

CABINET

20 DECEMBER 2011

AIRPORT PROPOSALS IN MEDWAY AND KENT

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Rodney Chambers, Leader

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Summary

This report advises Members of the 3 current proposals for International Airports in Medway and Kent and recommends strong opposition to all the proposals.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This is a matter for Council because of the potential for decisions which may seek to amend the existing policy framework and budget.
- 1.2 The Cabinet is asked to accept this matter as urgent to enable the views of Cabinet to be included in the report to Council on 12 January 2012.

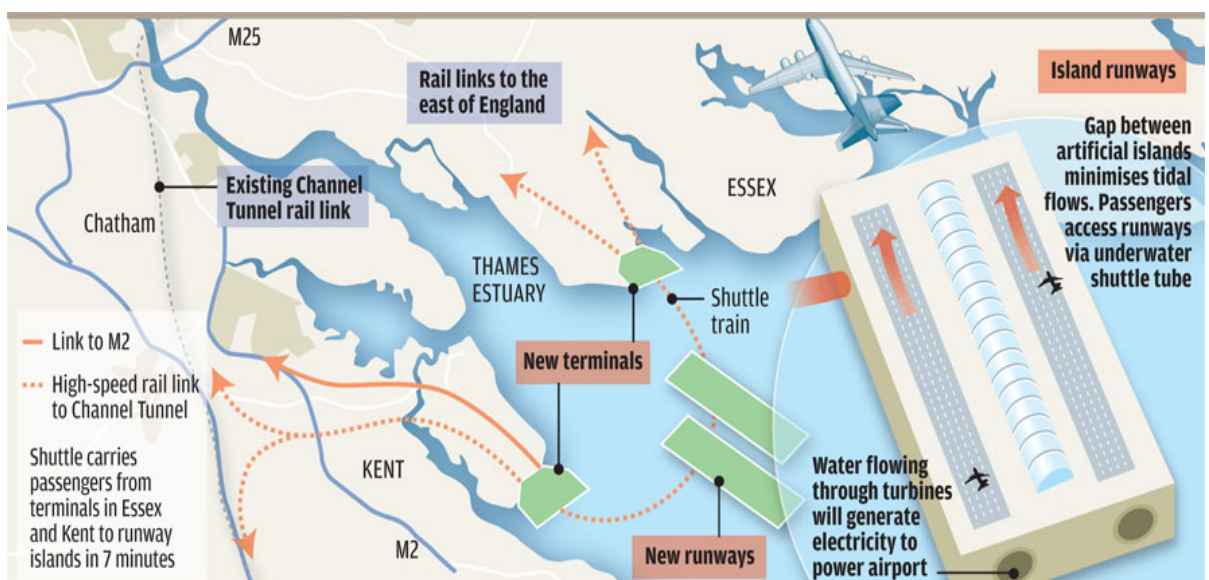
2. Background

- 2.1 Plans for international airports in and around Medway and Kent date back to the 1950s. For sixty years the community has been defending this corner of England against inappropriate airport proposals. There are currently three new proposals for International Airports in, or close to, Medway.
- 2.2 Firstly a proposal by **Boris Johnson**, Mayor of London, for an International Airport on reclaimed land in the Thames Estuary north east of Sheppey and Whitstable. It is sometimes referred to as "Boris Island". A £40 - £50 billion proposal on an artificial island 4800m long and 1800m wide connected by a high speed train line directly from Ashford, from Ebbsfleet, and also from Southend – requiring 48 miles of new rail line to be laid. The Mayor's report suggests the building of a road link across the Isle of Grain linking the M2 and M20 motorways.
- 2.3 The Council has strongly opposed this road proposal. The Chancellor in his Autumn Statement referred to the need to construct a new Dartford Crossing. This was flagged up in the *Dartford River Crossing Study – A Lower Thames Crossing*. The route options for a crossing

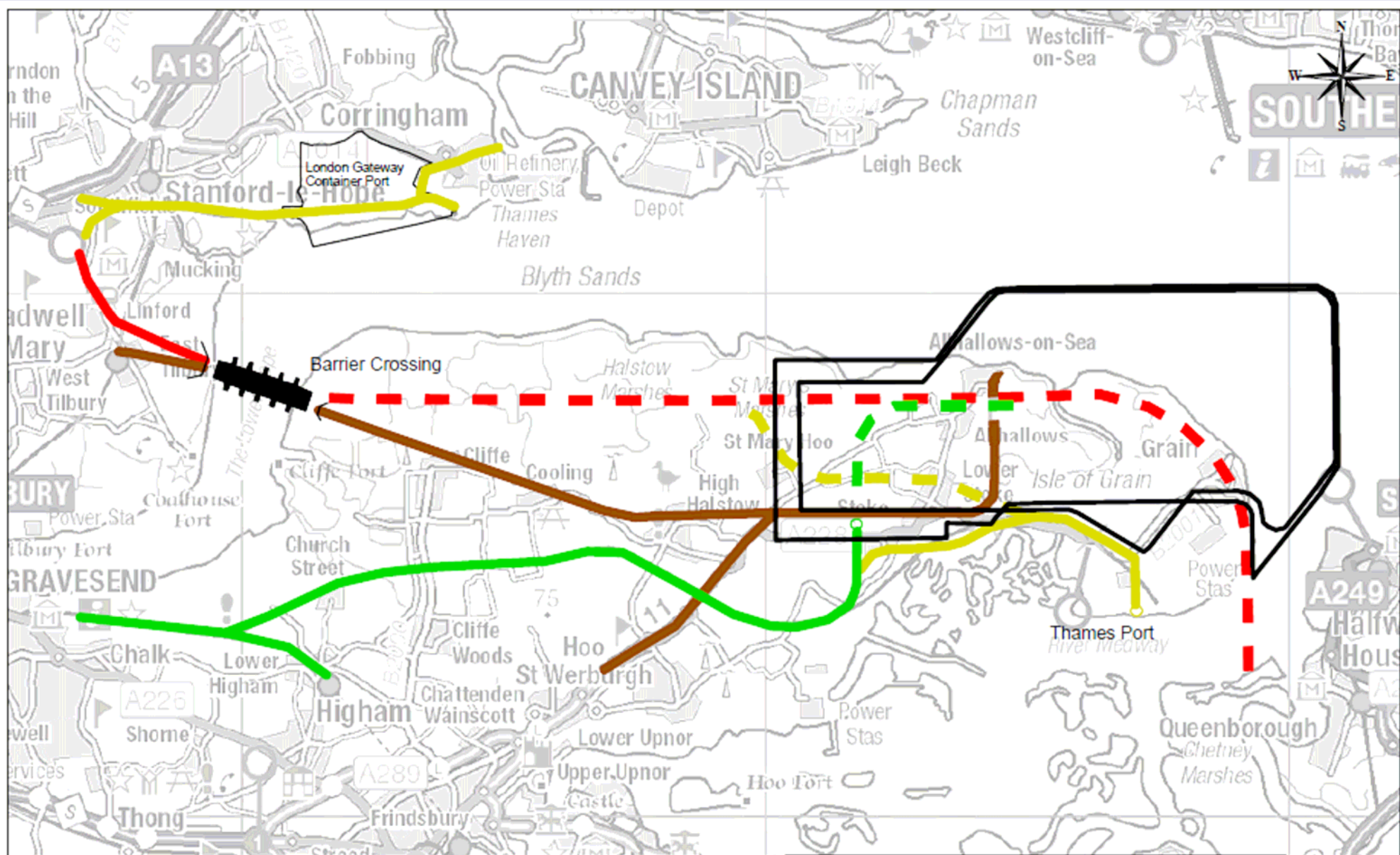
were initially shown (see Appendix A) and some were in Medway on the Peninsula. Latest information suggests these have now been dropped and only options to the west of Medway are being considered. The Department for Transport has set up a working party which has yet to meet but to which Medway has been invited to join.

2.4 The Council's opposition to the Mayor's proposal has been well articulated. Polling on the idea across the United Kingdom by ICM this year found that 76% do not believe London needs a new airport in the Thames Estuary. 81% felt that the Mayor's proposals are "too much to spend on a new airport" particularly with the financial difficulties the country faces. 87% agreed with the statement that we should use existing capacity already available at regional airports more efficiently.

2.5 The Mayor's proposal:



- 2.6 Secondly is a proposal from the architect **Lord Foster** for an International Airport on the Isle of Grain and partly on reclaimed land in the Thames and the mouth of the River Medway. This would be the world's biggest airport serving 150 million passengers operating 24 hours a day. It would cost at least £50 - £70 billion. It has 4 runways each 2.5 miles long with a new Thames Barrier and new high speed rail links. The proposals are supported by the Mayor of London. Lord Foster states "we need to recapture the foresight and political courage of our 19th century forebears if we are to establish a modern transport and energy infrastructure in Britain for this century and beyond. We can do it here".
- 2.7 Medway Council's Leader Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE has stated: "this plan quite possibly is the daftest in a long list of pie in the sky schemes that have been put forward for an airport. We have looked at Lord Foster's plan and he appears to want to place his fantasy Isle of Grain airport on top of the liquefied natural gas plant and a power station. It beggars belief. I can only assume he has not actually left his offices and travelled from London to Medway to have a look before releasing this plan". Lord Foster has, to date, chosen not to engage with either the Council or the local community most affected by his proposals, although many homes would be destroyed along with whole communities.

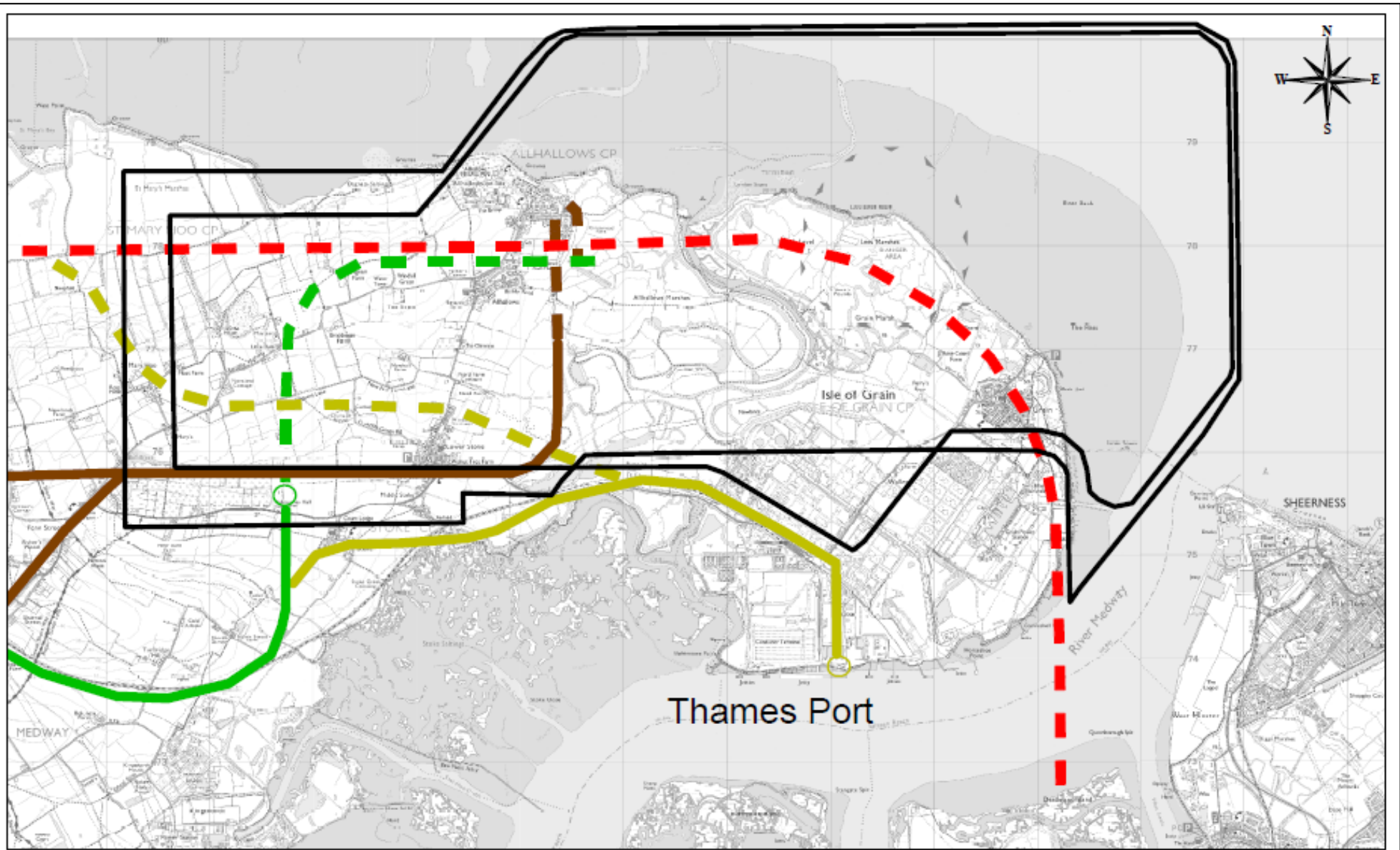


Foster's airport

- | | |
|--|--|
| Airport and Logistics City | High Speed Orbital Rail Line through Airport |
| Aircraft Stands | Regional and Local Rail Line serving Airport |
| Cargo Terminal | Freight City Rail Line |
| Passenger Terminal and Satellite Buildings | Airside Transit from Passenger Terminal |
| Aircraft Maintenance | Landside Transit |
| Runway | Principal Road Access |

Medway
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Scale: 1:100000 02/11/11
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Foster's airport

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- | | |
|--|--|
| Airport and Logistics City | High Speed Orbital Rail Line through Airport |
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Scale: 1:50000 02/11/11

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- 2.8 Thirdly is a proposal from ex Cathay Pacific Executive and previous head of airline Dan Air, **John Olsen**, for an International Airport at Cliffe costing £15billion, with 3 runways operating 24 hours a day and handling 100 million passengers a year. Olsen claims this is the “only viable project and the best piece of undeveloped land anywhere near a major city in Europe”.
- 2.9 Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE has stated “when this plan was put forward last year I stated I was furious that this unwelcome proposal to concrete over the Hoo Peninsula and create an International Airport appeared to be back on the table. That comment still stands. In 2002 we successfully fought off proposals to build on green fields and internationally important wetlands in Medway and we will do the same again”.

3. Government’s Response

- 3.1 The Government’s position on the airport proposals was clarified in a question from Rehman Chishti MP in 2010 at Prime Minister’s Question Time when David Cameron clearly stated his Government had no plans for a new airport in Medway or Kent.
- 3.2 Further, Mark Reckless MP, got an assurance last month from the Aviation Minister Theresa Villiers that her department “has no plans for a new airport in the Thames Estuary nor any other part of Medway or Kent”.
- 3.3 In the Chancellor’s 2011 Autumn Statement he suggested that “all options for maintaining the UK’s aviation hub status with the exception of a third runway at Heathrow would be examined”. This does not however imply any backing for new airports in Medway or Kent.
- 3.4 It is understood the Government intends to publish a policy document or White Paper on Airports around May 2012. The contents and subject areas of this are unknown at the current time.

4. Medway Council’s View

- 4.1 Following an initial report to Cabinet on 17 February 2009, Full Council on 5 March 2009 considered proposals from the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson for a new Thames Estuary Airport. Full Council agreed the following:

The Council object to the Mayor of London’s proposal to construct a Thames Estuary Airport on the following grounds:

- (i) It is unnecessary and not wanted
- (ii) The cost of an airport would be prohibitive
- (iii) The current infrastructure would not cope with huge increases in traffic
- (iv) The environmental damage would be catastrophic

- (v) The noise, light and air pollution would be intolerable
- (vi) The risk of air strike from migrating and nesting wildfowl would be high especially as this is an internationally important site for wildlife
- (vii) The airport would be disproportionately affected by fog and high winds
- (viii) The airport would lead to blight in the surrounding area including falling property prices and uncertainty for many years about inward investment into Medway
- (ix) Kent County Council is promoting Manston as an airport destination and this provides a viable alternative

4.2 In addition to the above, Full Council on 14 January 2010 noted that it is likely that an airport could, potentially, bring benefits to the local economy and the regeneration of the area, by creating a significant amount of direct and indirect employment and business opportunities. However, with the 75,000 jobs needed to run an international airport would come unsustainable pressure for new housing and unacceptable congestion on road and rail links in the south-east which is already the most congested in the UK. An earlier report suggested a need for up to 83,000 new homes. The airport would bring major, unacceptable disbenefits, including:

- Direct environmental destruction by causing harm to Sites of Special Scientific Interest and internationally important areas where hundreds of thousands of birds migrate to annually. The airport would destroy huge areas of legally protected habitat.
- Encouraging more air travel which is likely to exacerbate climate change. Assuming the airport would create new capacity, it is likely that the proposal is contrary to the national statutory target to reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. Furthermore, increased emissions from aircraft and associated passenger and freight vehicles accessing the airport could significantly add to existing local areas of known poor air quality.
- Significant risk of bird strike as the Thames Estuary is a hub for hundreds of thousands of birds. Even with an aggressive bird hazard management programme, such as shooting or scaring birds away, the bird strike hazard would be up to 12 times higher than at any other major UK airport (source: RSPB).
- Harm to areas of landscape importance by the construction of major road and rail infrastructure links from the airport to the strategic road and rail networks.
- Increased pressure for additional major development due the increased attractiveness of the area. This could result in areas of high landscape importance being lost to development, thereby being detrimental to the local environment.

- Kent International Airport at Manston has one of the longest runways in Europe that could be connected to HS1 at far less cost.
- 4.3 Therefore, whilst there could be economic benefits from an airport, these would be hugely outweighed by the environmental damage and other detriment to the area such an airport would bring.

5. Consultation

5.1 Working in partnership with Kent County Council and the RSPB, Medway Council has taken the lead on a “Stop the Estuary Airport” campaign, with high profile media campaigns and a dedicated campaign website. In summary, the campaign considers the projects to be undeliverable, unaffordable and unnecessary, and has raised the following grounds for objection:

- Immense damage it would cause to the area’s internationally important wildlife and the wider environment
 - Exacerbate climate change
 - High cost of construction
 - Significant risk of bird strike
 - It would require huge unsightly highways to be built linking the airport to the motorway network
- 5.2 Given the concerns regarding the significant impact on the environment and the high risk of bird strikes, it is considered that meaningful proposals for environmental mitigation in line with the requirements of the EU Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive would need to be developed prior to the principle of the schemes being considered further.

6. Airport Study

6.1 As part of the work of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) it has been agreed to commission a study into Airport Capacity in the Greater South East Study. The LEP covers local authorities and businesses in Kent, Essex and East Sussex and the three unitary Councils of Medway, Thurrock and Southend. A report to the last LEP meeting in December stated:

6.1.1 *It is generally accepted that the airport capacity within the Greater South East area – London Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, City and Southend are currently insufficient to cope with any significant increase in demand from passengers. Recent plans to build a third runway at Heathrow have been halted as have additional runways at Stansted and Luton. London City airport is constrained by its geographic location and Gatwick airport cannot bring forward any expansion plans until 2019.*

- 6.1.2 *Due to the economic climate, passenger numbers are currently falling however as the economy improves it is likely that passenger numbers will increase, placing a strain on the capacity in the South East of England. This capacity strain is unlikely to be alleviated by airports further north as the transport connectivity to the south east is not sufficient for business to access markets. It is possible, therefore, that businesses will withdraw from the Greater South East and relocate to northern Europe where airport expansion is happening.*
- 6.1.3 *In order to alleviate the capacity problems and grow the economy of the Greater South East, it has been argued that there is a requirement for a hub airport that is larger than Heathrow – around 4 runways compared with Heathrow's 2. There are currently 3 proposals for the location of the hub airport all of which are in the Thames Estuary. They include Lord Foster's proposal at the Isle of Grain, the Mayor of London's Thames Estuary airport and the Cliff airport proposal. All 3 proposals pose significant environmental and logistical problems and do not have the support of either Central or Local Government. They will have significant costs associated due to their location – in the region of £50bn – and are unlikely to be brought forward in the next decade, by which time the airports of the Greater South East will have reached, and potentially exceeded, their capacity constraints.*
- 6.1.4 *The new owners of London Gatwick have, however, recently stated that a more efficient use of the infrastructure could increase passenger numbers by almost 11m per annum before 2019. This leads to the question – could a more efficient use of existing infrastructure in the Greater South East as a whole lead to an increase in passenger numbers over the next decade without the need for increased runways? Alternatively, could the more efficient use of existing infrastructure in the Greater South East over the next decade create enough breathing space for a discussion about the need for a hub airport, an agreed location for one and commencing the financing and construction of a hub airport?*
- 6.1.5 *There is the potential to carry out a study that investigates the current **collective** capacity of the airports in the Greater South East and establish how they can be utilised more efficiently. With the recent expansion at London Southend Airport and the successful Regional Growth Fund bid which will link Manston Airport to high speed rail access, additional capacity has the potential to be realised. This additional capacity could be brought online within the next 5-10 years with the associated employment growth in a region that is the powerhouse of the UK economy. Through the partnership working of the respective LEPs, Local Authorities and Airport authorities it is possible to commission an independent study into capacity and how it can be more efficiently and effectively used to open up more airspace. This work could build upon the 2002 South East Regional Airport Study, providing a more up-to-date position vis-à-vis airport capacity. There is, of course, a need to include within this work an update on the infrastructure requirements that would facilitate such a strategic use of the airspace in the Greater South East – for example, how Stansted and Southend airports could link with Crossrail to provide greater*

accessibility to the west of London and beyond and how Manston can link into High Speed 1.

6.1.6 *This piece of work does not ignore the proposals for the hub airport but, instead, would look to see how existing infrastructure can best be utilised to alleviate anticipated capacity problems over the next 5-10 years before they become urgent and exploit the employment opportunities that enhanced access can bring.*

6.2 It has been agreed that the study will be commissioned to provisionally report back in the next 3-4 months. Medway will be involved in the commissioning and management of the study.

7. Risk Management

7.1 Risks associated with the development of a Thames Estuary Airport are detailed in the table below.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Development of Thames Estuary airports.	Proposal to develop an estuary report obtains stronger policy weight.	High profile campaign to raise awareness of the devastating impacts of the proposal. Respond to all published proposals.

8. Financial and legal implications

8.1 The cost of the Airport study proposed above may be found from finance allocated to the running of the LEP. Cabinet may however wish to consider a modest budget for dissemination of information on the airport proposals and on the Council's views and the reasons for holding those views, informed by the above study and also from the work of Sir Terry Farrell who advocates joining up existing airport capacity. If any of the proposals are taken to formal consultation by the Government the need to employ aviation and other experts so as to be able to consider any planning issues properly and to be represented at planning inquiries will led to significant costs to the Council. No budget is specifically being requested at this stage.

9. Recommendations

9.1 That Cabinet recommends Full Council reaffirm its strong opposition to the current plans to construct any of the new International Airport proposals in, or close to, Medway and agrees to work with neighbouring authorities, local communities, businesses and

environmental groups to oppose these proposals on the following grounds:

1. It would adversely affect homes in Medway, Kent and Essex and lead to the demolition of people's homes.
 2. An airport would cause environmental destruction to sites of special scientific interest and internationally important areas where hundreds of thousands of birds migrate to annually.
 3. As the Thames Estuary is a hub for hundreds of thousands of birds, there would be a significant risk of bird strike. Even with an aggressive bird hazard management programme, such as shooting or scaring birds away, the bird strike hazard would be up to 12 times higher than at any other major UK airport (source: RSPB).
 4. An airport would increase the pressure for additional major development due to the increased attractiveness of the areas of business. This could result in vast swathes of Kent and Medway being lost to development. At least 320 business are directly associated with Heathrow, there are hundreds more supporting the airport and Heathrow employs 72,000 people. If the Thames Estuary airport were to replace Heathrow many of these people would move to Kent and Medway, leading to significant house building and infrastructure requirements. One report suggests a need for up to 83,000 additional houses.
 5. The airport reports do not properly consider the risks associated with operating an airport in close proximity to the existing import facility for liquified natural gas (LNG) at Thamesport and the munitions on board the Montgomery and the proximity of a container port and power stations. Existing airports already have potential to increase capacity. For example, Birmingham says it could double the passengers it carries. Southend and Manston have additional capacity.
 6. Better use needs to be made of existing regional airports by improving connectivity.
 7. The cost of a new airport would be prohibitive (up to £70 billion).
 8. The noise, light and air pollution would be intolerable and exacerbate CO² emissions.
 9. The airport would be fogbound and affected by high winds.
 10. Nearly 9 out of 10 international airlines that use Heathrow are against an estuary airport and over ¾ of people polled in the UK.
- 9.2 That Cabinet agrees to set up a cross party Cabinet Airport Advisory Group with the aim of advising on the Council's strategy for joining with others to oppose plans for International Airports in or close to Medway

and Kent and that the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture, in consultation with the Leader, be delegated authority to finalise the composition of the Group.

10. Suggested Reasons for Decision

- 10.1 International airports in, or close to, Medway would have devastating impacts on residents' amenity and on the environment of Medway, Kent and Essex and should therefore be rejected. Two of the proposals also lead to the demolition of people's homes and in the case of Lord Foster's proposals the removal of whole communities such as the village of Grain and surrounding settlements.

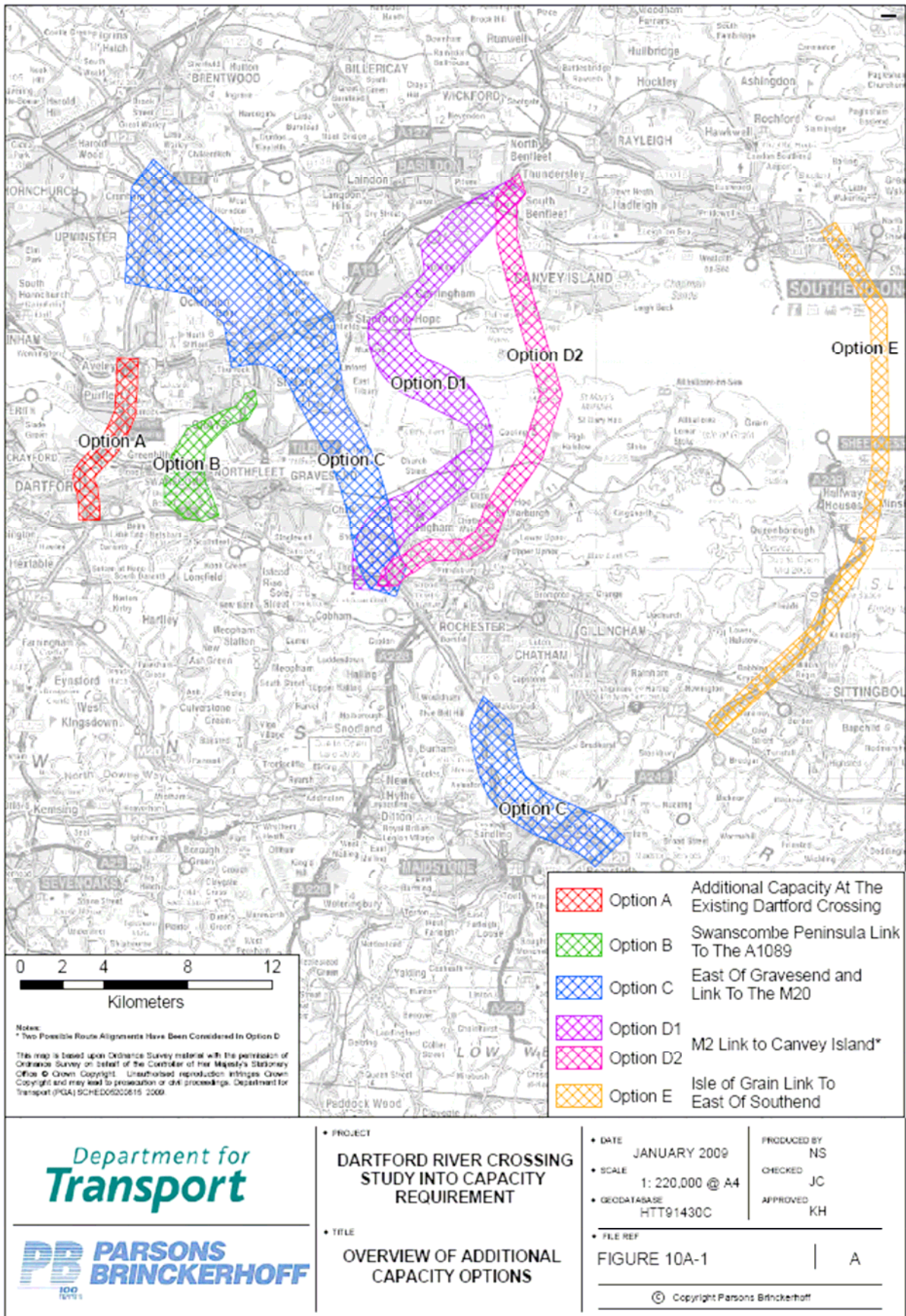
Lead officer contact

Robin Cooper
Director - Regeneration, Community & Culture
email: robin.cooper@medway.gov.uk

Background Papers

- Related web sites:
 - Campaign website: www.stopestuaryairport.co.uk
 - Thames Estuary Airport – Feasibility Review:
<http://www.testrad.co.uk>

Appendix A - Major Option Assessment routes for Lower Thames Crossing



Note: Option E appears to be land on the Isle of Sheppey, not the Isle of Grain as stated in the Department for Transport caption