recommended the use of hover trains and monorails to solve this problem’ more recent proposals have suggested connections with the existing High Speed One and the proposed High Speed Two routes.

¹ HC Deb 12 November 1958 vol 595 c368

² See [Library Standard Note 6144](#) for information on the Mayor’s proposals.

³ See [Library Research Paper 08/08](#) for information on aviation and climate change

⁴ HC Deb 09 August 1972 vol 842 c1747

⁵ “Fly into Gatwick and see why London needs another airport In four years’ time”, *Daily Telegraph*, 12 August 2008, p18

⁶ [Thames estuary airport feasibility review](#), October 2009, p40

⁷ [An airport island in the Thames Estuary](#), Testrud press release 2013

- Estuary airports have been criticised for their potentially destructive effects on bird-life – in particular, Brent Geese - in the area. Conversely, aircraft have been seen as at risk from ‘bird-strike’ incidents in the estuary. The January 2009 crash landing of a passenger aircraft in New York’s Hudson River following a collision with a flock of birds raised concerns about siting an airport in the Thames estuary which is home to a wide variety of bird species.⁸
- Objectors to Thames estuary airports have emphasised the difficulty of relocating the military installations – including a firing range at Shoeburyness - and of removing unexploded ordnance from the area. Concerns have also been expressed about the potential danger caused by the [SS Richard Montgomery](#), a US ‘Liberty ship’ carrying a large cargo of explosives, which was wrecked off the Isle of Sheppey in 1944.
- The congested air space in the south east has led critics to argue that no large new airport in the estuary could operate safely without the closure of, or substantial reduction in capacity at, one or more of the other airports in the London area.

However, the schemes have varied in several respects

- Plans have been put forward by both private sector and public sector bodies and by private individuals
- In terms of scale, they have ranged from a one runway project in addition to existing airports, to a six-runway scheme replacing all other London airports. Critics of estuarine airports proposals have questioned the ability of London to support two hub airports. Plans to replace Heathrow have been criticised for the cost implications of building a completely new airport.
- Different concepts and locations - some based offshore on artificial islands e.g. the [Marinair](#) scheme and the suggestion put forward in the [2009 Douglas Oakervee report](#); some on floating platforms e.g. the [Gensler scheme](#) which emerged in 2012; and some on existing land or on reclaiming land from the sea on the Kent or Essex banks of the estuary e.g. Cliffe. Although recent schemes have often been given the generic label, ‘Boris Island’, they vary considerably. Indeed, the Mayor of London has made 2 separate proposals based on different locations and designs - an Outer estuary artificial island and Inner estuary scheme on the Isle of Grain.
- Some projects have included extra features in addition to the airport e.g. Maplin Sands which also included a seaport and plans for a new town or the 2009 Oakervee report and the 2011 ‘Thames Hub’ report by Lord Foster/Halcrow which envisaged a new airport as one element in a programme of wider infrastructure investments. These additional features have led to a wide variation in cost projections for the different schemes.
- Sometimes based on a one centre model and sometimes a two-centre project, with terminals in east London and runways in the estuary e.g. the GLC proposals in the late 1970s/early 1980s or the Testrad/Gensler scheme submitted to the Airports Commission in 2013.

⁸ [“Airbus crashes in New York river”](#), BBC News website, 16 January 2009

Since the abandonment of the [Maplin Sands project](#) in 1974, no plan for an airport in the estuary has received Government support.⁹ Nevertheless, new proposals have continued to emerge from those convinced that the area is the optimum location for an airport to serve London. Of the 52 schemes for long-term aviation capacity solutions submitted to the [Airports Commission](#) in 2013, 10 (from both public and private sector groups and members of the public) involved the Thames Estuary.¹⁰ The Commission carried out a 3-stage sifting exercise and shortlisted the most credible candidates for expansion in December 2013; none of the estuary airport proposals were included. All of the Outer estuary artificial island plans were rejected, but the Commission decided to combine elements from several of the Inner estuary schemes and undertook to carry out further investigations into the possibility of building a new airport on the Isle of Grain; a final assessment of this will be published in the second half of 2014. The Commission's final report will be published in 2015 – the Government has stated that it will not comment on the respective merits of the options shortlisted until then.¹¹

The remainder of this Note looks at some of the most significant past and present estuary airport schemes.

2 Onshore [Coastal] airports

Many of the airport schemes proposed for the Thames estuary have involved the construction of an airport on existing coastal land or on land reclaimed from the sea. The most significant of these was the Maplin Sands (Essex) scheme which was abandoned in 1974.

2.1 Sheppey, Kent

The Isle of Sheppey has been labelled the birthplace of British aviation as Short Brothers opened the country's first aircraft factory there in 1909.¹² Plans for airports on or around the island have almost as long a pedigree.

Sheppey was considered by the Interdepartmental Committee on the Third London Airport in 1963/64 but rejected in favour of Stansted.

In the mid-1960s, Sheppey Island was suggested as the site for a 'super-airport' with up to six runways to replace Heathrow.¹³ This proposal was submitted to the 1965-66 public inquiry into the plan to develop Stansted as London's third airport, but the Planning Inspector ruled it out of the inquiry's scope. Sheppey, Foulness and Cliffe were also proposed at the Inquiry by Essex County Council, which argued that these sites merited further investigation. The Council's QC 'contrasted the rural character of North West Essex, its towns, villages and buildings with Cliffe and Sheppey which he said were marshlands with no particular amenities'.¹⁴

⁹ There is an existing commercial airport in the Thames Estuary region- at [Southend](#). However, this operates on a far smaller scale than the mega-airport proposals under discussion.

¹⁰ [Long term options: proposals received by the Airports Commission](#), Airports Commission, 7 August 2013

¹¹ [HC Deb 17 Dec 2013 c621](#)

¹² "'Cradle of aviation' title craved by Sheppey", *Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 2007, p11

¹³ "London airport must go", *Observer*, 7 November 1965, p11

¹⁴ *Report of the Inquiry into Local Objections to the proposed development of land at Stansted as the Third Airport for London*, HMSO, 1967, p28

In May 1967 a Government White Paper set out the reasons for rejecting the Isle of Sheppey.¹⁵ The Government claimed it was the most promising of the Thames estuary sites for the following reasons,

- no significant interference with military flying
- enough flat land available for three or four runways
- low noise pollution
- low quality agricultural land on the island
- loss of rural amenity might not be so grave as with other areas
- no serious objections to a modest expansion of population in the area

However, there were serious disadvantages – in particular the high cost of combating the relative inaccessibility of the site and the need to close Southend airport and relocate the MOD firing range at Shoeburyness – which meant that it should be ruled out.

This decision was supported by the British Airports Authority, whose Chairman, Peter Masefield, stated

As a satisfactory operational airport and as an economically viable airport, Sheppey is a non-starter. And for those who live around – nearly half as many again as around Stansted – the site includes the largest remaining area of unspoilt coastline in Kent.¹⁶

In August 1967, the Sheppey Protection Group met for the first time and announced that a series of technical studies would be undertaken to counter any attempt to make this location an airport site.¹⁷ Members of the Group submitted written evidence to the Roskill Commission (1968-1971) [see Section 2.3 for further information on Roskill] detailing the adverse effects on the residents of the island which would arise from the siting of an airport at Foulness/Maplin.¹⁸ Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils recommended Sheppey, mainly 'because a large flat area is available which is only thinly populated'.¹⁹ However, Sheppey did not reach the shortlist of four sites considered by the Commission.

During the Department for Transport's SERAS consultations in 2002/2003 Sheppey Airport Ltd submitted plans for an airport costing £6.6 billion.²⁰ Initially, 2 runways were planned, with a total of 4 by 2030. The project's promoters claimed that the airport's remoteness would mean very little destruction of existing residential property to construct the railway and low levels of noise pollution. The risk of bird strike was less than at Cliffe and the cost of development would also be lower.²¹

In its 2003 White Paper, the DfT rejected the Sheppey location

¹⁵ *The Third London Airport*, Cmnd 3259, Board of Trade, 1966-67, pp15-16

¹⁶ "Airports Authority Backs Stansted", *Flight International*, 22 June 1967 p1025

¹⁷ "Sheppey's move to stop airport", *Guardian*, 3 August 1967, p8

¹⁸ *Commission on the Third London Airport: Papers and Proceedings Vol III: Stage II: Local Hearings Foulness (off shore)*, HMSO, 1969

¹⁹ *Submission 2 to the Commission on the Third London Airport: statement on proposed sites*, Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils, October 1968

²⁰ "Isle of Sheppey airport proposals submitted", *This is Gravesham*, 6 January 2003

²¹ *Review of Sheppey Island proposal*, Halcrow Group for the Department for Transport, 2003 (UK Govt Web Archive)

The Sheppey proposal would generate significantly lower net economic benefits than a combination of one new runway at each of Stansted and Heathrow. The promoters' heavy reliance on high speed rail access with limited road connections was considered to be highly optimistic. There are also uncertainties as to whether the site proposed is adequate to handle the assumed level of traffic.²²

Sheppey Airport Ltd was dissolved in 2007.

The Isle of Sheppey option was considered in a 2013 report drawn up by Transport for London, but ruled out because of its distance from London (c70km) which would require extensive investment in transport infrastructure; the presence of Special Protected Areas which would constrain development; and the likely difficulty of achieving planning consent and overcoming local opposition.²³

No formal Sheppey airport proposal was submitted to the Airports Commission in 2013.

2.2 Hoo Peninsula, Kent

Cliffe

The area around Cliffe on the western side of the Hoo Peninsula in north Kent has long been considered a potential location for a Thames estuary airport.

In 1943 the aircraft designer FG Miles and the architect Guy Morgan suggested the construction of a new airport, possibly including a flying boat base, between Cliffe and Allhallows. Intended to serve 8 million passengers per year, the cost of the scheme was estimated at £20 million.²⁴ Cliffe Marshes was assessed as a successor to Croydon as a London airport after WWII but lost out to Heathrow.²⁵ It was also short-listed as the site for a new flying boat airport by the 'Pakenham Committee' in 1946/47. The Port of London Authority proposed the construction of a flying boat base with an adjacent landplane airport which could be developed into a bad weather alternative to London Airport.²⁶ In 1949, the Government confirmed that the Cliffe proposal for a flying boat base had been abandoned.²⁷ In 1954, following the local planning inquiry into the development of Gatwick, the Conservative Government explained why Cliffe had not been chosen

The air space near the Thames Estuary is restricted by two airways, by danger areas and approach sectors for two R.A.F aerodromes. This makes it impossible to find enough room for a control zone for Cliffe or for a holding area reasonably near Cliffe where aircraft could wait their turn to land during bad weather.

Aircraft flying to and from the Channel Islands, which would form an important part of the traffic using the aerodrome, would have to cross the two airways between London Airport and France.

²² *The Future of Air Transport*, Cm 6046, Department for Transport, Dec 2003, p135 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 12 March 2014)

²³ *A new airport for London and the UK Technical note - shortlisting the options*. Transport for London, 2013, p37

²⁴ "Thinking of the Future", *Flight*, 29 July 1943

²⁵ *Thames Reach Airport: SERAS assessment submission*, 30 June 2003

²⁶ "Flying-boat base: examination of Thames Estuary scheme", *Times*, 31 January 1947, p2

²⁷ *HC Committee of Public Accounts*, First, Second and Third Reports, HC 104-I, 186, I, 233-I, 1948-49

Cliffe would cost more than Gatwick to build, its weather is worse than Gatwick's, and its access to London is so bad as to rule this site out altogether.²⁸

An official report again short-listed Cliffe as a possible airport site in 1963. Again it was rejected, this time in favour of Stansted.²⁹ Following a public inquiry into the Stansted proposal, the Planning Inspector submitted a report in 1966 (published in 1967) in which he found the case for Stansted unproven and recommended a wider review to look at the alternatives, including Cliffe.³⁰

In 1967, the Labour Government published a White Paper on a Third London Airport. It rejected Cliffe as a possible location because it would require the removal of a MOD firing range at Shoeburyness; the site would be too restricted to accommodate more than two parallel runways; and because it was too close to Heathrow to allow both airports to function at maximum efficiency.³¹

While Cliffe did not make the shortlist of sites investigated by the Roskill Commission (1968-'71) [for more information on Roskill, see section 2.3 below], following the publication of the Commission's report advocating Cublington in Buckinghamshire, it was recommended to Government by a private consortium led by Brian Colquhoun, a consulting engineer. He argued that Cliffe was nearer to London than Foulness or Cublington and its coastal location away from major urban centres would limit nuisance to local residents. The Department of the Environment said it would look at the proposal.³² However, shortly afterwards it chose Foulness.

Three decades later, following a detailed site search covering some 400 locations across the country, Cliffe emerged as a potential new airport site during the South East and East of England Regional Air Services (SERAS) consultations in 2002. The proposal was for up to four runways arranged in two east-west close parallel pairs, with a possible fifth runway on a different alignment, which might be used only at night and in particular weather conditions. The main benefits of Cliffe were identified as:

- sufficient land available for a major new airport,
- potentially good surface transport links with London, other parts of the South East and the UK,
- relatively few people would be displaced by the airport's construction for the amount of new capacity provided,
- relatively low numbers of people would be affected by aircraft noise,
- a potential for 24-hour operation to meet the needs of air freight, and

²⁸ [HC Deb 30 July 1954 vol 531 cc131-2W](#)

²⁹ *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Third London Airport*, HMSO, 1964,

³⁰ *Report of the Inquiry into the Local Objections to the proposed development of land at Stansted as the Third Airport for London 6th December 1965-11th February 1966*, HMSO, 1967, pp4-8

³¹ *The Third London Airport*, 1967, Cmnd 3259, p15

³² "Government are urged to consider estuary alternative to Foulness", *Times*, 5 April 1971, p4

- development of an airport in this location would support regeneration policies in the Thames Gateway.³³

The Cliffe location gained partial support from SASIG (Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association). The Group saw Cliffe as an opportunity to “move from a situation where airports grow incrementally as demand forces last minute decisions, to one of planned growth and long term capacity”. While acknowledging the ecological impact of a new airport, SASIG stated that this had to be weighed against the noise and air quality impacts on people living around Heathrow and Stansted of any expansion there. However, the Group noted that there “may be better new airport sites still needing detailed examination.”³⁴

It was opposed by, amongst others,

- Kent County Council which described it as neither practical, viable nor environmentally acceptable. A number of more specific objections were cited including poor surface access, high cost (estimated by KCC as at least £16 billion), safety risks (including bird strike), planning blight because of the urbanisation and travel impacts of the new airport and destruction of wildlife habitats.³⁵
- The RSPB which was concerned at the potential damage to the breeding grounds of rare wading birds and marshalled a large public campaign against the proposal.³⁶ A 2002 study (published in 2003) commissioned by the Department for Transport on the bird strike issue stated

For the Cliffe airport option, it was found that an aircraft loss would be expected every 102 - 297 years. The range for ten of the largest airports in the UK is between 304 - 1210 years, with a mean of 654 years. Thus, the risk posed by birds at the new airport is considered to be greater than most, if not all, major airports in the UK.

...the environment around the Cliffe airport option contains substantial numbers of birds hazardous to aircraft. Without a comprehensive and aggressive bird management programme in place, incorporating careful and considered airport design, appropriate habitat management and active bird control, an airport could not operate safely in this location. Even with such world class management and mitigation measures in place as identified in this report, it is not considered possible to reduce the risk to a level similar to that experienced at other UK airports.³⁷

- ‘Freedom to Fly’ aviation industry lobby group.³⁸
- Local MPs

³³ *The Future development of air transport in the UK: South east and east of England: Chapter 11: Cliffe*, Department for Transport, 2003 (UK Government Web Archive, accessed 12 March 2014)

³⁴ *Future Development of Air Transport in the UK: response to the Dept for Transport*, SASIG, Nov 2002 (Internet Archive, accessed 12 March 2014)

³⁵ *The right airports policy? Kent County Council’s view*, KCC, Nov 2002 (Internet Archive, accessed 12 March 2014)

³⁶ “A birdwatcher’s wilderness on London’s doorstep”, *Financial Times*, 3 July 2004, p6

³⁷ *Study on safety risks from birds and safety measures around Cliffe Marshes*, Central Science Laboratory/British Trust for Ornithology for the Department for Transport, 2003 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 12 March 2014)

³⁸ “Air industry rejects Cliffe site”, *Guardian*, 20 May 2003, p8 (accessed 12 March 2014)

The Cliffe project was rejected by the Government in the [December 2003 White Paper](#) in favour of expansion at Heathrow and Stansted.³⁹

11.18 Early in the process leading up to this White Paper, the Government was urged by a range of interested parties to consider an option for a new airport as an alternative to incremental development of existing airports. Many believed that a new, purpose-built airport could provide the best long-term solution to the need for more airport capacity in the South East.

11.19 A detailed site search considered some 400 possible locations in the South East and other parts of the country, including some offshore. The site near Cliffe, on the Hoo Peninsula in Kent, emerged from this selection process as the leading candidate. In particular it offered enough land for large-scale development, the potential for good transport connections to key markets in and around London, support for regional planning objectives in the Thames Gateway, and the potential for 24-hour operation (of particular value to freight operators), with relatively low numbers of people affected by noise.

11.20 The Government recognised in the consultation document that the potential benefits of developing a major new airport at Cliffe would need to be considered in the context of its significant impacts on important wildlife habitats. Moreover, the internationally important status of some of the habitats under European law mean that any potentially adverse effect would require the Government to demonstrate that it has considered all reasonable alternatives. In the light of the consultation, the Government is satisfied that there would be reasonable alternatives to Cliffe.

11.21 The Government has also taken careful note of the conclusions of the report by the Central Science Laboratory and British Trust for Ornithology, who were commissioned to address in more detail concerns that had been raised in the consultation paper about the potential safety risk from bird-strikes at this location and about the feasibility of effective mitigation.

11.22 Our analysis shows that in the right conditions, an airport at Cliffe could attract a substantial number of passengers and generate large economic benefits. However, it also showed that, because of high capital costs, the net benefits of Cliffe were lower than for any of the combinations of additional capacity at existing airports involving more than one new runway, including the four-runway option at Stansted. 3 The high up-front construction costs also presented a risk that the financial viability of the project would be threatened if demand proved to be less strong than forecast, or if airlines and passengers simply did not use the airport.

11.23 Taking all factors into consideration, the Government does not support the option of a new airport at Cliffe.⁴⁰

Two new proposals for an airport at Cliffe emerged several years later. One of these was a plan for 'London Gateway Airport' from the Independent Aviation Advisory Group [in 2013 this was renamed the International Aviation Advisory Group] led by John Olsen (former director of Cathay Pacific and head of Dan-Air).⁴¹ In written evidence submitted to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee in November 2012, IAAG criticised the artificial island and Isle of Grain proposals and claimed that it was the only realistic and fundable (c £12-13 billion) long-term solution to the air capacity shortfall in the South East. The new 3 or 4 runway airport would eventually replace Heathrow, thereby freeing hundreds of thousands

³⁹ Department for Transport Press Release, [Darling announces two new runways for the South east](#), 16 December 2003 (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁴⁰ [Future of Air Transport White Paper](#), Cm 6046, Department for Transport, 2003

⁴¹ [Thames Estuary Airport Feasibility Review](#), Thames Estuary Research and Development Company, 2009 (accessed 12 March 2014)

of people from aircraft noise pollution and allowing a new 'eco-city' to be created on the old Heathrow site.⁴²

The new Cliffe scheme has been opposed by local MPs, councillors and environmentalists. However, according to Mr Olsen, the objections to Cliffe highlighted during the SERAS consultations are no longer valid.

"It's the best piece of undeveloped land anywhere near any major city in Europe," he said.

The group claims the bird populations on the peninsula's west and north are "meagre" and that the risk of bird strike is lower than at other locations.

The group also believes the plan is economically viable because the government already owns much of the land; it would be far cheaper than an island scheme, which has attracted estimates of £40bn; and one of the sovereign wealth funds from the Gulf would be keen to fund the scheme on a lease of up to 100 years.

Mr Olsen denied any financial involvement in the plan.

"We have not been paid a penny and we have not asked anyone to pay us," he said.⁴³

In its July 2013 submission to the Airports Commission, IAAG stated that Cliffe would be the best possible option for long-term solution to the lack of aviation capacity in the south east. It suggested that the Government should acquire the land held by the MOD/Port of London Authority/Church Commissioners and any other privately held plots necessary. This could then be packaged as a lease to foreign investors who would develop the new airport – IAAG had already been in contact with potential candidates.⁴⁴

In the 'sift 2 assessment' produced by the Airports Commission's consultants, the IAAG scheme was described as a complex proposal for a 3 runway airport with a 100m passengers per annum (ppa) capacity (less capacity than other estuary submissions). If the new airport were to replace Heathrow, there would be a substantial overall reduction to the total number of people affected by aircraft noise in the SE, though fewer than at an Isle of Grain location. Wildlife habitats would be removed and a case that no realistic alternative to Cliffe and that there would be an overwhelming public interest in favour of the scheme would need to be made before the project could proceed.⁴⁵

The consultants estimated the cost of the IAAG scheme as £66.4 billion and stated that its cost, location and environmental impact would be 'challenging'. They also questioned the scale of the private financing which would be required and also the value for money of the project.⁴⁶

A further Cliffe proposal was submitted to the Airports Commission by [London Medway Airport](#), a four-runway scheme located north of Cliffe village.

In its sift 3 stage, the Airports Commission stated that the IAAG proposal (along with several other Inner estuary schemes) would be used as the basis for further work, though on the Isle

⁴² *Aviation Strategy: written evidence submitted by IAAG*, House of Commons Transport Select Committee, HC 596 II 2012-2013,

⁴³ "Lobby group tries to resurrect airport at Cliffe", *Financial Times*, 27 December 2010

⁴⁴ *IAAG's proposals to the Airports Commission for the Long-Term development of UK Airports: submission to the Airports Commission*, July 2013

⁴⁵ *Long term options: sift 2 templates: IAAG Sift 2 final*, Airports Commission, December 2013

⁴⁶ *ibid*

of Grain at the eastern end of the Hoo Peninsula, than at Cliffe (see section below for further details); elements from the London Medway scheme might be incorporated where appropriate.⁴⁷ A final decision on the feasibility of the Isle of Grain location is expected to be made in Autumn 2014.

Isle of Grain

In recent years, the Isle of Grain at the eastern end of the Hoo Peninsula has been the focus of several estuary airport proposals. While not advocating any individual Inner estuary scheme, in its December 2013 Interim Report, the Airports Commission announced that elements of four different Hoo Peninsula projects would be combined and further studies would be undertaken to provide a proper assessment of the Isle of Grain. These studies are likely to be published in July 2014 and a final decision on whether this location should be added to the Commission's shortlist will be made by Autumn 2014.

Thames Hub

In August 2011, Halcrow Group/Foster & Partners Architects/Volterra Consulting announced that they had been developing plans to create a 'Thames Hub' which would include a new [airport on the Isle of Grain in Kent](#). Foster and Partners was behind the design of Hong Kong International Airport, built on partially reclaimed land. Halcrow Group carried out several studies on the feasibility of new airport proposals for the Department for Transport (and predecessor departments) at the time of the SERAS consultation, including a 2003 report on the development of airport capacity in the Thames Estuary.⁴⁸ Volterra Consulting was founded by Bridget Rosewell who, together with Douglas Oakervee (who led the Mayor of London's preliminary investigation into an airport in the estuary) is the co-founder of the Thames Estuary Research and Development Company (see Section 3.2 of this Note for information on Testrad).⁴⁹

Initial findings from their studies were published in November 2011. A Halcrow press release sets out the main elements of the scheme

- new barrier crossing that extends flood protection to London and the Thames Gateway into next century. The barrier harnesses tidal power to generate carbon-free energy
- a four-track, high-speed passenger and freight orbital rail route around London, which links the capital's radial lines, a future high-speed rail line to the Midlands and the North, the Thames Estuary ports, High Speed 1 (Channel Tunnel to London), and European networks
- an estuary airport, capable of handling 150 million passengers per annum, thus enabling the UK to retain its global aviation hub status. The airport is integrated within a logistics matrix that connects by rail the Thames Estuary Ports and the ports of Liverpool, Southampton and Felixstowe. Associated with the hub is a major renewable energy source in the estuary
- a new utilities and data spine in the Thames Barrier, orbital rail line and high-speed networks, with applicability across the UK
- a comprehensive environmental management strategy that minimises the impact of development and provides opportunities to create significant new wildlife habitats to

⁴⁷ [Airports Commission: Interim Report Appendix 2: Assessment of Long-term Options](#), Airports Commission, 2013 p14

⁴⁸ [Development of Airport Capacity in the Thames Estuary](#), Halcrow Group, December 2003

⁴⁹ [Thames Estuary Research and Development Company website](#) (accessed 12 March 2014)

more than offset losses elsewhere. The project can also serve as the catalyst to reduce pressure on foreshore habitats from rising sea levels and storm activity.⁵⁰

The new 4 runway airport would partly be created on land reclaimed from the sea. There would be high speed rail links enabling central London to be reached within 30 minutes. By allowing planes to approach over water, noise pollution would be much reduced and would enable the airport to operate 24 hours a day.

The ambitious and wide-ranging set of developments intended to fix Britain's 'creaking' infrastructure would cost, it was claimed, somewhere in the region of £50 billion (£20 billion for the airport and £30 billion for the other infrastructure improvements), though the authors claimed that if implemented the plan could generate £150 billion - £35bn from the airport, £35bn from road and rail; £2bn from environmental management and £75bn from growth in the Thames Hub area.⁵¹

The report stated that the project would not need to depend solely on public funding. Private sector funding models e.g. the Regulated Asset Base approach could provide the funding mechanisms and preliminary talks suggested that overseas investors e.g. sovereign wealth funds may be interested. However, the planning approvals processes would have to be reformed in order to reduce some of the perceived risk to investors.⁵²

Lord Foster has rejected criticisms that the scheme is unrealistic

It's certainly not pie in the sky, it's very, very down to earth - it's very realistic," he said.

Asked what he would say to worried residents, Lord Foster said: "I would be surprised if there wasn't opposition, it's human nature. Any one of us in that situation would react similarly.

"I can understand their concern. There is a choice of not doing anything that I accept.

"But if you do something then somebody's life is going to be affected. One can only assume that will be tackled responsibly and with compensation. Any infrastructure initiative will affect some lives."

Passengers would be transported to the airport - the world's biggest - by a high-speed rail link. Submerged tidal generators would mean it would be entirely self-sufficient, Lord Foster's vision claims.

He said he came up with the location by asking "obvious" questions about how to connect transport and power generation.

Lord Foster said: "If you bring these things together then you get economic benefits and environmental benefits.

"Wires and pylons across the landscape, if they could be part of that strategy, then things would flow from it.

"And that running as a spine across the nation would bring prosperity, would address the divide between the north and the south in terms of affluence and employment."

A number of private investors would be interested in financing the hub, he said.

⁵⁰ [Halcrow and Foster + Partners launch Thames Hub vision](#), Halcrow press release, November 2011 (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁵¹ "Foreign investors welcome Thames Hub vision, report claims", *Construction News*, 2 November 2011

⁵² [Thames Hub: an integrated vision for Britain](#), Foster & Partners/Halcrow/Volterra Consulting, 2011, p30 (accessed 12 March 2014)

However, there are a number of issues that will need to be addressed if Lord Foster's plan is to become a reality:

- * The Thames Estuary is used by 300,000 migratory birds and a bird strike on an aircraft engine can bring it down.
- * The future of the LNG plant on the Isle of Grain.
- * The sunken warship the SS Richard Montgomery, which has tonnes of explosives on board.

Lord Foster claimed there are solutions for these problems. The LNG plant could be relocated and there were a number of potential sites, he said. Addressing the issue of the SS Richard Montgomery, he said: "There would be a detailed study and consultation which would follow."

On the subject of the obstacles, Lord Foster added: "We're in a way seeing the tip of the iceberg in terms of my description, the reports, the presentation so there is a whole series of separate research projects that need to be done."

Then there is the significant opposition in the Towns.

Medway Council, all three local MPs, the RSPB and many local residents oppose the idea of an airport in the Thames Estuary.

Despite this, Lord Foster is convinced people will come round.

"We've come round to the idea of the Embankment, which addressed the health issues of the city when it was being killed off by cholera, of beautifying that area, of putting transport below ground.

"It was probably thought to be pie in the sky at the time. I think we're all very grateful for it now.

"If a venture is well thought through, if it's serious and delivers real long-term benefits and it minimises the environmental impact - not withstanding the fact that there will be some effect of individual lives - then, in the long term, history tells us those initiatives are welcome and we're grateful for them in the future."⁵³

In a press release,⁵⁴ and in lectures/presentations given by Lord Foster at the University of Oxford on 28 November 2011,⁵⁵ and by Huw Thomas at the Institution of Civil Engineers in April 2012,⁵⁶ further information was provided and various objections to the scheme were addressed

- It was acknowledged that listed buildings on the Isle of Grain would be affected by the construction of an airport, but a strategy had been developed which would allow them to remain within the new development or for their careful re-location.
- Much media coverage had referred to the potential hazard of the wreck of the SS Richard Montgomery (approximately 4 miles from the proposed terminal buildings). Lord Foster noted that the wreck has lain next to one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world without any problem for decades. Discussions had taken place with the MOD which had established that there would be no danger if the wreck were not disturbed during the construction process. Steps would be taken to ensure this.

⁵³"Island airport 'very down to earth'", *Medway Messenger*, 4 November 2011

⁵⁴ [Lord Foster reveals further developments for the proposed Thames Hub](#), Foster and Partners press release, 28 November 2011 (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁵⁵ ["Lord Foster Humanitas Oxford University Lecture November 2011"](#), youtube.com, 28 November 2011 (accessed 12 March 2014) – see in particular lecture from 22 mins onwards

⁵⁶ [ICE Thames Hub Airport Debate April 2012 – contribution of Huw Thomas \(Thames Hub Group\)](#) (accessed 12 March 2014)

- Approximately 20km sq. of bird habitat on the Isle of Grain in Kent would be lost. However, in his lecture at Oxford University, Lord Foster, citing the example of [Wallasea Island](#) as a precedent, proposed the development of a new 60km sq nature reserve on reclaimed land off the Dengie Peninsula in Essex for displaced migratory birds. The potential threat of rising sea levels was noted, but it was asserted that the creation of the new habitat would present an “opportunity for Britain to lead in addressing the impacts of rising sea levels”.
- The potential bird strike risk to aircraft was noted –though Lord Foster said that the bird strike issue is common to airports around the world and should not be considered unique to any airport in the Thames Estuary. He stated that established technologies would be used to frighten most of the birds away from the runways. A new form of technology, expected to become available by the time the new airport became operational, would be embedded in aircraft and would move the birds aside through electrical transmissions

At the time of the report’s launch, the Group had said that whether the new airport should replace or complement Heathrow would be open to discussion, but in his lecture on 28 November 2011, Lord Foster suggested that, in the long-term, Heathrow should be removed as a hub airport. He said that the closure of Heathrow and the subsequent property sale could net approximately £12 billion (more than half the estimated cost of the new airport). Some commentators have questioned by what means the Government could order the now privately owned Heathrow Airport to be sold to finance the construction of a new airport in the Thames Estuary. In a blog posting on *Director of Finance online* it was argued that it was the presence of the airport which made property around Heathrow airport valuable - close the airport and land values would fall. Advocates of an airport in the estuary would have to find an alternative source of finance.⁵⁷ At the Institution of Civil Engineers debate in April 2012, Mike Redican, a specialist in the infrastructure sector at Deutsche Bank, was sceptical of the attractiveness of the scheme to private investors and felt the costs involved had been ‘vastly underestimated’.⁵⁸

In July 2012, Foster and Partners proposed that if BAA (then the owner of Heathrow) were to co-operate, the new airport could be financed through a mixture of landing charges levied on aircraft landing at Heathrow between 2018-2028 and at the new airport from 2028-2038; the eventual closure and sale of land at Heathrow; and the development of land around the new airport. BAA would be offered the opportunity to take a controlling stake in the new estuary airport.⁵⁹ Colin Matthews, chief executive of BAA, said that the company had no interest in this proposal and did not think that the Thames Hub scheme would materialise.⁶⁰ The Government stated in September 2012 that it had no financial stake in Heathrow and any hypothetical sale of the airport would be a commercial matter for the airport operator.⁶¹

Like other recent plans for airports in the estuary, the Thames Hub proposal has been attacked by environmentalists, local authorities and local MPs. The Isle of Grain location for the airport has attracted particular criticism from the Head of the National Air Traffic Service, Richard Deakin. Although stating that “technically anything is possible”, in April 2012 he said that the Isle of Grain would be the “very worst spot” for a new airport given the existing

⁵⁷ [“Selling Heathrow won’t pay for a Thames airport”](#), by Richard Northedge, *Director of Finance Online*, 12 December 2011

⁵⁸ [ICE Thames Hub Airport Debate April 2012 – contribution of Mike Redican \(Deutsche Bank\)](#) (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁵⁹ “New funding plan eyed for estuary airport”, *Financial Times*, 9 July 2012

⁶⁰ “Foster plan to fund new airport rejected”, *Financial Times*, 1 August 2012

⁶¹ [HC Deb 13 Sep 2012 c367W](#)

pattern of flight paths around London.⁶² In July 2012 he said that a new 4-runway estuary airport, could not operate safely unless capacity at Heathrow were to be substantially reduced

“You may find that, in isolation, the airport works well but that actually the challenges of integrating it into the surrounding network of Southend, London City, Northolt and Heathrow are insurmountable,” Mr Deakin said.

“If you have four runways in the Thames Estuary, the approach and departure pattern would be right over the middle of London, where you have also got London City, Northolt, Heathrow and Dutch airspace traffic coming in from the east.”⁶³

In response to the May 2013 House of Commons Transport Select Committee report rejecting estuary airport options in favour of the expansion of Heathrow, Foster & Partners remarked

We believe these proposals to expand aviation capacity at Heathrow are ill-founded technically and would perpetuate unacceptable environmental impacts on Londoners. They are therefore not the right answer. Now is the time to look for a long term answer which minimises impacts and guarantees maximum future potential and flexibility.⁶⁴

The Thames Hub proposal was submitted to the Airports Commission in July 2013.⁶⁵ A further document responding to 96 questions was sent to the Commission on 3 September 2013.⁶⁶

In December 2013, the Airports Commission published its interim report which, although not shortlisting the Thames Hub scheme, stated that the Isle of Grain required further study as the possible location of a new airport. In response, Lord Foster stated

We are pleased to see that the initial work by the Airports Commission has confirmed the need for increased hub capacity and recommends an Isle of Grain airport for further study in 2014. We are ready to demonstrate to the Commission that costs for our Thames Hub proposal are affordable, the transition through closing Heathrow achievable and a fear of the future unreasonable. We look forward to engaging further with the Commission and to continued collaboration with those who have supported us so far, together with those now keen to lend their support. We aim to demonstrate that a new four-runway airport in the Thames Estuary is the right answer for the future of Britain and its economy.⁶⁷

⁶² “Proposed Thames Hub airport in 'very worst spot' say air traffic controllers”, *Guardian*, 13 April 2012

⁶³ “Air traffic chief's fear over 'Boris Island'”, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 July 2012

⁶⁴ [“Response to Transport Select Committee Report”](#). Foster & Partners press release, 10 May 2013 (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁶⁵ [“Thames Hub Airport: outline proposal to the Airports Commission”](#), Foster & Partners, July 2013 (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁶⁶ [“Thames Hub: Answers to the Airports Commission's questions”](#), Foster & Partners, 3 September 2013 (accessed 25 March 2014)

⁶⁷ [“Airports Commission recommends Isle of Grain airport proposal for further study”](#), Thames Hub press release, 17 December 2013 (accessed 12 March 2014)

Thames Reach

<http://www.thamesreachairport.com>

Proposals for a new airport called 'Thames Reach', located a short distance from Cliffe, on Halstow Marshes on the Hoo Peninsula in Kent, emerged in 2002. The scheme came from a private sector consortium headed by 'Bluebase' architects.

The new airport, partially based on reclaimed land, would have two runways (subsequent submissions from Bluebase offered alternative models – of up to 4 runways). A road and rail tunnel under the Thames would link the Kent site with Essex and high speed rail lines would link to central London.⁶⁸

Bluebase claimed to have had 'encouraging' talks about the proposal with the Star Alliance network of airlines led by Lufthansa.⁶⁹ The proposers were confident that their bird management system would reduce the risk of bird strike to normal UK levels.

Consultants commissioned by the Department for Transport carried out a review of the Thames Reach proposals.⁷⁰ In its 2003 White Paper following the consultation period, the DfT rejected the Thames Reach proposal

11.114 Although the Thames Reach promoters managed to mitigate some of the drawbacks of Cliffe, a substantial part of the airport site would impact, as did Cliffe, on areas of very high ecological value that are protected under the EC Habitats Directive, and we have doubts whether the passenger numbers envisaged could be handled within the land-take given the likely demand for air travel over the day. We were concerned that the surface access proposals were not robust and over-dependent on rail. In the light of the appraisal of the Cliffe option, there remain significant concerns about the risk of bird strike and the efficacy of the measures proposed to address it. The capital costs assumed by the promoters are much less than those for Cliffe, including for surface access.⁷¹

The Thames Reach project was refreshed in 2009 and relocated from the western to the eastern end of the Hoo Peninsula at the [Isle of Grain](#) with the 25 sq km airport platform largely based on land reclaimed from the sea. With three 4km long runways (possible extension to 4), there could be 24hr operation with far fewer people affected by noise than at Heathrow and a total passenger capacity of 180m ppa.

Flood protection and a tunnel to the Essex side of the estuary could be built into the scheme. According to the promoters, safeguards against bird strike including habitat re-location prior to construction of the airport would ensure that bird strike risk would be comparable to international standards. Including the cost of purchasing Heathrow, a 3 runway Thames Reach scheme was estimated at £36 bn.

In its 'second sift' assessment of the Thames Reach proposal the Airports Commission's consultants stated that although the scheme adds to capacity, its cost, location and environmental impact are challenging. The commercial viability of the scheme was

⁶⁸ Bluebase Inc Press Release, [Thames Reach Airport: an integrated hub solution for the southeast](#), 25 October 2003 (Internet Archive)

⁶⁹ "Third Kent airport plan - 23 million passengers a year for £6.5bn site", *Evening Standard*, 13 February 2003

⁷⁰ [Review of Thames Reach Proposal](#), Halcrow Group for the Department for Transport, Dec 2003, p27 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 12 March 2014)

⁷¹ [The Future of Air Transport](#), Cm 6046, DfT, Dec 2003 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 12 March 2014)

questioned - including 'optimism bias' and risk assessment, scheme costs were estimated at at £71.4 bn (not including the cost of closing Heathrow).

As part of the 'third sift', four Hoo Peninsula proposals, including Thames Reach, were combined to form a plan for a new 4 runway airport on the Isle of Grain.⁷² The Airports Commission will undertake further investigations to help decide whether to add an Isle of Grain option to its shortlist by Autumn 2014.

Mayor of London

Although the Mayor has been most widely associated with the Outer Estuary scheme dubbed 'Boris Island',⁷³ he submitted 2 separate estuary proposals for additional airport capacity to the Airports Commission in 2013. One of these was [centred on the Isle of Grain](#) in the Inner Estuary and it is this location rather than an artificial island concept which the Commission's December 2013 Interim Report stated would require further study.

The Mayor was reported as welcoming the launch of the Thames Hub scheme in Autumn 2011. Transport for London carried out a series of studies into various possible locations for a new report and Grain was assessed as the most favourable option.

this option scores consistently highly, including through sensitivity testing. It presents a good balance between maximising the economic and regeneration impacts that a hub airport could have, whilst able to reduce and manage the negative impacts of aviation.⁷⁴

The Mayor's Isle of Grain submission was for a four runway airport partly constructed on reclaimed land. Heathrow would eventually 'take on a new role for commercial/residential development. With a target opening date of 2029 and an opening capacity of 90 million ppa, the new airport could expand if necessary to meet a possible capacity of 180 million ppa by 2050. 'Excellent and environmentally sustainable' surface access connectivity would include high speed rail links and a target public transport mode share of 65%. The new hub would be able to serve 159 more destinations and more than a double the flight frequencies by 2050 than would Heathrow, without new runways or terminals. An efficient new 4 runway estuary airport and technological improvements would reduce aircraft emissions as compared with a 2-runway Heathrow by 2050. The impact on environmentally protected sites was acknowledged, but steps would be taken to limit the damage and provide compensatory habitats.⁷⁵

The new hub was estimated by the Mayor to cost £47billion at 2013 prices by 2029 and up to £68 billion to provide 180 million capacity by 2050. The Government was intended to purchase Heathrow, construct the new estuary airport and its associated infrastructure and then close Heathrow as an airport and sell the land for development and the new airport as a going concern.

⁷² [Isle of Grain proposal based on IAAG, Foster and Partners, Mayor of London and Thames Reach submissions](#), Sift 3, Reference No 67, Airports Commission, 2013

⁷³ See [Library Standard Note SN6144](#)

⁷⁴ [A new airport for London and the UK: Technical note - shortlisting the options](#), Transport for London, July 2013 (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁷⁵ [A new hub airport for London and the UK: Isle of Grain, submission to the Airports Commission](#), Mayor of London/TfL, July 2013

The Mayor called on the Commission to take a 'bold and urgent decision' in the national interest. It should be practical about the obstacles to be overcome and discount the views of those with a vested interest in existing airport infrastructure.⁷⁶

The assessment of the scheme by the Commission's consultants notes that it would have a larger environmental footprint and potentially more destructive impact on protected sites than the Thames Hub proposal; with 4 villages to be lost, the number of properties demolished would also be greater than with any other Hoo Peninsula project.

In his response to the Interim Report in January 2014, the Mayor said

'The creation of a monstrous Heathrow on a constrained site won't solve our capacity crisis and would inflict untold misery on hundreds of thousands more Londoners through the din of many more jet engines in parts of the Capital and home counties that have not so far experienced it.

'A new hub in the inner estuary can be built for the same cost as a four-runway Heathrow, and would bring new jobs, homes, and long-term competitiveness.'⁷⁷

In a more detailed response, he criticised the report's lack of strategic vision. While welcoming the Commission's rigorous work, he described some of its conclusions as inconsistent and incorrect. He felt that the benefits of the new hub at the Isle of Grain had been downplayed and particularly disagreed with the cost assessment approach adopted which he felt was biased towards the construction of new runways at Heathrow and Gatwick. The Mayor claimed that by ruling out all hub options apart from Heathrow and the Inner Estuary, the legal imperative to protect wildlife habitats by ruling out all airport development in the area unless there were no alternatives could be addressed. He said that the public health benefits (noise pollution etc.) of closing Heathrow would meet the public interest test and, although it would be difficult, compensatory habitat could be provided.⁷⁸

Airports Commission, 2013-

The Airports Commission, chaired by Sir Howard Davies, was established in September 2012 to 'examine the scale and timing of any additional capacity to maintain the UK's position as Europe's most important aviation hub'.⁷⁹ The Davies Commission carried out a 3-stage sift of the individual long-term capacity proposals it received, including 10 concerning the estuary. At stage 3, it decided to combine elements of four individual Hoo Peninsula proposals to form a new airport scheme (3 runways by 2030 and 4 by 2050) in order to minimise cost, environmental impact and avoid re-location of the existing LNG facility on the Isle of Grain.⁸⁰ Opening in 2029, it would replace Heathrow and would be linked to London by a new high speed rail line. The loss of [Special Protection Areas](#) and [Ramsar sites](#) was acknowledged and it was noted that for construction to proceed, a case would have to be made that there was no alternative and that there was an overriding public interest in favour. Compensatory habitat would also have to be provided. Three villages would have to be demolished and around 3000 people re-located with the remaining population newly affected by noise pollution, although fewer than at the other airport options. Including optimism bias

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p34

⁷⁷ [A new hub airport for London](#), Transport for London website (accessed 28 March 2014)

⁷⁸ [The Airports Commission Interim Report: Key Issues](#), TfL Planning Briefing Note, Transport for London, January 2014 (accessed 28 March 2014)

⁷⁹ See [Library Standard Note SN02893](#) for further information about the Commission

⁸⁰ [Isle of Grain proposal based on IAAG, Foster and Partners, Mayor of London and Thames Reach submissions](#), Sift 3 Reference No. 67, Airports Commission 2013

and contingency allowances, the cost of a 3 runway airport was estimated at between £82-112 billion and £93-125 billion for four runways by 2050. The Commission's consultants noted that there was no modern day precedent for undertaking a project of this scale and cost in the UK.

When the Airports Commission published its interim report in December 2013, it announced that no Thames estuary proposal had been shortlisted

6.43 The Commission's view therefore, is that no proposal for an Estuary airport advanced so far has presented a sufficiently powerful case for it to be recommended as a credible option for further detailed assessment at this stage.

6.44 But neither does the Commission consider that a firm conclusion can yet be reached that an Isle of Grain airport option would have no prospect of success. The scale of benefits associated with such a proposal is potentially greater than for any of the other options that the Commission has considered. As noted above, substantial further work is required to evaluate these fully. The delivery challenges posed need detailed and careful consideration. The analytical difficulties are of a different order from those associated with expansion at an existing airport site, particularly in relation to its local and regional economic impacts. It has not been possible to undertake this analysis in the time available for the publication of this report.

6.45 For these reasons, the Commission believes that it is appropriate to continue to analyse the feasibility and impacts of such an airport in addition to the further development of its short-listed options. Therefore, in the first half of 2014, it intends to carry out further analysis of a number of the key issues presented by an Isle of Grain airport. This may include consideration of:

- the surface access measures needed to support such a development, together with their costs and benefits (including wider impacts for users of the South East transport network);
- the feasibility of meeting the tests required for development affecting Natura 2000 sites, including in particular of delivering effective compensatory habitats; and
- the potential socio-economic impacts of a major airport development on the Isle of Grain, including the consequential impacts in respect of the Heathrow and London City sites.

6.46 The Commission will aim to complete this work in time to enable it to reach a decision in the second half of 2014 on whether an Isle of Grain option constitutes a credible option. If so, it will subject it to the same process of appraisal and consultation as the other three short-listed options, although not necessarily to the same timescale, so as to reach a firm recommendation in its final report in the summer of 2015.⁸¹

The main elements of the scheme would be

- A four-runway airport on the Isle of Grain, constructed on land reclaimed from the sea, would open by 2029
- Heathrow and probably London City airports would close. Some capacity at Southend airport would also be lost

⁸¹ *Airports Commission: Interim Report*, Airports Commission, December 2013, pp186-187

- A new high speed rail line to central London, an extension to Crossrail and additional road connections
- There would be a loss of environmentally protected sites which would require significant legal hurdles to be overcome and compensatory habitat to be created
- Approximately 3000 people would need to be re-located and 3 villages would be demolished
- High flood risk would need to be addressed in the design of the new airport
- There would be a higher risk of birdstrike than at an inland location and significant airspace redesign would be required
- The very high cost of the project is unlikely to be met by the private sector and substantial Government subsidy is likely to be required. The consultants emphasise that there is no modern day precedent for a project of this scale in the UK ⁸²

Further investigations would be made in 2014 to assess the viability of this combined scheme.

2.3 Foulness Island/Maplin Sands, Essex

Although there were early proposals to build an airport on Foulness Island itself, the most well-known attempt (and the only one with Government support) at an airport in the Thames estuary was centred on Maplin Sands, just off Foulness Island in Essex. The Maplin Sands proposal for an airport [plans for a seaport and new town were added later] was adopted by the Heath Government in 1971 but abandoned by Labour in 1974. In 1979 the Conservative Government announced that the plan would not be revived; there has been little activity since then.

Early proposals

Foulness Island in Essex was considered as a potential airport site as far back as the early 1960s.⁸³ In May 1963, as the 'Interdepartmental Committee' set up by the Conservative Government to consider the location of a Third London Airport continued its work, the Noise Abatement Society suggested Foulness as a viable option in a letter to the Minister of Aviation. The Government's response is recorded in Hansard

Your proposal is much more far-reaching than merely laying down runways and taxiways, etc. on a new site. It would mean writing off well over £50 million capital that the taxpayer and the airlines have put into Heathrow and the use of a large amount of national resources to re-provide them elsewhere. There would also be an immense social problem. Some 30,000 people are employed at Heathrow, and most of them live nearby. Unless they are to be deprived of their jobs, it would be essential to facilitate their transfer to the neighbourhood of the new airport. There are also many people living near Heathrow whose livelihood depends wholly or partly on the employment and business created by the airport. All these people would be vitally affected by your proposals. We should also have to consider the demands on housing and other social

⁸² *Isle of Grain proposal: drawn from Foster, IAAG, Thames Reach, Mayor of London submissions*, Sift 3, Reference No. 67, Airports Commission 2013 (accessed 12 March 2014)

⁸³ David McKie states that the Noise Abatement Society had been interested in this idea since 1957. *A sadly mismanaged affair: a political history of the third London airport*, By David McKie, 1973, p148

services in the area near Foulness, as the new airport would have to operate on the same scale as Heathrow.

A transfer of the kind that you have suggested would therefore constitute a major social upheaval with incalculable consequences. Foulness, anyhow, is not a suitable site for a major airport. We have, as it happens, examined the possibility of building a new airport in Foulness, not to replace Heathrow but to take the overflow of the London area's traffic when both Heathrow and Gatwick are operating to capacity. Foulness has had to be ruled out, even for this supplementary role, on several grounds. With a major airport at Foulness, Southend would have to be closed and its considerable traffic transferred to the new airport. This would mean that right from the start Foulness would be unable to take both Heathrow's and Southend's traffic, and the London area would thus need another very large airport at the same time. Even if we could find a suitable site—which our current studies show to be extremely difficult—the full cost of this extra airport would fall on the taxpayer. A major airport at Foulness would also mean closing the firing range at Shoeburyness. Many millions of pounds of public money have been spent in developing this range, which plays an essential part in our defence plans. Even if an alternative site were available for the range—and I understand that there is none—we could not justify the abandonment of such a large public investment and its duplication elsewhere.

I would also mention that Heathrow, which incidentally makes a profit of over £1 million a year, could not cease operations before both the airport replacing it and the monorail link with Central London were completed. Your consortium would therefore have to lay out sums of the order of £100 million on the airport, airlines' maintenance bases and the monorail, before beginning to receive a return.

I think that I have said enough to show why I could not encourage your consortium to devote time and effort to an impracticable scheme. I regret that I am therefore unable to support your request to the Secretary of State for War for permission to make soil tests on Foulness.⁸⁴

The Interdepartmental Committee's report (published in 1964) did shortlist Foulness, but recommended Stansted.⁸⁵ The 1965/1966 public inquiry into the development of Stansted heard evidence from the Noise Abatement Society on the necessity to site airports as far from built-up areas as possible. The Society argued that a monorail link to Foulness could bring the site within 20 minutes travelling time from central London. The Inspector's report found the case for the development of Stansted unproven and recommended further study.⁸⁶ Although the Labour Government did carry out another 'Interdepartmental Review' in 1966, the report was not made public. The Government's 1967 decision to overrule the Planning Inspector's objections (although it was not a statutory public inquiry) and approve Stansted's development provoked a great deal of protest.

A Motion [debated in the Commons on 29 June 1967](#) demanded that an independent public inquiry be held. During the course of the debate, the President of the Board of Trade, Douglas Jay (Lab, Battersea North) explained the reasons for the rejection of Stansted's alternatives. In respect of Foulness, he said

If, therefore, we were to choose Foulness, there would be a longer journey time to London; another site would have to be found for the firing range; the cost would be

⁸⁴ [HC Deb 29 July 1963 vol 682 cc17-9](#)

⁸⁵ HMSO, *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Third London Airport*, 1964

⁸⁶ *Report of the Inquiry into Local Objections to the proposed development of land at Stansted as the Third Airport for London*, Presented to the Minister of Housing and Local Government by G D Blake, 1967

very much greater; a much larger number of people in total would be affected by noise; and more agricultural land of high value would be sacrificed. I cannot think that this would be a very sensible decision either.⁸⁷

The Motion was defeated, but in a [Lords debate on 11 December 1967](#), the Government's decision was again heavily criticised. In February 1968, citing the reason as a recent decision to realign the runways at Stansted which the 1965/66 Planning Inquiry had not considered, the [Government announced](#) the establishment of an inquiry into the siting of London's third airport.

Roskill Commission on the Third London Airport (1968-'71)⁸⁸

The Commission on the Third London Airport chaired by Mr Justice Roskill was set up in 1968 "to enquire into the timing of the need for a four-runway airport to cater for the growth of traffic at existing airports serving the London area, to consider the various alternative sites, and to recommend which site should be selected." According to David McKie, the problem was handed over to an impartial Commission 'impervious to nobbling by pressure groups' which would look at the advantages and disadvantages of potential sites in a logical manner. It was felt that the findings of such a Commission would have a better chance of gaining public acceptance than a report written in Whitehall.⁸⁹

Oral and written representations were made to the Roskill Commission from interested parties including local pressure groups and MPs. Essex County Council also submitted proposals in respect of Foulness Island and Foulness Sands/Shore.⁹⁰

Several proposals for airports at Foulness were made by private sector organisations/engineers around the time of the Roskill Commission. In February 1968, John Howard and Company proposed a 4-runway scheme costing £50-70m. Bernard L Clark & Partners' scheme included a large dock complex in addition to the airport. The company argued that "There are no limits to the extensions or revisions which may become necessary, and certainly, whatever the future holds in store, so far as noise and similar problems are concerned, no inconvenience to the population generally".⁹¹ The Roskill Commission appeared unconvinced by their plans and questioned their value for money for taxpayers.⁹²

In March 1969, the Commission released a short-list of 4 potential sites. Three were inland: Cublington (Bucks); Nuthampstead (Herts); and Thurleigh (Beds); and one on the coast at Foulness (Essex). Stansted was eliminated.

The Report noted that Foulness was regarded as the public favourite for the Third London Airport. Nevertheless, although the technical feasibility of reclaiming land was accepted, the Roskill report eventually rejected Foulness on the grounds that its inaccessibility would mean that it would not succeed as an airport, with airlines choosing to fly from Heathrow and Gatwick and therefore increasing the noise burdens at these locations. In December 1970, the Commission released its conclusions, revealing that Cublington in Buckinghamshire was

⁸⁷ [HC Deb 29 June 1967 vol 749 cc798](#)

⁸⁸ For further information on the Roskill Commission, please see HC Library Reference Sheet 71/4, March 1971

⁸⁹ David McKie, *A sadly mismanaged affair: a political history of the third London airport*, 1973, p156

⁹⁰ *Submissions 1 and 2 to the Commission on the Third London Airport: location of proposed alternative sites*, Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils, 1968

⁹¹ *Proposal for an international dock system and airport on reclaimed land on the Thames estuary adjacent to Foulness Island*, Bernard L Clark & Partners, January 1968

⁹² David McKie, *A sadly mismanaged affair: a political history of the third London airport*, 1973, pp149-153

the preferred option of all but one of the Commissioners.⁹³ When the final report was published in January 1971, Professor Colin Buchanan submitted a dissenting opinion in favour of the Foulness site. Although he recognised that sites of scientific interest would be destroyed and ‘an area of remarkable fascination for its remoteness and loneliness would go’. he argued that it would be far more environmentally damaging to build a new airport at Cublington than at Foulness⁹⁴

In the period between the release of the Commission’s conclusions and the announcement of the Government’s decision on the location of the Third London Airport, there was a wave of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary protest against the Cublington location.

On 26 April 1971, the Government [formally responded](#) to the Roskill report. It announced that it accepted the need for a third London airport, but decided that the site should be at Foulness rather than Cublington

In the Government’s view, the irreversible damage that would be done to large tracts of countryside and to many settled communities by the creation of an airport at any of the three inland sites studied by the Commission is so great that it is worth paying the price involved in selecting Foulness. The Commission has clearly indicated that the Foulness site has its economic and environmental disadvantages.

The Government are confident that an airport at Foulness will meet the needs of aviation, despite the economic penalty involved. Speedy means of access and efficient operation can reduce this penalty, and the use of the new airport would be encouraged by stricter limits on movements at other airports. Such limits, which the new airport would make possible, would help to reduce noise at existing airports. It will be open to the British Airports Authority so to arrange charges between its airports as to stimulate traffic at Foulness. On these assumptions, which differ from those made by the Commission, the new airport can be expected in time to make a proper return on capital invested there, though it may not become self-supporting as quickly as one at an inland site.⁹⁵

In response, Anthony Crosland MP (Lab, Grimsby), Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, stated

I believe that the Government are, on balance, right to have rejected the three Roskill inland sites. I think they are also right to have rejected a second runway at Gatwick. But the choice of Foulness is totally wrong, on the ground of damage to environment, and particularly the coastline; on the ground of destruction of homes for motorways; on the ground of enormous additional cost; and probably also on the ground of safety.⁹⁶

Writing in *The Guardian*, a few days later, Mr Crosland accused the Government of making a monumental blunder’ in choosing Foulness. He noted that the provision of new transport links would mean “far more homes and families disrupted by bulldozers than would Cublington”. He argued that there was no need for a 4-runway airport, though there might be a requirement for a more modest 2-runway airport, which he said should be located at a

⁹³ “Government may turn to Foulness for third airport if Cublington protest becomes too strong”, *Times*, 19 December 1970, p1

⁹⁴ *Report, Commission on the Third London Airport* [Roskill Commission], HMSO, 1971

⁹⁵ [HC Deb 26 April 1971 vol 816 cc34-44](#)

⁹⁶ [HC Deb 26 April 1971 vol 816 c37](#)

coastal location without the drawbacks of Foulness. Ultimately, he believed that the cost would prove prohibitive.⁹⁷

Critics of the Government's decision, apart from local residents and pressure groups, questioned the need for a 4-runway airport at Foulness or anywhere else in the south east. It was argued that aircraft developments, including STOL (Short Take-Off and Landing) and VTOL (Vertical Take Off and Landing) and general aircraft improvements would limit their noise impact.

Why Maplin was chosen, 1971

The Government claimed that it would be a lesser evil to site the airport on the coast rather than inland, where much countryside and many people would be affected. Other reasons cited by commentators include

- Pressure from well-funded and organised local pressure groups opposed to development of Cublington and pressure from MPs.⁹⁸ According to Peter Hall, 'the forces of economic reason may have declared for Cublington, but the forces of environmental emotion were in favour only of Foulness, and they proved far stronger both in number and in intensity'.⁹⁹
- National environmental groups such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Noise Abatement Society were also in favour of the Foulness site.
- Advocates of Foulness stressed its advantages in terms of lower levels of noise pollution and damage to valuable agricultural land than an inland site. Having aircraft take off and land over the sea rather than over major built up areas would be safer.
- Colin Buchanan's Note of Dissent to the 1971 Roskill report stating that 'it would be nothing less than an environmental disaster if the airport were to be built at any of the inland sites, but nowhere more serious than at Cublington where it would lie athwart the critically important belt of open country between London and Birmingham'.¹⁰⁰
- Essex County Council was in favour, though it was criticised by anti-Maplin groups as taking this stance because it was dominated by members based in the North of the County who were anxious to protect Stansted from further development. David McKie, writing in 1973, commented that Essex County Council (ECC) had offered up Foulness as a 'burnt offering' in the 1960s in order to draw fire away from other sites in Essex which the Council felt were more important.¹⁰¹
- The regeneration of the area around Southend was seen as an advantage by Southend Borough Council.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ "The Folly of Foulness", *Guardian*, 28 April 1971, p12

⁹⁸ "Power of the lobbies in third airport campaign", *Times*, 5 April 1971 pp1,4

⁹⁹ Peter Hall, *Great Planning Disasters*, 1980, p37

¹⁰⁰ *Report, Commission on the Third London Airport*, [Roskill Commission], HMSO, 1971, pp149-160

¹⁰¹ David McKie, op cit, p146

¹⁰² David McKie, op cit, pp153-155

- Other commentators criticised Roskill's use of cost-benefit analysis which helped to decide on Cublington rather than Foulness.

In February 1972, the Government confirmed that it would consider constructing a seaport as well as an airport at Maplin (as the scheme began to be called rather than Foulness¹⁰³) and invited the Port of London Authority to submit proposals.¹⁰⁴

On 9 August 1972, the Government announced the proposed site of the Maplin scheme. The Government choice of site C was criticised by local MPs who had preferred the more northerly 'site D' which offered less noise pollution impact.¹⁰⁵

In the 1972-73 Parliamentary Session, the *Maplin Development Bill* was introduced in order to set up the Maplin Development Authority (Chaired by Sir Frank Marshall) which would carry out the redevelopment of the land; to give the Authority the duty of making land available for the airport and seaport; and to grant the necessary planning permission for the project.

On 8 Feb 1973 the *Commons Second Reading* of the *Maplin Development Bill* was opposed by the Labour Party "until the case for a new airport and seaport complex at Maplin has been fully reappraised by the Civil Aviation Authority in the light of the many changed circumstances since the original decision was taken and of the development needs of other regions of the country." This 'reasoned amendment' was defeated and the Second Reading subsequently passed. During the course of the Bill's passage, opposition to the project, now estimated by some critics as costing £1 billion,¹⁰⁶ grew from MPs concerned at its cost and unconvinced that it was necessary.¹⁰⁷ The Government inserted an amendment to the Bill which would require a detailed report to be presented to Parliament, and parliamentary approval given, before the Maplin Development Authority exercised its powers to reclaim land from the sea. Nevertheless, criticism of the project grew. According to a 1974 Library briefing,

During 1973 the emphasis in the debate over the third London airport altered. It was no longer a question of choosing a site, avoiding as far as possible environmental disruption and local discontent, but a question of whether it was necessary to build a new airport at all. Reports revising estimates made by the Roskill Commission began to appear... and the need for Maplin was seriously questioned.

The Maplin project seems to have been founded on two premises: that by the 1980s there would be a shortage of runway and other aircraft space in the London area, and that future air transport patterns would involve massive environmental disturbance (mainly noise) which would not be tolerated in a built-up area. By 1973 many of the economic and technological forecasts had altered and much of the "expert opinion" was beginning to argue that it might be possible to manage with existing capacity. The main discussion centred round the following points

¹⁰³ 'Maplin' began to be the preferred official name for the airport rather than Foulness ["Foul" is derived from the wild "fowl" for which the area is well known] around 1971/1972 as the proposed airport was to be on Maplin Sands rather than on Foulness Island itself. Some critics suggested that 'Maplin' had been adopted because it sounded more pleasant than 'Foulness'. ("Maplin overtakes Foulness", *Times*, 17 February 1972, p21).

¹⁰⁴ [HC Deb 02 February 1972 vol 830 cc446-55](#)

¹⁰⁵ "Maplin site C is 'too noisy'", *Times*, 10 August 1972, p3

¹⁰⁶ A figure rejected by the Government, which estimated the costs at £825m. However, in its 1978 White Paper (Cmnd 7084), the Labour Government estimated costs at £680m for a runway and two terminals, plus £410m for building transport links.

¹⁰⁷ "Angry Tory MPs stalk Maplin", *Observer*, 17 June 1973,

Air traffic forecast demand for the London area. [A 1973 CAA report¹⁰⁸] implies that there will be no need for new runways before 1986 and maybe not even then.

Runway capacities. The CAA report forecast that present capacity could meet requirements if for example 2 mixed mode" operations were used at Heathrow and the runways at Luton, Stansted and Southend were not closed down.

Ground capacity for passengers. A deficiency is accepted by the CAA report but this accepted the restrictions on the expansion at Heathrow and Gatwick in anticipation of Maplin

Noise forecasts. The report on aircraft noise published by the Department of Environment for the Noise Advisory Council in April 1972 on the siting of the runways at Maplin gives forecasts for noise levels for 1980 onwards which are "significantly quieter than predicted by the Roskill Commission", based on later information about technological advances... If these forecasts are related to Heathrow and Gatwick, it would seem the number of people affected by noise should fall.¹⁰⁹

Despite its difficulties, Prime Minister Edward Heath, who in the 1940s had sat on a Ministry of Civil Aviation committee overseeing the development of Heathrow airport, believed that the Government was right to press ahead with plans for an airport at Maplin.¹¹⁰ He saw it as a huge opportunity to develop 'the world's most modern and well-equipped airport' which would not be subject to 'all the disadvantages and restrictions that affect airports located in densely populated areas'.¹¹¹ By contrast, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, Anthony Crosland, condemned the proposal for an airport, seaport and new town at Maplin as a 'mad plan for Heathograd in South-east Essex'.¹¹²

In a [Commons debate](#) on 23 October 1973, Mr Crosland stated that, "the Labour Party is as of now unalterably opposed to the Maplin project...and will not proceed with it".¹¹³ The Act received Royal Assent on 25 October 1973 and the Maplin Development Authority formally came into being on that day. The plan entailed a 2-runway airport (with the possibility of expansion to 4 runways) which was due to open in 1980 (this date was later pushed back) and a deep-sea port. A new town was to be built 'to the highest environmental standards' to accommodate the workers employed at the airport and seaport and it was planned to connect Maplin via transport links including a new motorway and a high speed rail link to King's Cross.¹¹⁴

Why Maplin was abandoned, 1974

In March 1974 the Labour Party took power as a minority administration following the General Election of 28 February 1974 and on 20 March announced that it would undertake a review of the Maplin scheme. In July 1974 that review was published,¹¹⁵ and, in a parliamentary statement, the Secretary of State for Trade, Peter Shore MP (Lab, Stepney and Poplar), announced the abandonment of the project

¹⁰⁸ *Forecasts of Air Traffic and capacity at airports in the London Area*, Civil Aviation Authority, 9 May 1973

¹⁰⁹ [Third London Airport](#), HC Library Reference Sheet 74/22, 27 November 1974

¹¹⁰ Andy Beckett, *When the lights went out: Britain in the Seventies*, 2009, p36

¹¹¹ "Heath says Maplin offers 'enormous opportunities'", *The Guardian*, 12 July 1973, p22

¹¹² [HC Deb 24 July 1973 vol 860 cc1415](#)

¹¹³ [HC Deb 23 October 1973 vol 861 c1033](#)

¹¹⁴ *The Maplin Project: designation area for the new town consultation document*, Department of the Environment, July 1973

¹¹⁵ *Maplin: review of airport project*, Department of Trade. HMSO, 1974

Seven main conclusions emerge from the reappraisal. First, the forecasts of air passenger demand are significantly lower than was envisaged previously. Secondly, up to 1990 no further main runways will be required at any of the four London area airports at Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton. Thirdly, the passenger-handling capacity required to accommodate the forecast traffic up to 1990 is not now dependent on a new airport at Maplin. Fourthly, the noise nuisance is expected to be much lower than was forecast by the Roskill Commission. Fifthly, whether or not Maplin were built, capacity at Heathrow would need to be expanded from its present 20 million passengers a year to 38 million and at Gatwick from 6 million to 16 million. Sixthly, beyond that, further capacity would be required from the mid-1980s which could be provided through a new airport at Maplin or by some combination of developments at existing London area airports with the possibility of some diversion of London traffic to regional airports. Finally, the cost of accommodating the forecast traffic at Maplin is now estimated at about £650 million. This is nearly twice as much as the next most expensive alternative considered in the reappraisal.

In the light of this, the Government consider that the case for a new airport at Maplin has not been established, and they have decided to abandon it.

The review has particularly examined the question of aircraft noise. I am deeply conscious of the distress suffered by those who live near airports. However, the review shows that Maplin would not have had a great effect on total noise disturbance. First, if Maplin were built it could not affect the level of noise at existing airports before 1985. Secondly, by 1990 at London area airports nearly all air transport movements are expected to be by new, quieter types of aircraft. This means that, with or without Maplin, there will be a marked improvement in current noise levels at these airports. But there can be no relaxation in our efforts, and I am determined to achieve a further and progressive improvement in noise by tackling it at the source on the aircraft, by intensifying night jet curfews, by revised operational techniques and by improved facilities for noise insulation.¹¹⁶

In response, Rt Hon. Edward Heath MP (Con, Sidcup), then Leader of the Opposition, noted that the decision

...completely fits in with the prejudices of the Government when in Opposition...Of course it is understandable that those with constituencies affected should feel very strongly about it. Those who feel that they have been relieved from Maplin may express their thanks. Others in other parts of the country may take the simple view that money will be saved. But there is beyond all this a national interest, and a very large national interest at stake both in personal communications and trade communications. I do not believe it can be in the national interest for the Secretary of State to indicate that we are to have the worst airport facilities available of any European, North American or Australasian country.¹¹⁷

Following the Labour Government's July 1974 statement explaining its reasons for abandoning the scheme, contemporary/subsequent accounts have emphasised the importance of a variety of factors affecting the Government's decision:

- An additional airport was no longer seen as necessary in the light of new air traffic forecasts

¹¹⁶ [HC Debate, 18 July 1974](#)

¹¹⁷ [HC Deb 18 July 1974 vol 877 cc684](#)

- The oil crisis of 1973-74 (following the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war) which led some people to believe that there would be a sharp reduction in air travel.¹¹⁸
- The Labour Party when in Opposition saw it as a Conservative ‘prestige project’ which was too costly. In difficult economic circumstances it was perceived as unsustainable.
- Mr Eldon Griffiths MP (Con, Bury St Edmunds), former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who had ministerial responsibility for the 1970s Maplin scheme, said at the Stansted Public Inquiry in the early 1980s that the change of Government in 1974 was the main reason. He said that the new Labour Government ‘was less anxious to support projects in the south-east and more anxious to promote them elsewhere’. Had the Conservative Party been re-elected in February 1974, he felt that the project would have proceeded.¹¹⁹
- The airline industry was opposed to it.¹²⁰
- Environmental groups e.g. Friends of the Earth (FoE) were opposed to the potentially disruptive effects on local wildlife.¹²¹
- Pressure groups with the backing of local MPs fought a vigorous campaign which gathered support from local people as the potential damage caused by the construction of what the Conservative Government had referred to as the world’s first environmental airport became clear. The damage caused by the construction of transport links and the large-scale urbanisation resulting from the planned new town had generated growing discontent.¹²² Writing a month after the abandonment of the project, Derrick Wood of the Defenders of Essex claimed that the pressure groups had been able to delay the introduction of the scheme by the Conservative government, buying enough time “to enable political, technical and other expert pressures to be asserted in places where decisions are taken”.¹²³

Developments since 1974

The *Maplin Development Authority [Dissolution] Act 1976* effectively wound up the project; there has been little discussion of Maplin Sands as the site of a new airport since then and few firm proposals.

In 1979, the Greater London Council (GLC) produced a report urging reconsideration of the Maplin scheme, though on a smaller, less expensive scale than the project scrapped in 1974. The terminals would be based in central London with 60-70% of the passengers travelling to the airport site by rail. The GLC was reported to be in favour of Maplin because of the potential economic and social benefits to the East End in particular and also London and the Thames corridor.¹²⁴ The GLC proposal was supported by Essex County Council (ECC) – though by 1981, ECC appeared to favour the expansion of Heathrow instead.

¹¹⁸ Peter Hall, *Great Planning Disasters*, 1980, p39

¹¹⁹ Evidence given by Mr Eldon Griffiths MP, 1982 [part of batch of documents released by the Dept for Transport on 22 August 2008 in response to an FOI request regarding Maplin airport]

¹²⁰ Peter Bromhead, *The Great White Elephant of Maplin Sands*, 1973, p27

¹²¹ “[The Maplin Manifesto](#)”, *Ecologist*, April 1973 pp134-137 (accessed, 26 March 2014)

¹²² Peter Hall, *Great Planning Disasters*, 1980, pp38-9

¹²³ “Maplin: a campaign concluded”, By Derrick Wood, *New Statesman*, 23 August 1974, p248

¹²⁴ “GLC takes a new look at Maplin airport plan”, *Guardian*, 6 March 1979, p2

In July 1979, the Town and Country Planning Association recommended the construction of an international airport at Maplin because the location

...although not perfect is superior on environmental grounds to all other potential sites. It fits with projected growth for south-east Essex, could reduce commuting to London, help regenerate the East End, be linked with a new seaport and strengthen communications with Holland and Germany.¹²⁵

The *Report of the Study Group on South East Airports: possible sites for a Third London Airport* considered options for a new airport including a two runway airport on Maplin Sands or on Foulness Island itself. However, it made no recommendation, leaving it to Ministers to decide whether there should be a new airport.¹²⁶

In December 1979, following consultation, the Conservative [Government announced](#) that they would not revive the Maplin scheme

The Government have decided not to build a major new international airport of the kind considered by the Roskill Commission report in 1971; nor do they intend to resurrect the Maplin project, even in a revised form. Instead, the Government's policy is, first, to encourage the fullest use of regional airports and, secondly, to provide additional airport capacity, as the traffic develops, based on the existing airports in the South-East, particularly Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted...

We recognise that Maplin has certain advantages, but the provision of additional road and rail links, the preparation of the site and the relocation of defence establishments, all of which would require a commitment of over £1 billion, involve very serious risks, which are unjustified when we cannot be certain that an airport of such a size will be needed. Moreover, an airport at Maplin could not be ready to meet the expected shortfall in capacity in the late 1980s.¹²⁷

In 1980, the Noise Advisory Council (a Department of the Environment panel) concluded that on aircraft noise grounds, Maplin Sands was its preferred site for the third London Airport. However, no assessment was made of the noise problems arising from the road and rail access routes required.¹²⁸

In June 1980, the GLC was reported as intending to use the forthcoming public inquiry into the expansion of Stansted as the occasion to present a case for developing a single runway airport at Maplin, linked by a high speed train service to Liverpool Street station.¹²⁹

The 1981-1983 Stansted Inquiry considered the case for reviving Maplin. The Planning Inspector, Richard Eyre QC, stated that the Government's decision to select Foulness in 1971 had been 'ill-advised and precipitate' as little regard appeared to have been paid to vital access and environmental considerations. Mr Eyre noted that public support for Maplin had largely disappeared. Indeed, Professor Colin Buchanan, whose dissenting opinion from the Roskill Commission report had galvanised support for Maplin/Foulness had stated at the

¹²⁵ "Planners favour airport at Maplin", *Guardian*, 30 July 1979, p3

¹²⁶ *Report of the Study Group on South East Airports: possible sites for a Third London Airport*, Department of Trade, 1979, pp56-63

¹²⁷ [HC Deb 17 December 1979 vol 976 cc34-38](#)

¹²⁸ *The Third London Airport: report by a working group of the Council*, Noise Advisory Council, 1980

¹²⁹ "Plan revived for third London airport at Maplin", *Guardian*, 18 June 1980, p3

Inquiry that “I am driven to the conclusion that the Maplin tide has been missed, probably for good.”¹³⁰

The Inspector described those who did still support Maplin as ‘voices crying in the wilderness’. One of these was the Town and Country Planning Association which submitted a planning application to develop an airport at Maplin in March 1981(though it withdrew the application the following year). The TCPA’s case was dismissed by the Inspector for the following reasons:

- The construction of an airport, with the associated urban development at Maplin was no longer consistent with regional planning considerations;
- The damage to the environment which would be caused by the construction of new road and rail links. Urbanisation would spoil the area and there would be damaging consequences for the fishing and holiday industries. Mr Eyre described the proposition that an airport at Maplin would be ‘noise free’ as a myth;
- High cost and difficulty of relocating the MOD firing range at Shoeburyness;
- The existing airports would have to be run down to divert traffic to Maplin – which the Inspector found unrealistic due to the opposition of the airlines;
- Finally, the Inspector said that he believed ‘Maplin should be rejected on ground of cost and lead time alone. The costs would prove to be enormous. The risks would be incalculable.’¹³¹

The Inspector concluded by rejecting the TCPA’s argument and said

In my judgment the Maplin project should, for the overwhelming reasons I have rehearsed above, stay well and truly buried.

TCPA remains committed to an airport in the estuary and in 2006 called for the eventual closure of Heathrow in favour of an estuarial site.¹³²

Maplin retained support from some pressure groups. An organisation called the Maplin Movement was established in 1973 to campaign in favour of the airport/seaport and in 1977 declared approximately 4000 members.¹³³ In a collection of 1980s documents released by the Department for Transport under FOI legislation in 2008 there is a reference to the Chairman of the Movement having written to the Secretary of State for Trade in 1979 and to an MEP in 1982 protesting at the abandonment of the project.¹³⁴ No information on any more recent activities by this group has been traced.

In the 1980s, the Noise Abatement Society remained committed to the location. In 1987, the Chairman of the Society noted that it had been an idea ‘before its time’, but now felt that with the increase in air traffic congestion, noise and safety concerns at existing London airports,

The political climate is set fair for this imaginative project. The money, the expertise and will to succeed are there, and the first runway to ease the pressure could be ready

¹³⁰ *The Airports Inquiries 1981-1983: Part III: Chapters 9 to 13 inclusive*, Report by Graham Eyre QC, para 1.16

¹³¹ *ibid*, paras 8.4-9.2

¹³² [Heathrow: a retirement plan](#), by Tony Hall and Peter Hall, TCPA, 2006 (Internet Archive, accessed 26 March 2014)

¹³³ *Directory of British Associations 1977-8, 1977*, p225

¹³⁴ *FOI request for documents/plans for Maplin Airport*, DfT, released on 22 August 2008

for use within two years of the Prime Minister's blessing. We and vast numbers of flight path noise victims await it with eagerness and expectation.¹³⁵

The construction of a new airport at Maplin also remained popular with activists opposed to the development of existing London airports. In August 1988, Evelyn Atlee of the Federation of Heathrow Anti-Noise Groups wrote to the Financial Times

...in the 1970s there was a proposal to build a combined airport and deep water port on the coast in Essex. Aircraft would have taken off and landed over water, not people. With a high speed train to central London, and a motorway to join up with the national network, access would have been free from problems.

The chaos at our airports this summer shows our civil aviation industry in disarray. It also shows that the need for Maplin is greater now than when it was cancelled. It should be built now, before expansion plans for existing airports are carried out, bringing further turbulence in their wake.¹³⁶

Although Maplin Sands was apparently raised as a potential site by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, no firm Maplin/Foulness proposal was submitted during the SERAS consultation in 2002/2003.¹³⁷

Maplin did appear in the longlist of options for a new airport drawn up by Transport for London of the Mayor in 2013. However, it failed to reach the shortlist – its relative remoteness (located 70km east of central London) meant it was seen as being potentially less attractive to private sector investment and the nearby environmentally protected sites would make achieving planning permission problematic.¹³⁸

A newspaper in Essex carried a report in January 2012 of a proposal from the former head of design at Ford to construct a new eight-runway airport on Foulness Island (rather than Maplin Sands).¹³⁹ In 2013 this Foulness Island option was submitted to the Airports Commission;¹⁴⁰ it was ruled out as unfeasible due to problems in converting the existing land occupied by the MOD to civilian use.¹⁴¹

In 2013 the Airports Commission published a proposal which had been submitted to it by a private individual for a four-runway airport on Maplin Sands.¹⁴² The new airport would replace Heathrow and the project would include additional features including a new Thames Barrier, power generation plants, water treatment and waste disposal facilities and upgraded transport links. The Commission assessed it as undeliverable within current legal and

¹³⁵ "Noise group urges revival of Maplin plan", *Financial Times*, 20 August 1987, p7

¹³⁶ Letter to the editor: "Maplin should be built", *Financial Times*, 9 August 1988, p13

¹³⁷ *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: a national consultation: Report on responses to the Government's consultation: south east*, Dept for Transport, December 2003, p67 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 26 March 2014)

¹³⁸ *A new airport for London and the UK : Technical note - shortlisting the options*, Transport for London, 15 July 2013, p 35 (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹³⁹ "Danbury man's £25bn vision for "Boris Island", *Essex Chronicle*, 31 January 2012

¹⁴⁰ *Long-term options submitted to the Airports Commission: Flagship Concepts -Foulness*, Airports Commission, 2013 (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁴¹ *Airports Commission: Interim Report Appendix 2: Assessment of Long-term Options*, Airports Commission, December 2013, p12 (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁴² *Long-term options submitted to the Airports Commission: Private Individual-Maplin Sands*, Airports Commission, 2013 (accessed 26 March 2014)

regulatory frameworks and again pointed out the difficulty in converting the land currently used for munitions testing.¹⁴³

No Maplin Sands/Foulness project was shortlisted by the Airports Commission.

¹⁴³ [Airports Commission: Interim Report Appendix 2: Assessment of Long-term Options](#), Airports Commission, 2013 p12 (accessed 26 March 2014)

3 Offshore airports

Several estuary schemes have involved the creation of an airport offshore rather than on existing land or using land reclaimed from the sea. Promoters of these projects have particularly emphasised the advantage of having aircraft take-off and land over water rather than over large centres of population so reducing the number of people affected by noise and air pollution.

The two Thames Estuary offshore airport solutions presented to the Airports Commission in 2012/2013 were rejected. However, a number of offshore airports have been constructed overseas – in particular in China, South Korea and Japan. In a report commissioned by the Department for Transport in 2003, Halcrow Group stated that “the development of a major airport offshore is entirely feasible and offers advantages of high capacity and much-reduced overall environmental impact”.¹⁴⁴ However, a number of potential problems with offshore airports were noted. In the aviation White Paper published in December 2003, the Government had the following to say on proposals for offshore Thames estuarial airports:

construction costs would be significantly higher than for onshore sites and less certain. The additional costs would be incurred largely in the early phases of development before any revenues are generated;

construction might be several years longer for an offshore site;

costs of related transport infrastructure could be very high. The further the distance from the key London markets, the more heavily an airport would depend on dedicated, high-speed rail access and sufficient terminal capacity in Central London. A new railway would be expensive and difficult to provide. There is little spare capacity at the London terminals. Substantial additional road infrastructure would also be required;

some impacts (such as noise), would be reduced but damage to sensitive habitats is often more likely, and some new environmental impacts would need to be considered, such as marine ecology, and effects on tidal flow. Land-take at the site would be less than for onshore locations, though land might be still required for associated facilities and for new road and rail links. Risks posed by bird strike would be expected to be greater at estuarine sites, especially those on or close to the shoreline;

forecasting suggests that the financial viability of a new estuarine airport would be likely to depend on government intervention to try to ensure early take up of new capacity by passengers and airlines. Although offshore airports have been built elsewhere in other parts of the world, none of them is part of a multi-airport system as would be the case in the South East. The level of intervention required to ensure success would almost certainly entail significant costs to the public sector...

11.116 In the light of these particular concerns, the evidence currently available to the Government, and all other relevant factors, the Government does not consider that any of the above proposals can be considered to offer a solution that is both superior to the preferred options for development of existing major airports, as previously described, and clearly viable within the timescale concerned.¹⁴⁵

Offshore airport schemes may broadly be divided into two main types – ‘floating airports’ and airports built on artificial islands.

¹⁴⁴ *Development of Airport Capacity in the Thames Estuary*, Halcrow Group Ltd for the Department for Transport, Dec 2003 (UK Government Web Archive, accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁴⁵ *The Future of Air Transport*, Cm 6046, DfT, Dec 2003, para 11.110 (UK Government Web Archive, accessed 26 March 2014)

3.1 Floating airports

Plans to create 'floating airports' on man-made platforms, sometimes called 'mega-floats' or 'Very Large Floating Platforms', have existed for decades. In 1970, the UK Ministry of Public Works published a research report stating that floating airports were technically feasible and offered many advantages over land-based sites.¹⁴⁶ The Japanese Government has carried out extensive research into the feasibility of large floating platforms, including the construction of test runways in Tokyo Bay in 1999.

Floating airport schemes have been proposed in a number of locations around the world including [San Diego](#) and [Amsterdam](#), but no examples of existing operational commercial floating airports have been found.¹⁴⁷ Separate schemes have proposed building airports on piers driven into the sea bed rather than on floats, for example the 1997 plan by the Pacific Airport Group to create an offshore airport for Sydney in Australia.¹⁴⁸

Gensler – floating airport proposal, 2012-2013

In September 2012 the architecture firm [Gensler](#) produced a 'conceptual proposal' for 'London Britannia' - a floating airport in the Thames estuary to replace Heathrow. There would be 4-6 runways on floating platforms tethered to the sea bed and 3 land-based terminals.¹⁴⁹ An exact location was not specified, but it is likely that somewhere in the Outer estuary would have been the preferred area. The 5km-long runways would be built in UK steel yards and shipyards and floated in and out as required.

Ian Mulcahey, Project Director "This will be a 'national' infrastructure project that can inject new pace and dynamism into our economy. The airport can be quickly manufactured in the ship yards and steel works across the UK and can be floated by sea and positioned in the Estuary. This isn't a London Airport it is a Global Airport, designed, manufactured and built in the UK."

Environmental Benefits

The relocation of a UK hub airport to the Thames Estuary will provide a state of the art facility that will transform the quality of life for millions of Londoners and will provide London with the space and infrastructure to grow and thrive over the next century. The marine location not only minimises noise disruption to existing communities whilst enabling 24hour passenger arrival and departure, but it also avoids any demolition of homes.

Building upon the UK's capability as a world leader in marine construction, London Britannia Airport includes four, five kilometre, floating runways. To minimise environmental disruption the runways are tethered to the sea bed and to the final departure concourse which provides access to the marine rail tunnels that connect directly to central London and the European High Speed Rail Networks.

The design's inherent flexibility creates a platform whereby runways can be floated in as required and taken away for maintenance in the future. The concept allows for future expansion to accommodate 6 runways when required.

By floating the runway and its associated hard standing it is possible to avoid the negative effects of land reclamation in the sensitive estuarine waters of the Thames. The location of the airport can then be optimised to avoid the key feeding and migration areas between high and low water.

¹⁴⁶ "Airports all at sea", *Flight International*, 3 March 1970, p 328-9 (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁴⁷ "California company claims part of Pacific for floating airport", *Commercial Property*, 17 July 2007

¹⁴⁸ [Cached version of Sydney Offshore website](#) (Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed 26 March 2014).

¹⁴⁹ "New Thames Estuary airport proposal unveiled", *BBC News*, 12 September 2012 (accessed 26 March 2014)

London Britannia will have a sustainable access strategy with unparalleled accessibility to the UK and Europe through a combination of rail, ferry and jetfoil connections. Vehicular access will be dispersed to three new land based Departure/Arrival terminals, two located north and south of the estuary, and a third Central London terminal proposed between Canary Wharf and the Olympic Park.

The airport has also been designed to generate much of its own power from marine turbines situated within, and adjacent to the floating runways.¹⁵⁰

In oral evidence before the Transport Select Committee in January 2013, Mr Mulcahey (Gensler MD) states that one of the reasons for the floating runways concept was to cope with a possible rise in sea level in the area and with individual storm surges.¹⁵¹

In July 2013 it was announced that a 'schematic merger' had taken place with the Thames Estuary Research & Development Company (Testrad) and that, due to safety concerns, the new joint proposal would involve the construction of an artificial island rather than floating runways.¹⁵²

No Thames estuary floating airport scheme was submitted to the Airports Commission.

3.2 Artificial island airports

Recently constructed offshore airports have been based on artificial islands. Some examples (not a comprehensive list) of proposed or existing artificial island airports follow

Australia

Since the 1970s, several proposals have been made for offshore airports to serve Sydney. Although several of them were considered to be feasible in terms of civil engineering, the schemes have been ruled out on the grounds of cost.¹⁵³

China

[Hong Kong International Airport](#), though strictly speaking not a completely artificial island, airport, opened for commercial operations in 1998. After some initial problems, for which foreign managers and engineers (including Doug Oakervee who led the Mayor of London's preliminary feasibility group) were blamed by the Hong Kong authorities,¹⁵⁴ the Airport has won many notable international "Best Airport" awards.¹⁵⁵ HKIA operates twenty-four hours a day with 2 terminals and 2 runways and in 2012 had a passenger throughput of over 56 million.¹⁵⁶ A third runway is planned and is intended to be operational by 2023.¹⁵⁷

Japan

Several offshore airports were constructed in Japan (where the cost of land is extremely high) during the 'lost decade' of the 1990s as part of economic stimulus plans. More recently,

¹⁵⁰ "New vision for Thames Airport revealed", Gensler press release, 5 September 2012

¹⁵¹ [Transport Committee - Minutes of Evidence](#), HC 78 2012-13 Q584

¹⁵² "Thames Estuary back as airport hub contender", *New Civil Engineer*, 25 July 2013

¹⁵³ [Joint Study on aviation capacity in the Sydney region: Assessment of options for meeting aviation needs in the Sydney region: technical paper](#), Australian Government, February 2012 (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁵⁴ "Hong Kong blames foreign managers", *New York Times*, 23 January 1999

¹⁵⁵ "HK loses best-airport title, held for 7 of past 8 years, to S Korea", *South China Morning Post*, 10 June 2009

¹⁵⁶ [Hong Kong International Airport: facts and figures](#) (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁵⁷ [Hong Kong International Airport - three runway timeline](#) (accessed 26 March 2014)

many Japanese airports have been experiencing problems of overcapacity and lack of revenue.¹⁵⁸

- 1) **Kobe Airport** is on an artificial island just off the coast of Kobe on the island of Honshu. The construction of the airport was stalled for lack of funding until 1995. Construction began in September 1999 but political controversy continued. The airport finally opened on February 16, 2006 and was used by 2.97 million people in 2007. First year operation (2006) results were 2,697,000 passengers at 61.1% capacity. Kobe is already the most indebted municipality in Japan and this project's cost (estimated at US \$2.7 billion) has made it very controversial.¹⁵⁹
- 2) **Chubu Centrair** is the main international gateway for the Chūbu ("central") region of Japan and Japan's second airport on a man-made island. Construction started in August 2000. It opened with a 3,500m runway on February 17, 2005¹⁶⁰ and is able to operate 24 hours a day.
- 3) **Kansai Airport** on an artificial island in Osaka bay was opened in 1994. It has experienced greater than predicted problems with subsidence, which has caused damage to airport buildings.¹⁶¹ In August 2007, it opened a second runway allowing it to operate 24 hours a day.¹⁶² In 2008 it was serving over 15 million passengers. Its major shareholder is the central government which has provided subsidies for it since 2003. Nevertheless it remains heavily indebted.¹⁶³ It has recently achieved success in attracting budget airlines by cutting fees charged to newcomer airlines.

Netherlands

In 1999, the Dutch Government put on hold plans to build a new airport for Amsterdam on an artificial island in the North Sea, although it did not rule out the possibility of such an airport in the long-term.¹⁶⁴ More recently, a Dutch engineering company has proposed constructing a 'rotating floating airport' approximately 15-20km off the mainland to reduce pressure on Schiphol. It claimed that this would be cheaper and less harmful to the marine environment than an artificial island scheme.¹⁶⁵

United Kingdom

Several artificial island airport projects have been proposed for UK locations.

- **Goodwin Sands**

The idea of siting an airport on an artificial island on the Goodwin Sands in the English Channel had been **raised** in 1966 during the debate about the Third London Airport. In 2002/2003, proposals were submitted to the Department for Transport for 2 artificial islands providing 4 runways and a maximum capacity of up to 120 mppa.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁸ "Keynes Killed JAL; The airline fell victim to infrastructure stimulus gone terribly wrong. Is China next?", *Wall Street Journal*, 21 January 2010

¹⁵⁹ "Kobe hopes for post-quake economic boost from new airport", *Agence France Presse*, 15 February 2006

¹⁶⁰ "Chubu airport opens as Japan's 3rd main int'l gateway", *Kyodo News*, 17 February 2005

¹⁶¹ "Kansai airport going down", *Japan Times*, 6 October 2002

¹⁶² "Kansai open all hours with new runway", *The Australian*, 3 August 2007, p35

¹⁶³ "Kansai operator heads for clearer skies", *Nikkei Weekly*, 17 August 2009

¹⁶⁴ "Dutch Government rejects proposal for new Amsterdam airport at sea", *Associated Press*, 17 December 1999

¹⁶⁵ [Van den Noort innovations](#) (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁶⁶ [Review of Goodwin Sands Airport Proposal](#), Halcrow Group for the Department for Transport, December 2003 [UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 26 March 2014]

The scheme was ruled out by the Department on the grounds of poor economic benefits relative to its costs. A further Goodwin Sands option for a four-runway airport was submitted to the Airports Commission in 2013.¹⁶⁷

- **Severnside International, Wales.** In 2003, plans were submitted to the Department for Transport for a new international airport on a man-made island in the Severn Estuary. The Government rejected the proposal in its 2003 White Paper, stating that such an airport “would not be financially viable and would not generate sufficient economic or regeneration benefits to merit support in this White Paper”.¹⁶⁸ Two Severn Estuary proposals were submitted to the Airports Commission in 2013.
- **‘The Cant, Thames Estuary’.** This site emerged during ‘optioneering’ studies produced for the Department for Transport in its SERAS consultation on the future of air transport. A 2003 report for the DfT summarised the scheme as, “an offshore site on an artificial island in the Thames Estuary, some 10 km to the west and 2 km to the south of the Marinair site. The concept also offered four runways in an east-west, twin close-parallel layout. The construction advantages of The Cant were seen to arise from shallower water and the scope for a better solution in terms of river hydrology. Surface access advantages stemmed from its closer proximity to London and therefore lower infrastructure cost and faster journey times”. The site was dropped at a preliminary stage.¹⁶⁹
- **Sahara Group Thames Estuary proposal.** Since the 1990s, Sahara Group UK, part of an Indian conglomerate, has expressed interest in constructing a 4-runway Thames Estuary airport, as part of a much wider series of infrastructure developments in the area, including maglev links to other UK airports.¹⁷⁰ In 2002, the Group contacted the Government with an outline of its proposal, but it did not submit formal plans to the SERAS Review or the Airports Commission.

Information on the most long-standing Thames Estuary island scheme, ‘Marinair’ and the more recent Thames Estuary Research and Development (Testrud) proposal follows. See [Library Standard Note 6144](#) for information on the Mayor of London’s investigations.

Marinair/Thames Estuary Airport Company. 1989-

<http://www.thamesestuaryairportcoltd.co.uk/>

The ‘Marinair’ proposal by the Thames Estuary Airport Company (TEACO) to build an airport on an artificial island in the Thames estuary has existed since the late 1980s. It has been at pains to deny that it is a ‘Son of Maplin’ scheme and has described itself as a true estuary airport in contrast to the Maplin Sands-type projects based onshore, often on land reclaimed from the sea.

The original version of the scheme, estimated as costing £20 billion and funded by an overseas consortium, was based on a two-centre model, with the terminals at East Tilbury and the runways on the artificial island in the estuary. The two would be linked by high speed

¹⁶⁷ [Goodwin Airport website](#), (accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁶⁸ [The Future of Air Transport, Cm 6046, DfT, Dec 2003](#) (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 26 March 2014)

¹⁶⁹ [Development of airport capacity in the Thames estuary](#), Halcrow Group for the DfT, December 2003, p4 [UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 26 March 2014]

¹⁷⁰ [Sahara Group website](#) (accessed 26 March 2014).

rail via a tunnel which would transport passengers the 22 mile distance direct to the aircraft in 12 minutes.

The company submitted evidence to the Runway Capacity to Serve the South East (RUCATSE) Working Group in the early 1990s. TEACO argued that while no cap should be placed on existing airports, the provision of second runways at Gatwick and Stansted and a third runway at Heathrow would be 'politically unpalatable'. By contrast, the Marinair scheme would be an expandable long-term solution. The Report of the RUCATSE group stated

The Marinair proposal offers an innovative means to tap the potential benefits of a Thames estuary option. But it seemed to us that, although a great deal of useful initial work had been done, there were still a good many uncertainties over the project and some challenging issues left to resolve. Our fundamental concerns and reservations related to demand, including the project's reliance on the effective capping of existing London airports at levels well below those which we believe could be accommodated using existing runways; and the operational details of the scheme which we thought raised serious problems of practicality.¹⁷¹

Lord Mowbray and Stourton was Chairman of the company from 1993-2006 and spoke about the proposals in a 1994 Lords debate, noting the regeneration benefits for the East Thames region as well as the transport advantages of the scheme

...I have declared my interest as chairman. I must declare also that at present the company has all the solutions in the bag except the final solution: we do not have quite the financial support that we need. The company will be an inward investment company. By inward investment, I mean inward investment from foreigners who bring enormous sums of money into this country. If your Lordships think that that is not useful to this country, then I believe that your Lordships should think again.

When I was first made a junior member of the government some 24 years ago, I was at the Department of the Environment. My then right honourable friend Mr. Peter Walker had appointed Sir Frank Marshall to look into Maplin, which was a land airport round the corner from Southend. Unfortunately, it was forgotten that Shoeburyness military range was there as well, so that was turned down. Of course, the road situation there was not right.

...Marinair is totally in line with the East Thames corridor policy and will greatly improve the economy of North Kent and South Essex.

...If we were to develop the South East policy of an airport in the estuary—and we have chosen a part of the estuary 31 kilometres east of Tilbury where we would have our first terminal—one would travel there by way of the A.13, which is to be improved, and we would build a joint road to accompany it. So the Marinair terminal is no further east than the Heathrow one is west. We would then have our island estuary which would not be a small island; indeed, it would be over five kilometres long, nearly three kilometres wide and would consist of 4,000 acres situated about eight kilometres north of Whitstable. There would eventually be three runways, two terminals and two cargo berths for liners or cargo. It would not require the destruction of one house. However, if Terminal 5 is built at Heathrow, what happens? Well, 4,000 houses will be destroyed. Of course, one may argue it one way or the other but I believe that to be the case—

Lord Brabazon of Tara My Lords, my noble friend says that 4,000 houses would be destroyed if Terminal 5 is built. I really think that my noble friend should get his facts straight.

¹⁷¹ *Runway Capacity to Serve the South East: a report by the working group*, Dept of Transport, July 1993, p144

Lord Mowbray and Stourton My Lords, with all the extensions that Heathrow requires that would be the total number.

At any rate, there are many more problems as regards noise. If one was to go to our plans in the next century, instead of going to one of the most concentrated areas of traffic and noise as regards aeroplanes, one would have a new concept where one could land as many planes as one wanted without noise affecting any housing.

Let us just think about it. It is not a silly concept; indeed, it is a good concept. No houses would be destroyed and we would add 4,000 acres to the land mass of Great Britain because that part of the Thames is only 4 metres deep. It makes a good deal of sense. We shall bring people from Tilbury and Kent in fast underground trains through tunnels under the Thames to the airport in 12 minutes. It is not to be sneezed at. There will be no noise pollution and no demolition of property.

It cannot be said that there is no noise pollution or demolition of property as regards any other of the airports. I do not mind to whom I address those remarks. Noble Lords know that to be a fact. Moreover, because we are so far into the estuary, and with the help of modern technology, we would have the ability to operate 24 hours a day without causing anyone any upset. We could be phased to meet the demand: in the short term, one runway; in the medium term, two runways; and, in the long term, three runways. Therefore, we are able to accept the title of a mega airport. It is not pie in the sky...

...Sometimes I am told that I am old fashioned, but I think on this matter I am probably more in touch with the feelings of the people who live round the airports than most other people. By adopting my proposition all the environmental and planning objections as regards Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted would be obviated. There would be no greater problem as regards access. The estuary island would be 5 x 2.75 kilometres and would cover 1,375 hectares. The average depth of water in the estuary at that point is four metres. Everything is looked after. The flooding projection has been based, I am told, on a 1,000 year period. I find that hard to believe but it is what I am told.

What are we worrying about? Why is no one considering my proposal, as I think it is the sanest solution? It offers no risk of flooding and it is just as convenient to reach as any other airport, with the extensions to the A.13. Noble Lords are all talking about the vested interests of airlines whereas I am trying to suggest that there is an alternative. I should add that I am chairman of a shell company; I am not drawing any money from that. I believe my proposal will offer a much better service in the future for Britain...¹⁷²

TEACO submitted written evidence to the 1995/96 House of Commons Transport Select Committee investigation into UK airport capacity.¹⁷³ It rejected the approach of squeezing more capacity into the existing London airports and advocated 'the provision of a new airport in an environmentally acceptable location with safe approach and departure routes, designed to meet the needs of air transport in the medium and longer term'.

The company stated that by having the runways based on an island away from built-up areas, the Marinair scheme would 'virtually eliminate' the noise pollution problems arising from the expansion of existing London airports and would allow 24-hour operation. The main features of the scheme were the separation of runways from terminals 'allowing the independent development of each'. The terminals would be constructed (on the site of a

¹⁷² [HL Deb 17 May 1994 vol 555 cc225-29](#)

¹⁷³ HC Transport Select Committee, [UK airport capacity](#), HC 67, 1995/96

disused quarry near east Tilbury) onshore for ease of landside access – with direct links to the M25, the Channel Tunnel link and allowing access by river craft. The terminals would be connected to the runways by a 4-track high speed train service running in a tunnel under the Thames. There would be road access to the island via a tunnel from the Isle of Sheppey. The artificial island in the Thames would contain 3 runways and two satellite island terminals.

In oral evidence from the company's representatives, Lord Mowbray and Stourton said that the airport would be privately financed. The Japan-based owners of virtually 100% of the airport would be the 'Flamingo Trust'. Once the costs of construction had been paid, half (and eventually all) of the profits would go to charitable purposes.¹⁷⁴

The Committee report stated

205. We are not in a position to give an authoritative judgment on the particular scheme proposed, but clearly the idea of an airport in the Thames Estuary is one of the options to be considered and should not be ruled out if demand for airport capacity in the South East is predicted to be substantially higher than could be satisfied by a single extra runway serving the region. Such an estuarial development would avoid most of the land use and noise problems of a mainland airport, although there are likely to be adverse environmental implications for the Estuary itself. Surface access and the arrangements for moving passengers to the aircraft would need careful examination. In the meantime, the Government should ask NATS to study the air traffic control implications of an airport in the Thames Estuary and how any problems might be surmounted.¹⁷⁵

The Government response to the Committee's report stated that it had not ruled out the possibility of an estuarial airport. Noting that the RUCATSE report had listed pros and cons for such developments, the Government said that 'it would be for a promoter to come forward with a proposal for an estuarial airport and seek planning permission; such an application would be judged on its merits.'¹⁷⁶

In 2002, at the time of the DfT's consultation on the future of air transport, the company's proposal changed from a two-centre to a one-centre model. Instead of having the terminal complex at Tilbury, it was proposed that all facilities would be located on the artificial island, which would be located 5km north east of Minster on the Isle of Sheppey.

In 2003, TEACO's representatives gave oral evidence to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee on the project, which was now estimated as costing £33 billion. Mr Crocker, representing the company, said that all of the funding would come from the private sector, although 'banking confidentiality' prevented the company from revealing further details.¹⁷⁷

The Committee appeared sceptical about the nature of this funding.

Mr Crocker: What I am leading up to, Madam Chairman, is that, if we are able to pursue our proposal, then we shall be providing our country with a state of the art airport which has the minimum environmental impact. It is something which will not call on the Exchequer to support, and we believe that with the benefit of a state of the art

¹⁷⁴ HC Transport Select Committee, *UK airport capacity*, HC 67, 1995/96

¹⁷⁵ HC Transport Select Committee, *UK airport capacity*, HC 67, 1995/96

¹⁷⁶ Transport Select Committee: *UK airport capacity government observations on second report session 1995/96*. (HC 67), HC 644 1995/96, p xv

¹⁷⁷ HC Transport Select Committee, *Aviation*, HC 454 2002/03 (accessed 17 March 2014)

facility such as I am describing, then the airlines will be encouraged to come anyway, but part of our financial plan would be probably to support them in making that change.

Chairman: Well, it sounds almost too good to be true, Mr Crocker.

Q1187 Clive Efford: How do you manage to secure the funding because, if you do not have guarantees or expressions of interest from the airlines, you do not seem to have a strong business case in order to attract that sort of private sector interest?

Mr Crocker: We certainly have not produced a detailed feasibility study or a detailed business plan, but we certainly have done enough research in overall terms to satisfy ourselves that this project can be very successful, and if for no other reason it really is the very best solution for our country. We are talking about a state of the art airport which has minimal environmental impact and does not require funds of government.

The company stated that it would be able to build the new airport in 7-10 years, once planning permission had been granted.

In its conclusions, the Committee stated

229. We see the future of airport development in the United Kingdom being centred on targeted expansion of existing sites. We have not seen any off-shore or green field developments that would provide a solution to the capacity problems. The new sites and extensive new land access infrastructure required to service them would have high environmental costs. The only way to ensure that a newly built hub airport would be successful would be to close down existing ones. This would be neither cheap nor easy; airport operators and airlines would expect compensation for their losses and local communities would lose the employment that established airports provide.¹⁷⁸

The Marinair scheme was not short-listed by the Government following the SERAS consultations. In its 2003 White Paper following the consultation period, the DfT commented

Insufficient information was supplied by the promoters of the Marinair proposal to enable a meaningful comparative appraisal of its potential costs and benefits. However, from the limited information provided it would appear likely that the Marinair project would be prohibitively expensive, both in terms of airport construction and road and rail links.¹⁷⁹

In a 2011 update to its plan, the company proposed a 4-runway international hub airport with a dedicated rail link to the City of London, a link to HS1 and connections to the M2 and M20 motorways. An Outer Thames Barrier, capable of generating hydro-electric power, would be constructed east of Southend and Sheerness and TEACO would develop 80,000 new homes in South Essex and North Kent to house the airport's staff.

TEACO noted some of the potential difficulties to its scheme, but claimed that none of these were insurmountable.

- Air Traffic Control – Critics have claimed that the air space in the region would become too congested to accommodate a new airport. Marinair stated that the air traffic control system could be redesigned.
- Bird Strike – Marinair stated that bird migration paths in the estuary tend to follow the coastline and also that the nearest bird sanctuary is over 14km away. It described as

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmtran/454/454.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2014)

¹⁷⁹ *The Future of Air Transport*, Cm 6046, DfT, Dec 2003 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 17 March 2014)

‘unfounded and misleading’, claims that its location would be unfeasible because of the risk of birdstrike.

- Air pollution. The company said that Marinair’s location would mean that pollutants from aircraft would fall into the sea rather than on land and be washed out to the North Sea to be consumed by micro-organisms
- Costs/Finance. The company noted ‘significant interest from investment partners exclusive to TEACO to fund the whole project – but only if Government support for the scheme is secured.’¹⁸⁰

Although Marinair [provided written evidence](#) to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee in October 2012, in which it claimed to be ‘the only effective and environmentally acceptable long-term solution to the provision of a hub-airport to serve London and the south-east of England and it is the only genuine Thames Estuary island airport submitted to Government’ it did not present a proposal to the Airports Commission by the deadline of 19 July 2013.

Mayor of London, 2008-

The Mayor’s investigations into the creation of an airport on an artificial island in the Outer Estuary are detailed in [Library Standard Note 6144](#).

TESTRAD/London Britannia Airport

The Thames Estuary Research and Development Company (Testrad) was formed by Doug Oakervee, who had carried out a feasibility study into the construction of an estuary airport on behalf of the Mayor of London in 2009, and the economist Bridget Rosewell. It is consortium of economists, aviation and transport specialists, engineers, urban planners and architects

In 2012 Testrad published a proposal for ‘London Jubilee International Airport’ which would replace Heathrow in its hub role.¹⁸¹ To be built on an artificial island in the Outer estuary [approximately 6km off the Isle of Sheppey](#), it would have 5/6 runways and would be connected to a passenger terminal located in London by high speed rail links

In July 2013 Testrad and the architecture firm Gensler (which had earlier proposed a floating airport scheme- see Section 3.1 above) announced that they had carried out a ‘schematic merger’ and were now jointly making a new proposal to the Airports Commission for a scheme called London Britannia Airport.¹⁸² With 5-6 independent runways and a capacity of 172 million ppa (capable of expansion to 200 million), there would be a passenger terminal at Ebbsfleet, and in the future in St Pancras London, connected to the airport by a high speed link. Heathrow would be closed and the land sold for development purposes to help finance the new airport which was projected to cost £47 billion. In a November 2013 press release Testrad outlined the benefits of the plan

Located actually in the Thames Estuary, the scheme avoids all the problems of the other land based schemes. For instance the demolition of houses, the removal of green field sites, the avoidance of bird strikes, the acquisition of private land, the demolition of strategic industrial infrastructure to name but a few. Most importantly it avoids flying over densely populated areas of

¹⁸⁰ [Thames Estuary Airport/Marinair website](#) (accessed 17 March 2014)

¹⁸¹ [London Jubilee Airport](#), TESTRAD, November 2012 (accessed 17 March 2014)

¹⁸² [London Britannia: outline proposal for providing additional airport capacity in the longer term](#), TESTRAD, 19 July 2013 (accessed 17 March 2014)

London and the South East, removing completely the noise contours and impact which have bedevilled millions of people throughout and around London over the last 40 years.

This scheme enables London to provide the most efficient and environmentally beneficial airport in the world and will safeguard the UK's position as a global destination for business, commerce and tourism. The proposals directly address long term planning issues of London, including the provision of the key surface access links. Although Heathrow would probably have to close, the opportunities for providing vital new housing, employment and economic regeneration are large.¹⁸³

The Airports Commission rejected 'London Britannia' at the stage 2 of the sifting process

Compared against the inner estuary options, this is a more expensive proposal due to its surface access requirements and location, and it also delivers an over provision of capacity set against the assessment of need, and will place a large amount of pressure on Ebbsfleet. Its benefit over the inner Estuary proposals is the complete lack of people affected by noise but the inner Estuary offers very few people affected. The inner Estuary was therefore considered a more plausible option for further analysis.¹⁸⁴

On 16 January 2014 Testrad responded to the Commission's Interim Report

We are disappointed that the Commission did not recommend our London Britannia proposal for further analysis and, following our detailed review of the Report and its appendices, we remain concerned about the adequacy of the assessment upon which the Commission has based its conclusions for the final shortlist.

It is our strong view that, when tested against the Commission's own criteria, the London Britannia proposal has far greater merit as a location than the Isle of Grain (in any guise). The Commission's dismissal of our scheme as not credible, while preserving the Isle of Grain for further consideration, was a considerable surprise both to us and those bodies with which we were engaged from financial, regulatory and environmental sectors.

We are also concerned that we were not given the opportunity to meet with the Commission and explain the detail of our proposal – our request for a meeting was refused, although, we understand that the Commission did meet other scheme promoters.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ *An airport island in the Thames estuary*, Testrad, November 2013

¹⁸⁴ *Airports Commission: Interim Report Appendix 2: Assessment of Long-term Options*, Airports Commission, December 2013, p23 (accessed 28 March 2014)

¹⁸⁵ *Bridget Rosewell's open letter to Sir Howard Davies following the findings of the Airports Commission*, Testrad, 16 January 2014

4 Estuary airport proposals - the last or just the latest?

The Government-appointed Airports Commission has determined that an additional runway will be needed in the south east of the UK by 2030 and that a further runway may be required by 2050. It will decide, by Autumn 2014, whether to add an Inner Estuary option to its shortlist of contenders and will provide advice to Government in a final report to be published in 2015, after the projected date of the next General Election.¹⁸⁶

The Thames estuary has been considered as the location for a new airport to serve the UK, and more particularly London, for over seventy years. Since FG Miles and Guy Morgan outlined plans for a new airport near Cliffe on the Hoo Peninsula in 1943, dozens of separate estuary schemes have appeared, based on several different concepts and several different locations within the estuary. Miles and Morgan's scheme was projected to cost £20 million and was intended to serve 8 million passengers per year; the latest proposal being examined by the Airports Commission is for an Isle of Grain airport serving c150 million ppa and with estimated costs of up to £112 billion by 2030 (for 3 runways) and up to £125 billion by 2050 for extension to four runways.

The issue has been considered by a long line of official inquiries into UK airport capacity; in general these have ruled out estuary proposals, only for a new scheme to emerge a few years later. Governments have not always accepted the advice they have received from the inquiries they established. Most famously, the Roskill Commission recommended the construction of a new inland airport in 1970 and the Government of the day ignored its advice in favour of a Thames estuary location (Maplin Sands) which was itself rejected by another Government four years later.

None of the 3 major UK political parties has formally advocated an estuary airport in recent years. In 2012, Maria Eagle, then the Labour Party's Shadow Transport Secretary, stated that the Party had a clear position of opposing any estuary airport proposal

As I saw for myself when I visited Medway, the idea of constructing a massive four runway airport on the Isle of Grain, partially on land reclaimed from the estuary, is a complete non-starter. The location of the SS Richard Montgomery and its huge quantity of explosives and of the natural gas terminal would make this a hazardous place to construct and operate an airport. Even more of an issue is the estimated 300,000 birds that breed in the area over which planes would fly to take off and land at the proposed airport, causing a serious risk of bird-strike. Proposals to 'move' these birds are a nonsense and would be wrong in any event. Any new airport would have a significant impact on the population of the Medway towns and those in the Peninsula villages in terms of both noise from flights and from the new roads and high speed rail lines that would need to be constructed to serve the airport.¹⁸⁷

The current Shadow Transport Secretary, Mary Creagh, said in November 2013 that Labour would not give any guarantee now to implement the final recommendations of the Airports Commission and she also commented that no party would undertake to do so until they understood the cost implications.¹⁸⁸

The Liberal Democrats opposed the expansion of any airports in the south east in their 2010 General Election manifesto. In January 2012, a spokesman for the Lib Dem leader Nick

¹⁸⁶ See [Library Standard Note Note SN02893](#) for further information about the work of the Davies Commission

¹⁸⁷ [Letter from Shadow Transport Secretary Maria Eagle MP](#), Medway Labour Group website, 5 July 2012 (accessed 20 March 2014)

¹⁸⁸ "Labour hedges bets on aviation review", Financial Times website, 3 November 2013

Clegg said that he was not in favour of an estuary airport, regarding the proposal as unfeasible on cost and environmental grounds.¹⁸⁹

The Conservative Party also signalled their opposition to runway expansion at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. No statement on the Party's attitude to an estuary airport since then has been traced.

It remains to be seen whether the 2012-2015 Airports Commission inquiry presages the construction of new runways in the Thames estuary or elsewhere, finally puts the estuary airport concept to rest or is simply the latest of many investigations into the provision of additional runway capacity in the UK.

¹⁸⁹ *"Nick Clegg threatens to veto 'unviable' vision of a new airport in the Thames Estuary", Daily Telegraph, 19 January 2012*

Reference Materials

Chronology

'After the biggest inquiry, by the Roskill Commission [on the Third London Airport] in 1968-71, someone unkindly said that the documentation, suitably pulped and compressed, could provide all the material needed for the runways'¹⁹⁰

The following timeline sets the proposals for an airport in the Thames Estuary in the context of airport development in the Greater London area and attempts to list the relevant major events and reports since the 1940s. The Library does not hold all of the many reports referred to, but, where available, links to on-line versions of material or their Library locations have been provided.¹⁹¹

- 1943** Proposal by the aircraft designer FG Miles and the architect Guy Morgan for a combined land/flying boat airport near Gravesend to serve London after the war ([Flight](#), 29 July 1943).
- Royal Institute of British Architects London Regional Reconstruction Committee suggests the construction of a 6 runway airport (though not for major intercontinental traffic) near the Isle of Dogs.¹⁹²
- 1946** Heathrow opens for traffic as a civilian airport [Cliffe Marshes had been considered as a potential successor to Croydon as London's main airport¹⁹³].
- 1947** Cliffe was considered as a flying boat airport by the Pakenham Committee (1946/47) (*Times*, 31 January 1947, p2), but in 1949 the Government confirmed its rejection of the site.
- 1953** Government white paper ([Cmd 8902](#)) proposes Gatwick as second London Airport. Estuarial airports were not short-listed.
- 1954** Local public inquiry into development of Gatwick. Government report on the Inquiry ([Cmd 9215](#)) and policy statement ([Cmd 9296](#)) confirming its decision to develop Gatwick.
- 30 Jul 1954** [Government explains](#) that Cliffe was rejected as an alternative site to Gatwick on grounds of cost, poor transport links, and weather and air traffic control concerns.
- 1958** Gatwick Airport opens as a one-runway airport.

¹⁹⁰ Peter Hall, *Great Planning Disasters*, 1980, p15 (Library location: TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING-HAL)

¹⁹¹ The full text of the older parliamentary papers listed is accessible to Intranet users via [the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers](#) service.

¹⁹² Peter Larkham, *The London Regional Reconstruction Committee: architects, exhibitions, and post-war visions for replanning*, Centre for Environment and Society Research Working Paper series no. 16, Birmingham University, 2013 (accessed 17 March 2014)

¹⁹³ *Thames Reach Airport – SERAS assessment submission*, Thames Reach, 30 June 2003, p34 (accessed 17 March 2014)

- 1960/61** HC Estimates Committee report on London Airports (HC 233 1960-61) recommends study into developing Stansted as third London Airport.
- Jun 1963** ‘Interdepartmental Committee’ reports shortlist of 18 sites including Cliffe, Foulness, Sheppey and Southend-on-Sea. It recommends Stansted as the best option.¹⁹⁴
- Consortium proposes scheme to move London Airport to Foulness Island (*Observer*, 30 June 1963, p1).
- Nov 1965** Plan to develop a 6-runway airport on the Isle of Sheppey to replace Heathrow (*Observer*, 7 Nov 1965, p11).
- Dec 1965 - Feb 1966** Public inquiry into development of Stansted with Leysdown on Isle of Sheppey touted as the alternative. Foulness is rejected on several grounds including cost and the difficulty in removing the military firing range at Shoeburyness.
- Mar 1966** General election. Labour wins power with a majority of 96.¹⁹⁵
- May 1966** Planning Inspector submits report (published 1967) into inquiry and finds the case for Stansted unproven, recommending a wider review to look at the alternatives including Cliffe and Sheppey.¹⁹⁶ The Government sets up a Second Interdepartmental Committee to revisit the issue.
- Jan 1967** In a lecture given in a personal capacity at Leeds University, Sir Donald Gibson, DG of Research and Development at the Ministry of Public Building and Works, suggests that a new airport made of expanded polystyrene could be constructed to float on the mud flats of the Thames estuary. Passengers could travel to the new airport by hovercraft (*Guardian*, 27 January 1967, p3).
- May 1967** Government White paper ([Cmnd 3259](#)) produced at the same time as the Planning Inspector’s report is published, recommends Stansted but discusses alternatives including Gunfleet Sands near Clacton, Dengie Flats in Essex, Foulness island, Isle of Sheppey and Cliffe in Kent and Plumstead Marshes.
- 12 May 1967** [Ministerial Statement](#) announcing the decision to develop Stansted.
- 29 Jun 1967** [HC Debate](#) on National Airport Policy.
- Sep 1967** ‘Floating airport’ off Sheppey proposed by a Mr A.J Harris, consulting engineer (*Guardian*, 9 September 1967, p9).

¹⁹⁴ *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Third London Airport*, HMSO, 1964 (Library location: SOP AVIATION NS 4)

¹⁹⁵ [BBC Politics 97 website: Election 1966](#) (Accessed 17 March 2014)

¹⁹⁶ *Report of the Inquiry into Local Objections to the proposed development of land at Stansted as the Third Airport for London*, Presented to the Minister of Housing and Local Government by G D Blake, 1967 (Library location: SOP HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT NS 34)

- Oct/Nov 1967** Noise Abatement Society report (summarised in [Foulness: a feasible alternative? Flight International, 9 November 1967](#)) prefers Maplin Sands over Stansted.¹⁹⁷
- 11 Dec 1967** [Lords debate](#) on Airport issue. General hostility to Stansted as the proposed site.
- Feb 1968** [Government announces](#) the establishment of the Commission to re-examine the location of Third London Airport.
- John Howard and Company (engineers) announces a scheme for an airport on Maplin Sands with four runways. Privately financed, it would be handed over to the Government as a going concern. The Govt would then pay back the costs 'over a period to be agreed' when the airport started to earn money. (*Times*, 27 February 1968, p3)
- May 1968** Roskill Commission Inquiry. During its course, opposition grows at
Dec 1970 potential inland sites
- Nov 1968** Report released by Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils recommending Foulness Sands (*Guardian*, 20 November 1968, p12).
- Dec 1968** Proposal by Bernard Clark (engineer) for an airport and port at Foulness on Maplin Sands using reclaimed land (*Times*, 5 December 1968, p2).
- Mar 1969** Roskill Commission issues short list of sites – Cublington, Foulness, Nuthampstead and Thurleigh.
- Mar 1969** Thames Aeroport Group plans for Foulness outlined (*Times*, 20 March 1969).
- Nov 1969** Thames Aeroport Group and Bernard L Clark & Partners combine and announce that a viability study of the project will be undertaken by the Netherlands Economic Institute. Another group, Thames Estuary Development Company (Tedco), supported by Southend Corporation, continued separately.
- Jan 1970** The Roskill Commission releases research showing Foulness to be the most expensive and Cublington to be the cheapest of the short-listed sites (*Guardian*, 31 January 1970, p1).
- Feb 1970** Survey by Ministry of Building and Public Works states that offshore airports are feasible and have many advantages over inland sites. (*Times*, 25 February 1970, p5).
- Jun 1970** General election. Conservative majority of 30.¹⁹⁸
- Jul 1970** All Party Parliamentary Committee, led by Stephen Hastings MP (Con, Mid-Beds), set up to oppose inland sites for the airport and recommend Foulness.

¹⁹⁷ Ralph G Covell et al, *The third London airport*, Noise Abatement Society, 1967 (Library location: 387.7-COV – Reserve)

¹⁹⁸ [BBC News website](#) (accessed 17 March 2014)

- Dec 1970** Roskill Commission releases summary of conclusions.
- An EDM against the Cublington location and in favour of Foulness or ‘any other suitable coastal site’ is introduced and rapidly gathers signatures - over 200 by the end of session.¹⁹⁹
- Jan 1971** Roskill Commission final report rejects Foulness and recommends Cublington in Buckinghamshire by majority. Professor Colin Buchanan submits a minority report in favour of Foulness, describing the Cublington proposal as an ‘environmental disaster’.²⁰⁰
- Feb 1971** Bernard Clark (engineer) criticises Roskill decision and accuses the Commission’s report of altering the proposed location from Foulness and overstating its costs. (*Times*, 4 February 1971, p 4)
- Feb/Mar 1971** Lords debates on [22nd](#)(part one); [22nd](#)(part two) and [23rd](#)(part one); [23rd](#)(part two) February and [Commons debate](#) on 4 March 1971 on the Roskill Commission report.
- 4 Apr 1971** Group led by Brian Colquhoun (consulting engineer) recommends Cliffe in a proposal sent to the Government (*Times*, 5 April 1971, p 4).
- 26 Apr 1971** Government makes announcements in the [Commons](#) and [Lords](#) revealing that it has overruled the Roskill Commission recommendation in favour of Foulness on environmental and planning grounds.
- 28 May 1971** [Commons debate](#) on Foulness airport proposals.
- 9 Aug 1972** [Government announces plan](#) to develop site ‘C’ creating “the world’s first environmental airport” at Maplin Sands.
- Jan 1973** Publication of ‘Maplin Manifesto’, opposing the Maplin development, by Friends of the Earth (FOE) (*Guardian*, 30 January 1973, p26).
- 8 Feb 1973** 2nd reading of [Maplin Development Bill](#) which provides for reclamation of land and the establishment of a 4-runway airport and a seaport. Government majority of 23 in favour of the Bill.
- During the passage of the Bill, a clause is inserted which ensures that a review should be carried out before any reclamation work takes place.
- 15 Feb 1973** A pamphlet from the [Conservative] Bow Group suggests that the development of Vertical Take Off and Landing (VTOL) aircraft would allow the development of landing pads at Surrey Docks or King’s Cross making Maplin scheme redundant (*Observer*, 25 February 1973, p3).

¹⁹⁹ EDM 208 1970/71

²⁰⁰ *Report, Commission on the Third London Airport* [Roskill Commission], HMSO 1971 (Library location: BT 387.736(421),P)

- May 1973** Civil Aviation Authority report claims that Maplin would not be needed before 1985.²⁰¹ The [Government](#) reiterates its view that Maplin is the best site.
- Jul 1973** Letter from Prime Minister Ted Heath to Toby Jessel MP (Con, Twickenham) thanking him for sending him a petition from 5000 constituents supporting Maplin. Mr Heath stresses the advantages of the Maplin site (*Guardian*, 12 July 1973, p22).
- Conservative Central Office produces 'The case for Maplin' leaflet for Conservative MPs (*Times*, 23 July 1973, p2).
- Oct 1973** British Chamber of Commerce study claiming that developing Maplin would be pointless because of the introduction of quieter aircraft (*Guardian*, 3 October 1973, p5).
- 6-22 Oct 1973** Arab-Israeli ['Yom-Kippur']war. OPEC restrictions led to a substantial rise in the cost of oil.
- 23 Oct 1973** In a [Commons debate](#), Mr Anthony Crosland (Lab, Grimsby) reiterates his objections to the scheme and confirms that the Labour Party would scrap the scheme if elected.
- 25 Oct 1973** Maplin Development Act receives Royal Assent
- Feb 1974** General Election. In March 1974, Labour Party takes power, though as a minority administration.²⁰²
- 20 Mar 1974** [Government announces](#) that a Review of the Maplin project will be initiated.
- Jun 1974** Institute of Economic Affairs pamphlet condemns the Maplin project.²⁰³
- 18 Jul 1974** [Government abandons Maplin](#).
- Aug 1974** Department of Trade consults on Maplin Review and on how future London air traffic should be handled.²⁰⁴
- Oct 1974** General Election. Labour majority of 3.²⁰⁵
- Nov 1975 - Jun 1976** Government consultation on Airport Strategy for Great Britain.
- Feb 1978** White Paper on Airports policy repeats Government position that Maplin should be abandoned citing cost factors and lack of need on the basis of air traffic forecasts. Expansion of Stansted recommended.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ *Forecasts of Air Traffic and capacity at airports in the London Area*, Civil Aviation Authority, 1973 (Library location: DEP 5459)

²⁰² [BBC News website](#) (accessed 17 March 2014)

²⁰³ Christopher Foster et al, *Lessons of Maplin: is the machinery for governmental decision-making at fault?* IEA, 1974 (Library location: Members Library HU (NS) VOL 8)

²⁰⁴ *Airport strategy for Great Britain: part 1, the London Area*, Dept of Trade, 1975 (Library location: SOP TRADE NS 54)

²⁰⁵ [BBC News website](#) (accessed 17 March 2014)

²⁰⁶ *Airports policy*, Dept of Trade, [Cmnd. 7084](#), 1978

- Mar 1979** Greater London Council report urging building of airport at Maplin (*Guardian*, 6 March 1979, p2).
- May 1979** General Election, Conservative majority of 43.
- Aug 1979** “[Gatwick Agreement](#)”²⁰⁷ between BAA and West Sussex County Council that there would be no operational second runway at the airport before 2019.
- Dec 1979** *Advisory Committee on Airport Policy report*²⁰⁸ and *Report of the Study Group on South East Airports: possible sites for a Third London Airport* published. 6 possible sites were identified – 5 inland and one coastal, at Maplin.
- 17 Dec 1979** Following the receipt of the Study Group on South East Airports and Advisory Committee on Airports reports, the [Government states](#) that they ‘do not intend to resurrect the Maplin project, even in a revised form’ and that no new airport would be built.
- 1980** Noise Advisory Council report recommends Maplin as location for third London airport on aircraft noise grounds.²⁰⁹ However, it notes that if the new airport could not attract passengers, demand would fall on other London airports.
- 21 Feb 1980** [Commons debate](#) on airports policy in which the Secretary of State for Trade reiterates the reasons for the abandonment of Maplin.
- Jun 1980** GLC plan for Maplin seaport and passenger terminal with one runway (*Guardian*, 18 June 1980, p3).
- 1981-1983** Inquiry into development of Stansted, Heathrow’s 5th terminal and a new airport at Maplin.
- 1982** Town and Country Planning Association criticises planning inquiry into Stansted but withdraws planning application for new airport at Maplin (*Financial Times*, 2 Feb 1982, p7).
- 1984** After the Stansted Public Inquiry (1981 to 1983) lasting 258 days, Inspector Graham Eyre rejects Maplin proposal but recommends that the application to increase capacity on Stansted’s single runway should be allowed only if Government guaranteed that throughput would never go beyond 25 million and that there would never be a 2nd runway.²¹⁰
- 1985** Following the public enquiry, the Government [accepts](#) Eyre’s recommendations and approval is given for Stansted to be developed.
- 1986** Opening of Heathrow Terminal Four.

²⁰⁷ “[Gatwick Agreement](#)”(Internet Archive, accessed 17 March 2014)

²⁰⁸ *Report of the advisory committee on airports policy*, HMSO, 1979

²⁰⁹ *The Third London Airport: report by a working group of the Council*, Noise Advisory Council, HMSO, 1980 (Library location: SOP Environment, NS 80)

²¹⁰ *The Airports Inquiries 1981-1983, Report of the Inspector, Graham Eyre*, Department of the Environment, 1984 (Library location: DEP 1196)

- 1987** Opening of London City Airport aimed at business travellers and using short take-off and landing (STOL) aircraft.
- Apr 1989** Marinair scheme to build an offshore airport on an artificial island in the estuary (*Guardian*, 22 Apr 1989, p24).
- 1990** CAA advises Government that air traffic in the south east would reach saturation point by 2005 and that another runway would be needed at one of ten locations including Stansted.²¹¹ Local consultation took place on two close parallel runway options for Stansted but these were universally rejected in view of the assurances given by Government in the 1985 White Paper
- 1991** New terminal at Stansted opens.
- 1993** The Runway Capacity to Serve the South East (RUCATSE) panel was formed to decide which of the options would be adopted. RUCATSE dismissed the Stansted option for much the same reasons that the Graham Eyre Inquiry had identified and recorded that a new runway was not likely to be needed there before 2015. The report also discussed estuarial sites, stating that they 'remain a long term possibility and offer important potential benefits but [that] they raise major issues in relation to cost of construction, passenger demand and effect on the natural environment' and the Marinair proposal in particular, recording reservations on the grounds of lack of demand and practicality.²¹²
- 1996** Marinair project submits written and oral evidence to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee (HC 67 1996/96).
- 2002** Press reports of Mayor of London Ken Livingstone considering and then rejecting estuarial airport proposal (*Planning*, 20 September 2002, p1).
- 2003** South East Regional Air Services Study (SERAS) examines Cliffe etc.²¹³
- Jan 2003** Stop Stansted Expansion campaign submits short report to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee on offshore airport development.²¹⁴
- 2003** Marinair project gives [oral evidence](#) to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee.
- 2003** Report commissioned by the DfT providing an overview of the concept of developing estuarial airports.²¹⁵

²¹¹ *Traffic distribution policy and airport and airspace capacity: the next 15 years – Advice to the Secretary of State for Transport*, CAP 570, Civil Aviation Authority, 1990 (Library location: SOP CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY NS 3)

²¹² *Runway Capacity to Serve the South East :a report by the working group*, Dept of Transport, 1993 (Library location: DEP 9554)

²¹³ For more information on SERAS, please see [Library Standard Note SN/BT/2893](#)

²¹⁴ *Offshore Airport Development*, Stop Stansted Expansion, 2003 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²¹⁵ *Development of Airport Capacity in the Thames Estuary*, Halcrow Group for the Department for Transport, December 2003 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 17 March 2014)

Dec 2003	Labour Government White Paper dismisses proposals to construct an airport in the estuary. ²¹⁶
2006	Town and Country Planning Association pamphlet recommending closure of Heathrow in favour of an estuarial airport. ²¹⁷
Nov 2007	Labour Government consultation paper on the construction of a third runway at Heathrow.
2008	Opening of Heathrow Terminal Five. London Mayoral election campaign in which Boris Johnson raises the option of siting an airport in the estuary.
Nov 2008	All Party Parliamentary Group formed to promote consideration of an airport in the Thames estuary. ²¹⁸
15 Jan 2009	Labour Government confirms its support for a third runway at Heathrow. ²¹⁹
Aug 2009	Oakervee Report delivered to the Mayor of London.
16 Oct 2009	Thames Estuary Steering Group established by the Mayor of London. ²²⁰
19 Oct 2009	Thames Estuary Airport Feasibility Review report published. ²²¹
3 Dec 2009	Aviation Environment Federation position paper on Thames estuary airports. ²²²
Jan 2010	Report for Medway Council summarising the Oakervee Report and the Council's objection to an airport in the estuary. ²²³
Feb 2010	London Assembly Environment Committee releases evidence submitted to the Committee by interested organisations. ²²⁴
26 Mar 2010	High Court judgment rules that a further review of the policy issues should take place before agreement is given to a third runway at Heathrow. ²²⁵

²¹⁶ [The Future of Air Transport](#), Cm 6046, Department for Transport, Dec 2003 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 17 March 2014)

²¹⁷ Tony Hall and Peter Hall, [Heathrow: a retirement plan](#), TCPA, May 2006 (Internet Archive, accessed 17 March 2014)

²¹⁸ This APPG is not in the current Register of All Party Groups (as at 18 February 2014)

²¹⁹ Department for Transport Press Release, [Hoon outlines air, road and rail improvements to boost economy and jobs](#), 15 January 2009 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²⁰ [Thames Estuary Airport Steering Group - request for mayoral decision](#), GLA, 16 October 2009 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²¹ Douglas Oakervee, [Thames Estuary Airport Feasibility Review](#), Thames Estuary Research and Development Company, October 2009 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²² [Thames estuary airport: AEF position paper](#), Aviation Environment Federation, December 2009 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²³ [Thames Estuary Airport – Feasibility Review: report to Council Cabinet Members](#), Medway Council, January 2010 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²⁴ <http://legacy.london.gov.uk/assembly/envmtgs/2010/mar11/item06b.pdf> (accessed 20 August 2013)

²²⁵ <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2010/626.html> (accessed 20 August 2013)

- 6 May 2010** General election. Hung Parliament.
- 20 May 2010** New Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government issues a full list of agreed policies. New runways at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted are ruled out.²²⁶
- May/June 2010** [Scoping review document](#) for the Thames Estuary Research and Development Company and [strategy document](#) by the Thames Estuary Steering Group.
- July 2010** Secretary of State for Transport states that the Government has no plans to build an airport in the estuary.²²⁷
- Jan 2011** The Mayor publishes part 1 of a report making the case for a new airport in the south-east.²²⁸
- 30 Mar 2011** DfT consultation paper, [Developing a sustainable framework for UK aviation: Scoping document](#). Consultation closed on 20 October 2011. Government responded in July 2012.
- 25 Aug 2011** DfT publishes [UK Aviation Forecasts](#) which predicts average annual growth in passenger numbers to 2050 of 2.0% (within the range 1.5-2.3%) as compared to a 3.7% average over the past twenty years.
- Sep 2011** Maritime & Coastguard Agency releases a summary report of the 2008 and 2009 surveys of the SS Richard Montgomery.²²⁹ Report suggests that structural collapse is not imminent, but the prospect is getting closer. This may require a 'carefully planned intervention operation'. The [2012 survey](#) published in October 2013 noted little change since 2009 with the wreck remaining stable.
- Oct 2011** Mayor publishes his response to the DfT consultation [Developing a sustainable framework for UK aviation - scoping document](#).²³⁰
- Nov 2011** 'Thames Hub' report by Foster & Partners/Halcrow/Volterra Consulting recommending the construction of a new airport on the Isle of Grain on the Hoo Peninsula as one element of a wider programme of ambitious infrastructure developments.²³¹
- 21 Nov 2011** The Mayor publishes part 2 of a report making the case for additional airport capacity in the south-east.²³²

²²⁶ [The Coalition: our programme for government](#), HM Government, May 2010 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²⁷ [Tracey Crouch MP blog post](#), 27 July 2010 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²⁸ [A new airport for London : Part 1 – The Case for New Capacity](#), GLA, January 2011 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²²⁹ [SS Richard Montgomery Surveys 2008 & 2009 Summary Report](#) (accessed 17 March 2014)

²³⁰ [Developing a sustainable framework for UK aviation: scoping document: The Mayor of London's response](#) (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 17 March 2014)

²³¹ <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/ThamesHub/> (accessed 17 March 2014)

²³² [A new airport for London - Part 2 – The economic benefits of a new hub airport](#), GLA, November 2011 (accessed 17 March 2014)

28 Nov 2011	In a lecture/presentation given at Oxford University, Lord Foster provides additional detail about the Thames Hub proposal. ²³³
Jan 2012	Civil Aviation Authority publishes report on aviation policy. The estuary airport option is not specifically mentioned, but the need for additional airport capacity in South East England is stated. ²³⁴
Jun 2012	South East Local Enterprise Partnership publishes a report (commissioned from Parsons Brinckerhoff) into airport capacity in the South East. The report states that a new hub airport in the Estuary is not a viable short term solution to the problem of lack of capacity in the region. ²³⁵
12 Jul 2012	Government publishes its draft Aviation Policy Framework policy framework. ²³⁶
Sep 2012	The Government establishes an independent Commission to examine UK aviation capacity. Due to publish final report by summer 2015 – after the expected date of the next General election. Gensler (architects) propose 'London Britannia', a floating airport with 4-6 runways in the estuary.
Nov 2012	Thames Estuary Research & Development Company publishes plan for a five runway airport (with potential expansion to six) on an artificial island in the Outer Estuary. ²³⁷
Jan 2013	Oxera Consulting produces a report for the House of Commons Transport Select Committee stating that an estuary airport would not be commercially viable without subsidy from Government. However, it notes that a new airport in this location could potentially offer good value for money in terms of wider public benefits. ²³⁸ Gateway Associates survey Will it ever be time for TEA? Most of the stakeholders surveyed are opposed to an estuary airport
Mar 2013	Aviation Policy Framework published by DfT. It is condemned as expansionist and being too favourable to the aviation industry by environmental campaigners. ²³⁹

²³³ [“Lord Foster Humanitas Oxford University Lecture November 2011”](#), youtube.com, 28 November 2011 (accessed 17 March 2014) – see in particular lecture from 22 mins onwards

²³⁴ [Aviation policy for the future](#), CAA Insight Note 003, Civil Aviation Authority, January 2012 (Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed 17 March 2014)

²³⁵ [Greater South East Airport Capacity: airport capacity research study](#), SELEP, June 2012 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²³⁶ [Draft Aviation Policy Framework](#), DfT, July 2012 (UK Govt Web Archive, accessed 17 March 2014)

²³⁷ [London Jubilee International Airport](#), TESTRAD, November 2012 (Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed 17 March 2014)

²³⁸ [Would a new hub airport be commercially viable?](#) Report prepared for the House of Commons Transport Select Committee by Oxera, 25 January 2013 (accessed 17 March 2014)

²³⁹ “Between a Rock and a Hard Place’: The Coalition, the Davies Commission and the Wicked Issue of Airport Expansion”, Steven Griggs and David Howarth, *Political Quarterly* Vol 84(4) Oct-Dec 2013 p519

- 10 May 2013** House of Commons Transport Select Committee publishes report on aviation strategy. Construction of a new hub airport east of London is rejected on several grounds including cost to the public purse, unacceptable disruption and damage to the local economy caused by the closure of Heathrow, birdstrike risk, environmental impact and air traffic control issues.²⁴⁰
- July 2013** The TESTRAD and Gensler proposals are merged, The new London Britannia Airport, with up to six runways, would be based on an artificial island in the Outer Estuary.
- 7 Aug 2013** Airports Commission publishes the reports which have been submitted by organisations proposing long-term aviation capacity solutions. 10 estuary airport schemes are put forward.
- 3 Sep 2013** Foster & Partners respond to 96 questions posed by the Airports Commission about the Isle of Grain Thames Hub Scheme.²⁴¹
- 17 Dec 2013** Airports Commission publishes interim report and the assessments of long-term options considered by its consultants. 2 proposals for possible new runways at Heathrow and one at Gatwick are shortlisted. No estuary airport scheme is shortlisted, but the Isle of Grain in the Inner estuary is recommended for further study; a decision on its suitability as the location for a new 4 runway airport will be made in 2014.²⁴²
- Jan 2014** Mayor of London publishes response to the Davies Commission's interim report.²⁴³
- 27 Mar 2014** Airports Commission publishes revised terms of reference for the feasibility studies into the construction of a new airport in the Inner estuary.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ [Aviation Strategy](#), House of Commons Transport Select Committee, HC 78 2013-14 (accessed 28 March 2014)

²⁴¹ [Thames Hub: Answers to the Airports Commission's questions](#), Foster & Partners, 3 September 2013

²⁴² [Airports Commission website](#), 17 December 2013 (accessed 27 March 2014). See [Appendix 2: Assessment of Long-term Options](#) for a breakdown of the reasons individual estuary airport proposals were 'sifted out' by the Commission.

²⁴³ [The Airports Commission Interim Report: Key Issues, TfL Planning Briefing Note](#), January 2014 (accessed 28 March 2014)

²⁴⁴ Airports Commission, [Inner Thames Estuary feasibility studies: terms of reference](#), 25 March 2014 (accessed 28 March 2014)

Press articles

Recent press articles can be found using [Nexis](#) via the Library Intranet. The [AirportWatch website](#) also has an extensive list of articles on the subject from 2009 onwards.

The [Times Digital Archive](#) service on the Intranet can be used to trace older articles from the *Times/Sunday Times*.

A pack of relevant articles from various newspapers from the 1960s-1980s is available to Members from the Library's [Business and Transport Section](#) (x3694/4314)

Early Day Motions

EDM 493 2010/12 – THAMES ESTUARY AIRPORT

Mr Gordon Henderson (Con, Sittingbourne and Sheppey)

That this House notes the re-inauguration of the Thames Estuary Airport All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to promote consideration of a new airport in the Thames Estuary; believes that this APPG is ill conceived as such an airport would be economically unviable, operationally unsafe and environmentally disastrous; and is concerned that continued speculation about the feasibility of an airport in the Thames Estuary is bringing unnecessary uncertainty and distress to those residents of North Kent and South Essex who would be most affected by its construction.

EDM 321A1 2008/09 – UK INTERNATIONAL HUB AIRPORT

Mr Bob Spink (Ind, Castle Point)

at end add `; and finally notes that various studies and Government policies have ruled out an airport in the Thames Estuary and that this option should not be re-opened.'

EDM 321 2008/09- UK INTERNATIONAL HUB AIRPORT

Mr Graham Stringer (Lab, Manchester Blackley)

That this House recognises the need for a world-class international airport in the UK; notes that additional capacity in the South East will be essential to achieving this, and that future economic growth in the UK including Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions depends on global aviation links; further recognises that all current and future UK airports must meet strict environmental rules and standards including noise levels being no higher than 2002 levels and adherence to tough EU air quality standards; and further notes that aviation will become part of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme in 2012.

EDM 1795 2002/03 - PROPOSED NEW AIRPORT AT CLIFFE

Mr Robert Marshall-Andrews (Lab, Medway)

That this House believes that the proposal for a new airport at Cliffe in north Kent would be one of the most environmentally damaging infrastructure developments ever seen in the United Kingdom; notes that it would destroy sites designated as special protection area, Ramsar site, special area of conservation, site of special scientific interest, national nature reserve and environmentally sensitive area; further notes that it would have a damaging impact on local communities, destroying over 1,000 residential properties; believes that it would not attract sufficient funding from the private sector to cover its construction costs or attract carriers away from existing airports; urges the Government to reject the case for a second hub airport in the South East and to take a more sustainable view of aviation by managing demand; and therefore calls on the Government to reject the Cliffe option when it publishes its air transport White Paper.

EDM 1781 2002/03 - INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AT CLIFFE MARSHES

Mr Alan Meale (Lab, Mansfield)

That this House is alarmed at proposals to build a new international airport on the Cliffe marshes in Kent, which is an internationally protected wildlife area which encompasses within it three sites classified as being of special scientific interest, together with a number of important wildlife reserves; is concerned that the construction of such an airport in this area would destroy these important assets which offer harbour to millions of migratory and wintering wading birds and wildfowl; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government not to support such measures which would neither be welcomed nor necessary as capacity already exists elsewhere.

EDM 457 2002/03 - CLIFFE AIRPORT

Mr Bob Spink (Con, Castle Point)

That this House notes the extension of the air transport consultation to consider Gatwick as an option in the South East; further notes the overwhelming public rejection of a five runway, new hub airport, operating 24 hours each day, at Cliffe; believes that the continuing uncertainty is causing great concern and blighting the lives of many people in Kent and Essex; and urges the Government to make the earliest possible announcement and reject the Cliffe option.

EDM 52 1978/79 - MAPLIN SANDS

Mr Ronald Bell (Con, Beaconsfield)

That this House, noting how the operation of the four existing London airports imposes a heavy burden of noise disturbance upon the centres of population in or near which they are situated, and that every intensification of their use imposes an additional burden upon that population, deeply regrets that Her Majesty's Government should be proposing yet further expansion of these airports; and declares that there is no acceptable solution of the problem of aircraft noise, in spite of all technical advances and procedural mitigations, except the development of a coastal airport for London.

EDM 223 1973/74 - ABANDONMENT OF MAPLIN

Mr Ronald Bell [Con, South Bucks)

That this House deeply regrets the decision of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to abandon the project of an airport at Maplin Sands; and declares that by this Her Majesty's Government have condemned millions of people living around London Airport to the indefinite continuance of intolerable noise nuisance, to the consequences of a proposed growth in passenger movement of nearly ninety per cent, to the continuance of night movements and to the operation over very many years of surviving noisy types of aircraft and of Concord when it is introduced.

EDM 458 1971/72 - GOOSE INGESTION

Mr Maxwell-Hyslop (Con, Tiverton)

That this House, aware that a civil aero engine certification requirement is the safe ingestion of a 4lb chicken, and that the proposed site of the Third London Airport at Maplin lies in the migratory path of geese, warns the Government not to enter into any binding contracts concerning the construction of an airport on this site until the aircraft which will use it have demonstrated a certified capacity safely to ingest such geese.

EDM 457 1971/72 - SITING OF THE RUNWAYS AT THE THIRD LONDON AIRPORT

Sir Bernard Braine (Con, Essex SE)

That this House, recognising that the Government's decision to site the Third London Airport off-shore rather than in-shore was the result of a policy decision designed to ensure that the minimum number of people should be subject to noise nuisance, urges Her Majesty's Government to choose Site D, notwithstanding the additional cost, and so keep the airport as far out to sea as possible and away from people's homes.

EDM 449 1970/71 – THAMES TUNNEL TO FOULNESS AIRPORT

Mr John Wells (Con, Maidstone)

That this House, noting with concern the adverse effect any airport at Foulness would have on the quality of life in Kent without any compensating economic advantage to that county, urges Her Majesty's Government to declare a new tunnel under the Thames Estuary to be a prerequisite of any airport at Foulness.

EDM 234 1970/71 – COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON THE THIRD LONDON AIRPORT

Mr James Wellbeloved (Lab, Erith & Crayford)

That this House commends the Commission of Inquiry on the Third London Airport under the chairmanship of the Honourable Mr Justice Roskill on the painstaking thorough and able way it carried out its work; recognises that it showed great humanity in the careful way it investigated the whole problem and took fully into account the effects of a major international airport upon people, their amenities and their environment at each one of the sites, as well as showing a clear understanding of the many technical aspects in assessing the effects upon farm land and in weighing up the rest of the planning, communications and other considerations; appreciates that each of the sites would involve an environmental disaster; notes that there has never been an enquiry on such a massive scale before; and, as it would be difficult if not impossible to devise a fairer, less-biased and more thorough way to make such an investigation, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to accept the Commission's recommendations.

EDM 208 1970/71 – THIRD LONDON AIRPORT

Mr Stephen Hastings (Con, Mid-Bedfordshire)

That this House, while recognising the need for a third London Airport is totally opposed to the choice of any inland site, or to the extension of any other existing airport for this purpose; and strongly advocates the selection of Foulness or any other suitable coastal site.

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1) National Archives

A wide selection of official papers on proposals for Thames Estuary airports – in particular the proposals for an airport at Foulness/Maplin Sands in the 1960s/1970s.

2) Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service

“This archive has been compiled from the files created by Bedfordshire County Council's County Secretary's Department. They naturally favour the two sites that would affect the county most (Thurleigh and Wing), though a considerable amount of evidence concerning the Nuthampstead and Foulness sites as well as general information concerning the issue as a whole was compiled. The County Record Office's normal practice (as outlined in its Collecting Policy) is to collect material mainly of relevance to Bedfordshire. However, given the interlinked nature of the records of the Commission and the fact that the Third London Airport was an important national issue of which records might well not survive elsewhere, it was decided to keep the archive intact, retaining information on the Bucks, Herts and Essex sites and fights as well as those concerning Thurleigh. This enables the researcher to build up a picture of the work of the Commission and the co-ordinated campaign against the various sites. It also serves to highlight differences of approach and/or emphasis between Bedfordshire County Council and BARA compared with other local authorities and pressure groups.”

3) Centre for Kentish Studies

“In 1965 it was announced that the government had selected Stansted in Essex as the site of the Third London Airport. A public inquiry was to be held and there was a possibility that some of the objectors would suggest alternative sites including sites in Kent. Initially the County Council did not feel able to support or oppose any site in Kent until the fullest possible technical information and professional advice had been obtained. This was still the County Council's view when the decision to use Stansted was reopened by means of the Roskill Commission enquiry which began in 1969 though the County Council expressed apprehension as to the effect of noise on parts of Kent and the implications for the transport system of the county and an adviser on the effects of noise was retained by the County Council. As the implications became clearer of what a large new airport would mean in terms of additional population, transport needs, noise and loss of recreational facilities, the County Council advised the Commission that it hoped that a site in Kent would not be on the short list. When this was drawn up in 1969, the County Council then turned to the implications for Kent of the nearest of the possible sites, Foulness. Again the County Council reserved judgement until more information on noise was produced both by the Commission and their own consultant, but when the position was clearer the County Council decided that Kent would obtain no benefit from an airport at Foulness only inconvenience and gave evidence to the Roskill Commission that noise nuisance from Foulness would

²⁴⁶ The Library does not have special access to these archives, and a personal visit would be necessary to consult the material they hold.

have a detrimental effect on Kent particularly in respect of development on Sheppey and in its effect on holiday use of the North Kent coast.

When the choice of the site of Cublington in Buckinghamshire was made, the County Council, while feeling that the points put forward at the enquiry on the County Council's behalf had had a marked effect on the final outcome, remained wary of the strong pressure which still existed in favour of Foulness and made their views known to Kent MPs. Their caution was justified as the decision for Cublington was reversed in favour of Foulness in 1971. The County Council continued the policy of collecting further information and of obtaining safeguards and assurances from the Department of the Environment in respect of certain matters in the Maplin Development Bill and of demanding the right to full consultation. (Extracted from E Melling, "History of the Kent County Council", pp122-123)"

4) [Essex Archives](#)

This collection contains material on the 1970s Maplin Sands scheme and includes papers relating to the Defenders of Essex Association which opposed the proposal