

## **Redevelopment of the Coltishall Site - Preferred Bidder Announced**

The Ministry of Justice has confirmed TAG Aviation (Stansted) Ltd. as the preferred bidder for the ex RAF Coltishall site. Negotiations will now continue with TAG Aviation to agree the detailed terms of the purchase agreement with an aim of confirming the sale in the Spring of this year.

CETAG has already been working with TAG Aviation to ensure the voice of local communities was heard during the initial planning stages of this proposed scheme. We had given our support in principle to the proposals, subject to consideration of the full details of the proposed operations, particularly the level of air and road traffic movement.

The detailed planning application for the scheme is now being prepared with Bidwells of Norwich acting for TAG and it has been agreed that full consultation with CETAG will continue throughout this important stage. TAG have also commenced discussions with NNDC planning officers.

TAG have confirmed that the planning application will cover the proposed business plan, as briefed to CETAG in January 2010 - to use the airfield, hangars and workshops as a storage and recycling facility for airliners and business jets that have reached the end of their useful lives. There is a growing requirement for this service and the recession has tipped the balance against operating older and less fuel-efficient jets.

The application will also include the key control parameters to determine the maximum number of aircraft movements per year. Road traffic movements are equally important and will also be included in the planning application.

TAG are basing their plans on a throughput of about 60 airliners per year into the decommissioning process and around 60 aircraft at any one time being stored outside, for an average period of 3 months. This generates a movement rate of around 500 arrivals or departures per year. TAG will be asking for a higher "control" level to give the company some future operating headroom, but it will still be a rate vastly less than an operational airfield. (Norwich Airport has approximately 50,000 air traffic movements per year of which 25,000 are air transport movements, 10,000 off shore support helicopters and the remainder, training and leisure flights).

The airliners arriving at Coltishall will have no payload and a very light fuel load. Thus the noise level would be low and the footprint small. A departing aircraft would make more noise, but again compared to a laden passenger aircraft or freighter, the noise levels would be significantly lower. The great length of the Coltishall runway, at 1.64 miles, would also allow take - off and landing runs to be tailored to minimise the noise footprint.

TAG has quoted Lasham Airfield in Hampshire as a useful comparative facility where a 5-bay airliner maintenance facility operates, along with airliner storage. The local community is hardly aware of this activity. On the other hand, the glider tugs that operate at weekends at Lasham generate a lot of intrusive noise as they strain to tow gliders to their release heights. Such leisure use at Coltishall could be of concern to local communities therefore TAG has no plans to operate light aircraft, gliders, micro-lights or other noise making small aircraft. The company will have a few movements of communications aircraft, but these

would not be doing circuits. Finally, there are no plans to operate commercial helicopters at Coltishall.

TAG have calculated that road traffic movements would be considerably less than when Coltishall was operating as an RAF base. The NCC Highways Department is looking at this and will almost certainly impose lorry routes which will keep traffic away from the well-known congestion points. It has been confirmed that the vehicles taking serviceable components and aluminium away from Coltishall will be smaller than the sugar beet lorries that currently operate on local rural roads.

The decommissioning operation is not a "wrecking ball" activity. While the airliners concerned are worth little as operating aircraft, their value lies in the spare parts recovered. TAG talks of "surgical deconstruction" and this has to be done inside the hangars, to allow efficient use of manpower and safe handling of components. Also it will probably be mandatory soon to carry out this work in a controlled environment.

The great value of Coltishall to TAG is not only the long runway, but also the huge dispersal areas either side of the control tower. These should accommodate all the airliners in short, medium and long term storage. The layout of the airfield means that the dispersal areas are not visible from the northern quadrant and fairly unobtrusive from other directions.

Finally TAG is very proud to be associated with such a famous Battle of Britain fighter station. Many of their staff are ex RAF and they fully support the conservation area status given to Coltishall by NNDC and, while they may wish to demolish a few of the unsightly 1960s buildings, there is no intention of altering the 1940s heritage.

From the economic viewpoint, the original plan for 323 skilled and semi-skilled jobs in 5 years remains valid. Since being confirmed as "preferred bidders" TAG have been inundated with enquiries from local people about employment. Their plans also still include the setting up of an apprentice scheme to ensure a sustainable workforce in the future.

**CETAG will continue to meet and operate to ensure local views are taken into account during the planning process for the proposed scheme. We will continue to be consult with TAG and NNDC throughout the process. If you have any views on the TAG proposals please contact us via the web site. Also look out for details of community consultation events concerning the scheme over the coming months.**

**Make sure you have your say!**

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*Briefing Note prepared from correspondence (dated 16/01/11) from Andy Verdon, Aviation Consultant for TAG Aviation (Stansted Ltd.)*

