

Consultative Committee

DONCASTER SHEFFIELD AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING – HELD VIRTUALLY

29 SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT: A Tolhurst OBE (Chair)

Councillor D Beck (Substitute Member for Cllr Lelliott (Rotherham MBC)), Councillor S Cox (Doncaster MBC), D Grant (Doncaster Sheffield Airport), Councillor Greenhalgh (Doncaster MBC), C Hall (Doncaster MBC), C Hill (Substitute Member for M Di Salvatore (West Lindsey District Council)), Councillor M Jones (Sheffield City Council), N McCarron (Ex-Officio), Councillor Councillor J Milne (West Lindsey District Council), Councillor D Pidwell (Bassetlaw District Council), M Sewell (Doncaster MBC), A Shirt (Committee Secretary, Barnsley MBC), Town Councillor I Smith (Substitute for Tickhill Town Council), Parish Councillor I Swainston (Auckley Parish Council) and Y Woodcock BEM (Ex-Officio)

Noise Monitoring & Environmental Sub-Committee representatives:-
Town Councillor A Copley (Bawtry Town Council), G Levett (Doncaster MBC), Parish Councillor P Raybould (Blaxton Parish Council) and Parish Councillor N Williams (Cantley with Branton Parish Council)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Blackham (Doncaster MBC), A Bosmans (FODSA), Councillor Councillor J Cattanach (North Yorkshire County Council), Councillor L Curran (Doncaster MBC), County Councillor K Girling (Nottinghamshire County Council), Councillor B Johnson (Doncaster MBC), Councillor Councillor G Jones (Doncaster MBC), P Kennan (South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority / Private Sector LEP Board Member), Councillor S Knowles (Doncaster MBC), Councillor D Lelliott (Rotherham MBC), Parish Councillor A Martin (Finningley Parish Council) and M Di Salvatore (West Lindsey District Council)

1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

A Tolhurst welcomed everyone to the Special Meeting of the Airport Consultative Committee.

Apologies for absence were noted as above.

2 ANNOUNCEMENTS

A Tolhurst opened the meeting and he said that on Monday 26 September 2022, the waiting was over. At 11:30 am that morning the sad news was announced that

aviation services at DSA would start to be rundown in just over four weeks, on 31 October 2022.

Like many ACC Members, his association with the airfield dated back some time. It was in 1983 that he came to RAF Finningley to begin two of the most enjoyable years of his RAF career. He was delighted when his connection was restored in 2005 as an ACC Member.

Monday's announcement was a great disappointment to him, as it will have been to the many who campaigned for its retention as an operational airfield after the RAF had moved out, and more recently to the 100,000+ who had signed the petition to keep the airport open.

A Tolhurst said that we are where we are and he was grateful to David Grant, the Managing Director, for agreeing to brief the Committee on the Strategic Review process and how the decision to close the airport for aviation services was made.

3 UPDATE ON THE CONSULTATION OUTCOME OF THE STRATEGIC REVIEW OF DSA - DAVID GRANT (INTERIM MANAGING DIRECTOR, DSA)

D Grant provided Members with a summary of the consultation process which had been carried out to undertake the Strategic Review of DSA.

It was reported that work had been undertaken principally via a Working Group led by Doncaster MBC (known as the 'South Yorkshire Partners'). The Working Group included representatives from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and the Doncaster Chamber of Commerce. Included within the Working Group were smaller Sub-Groups focusing upon two workstreams.

The first workstream was established to investigate different ownership models. The second workstream was to examine different operating models for the airport.

In relation to the operating model, the South Yorkshire Partners had commissioned a number of external consultants with specialisms in aviation and infrastructure. At the Working Group meetings Members explored different operating models for the airport with the input and knowledge from the consultants.

The options were explored and reported back to the Working Group. D Grant explained that he had not seen the conclusions of this work.

In relation to the second workstream around exploring different ownership models, the Committee was informed that the South Yorkshire Partners had stated that there would be no direct funding available from them. They had made this position very clear from the start of the consultation period.

In addition, this position had also been adopted in the previous 2 years when Peel had approached them for equity and debt funding.

It was reported that weekly conversations had taken place between Peel Group's Chief Executive, Peel Airport's Chairman and D Grant to discuss different ownership models.

The South Yorkshire Partners had decided that they would go to the market to seek a third-party investor or operator.

As announced in the Press, the South Yorkshire Partners had indicated that they had found a potential consortium, which they considered to be credible and a viable purchaser or operator for the airport. Partners had also indicated that the consortium had or was being led by an airline group.

At this time, Peel had indicated that they were very interested to obtain information around who the consortium may be and to hear their proposal.

Unfortunately, this did not materialise, and the South Yorkshire Partners did not come forward with further information.

On 22 September 2022 a letter was received from the South Yorkshire Partners offering grant funding to maintain operations for 13 months (to the end of October 2023).

It was reported that Peel had considered the letter and discussed its contents with various partners, including the Department for Transport (DfT) and with The Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP (the new Secretary of State for Transport).

Peel concluded that the offer which had been made did not solve the problem, it only moved the problem on for a period of time. Peel made the decision not to accept the grant and to close DSA. This was announced on Monday 26 September 2022.

In relation to closing the airport and winding down aviation services on 31 October 2022, D Grant explained that he would be trying to maintain a full 24-hour operational service which would be focused on the passenger service in order to avoid any disruption.

It was highlighted that the key risk was losing staff in business-critical areas (e.g., Air Traffic Control, Fire and Rescue, Airfield Services and Fuel). If staffing levels dropped below a certain complement, the airport could not remain compliant in relation to aviation regulations.

D Grant's current focus was managing the airport and maintaining the service. It was highlighted that there were a number of Contingency Plans in place should staffing levels start to drop. If required, a number of business areas may close early in order to consolidate staffing levels within the terminal.

Work was also taking place with all the airport's business partners to ensure services remained in place.

The Committee was informed that TUI's last inbound flight to DSA would be on Friday 4 November 2022, when all airport services will cease, and the airport will cease to be an international passenger services airport.

In relation to other operators at DSA, D Grant reported that discussions were currently taking place in relation to them potentially being able to use the facility for a period of time after 4 November 2022.

Work also needed to take place around airspace, licensing and with UK Border Force.

The Committee were informed that staff consultation would take place on 5-6 October 2022 regarding a 45-day consultation period which would run until late November / early December 2022.

D Grant wished to place on record his sincere thanks to all DSA's staff for their incredible response, professionalism and for maintaining services during a very difficult period.

Retaining staff was now a key risk for the airport. Some staff had already accepted job offers at other airports.

The Committee was pleased to note that the Manchester Airport Group had offered a guaranteed interview scheme for any current DSA employee who wished to apply for a job within the Group. Similar offers had also been received from Leeds Bradford Airport, Birmingham Airport, Liverpool John Lennon Airport and Newcastle Airport.

A Tolhurst thanked D Grant for his briefing and invited questions from Members.

A Tolhurst asked if grants from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority had any terms and conditions attached to them.

D Grant replied that under previous EU Competition Rules, DSA would not have been able to accept grants as this could be viewed as favourable treatment by other airports. He understood that the rules had now changed following Brexit. There had been previous discussions with the Mayoral Combined Authority regarding an equity sale or a loan facility of £20m to the airport.

Councillor Cox asked if the £20m loan from the Mayoral Combined Authority would have changed Peel's position if it had been offered. In addition, he asked if the 'Green Agenda' had contributed to the decision to close DSA.

D Grant replied that, if the loan had been offered at the time it had been requested, then it would have been accepted by Peel.

In relation to the Green Agenda, due to the runway and location of DSA, some studies had suggested that DSA would have been well-placed to be at the forefront of the green aviation revolution. In addition, the Green Agenda (Jet Zero) would place considerable addition costs to all airports and would have made viability more difficult to achieve.

Councillor Cox reported that he had requested information at a Doncaster MBC's Full Council meeting regarding how the initial decision not to provide a loan of £20m to DSA had been made. Councillor Cox had been informed that no information was available from the Authority.

Town Councillor Smith asked how many passengers DSA would need to make the operation viable.

D Grant replied that it would require around 2.5 to 3 million passengers per year to make the operation viable.

In response to a question from Y Woodcock, D Grant confirmed that the Hangars onsite at the Airport would not be demolished. A number of Hangars had tenants in situ who may decide to stay or leave.

It was also confirmed that there were currently no plans to remove any of the airport's infrastructure in the short-term.

Councillor Cox asked if D Grant anticipated if the airport would open again in the future.

D Grant replied that it was difficult to provide his comments on this question. He confirmed that the airport's infrastructure would remain in place for use.

Councillor Cox highlighted that there was a section in Doncaster MBC's Local Plan stating that any development around the airport needed to be aviation related. He asked if no aviation was taking place onsite at the airport, would there need to be a request submitted to Doncaster MBC for a revaluation of the Local Plan, or resubmission of planning applications which had already been submitted to Doncaster MBC.

D Grant confirmed Councillor Cox's statement was correct, however, he was unfamiliar with the original planning consent for the airport.

It was confirmed that the GatewayEast consents were predicated on the airport's use. D Grant said that he was unable to provide any further comments on what this change would mean. He understood that Doncaster MBC officers were currently having discussions around this.

N McCarron asked if DSA's runway was still available for emergency divers.

D Grant confirmed that whilst DSA was still open, and had a public licence to operate, the airport needed to be available for emergency divers. The airport was also part of the National Managed Plan and was named in this Plan for certain emergency situations. When the airport closes, there was no statutory or legal requirement for DSA to remain in the Plan.

Parish Councillor Williams asked if an estimate cost could be provided in relation to restarting the facility once Peel had left the site.

D Grant replied that it was difficult to provide an estimate; this would depend on the length of time the facility had stood still and what items had been removed. He envisaged that additional capital expenditure would be required for x-ray equipment and this could cost millions.

Councillor Pidwell asked what Peel's position would be if the unnamed consortium came forward now with a late offer.

D Grant replied that it was difficult to answer this question; this would be for the Peel Board to deliberate.

Y Woodcock commented that she was very sad about the announcement to close DSA now that Doncaster was a City.

Y Woodcock wished to place on record her thanks to A Tolhurst for chairing ACC meetings and to A Shirt for his support to the Committee. Y Woodcock also thanked N McCarron who had been involved with the airport from the very beginning.

A Tolhurst said that the relationship which the Committee had with Peel Airports over the years had been fantastic. A Tolhurst wished to place on record his personal thanks to DSA's staff, who had never shied away from answering questions and for being open and involved with the Committee throughout.

Members were informed that arrangements would be made for a final ACC meeting to be held towards the end of October / the beginning of November.

It was confirmed that the ACC meeting scheduled for 6 October 2022 would be cancelled.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the update.

4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No further items of business were discussed.

CHAIR