

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Exeter Airport Consultative Committee held online via Zoom on 10 February 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.15 am

29 Declarations of interest

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Councillor Phil Twiss, Pecuniary, worked in the travel industry.

30 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2020 were confirmed as a true record.

31 Matters arising - Chair's comments

The Chair commented that the start of the summer flying season was unlikely to get underway until at least mid-June. There are approximately 192 airport staff currently on the furlough scheme which was due to end on 30 April 2021, with the possibility that redundancy notices would need to be issued in mid-March. This was creating huge uncertainty amongst staff, especially if the furlough scheme was not extended.

The Chair also reported that a covid-19 vaccination certificate had been unofficially proposed by the 'Club Med' (Greece, Italy and Spain) countries. This would be a huge disadvantage for younger people who will not be vaccinated and usually formed the bulk of the summer package holiday business. He felt that this was incredibly divisive and unfair. The need to have 2 PCR tests was also very expensive and potentially cost prohibitive.

The Chair sympathised with the management of the airport and the aviation industry as a whole. There were huge uncertainties surrounding travel and also what restrictions other countries would be enforcing.

32 To consider planning application 20/2856/PDO - Unit 14 McBains Business Units. Exeter Airport

The committee had no comments to make on this planning application.

33 Verbal report from Andrew Bell, CEO, Regional and City Airports

The CEO, Regional and City Airports outlined the landscape of travel and what was felt to be significant confusion in respect of travel policies. He gave a brief overview of the current situation regarding the international travel policy in the UK. There were increasing layers of travel restrictions due to public health reasons, with different countries having their own rules. He hoped that domestic travel around the UK would resume sooner, in late spring. However, international travel remained hugely unknown, with great uncertainty about any international travel taking place, especially in spring/early summer. He felt that the vaccination programme would play a role and that testing would be an integral part of travel for a while.

Regional and City Airports were doing what they could to make the process as easy and smooth as possible, but it was hard to prepare as so much was unknown at present and subject to change. It was noted that further staff redundancies were a possibility, but that any future action required to make further savings would consider a number of options of which redundancies may be one albeit as a last resort. Regional and City Airports were looking at various scenarios, with the worst case scenario that the summer 2021 travel season not happening. The company were trying to be as agile as possible and ready for whatever came next.

34 **Verbal report from Stephen Wiltshire, Operations Director, Exeter Airport**

The Operations Director for Exeter Airport reported that flights had been 97% down in December 2020 and 99% down in January 2021. The significant impact of this had been seen on the ground. 188 staff were on flexible furlough, with a few others on permanent furlough and it was hoped that the furlough scheme would be extended. Following recent redundancies the airport now had 206 full time equivalent staff left on the payroll.

It was noted that the Exeter to Belfast flight had reduced to once per week, but was still in operation. Tui had cancelled all flights through to the end of March 2021 and would continue to review flights on a two week rolling basis. The Aerodrome was currently open four days a week with limited hours and the airport remained open for Royal Mail which continues to operate 5 nights per week.

In terms of Covid cases, the airport had experienced low numbers compared to other businesses. Options were being investigated for the testing of both staff and passengers. There had been no noise complaints received since the last meeting and all regulatory dispensations available were being used to reduce the impact on cost while maintaining the requirements for training and competency of staff.

35 **Verbal report from Will Campbell, General Manager, Exeter Aerospace**

The General Manager reported that Exeter Aerospace was now up and running, with 26 employees. They had continued the interviewing and recruitment process, with 28 people with contract offers waiting for a start date. The apprenticeship scheme had been delayed until 2022, but they were in discussions with Exeter College.

It was hoped that over the next six to nine months leasing companies would form the main business

36 **Verbal report from Anne McLaird, Director, Southwest Aviation**

Anne McLaird explained that Aviation Southwest was a small flight training school based at Exeter Airport. It had been in operation since 2015 and busy until lockdown in spring 2020. During lockdown many enquiries were received for flight training and Aviation Southwest was very busy again following the first lockdown. However, the last two lockdowns had really impacted the company. They now had reduced days and hours available for flight training at the airport and this had also impacted them. With no clear guidance it was hard to make steps forward and in order to make the business viable it was likely to have to make redundancies in the near future.

37 **Verbal report from Ian Payne, Operations Director, Devon Air Ambulance Trust**

The Devon Air Ambulance Trust (DAAT) Operations Director stated that he was aware of everyone's difficulties and was sympathetic to them all but reported that 'hamstringing' was happening to DAAT training. He explained to the committee how DAAT operated and the training and checks that were required. He acknowledged that everyone was trying as hard as they could but that DAAT wanted to keep all its aircrafts operational.

The Operations Director reported that contractors were finding that parts were getting stuck in customs at the moment so the whole operation was requiring a huge amount of juggling, therefore any assistance they received would be hugely appreciated.

The Chair asked whether there was anything that Exeter airport could do to assist DAAT and Aviation Southwest to maintain their training programmes. The CEO of Regional and City Airports replied that they were trying to strike a balance, but ultimately decisions came down to cost. Nothing was prohibitive if someone was willing to pay. It was noted that Exeter airport's opening hours had changed a number of times over the past few months and that it was a fluid situation. Regional and City Airports were experiencing a lot of pressure to close the airfield at present as it was costing more to keep it open than it would to close it, however they were resisting that as it had a responsibility to the businesses that used it.

The DAAT Operations Director replied that it would be useful to understand the airport's cost implications as there was a possibility that could be offset with the advantage of DAAT using a local airport. It was agreed that DAAT, Aviation Southwest and Regional and the local airport management would discuss further options outside of the meeting.

38 **Verbal summing up by Cllr Paul Hayward, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets, EDDC**

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Assets, EDDC stated that it had been a very fraught period for the airport, businesses, employees and residents and was not ending anytime soon. He was immensely grateful to the teams in the Council to keep businesses going during an incredibly disheartening time.

Many people were confused and upset by what was happening and EDDC would assist where it could. As far as the airport was concerned EDDC would do whatever it could to work with and help maintain the future of Exeter airport. This was also echoed by Exeter City Council. The airport was regarded as absolutely vital to the economics of Exeter, bringing people in to organisations such as Exeter University and the Met Office. The airport was also regarded as vital to the further expansion of Exeter, East Devon and the South West.

39 **Noise report for the airport from Stephen Wiltshire and EDDC Interim Principal Environmental Health Officer**

It was noted that no noise complaints had been received. It was acknowledged that the general feeling was that once flying again, the general public would be very aware of aeroplanes again. It was suggested that air traffic should encourage departing jet aircraft to avoid overflying Exeter city whenever possible.

40 **Verbal report on initial contact with UKACC by the Chair**

The Chair reported that he had attended one virtual meeting of the Chairs of the Airport Consultative Committees (UKACC) group. He received a lot of feedback from UKACC which he went through and disseminated where appropriate. He felt that the UKACC had a purpose and that airports needed an effective, informed ACC.

41 **Complaints handling**

It was noted that there had been no complaints.

42 **Any other business (it should be noted that matters of substance may not be dealt with under this item)**

It was noted that the airspace change proposal (ACP) previously submitted was currently paused due to Covid-19 and awaiting the outcome of a funding decision by the DfT, there was nothing further to report at this stage.

The Chair thanked all those present for attending the meeting and for adding different perspectives to the situation. He advised that he would keep the committee informed and up to date where necessary.

It was noted that the next Exeter Airport Consultative Committee meeting would be held on 12 May 2021.

Attendance List

Richard Bartlett (Chair)	Independent
Chris Daly (Vice Chair)	Aylesbeare PC
David Harvey	Exeter City C
Phil Twiss	DCC
Paul Hayward	EDDC
Leslie Bayliss	Cranbrook TC
Gary Collier	Clyst Honiton PC
Chris Scanes	Bishops Clyst PC
Henry Gent	Broadclyst PC
Margaret Hall	West Hill PC
Andrew Bell	Regional & City Airports
Stephen Wiltshire	Exeter Airport
Will Campbell	Exeter Aerospace
Ian Payne	DAAT
Anne McClaird	Aviation Southwest

Officers in attendance:

Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity

Apologies: Philip Knowles D & C Police Helicopter Unit

Chairman..... **Date**.....

