

Politics, Electioneering and our Plans for the Airfield

McLENNAN



McCLELLAND



We intended staying silent during the upcoming local elections but the comments posted by two of the leading candidates for the Laverstock and Ford seat mean that we must set the record straight regarding the truth of some of the comments and the truth about our plans.

Firstly, **McLennan** yet again insults both myself and Matthew Hudson, the airfield owner and reinforces our belief that his actions are not in the interests of the local community but some form of personal vendetta against those involved in the running of the airfield. He has made many unfounded personal accusations over the years and those posted above are just the latest incarnation.

His caustic remark about "*Tax haven*" is simply false. Old Sarum Airfield Ltd is the owner and operator of the airfield and is a company resident in the UK – subject to the tax rules of the UK. We have made it very clear over the years that the company is owned by a Hudson family trust which resides with Matthew Hudson who has a retirement home in the Bahamas. Without the security and very generous support the trust has provided over the last 30 years the airfield would have closed years ago and its important heritage would have vanished. This support has amounted to many millions of pounds and is tangible, real evidence of the commitment by "Messrs

Hudson and Hodge” always to place the long term retention of flying at this historic airfield as their first priority. In addition to the millions of pounds to support this aspirational aim, many tens of thousands of unpaid hours have been spent keeping the airfield operational and battling those who have persistently tried to do it harm.

He again falsely claims that we “*just want to build on it all*”. Nothing is further from the truth. Our plans were formulated at the request of the District Council a decade ago to permit noise reduction to co-exist with a commercially viable airfield. Those plans, which are in compliance with all planning mandates, are to build: (i) high quality houses on a small proportion of our surplus land outside the airfield boundary; and (ii) to build new aviation facilities within the airfield boundary. 63% of our land will remain in new, restored and preserved aviation uses – nearly three times the existing aviation boundary. 13% of our land will be used for new community open space and only 23% of our land will be used for housing. This is less than 60% of our land allocated as “incentive” development land in Wiltshire Council’s Core Policy 25.

McLennan then continues “*currently doing all they can to disturb the peace*” and later “*fail in their duty of care to the community, in the running of the airfield*”. The truth is different. For ten years, at great cost to us, we upheld our bargain with the Council by restricting the number and types of aircraft operating from the airfield - simply as a means of living in harmony with the local community. We know this has been successful through the noise survey of homes in the local area we conducted in late 2015. The resulting huge loss of revenue has meant that the only way in which the airfield has survived is through the continual injection of substantial amounts of cash by Matthew Hudson. The number of aircraft movements were halved from the those in 2006 as our response to Salisbury District Council’s eagerness for us to reduce aviation noise. To recover some of the lost revenue from the reduced flying, and to provide support for the non-flying commercial activities at the airfield, it was agreed that houses could be built on the surplus land around the airfield. This was a very practical and straightforward agreement and the Core Policy which resulted has been subjected twice to public consultation and twice to public review by independent government inspectors – both of whom solidly endorsed the policy.

Throughout this exhaustingly long ten year process we have continued to honour the reduction in flying and it has only been very recently that we have agreed that a small number of helicopters can operate from the airfield. This has resulted so far in the total number of movements being only two thirds of that in 2006.

McLennan falsely states “*Meanwhile their one remaining Grade II* listed hangar is left to fall down (the other one burnt down some years ago and was reported as suspected arson)*” It is unclear what he is trying to say here, at best he is muddled. Firstly there are three Grade II* listed hangars. We have only ever owned the one we are currently protecting (in agreement with the Wiltshire Council Conservation Officer). The “*other one*” was owned by Optica Industries who built the Optica light observation aircraft. It is true that it was destroyed by arson by someone trying to destroy the Optica project. The business nearly did collapse due to the uninsured

losses it suffered due to the fire and only survived through the financial support of Matthew Hudson who had intervened sight unseen a few weeks earlier, meeting the payroll at the 11th hour. Throughout his association with Old Sarum he has been consistent in his generosity and support.

With the confidence we have gained through the increasing revenues from the new flying we will not be starting to pay interest on the multi-million debt to the Hudson family, but at their request have instead started to undertake the major repairs required by the hangar. We will be reporting the progress on this exciting project as it develops since we plan to develop an apprentice scheme hand in hand.

McLennan's statement "they have totally failed to produce a management plan to enhance the Conservation Area" is again untrue. Even though it is an obligation of the Council to produce a conservation management plan when designating a conservation area, it did not. As a result we commissioned leading heritage architects to produce a Conservation Management Plan in 2007. We paid for this excellent document and furthermore have paid for it to be kept up to date in the intervening period. All of our plans have been informed by this very carefully produced Conservation Management Plan since what we wish to see is a greatly enhanced environment in and around the airfield – this is what our plans are all about.

Sadly Dr **McClelland** has refused to talk to us before the election in order to truly understand what we are planning to do and the many, many benefits to the community he seeks to represent. Instead he has decided to get into bed with the small group of vocal and self interested opponents to our plans who have done their utmost to sell misinformation and falsehoods about our plans for many years. They claim to wish to "Save Old Sarum" but have done nothing to support the airfield – in fact to the contrary they have done their utmost to put hurdles in the way of our efforts to give the airfield a long term future. Their leading lights all live in homes built on ex-airfield land and now they wish to ensure that no-one else can have this privilege. No doubt Dr **McClelland** hopes to draw some of the votes from this group from Mr **McLennan**.

As is clear to any honest observer, given our actions over the past 30 years we would oppose houses being built on the airfield. That is obvious. It is thus obvious that is not our plan. As I have explained above we will only build houses on some surplus land around the airfield. **McClelland's** comments about "*slippery slope to losing a historic airfield*" are insulting to me, as someone who has spent so much time and effort in keeping the airfield operational over so many years, and to Matthew Hudson who has also spent a considerable amount of his time and huge sums of his money in making sure that the heritage is protected. Our plans do not diminish the heritage of the airfield, they enhance it. After many years of discussion we have agreed with the Royal Aeronautical Society that the National Aerospace Library should be moved to Old Sarum – this would be a highly prestigious centre-piece on which to build the heritage centre in our plans. Because of the persistent delays by Wiltshire in deciding our application, this is now in jeopardy. **McClelland** says "*we need to protect this unique asset ... no new housing development in the*

area” but he has not bothered to understand that there are two options for maintaining the airfield – one is the well thought out plans we have proposed in our planning application, balancing some development with reduced flying at the airfield; and the other is to massively increase flying operations to make the airfield commercially viable – with the associated noise impact on our neighbours.

We do want to build some of the houses both the local area and the nation needs. Our plans are to build them sensitively and imaginatively on our surplus land and we have gone to great lengths to listen to the concerns of those in the community who are concerned about any new development on the local transport infrastructure. This is why we have agreed that part of our plan will be: (i) to improve the Castle Road roundabout with computerized signalling, giving a significant improvement in congestion on Castle Hill; and (ii) to sensitively improve the roads in and around Ford.

In summary, it would be far easier for us to simply increase flying at the airfield and accept the ramifications this would hold for the many families who live in earshot of aircraft operations. This is the same situation that existed in 2006 but with many, many more people now affected. Alternatively, we would implement the agreement struck originally with Salisbury District Council to limit flying and create a new community in and around the airfield. We would be proud to build high quality housing, we would be proud to create new and exciting aviation facilities, we would be proud to restore and improve the heritage aspects of the airfield and the new community access. In short we would be proud to implement a real vision that would create a vital asset for Salisbury and its community. This however will require much more in both funding, effort and time than the simple option of unlimited flying.

For those who want to know the truth about our plans, they are still displayed in the café at the airfield and also in great detail on our website. We would be delighted to talk to anyone individually or in groups to explain in detail what we are proposing. Contact details are on our website.

To quote Edmund Burke - “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

We have done more than we should have had to do. What will you do?

Grenville Hodge

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