UPBEAT ASSESSMENT FOR LONDON ASHFORD AIRPORT EXPANSION

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More than 60 pre-commencement conditions attached to the planning permission for a runway extension at **London Ashford Airport** have been successfully discharged and work to lengthen the runway will begin early in the New Year.

An upbeat assessment of the multi-million-pound redevelopment of the Kent airport was presented to the newly-formed Lydd Airport Consultative Committee when they met on November 26.

Executive Manager Hani Mutlaq told the committee that a huge amount of work had gone into satisfying the conditions set by Shepway District Council (SDC) when it granted planning permission for a runway extension and a new terminal building in April 2014. This work is expected to be signed off by SDC “within days”.

“Our team has worked tirelessly to meet these conditions, which cover everything from winter bird nesting studies to noise pollution, ground water drainage to conserving local populations of amphibians and other wildlife. In meeting our obligations we have satisfied all the tests set by the council, Natural England and a host of other bodies.

“With the conditions discharged I’m delighted to report that we can now proceed to the next phase of our exciting development plans, the 294-metre extension of our existing 1,500 metre long runway plus a 150-metre starter area.

“We expect construction work to start in spring 2016 and be completed by the end of the year,” Mr Hani told members of the consultative committee meeting at the airport.

He summarised a host of recent investments and developments at Lydd, which has resulted in a number of jobs being created. A £700,000 investment in a new hangar was finished in the summer to cope with soaring demand for covered storage for light aircraft, while Bristow’s search and rescue (SAR) base became operational in August. The SAR operation had directly created employment opportunities for local people, said Mr Hani.

Answering questions about the future prospects of attracting airline operators to Lydd, he explained that a comprehensive marketing campaign would be launched to sell Lydd to

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prospective aviation customers once work on the runway extension is started.

“Our approaches to airlines in the past have always been met with the response that Lydd would only be considered as a potential new route when work to extend the runway was under way. Once we have spades in the ground we will be redoubling our efforts to get airlines and other aviation businesses to consider the case for starting holiday charter and other services from Lydd,” he added.

The committee has been formed to improve links with the local community and will help to create clear communications channels with residents, businesses and others interested in the airport’s growth. Chaired by highly respected former county councillor Fred Wood-Brignall, the committee is made up of representatives of airport users, local councils, Dungeness Power Station, nearby Army firing ranges and other organisations.

Members of the public will be encouraged to participate in future meetings, either by tabling questions in advance or by attending. Two meetings a year are planned and the next one is due in spring 2016. Details will be announced in the press and on the airport’s website and will also be circulated by committee members who sit on local councils serving Lydd and New Romney.

The airport has spent £35 million upgrading facilities over the past decade, including the installation of a state-of-the-art instrument landing system, a new executive terminal with VIP facilities, improved passenger check-in and security, and a new departure lounge. The airport already caters for a range of aircraft operations and provides extensive services, including air traffic control and navigational aids, an FBO with 24-hour operating capability, full terminal services and engineering and cargo facilities.

27 NOVEMBER 2015

SOURCE: AIRPORTSINTERNATIONAL
ARTICLE LINK:
https://mfa.50skyshades.com/news/airports-routes/upbeat-assessment-for-london-ashford-airport-expansion

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