

Exeter and Devon Airport Ltd

East Devon Local Plan 2021 to 2040: Issues and Options Consultation

Question 24 - Additional sustainable transport policy objectives

Do you think these are appropriate sustainable transport policy areas to be addressed in a new local plan and are there any other major policy areas that you think we should be addressing?

Paragraph 11.7 of the Issues and Options document notes that emerging themes and issues will be considered that may be addressed in the plan. Key issues listed in this regard include (number 10) to, “Recognise the importance of Exeter airport with the expectation of a specific policy for the airport and its future.” The Airport is very clearly one of the sustainable transport policy areas that must be addressed in the new local plan but there are also wider considerations around this facility which warrant the inclusion of a specific policy. This should address sustainable transport issues surrounding the Airport but also cut across a range of other policy areas – for example in relation to the provision of new development opportunities, and the implications of the Airport’s operations from a development management perspective – so that the future success of the facility is supported comprehensively by the plan.

Exeter Airport is keen to engage positively with the Council in the framing and content of such a specific policy for the Airport to be included in the plan. At this initial Issues and Options stage, the following comments are offered by way of background to the Airport’s vision and objectives, and to suggest the overarching direction an Airport specific policy should take. It is suggested that the detail of this policy would then emerge through dialogue between the Airport and the Council, and through consultation responses to subsequent stages of plan preparation.

Vision

The Airport’s vision is to contribute to the delivery of a smart, digitally connected, green growth area across the sub-region. Exeter Airport will become a focal point of connectivity, research, innovation and productivity within a new mid-South West Logistics and Cargo Hub and Aviation Skills Centre.

With a leading aviation campus and airport this will help elevate the area to the global stage with a focus on green, sustainable and smart economic growth and recovery, amidst a quality of life offer like no other. It will become a test bed for new smart / IOT technologies, and passenger and freight innovations.

Approach

The Airport’s approach is one which seeks to unlock the delivery of a series of economic benefits to the East Devon and wider economies including for example:

- Promoting the delivery of a smart, connected and high growth City Region
- Promoting regeneration and job creation in support of the national levelling up policy agenda
- Creating a platform for innovation and R&D activity in key growth marine, aviation and advanced engineering clusters

- Driving inward investment and global trade through promoting the international profile of the Airport as a key economic asset at a UK scale

The Airport is committed to unlocking an immediate and significant economic growth opportunity. It is also committed to collaborative working to engender an agreed vision for growth that all stakeholders are fully supportive of. The Airport can move swiftly to help drive economic growth and recovery, building on distinct and niche opportunities to drive a positive outcome.

It is imperative that a framework is put in place to lever in investment to accelerate the roll out of digital technology and connectivity, which will be vitally important post-COVID both economically and socially. A specific policy for the Airport will make an important contribution in this regard, and in the advancement of development in a range of other sectors. It is anticipated that such a policy would locate the Airport within the wider strategic framework of the plan as it encourages growth in East Devon and seeks to establish its role in the promotion of the wider City Region.

Exeter Airport

Exeter Airport is operated by Regional & City Airports (RCA) part of Rigby Group plc, one of the UK's fastest growing private businesses with a turnover of £3.2bn and around 8,000 employees globally. RCA owns and operates a number of regional airports across the UK and acquired Exeter Airport in 2013 with ambitions to grow and diversify its offer. RCA's vision is to help smaller regional airports to prosper through effective management and collaboration, enabling them to benefit from the economies of scale and sharing of best practice traditionally enjoyed by larger hub airports.

In its first five years of ownership, RCA invested £18m in Exeter Airport, completely refurbishing the 1.3-mile runway and associated airfield infrastructure and technology, improving the terminal and executive lounge, and investing in hangars. Moving forward, RCA is experienced and well-funded with a proven track record in the promotion of regional airports. The capability is therefore in place to take forward and deliver initiatives embodied in plan policy.

Exeter Airport and its owners play a key role in promoting regional connectivity and access to national and international markets, with its 'Exeter Connects' initiative bringing together key senior regional stakeholders. The airport supports many local jobs, contributes extensively to the economy, and acts as a critical transport and Royal Mail hub for regional businesses.

Exeter Airport is also set to benefit from a package of investment approved by East Devon District Council which aims to support significant job creation across the Enterprise Zone area. This includes a new bus service from this summer connecting Exeter to the Enterprise Zone, including Exeter St David's station and the airport, with 30-minute peak frequency. Indeed, the airport is seen as integral to the success of the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone, and with rapid growth at Exeter Science Park and Skypark demand for business travel can only increase.

In this context the scale and importance of the Airport and its contribution to the economy are such that it is essential its role is sustained and enhanced through positively framed supportive plan policy.

Policy

Having regard to the vision of the Airport, its approach to future growth and development, and status as a focal point for the regional economy, it is considered that a specific plan policy to manage this should be included. It should cover a range of aspects including:

Connectivity

- Support and enable passenger air travel to and from the south west, for business and leisure
- Promote connection to destinations that support core economic objectives and to meet market demand
- Ensure that the Airport and its hinterland are well connected and easily accessible to those travelling by all modes of transport
- Ensure that the Airport and its hinterland are well connected through leading digital technology, and that such technology is at the heart of all that is done there

Multi modal logistics

- Support the evolution of the Airport as the centre of an air / road logistics interchange, facilitating the in- and outbound flow of goods from the region by air
- Support the development of new logistics technologies and infrastructure around the Airport, including for the 'last mile'

Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul

- Enhance the role of the Airport as a centre of engineering and technical support for aircraft
- Promote the status as an internationally recognised location for technical support for emerging aircraft, fuel and propulsion technologies

Education & training

- Support the provision of skills and qualifications for a wide range of enduring aviation related careers
- Establish an internationally recognised location for developing and delivering skills and qualifications to support emerging aircraft, fuel and propulsion technology

Sustainable industry

- Support the development of sustainable aviation solutions in particular but also growth in marine, advanced engineering and other technology driven sectors
- Promote the Airport as a recognised location in the UK for aviation-related operational R&D
- Broaden the Enterprise Zone to include more land at and around the Airport

To this end, a policy should set out a strategy to support and promote the Airport in its core role as an Airport and as a focal point for economic growth. It should identify sites within and immediately around the Airport for development consistent with the aspects identified above; a number of such locations are identified by the Airport through the Call for Sites. It should be flexible in terms of the range of

activities allowed both on identified sites and generally within the Airport's operational area so that the improvement of passenger and freight facilities is supported as well as the general expansion as a hub for economic development. It should support the provision of the infrastructure required to deliver the strategy.

Finally, it is also important that the plan, either through a specific policy or otherwise, should include provisions such that the day-to-day operations of the Airport are not impeded by other development activity. This is relevant across the full range of types of development, including for example residential, employment, sustainable energy, and so on. It should make sure that fundamental issues such as safeguarding and noise and other amenity impacts are fully taken into account and addressed at the earliest stage in any planned development activity and recognised where appropriate in allocation and general development management policies. It should also ensure that where development has an impact on infrastructure relied on by the Airport – for example highways, communications and, importantly, navigational systems – that is properly understood and mitigated as a prerequisite for schemes proceeding. The importance of these matters being recognised and made explicit in the plan cannot be overstated; if they are not properly attended to the operation of the Airport as such is placed at risk.