

Headcorn Aerodrome Consultative Committee
Tuesday 24th October 2017

Present: Jamie Freeman – Chairman
Lyn Selby – Headcorn Parish Council
Brian Bristow – Smarden Parish Council
David Parker - Parachuting
John Perry - Staplehurst Parish Council
Martin Round – Maidstone Borough Council
John Mather - Headcorn Parish Council
James Tuke - Thurston Helicopters Ltd
Gerald Hodges – Thurston Helicopters Ltd
Sue Line – Secretary

Apologies for Absence

Terry Hodges, Alan Marsh, Lester Gosbee, Christine Dyer

Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes were read, accepted and signed by the Chairman

Matters arising from the Minutes

Nothing specifically discussed.

Planning & Events

Jamie Freeman confirmed that planning for new hangar been granted and it would probably go up in the Spring of 2018. He had a plan for renewable energy (pv) on the roof and said that the Pipistral aircraft was totally electric. It was a green energy project and capacitors would be able to build up enough charge to charge the aircraft. He was considering linking in with Tesla (or other ecars) to have power points in the carpark and it was an innovating and exciting plan.

The aerodrome had put in an application to enable a DC3 C47 (military equivalent) to use for parachutists on a WWII re-enactment programme. The market would be based mainly on USA visitors and Keith Perkins of Aero Legends Ltd was initialising this project. Lyn Selby had been questioned about this project at the Parish Council meeting the previous evening and had been given a list of questions:

There was concern that this aircraft was bigger and possibly a lot noisier than anything currently at the aerodrome and it was noted that the Mid Kent Environment Protection Team were not happy that a Noise Report had not been supplied. Jamie Freeman said that this aircraft had no noise readings on the website and was not

certificated. However he did have access to noise readings as the aircraft was here for Combined Ops – which was when this project had first been mooted – and he hoped to have access to these readings shortly. When it flew at Combined Ops this year there were no complaints and was very un-intrusive. It had been off the ground by the first windsock using full fuel and crew on runway 28. Effectively half its load.

Lyn Selby continued that this Planning Application had gone to the Parish Council and will go to Maidstone Borough Council. Lyn Selby noted that the dates put forward for the aircraft to be at Headcorn Aerodrome were from 1st May to 30th September (5 months). Jamie Freeman indicated that the aircraft would be used sparingly for these events, dropping parachutists for re-enactment. There was a discussion between Lyn Selby, Brian Bristow and Jamie Freeman as to the number of flights which would be involved. Jamie indicated an average of 10 flights (20 movements) and Lyn Selby said that she and fellow Councillors were questioning this and how it would affect the village.

Jamie Freeman said the customers would book maybe one session e.g. twice a month but then, dependant on weather, they could end up being backed up and therefore he had allowed for a bit of scope to book them in. Lyn Selby felt it could be quite concerning for the village. Jamie Freeman further explained that it would be a static line drop from 3.500ft. He explained that the aerodrome did not know about this project at the last Consultative Committee as it was not raised until after Combined Ops which is why nothing had been said at the last meeting. Martin Round indicated his support.

Jamie Freeman explained that he felt that some aircraft were technically below the noise threshold but were intrusive whereas the DC3 had a deeper noise which was less intrusive. The other option would be to bring it in on trial.

Brian Bristow mentioned that there could be 20 people maximum at a time and Lyn Selby said that they would probably be airborne for about 40 minutes. It was felt that this would also happen at weekends, but Jamie Freeman said that this activity would happen midweek and this was because of the Headcorn Parachute Club operation and because clients would be flown over from America and they had to go through various briefings before being allowed in the aircraft. David Parker confirmed that the regular parachute aircraft would not be up at the same time, and the plan was that only one aircraft capable of performing a parachute drop would be in the air at the same time.

Brian Bristow checked the fact that Americans would be coming over for these re-enactments, and this was confirmed. Martin Round was very supportive especially concerning knock-on effects of tourism and the site in general. He mentioned the fact that at the last Combined Ops weekend 14 Mayors were at the aerodrome when the aircraft took off and that when the BBMF went ‘tech’ they used the DC3 as a fill in and nobody noticed/complained. Lyn Selby confirmed that there had been no complaints about Combined Ops

The subject turned to helicopter flights: Martin Round pointed out that the short helicopter flights were not connected to the aerodrome itself, but were an external company operating a flying programme for passengers to undertake short flights. Jamie

Freeman said that the aerodrome had tried to vary the circuit, change the heights and flying procedures. He was still talking to the company to encourage them to lengthen the flights so that they could go further out e.g. to Sutton Valence or Leeds, but quite a lot of people booked those flights because they were short and therefore cheap. Lyn Selby asked if they were connected to the Kent Messenger and Jamie Freeman said that they were run by Adventure 001, like Groupon. Lyn Selby asked how often they were flying this year and the answer was about 6 or 7 flying days. Jamie Freeman said he felt he had to balance the noise complaints against people who wanted to fly. Lyn Selby asked if they could miss the village. Jamie Freeman said they were flying directly north and coming round and back in. If there were no parachuting they would be allowed straight in on runway 28. They had been specifically told not to fly over the village. Lyn Selby said that, as she remembered it, one flew directly over the village. Jamie Freeman said that complaints should be phoned in at the time (bearing in mind that conversations with Air Traffic needed to be brief during busy periods). He felt that the number of short flights would make it more economical for the organising company. He reiterated that with longer flights the noise would be taken away from the operating base.

There was a further discussion about the running of the helicopter project. Gerald Hodges wondered if the number of days could be reduced or possibly just operate on a Sunday. Jamie Freeman said that he was talking to the operators. Lyn Selby felt this new project was unfortunate as there had not been any complaints for a long time. Jamie Freeman said that it would be possible to fly at different points of the compass, although they could be close to the mobile homes.

Jamie said that at Combined Ops the aerodrome flew helicopters but there had been no complaints. He felt (again) that they needed to extend flights.

Jamie ran through the listed complaints from Air Traffic. They were mainly concerning Adventure 001. One further complainant mentioned noise and the horses in a manege. This complainant had been invited to the aerodrome to be shown the circuit and had been re-advised that instructional flights would have been well above 500ft when over the manege area. The fact remained that the manege was under the circuit.

The aerodrome needed to make it clear that, concerning the complaint of 10th of month, this was caused by one of the Utility Companies (the Gas Board) checking the lines.

Lyn Selby said that she was interested about the calls and that she would go back with information about Adventure 001 and understood that this activity was not Thurston Helicopters Ltd. Jamie Freeman re-iterated about convincing Adventure 001 that they needed to sell longer flights.

Any Other Business

Martin Round enquired about bookings and plans for the next season. Jamie Freeman said that the aerodrome was firming up on dates for the Southern Model Show and the Combined Ops. A more comprehensive diary would be produced at the March meeting.

Additional to those events would be the Battle of Britain Air Show. This was now being held annually instead of bi-annually. The dates would be roughly the same. Martin Round mentioned the anniversary of the end of WWI as being a possible date. Jamie said that was the end of June.

Jamie Freeman felt that Aero Legends had begun to fit in well with the way that the aerodrome operated. Flt Lt Parkinson would be joining them and this in itself would raise the profile even further. He often piloted the 2-seat Spitfire and had huge experience in the RAF. Jamie Freeman felt that aviation generally needed to encourage younger pilots. He mentioned Jeremy Britcher by name as being a potential Spitfire pilot and that Keith Perkins (MD of Aero Legends) had ideas for an improver route for pilots.

Martin Round confirmed that he had had a number of conversations on the subject of the Carriage Museum. He felt that if the project to establish the museum at Headcorn came to fruition then much could be made in connection with its relocation: pilots with kudos., heritage aircraft, Lottery Funding, flying training, engineering training, tourism in general and education. Lyn Selby asked if the site needed Heritage Lottery funding and Martin Round's view was that the aerodrome could stand on its own but if it had Heritage Lottery funding it could attain critical mass. He pointed out that the skills used on older light aircraft (fabric and woodwork) were similar skills needed for carriages and he could see a valuable training element. On the subject of the carriages themselves this was a sensitive issue. But he felt that MBC would be supportive of bringing them to Headcorn into a protected environment thus releasing valuable existing building in the centre of Maidstone for other purposes and saving money. There was a view that having the Carriage Museum in the centre of Maidstone had a certain prestige value but figures showed that last year only 684 people has visited plus 500 from school trips and there were overheads of 3 staff for 6 weeks during the season. He felt that most of residents in Maidstone had not seen the carriages. He pointed out that when he, Jamie Freeman and his team went to visit the location the wheelwright which Jamie Freeman had asked to attend felt that most of the carriages were in relatively good condition. It was also understood that it was the intention not to refurbish them but to maintain them in their original condition.

Martin Round said that the original owners or families will be difficult to trace and whilst ownership is known on some, even then there may be considerable work securing a future for the carriages, on the basis that they were left in perpetuity with the Museum as it was known and assumed to be at that time and forever. Even family descendants may be unaware, or uncaring of their legacy, so legally that does present a challenge.

Jamie Freeman, during the visit, had established a way to move the carriages on the first floor by going through the centre of the building using a scissor lift and rolling them off into the courtyard. Lyn Selby speaking for Headcorn Parish Council offered support as HPC felt it was a good idea.

Martin Round continued on the subject of the Carriage Museum: The building was a Tudor building in a conservation area with no heating, it was drafty and the carriages and hoods were deteriorating. John Perry said the project has cross-party support. It was felt that this could take 2 or 3 years to bring to fruition and that MBC needed to define what they were going to do with the building which was in such a prestigious location.

There followed a general exchange on the subject of the current location of the Carriage Museum.

Correspondence:

There was no correspondence.

Complaints - Have been dealt with above.

Meeting Closed at 3.20

Date of Next Meeting 20th March at 2.30 at Headcorn Aerodrome to include AGM.

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