

## UPDATE FOR MEMBERS

7th December 2016

### **Wellesbourne Mountford Airfield.**

I thought it would be a good time to brief you regarding the latest situation regarding Wellesbourne Airfield as there has been a lot of talk about it in the media recently, quite a lot instigated by ourselves. The owners are threatening to demolish the airfield even though they have no hope of obtaining planning for a future development which does not incorporate the flying function at the airfield.

As you are probably aware, Take Flight Aviation Ltd have been tenants at Wellesbourne Mountford Airfield for over 10 years. During this period, we have been exemplary tenants, paid our rent and fuel bills promptly each month and maintained our building and grounds to a high standard. We have built the business from one to sixteen aircraft which has given the owners a substantial income. Some of our fellow tenants have been at the airfield even longer, one in excess of 30 years. We are therefore and understandably very disappointed by the way that we have been treated by the airfield threatening to end our tenancies by demolition of the airfield with no communication other than through their lawyers.

As you may be aware the airfield does not form part of the local authorities plan for future housing. The core strategy of Stratford upon Avon's district plan, which has now been adopted, shows the airfield as part of the authority's infrastructure delivery plan, to support the economic structure of the local community. The plan quotes 'retain and support the enhancement of the established flying functions and aviation facilities at Wellesbourne Airfield'.

The plan to demolish the airfield without any chance of success of a future large scale housing development appears to be a deliberate action to circumvent the rights of tenure that would otherwise be afforded to us under the Landlord and Tenant Act. The motivation for this seems simply to make the site redundant with the hope of getting planning permission by the back door. The council have assured us that this will not happen under any circumstances and will not falter because of these aggressive tactics. Please see the latest press release from them.

The deliberate vandalism of one of the countries busiest General Aviation airfields goes directly against the government's vision for "the UK being the best place in the world for GA as a flourishing, wealth generating and job producing sector of the economy". As you are aware the government's planning guidance on the National Planning Policy Framework for England considers that GA aerodromes will be considered as part of a national network and not just as individual sites.

**Take Flight Aviation Limited**

Wellesbourne Mountford Airfield

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The government have also encouraged more proactive engagement between local aerodromes, local communities, Local Planning Authorities and LEAs. As you are aware the council have offered their support to consider a mixed used development retaining the flying facilities at the airfield which could provide the developers and landowners a considerable windfall and future income. We have therefore urged the family and developers to consider this option most seriously and would seem to be the most sensible solution for all concerned. However, to date we have been unsuccessful in having any positive outcome in this regard.

In the absence of such agreement we have asked the council to consider compulsory purchase of the airfield. I know that they have written to the Secretary of State to seek approval for an action of this nature and we are also meeting with MP's to support the case for this as it fits perfectly with the Government's GA policy. Should the infrastructure of the airfield be destroyed in the interim period, no doubt the value of land will be substantially reduced for any potential CPO. Hana and myself were down at Westminster with the leader of the council meeting with MP's and local businesses on Monday including the CEO of Aston Martin and Birmingham airport and without exception everyone supports us.

You may have heard that Coventry airport is also under the threat of closure because of JLR expansion plans. This only goes to strengthen our case for keeping Wellesbourne, the country's busiest GA airfield operational.

Please rest assured that Take Flight Aviation will remain operational whatever happens and although we are still upbeat about the future of Wellesbourne if we have to find a new home - we will and as local as possible. As you are aware we have already started a small operation at Oxford and I appreciate this will not be convenient for many of our members but it does offer us a temporary home should the need arise. However, we could not be doing any more for the fight for Wellesbourne and appreciate your continued support.

Mike Roberts  
Managing Director  
Take Flight Aviation Ltd

# News release

Executive Director 60/2016

Date: 7 December 2016

## **SDC continues fight to protect businesses at Wellesbourne Airfield**

Stratford-on-Avon District Council is continuing its fight to help save businesses at Wellesbourne Airfield from closure.

Last week the Leader of Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Cllr Chris Saint met with local businesses from the site and following the meeting wrote to Central Government seeking help and guidance in order to retain the site as an operational airfield, despite strong planning policies being in place to prevent any change in use.

Cllr Saint has written to Rt Hon Greg Clark MP the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Margot James MP the Parliamentary Under Secretary, Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility seeking options to continue to help support the established aviation businesses that operate at the airfield.

Cllr Chris Saint, Leader of Stratford-on-Avon District Council says: "There is nothing to be gained by destroying businesses that employ more than 200 people at this time. The Council policy has the support of the national Planning Inspectorate and it is not a realistic option that demolition of operational buildings will make it easy for the owners to build a big housing estate at the airfield.

"We are confronted with an unnecessary threat to the businesses on site that would sterilise the site for any practical uses with the risk of an eyesore for many years to come, when we would not wish to put the integrity of our adopted Local Plan at risk."

Cllr Dave Riches, Enterprise and Revenues Portfolio added: "The District Council has always kept the compulsory purchase option as a last resort, with preference ideally given to help the owners and businesses flourish through support and enabling the enhancement of the existing flying facilities (as per Area Strategy 9 in the now adopted core strategy).

"Sadly, it would seem that negotiations have not progressed as we would have liked, and the site owners seem determined on the cessation of those businesses' leases, ultimately resulting in a negative impact on the local economy and jobs.

"Local authorities are empowered to do their best for the taxpayer with vehicles such as compulsory purchase being available. We must consider all options to try and save the airfield,

its businesses and their respective employees. At this point in time, compulsory purchase has now presented itself as an option we should further investigate, and are actively doing so.

"The Council are not about to immediately strengthen the landowner's position. We will use all tools at our disposal to do the best job for the taxpayer, facilitating businesses, jobs and tourism in this context."

**Ends**

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