

Mid Wales Regional Committee MID 04-01(p.5c)

Date: Friday 2 November 2001

Time: 10.30am to 1.00pm

Venue: Village Hall, Aberporth

ABERPORTH TECHNOLOGY PARK AND WEST WALES AIRPORT – AN OVERVIEW OF PROPOSALS, INNOVATIONS AND BENEFITS.

Submission by Donald Booth, QinetiQ

OUTLINE PLANNING FOR A COMMON GOAL PROJECT

Although Outline planning has been sought by DERA/QinetiQ for a technology/science park at the current Blaenannerch airfield, it has very much been a joint proposal between DERA/QinetiQ, the Welsh Development Agency, Ceredigion County Council economic development division, ELWa and the private airfield developer (the MANN organisation). This joint proposal has never been a formal partnership in any legal sense, but more of a common goal approach much needed for developing any sort of major investment in this part of Wales.

There has been some local concerns raised on the openness of these proposals and accusations of a lack of consultation with the local community throughout the planning process. This has simply not been the case, all planning requirements in terms of public consultations have been both met and indeed exceeded. An example of this has been the two open days held to highlight the planning proposals and to seek public consultations on both the informations presented and indeed any wider issues or concerns brought forward. On both these all day events at both Aberporth and Cardigan, supported by Aberporth community council and Mentor Abertiefi respectfully, many members of the local community did indeed attend. On both occasions very little opposition was voiced to the proposals although there were some minor concerns over noise pollution from the airport. To address this particular issue a noise assessment report was commissioned through an independent consultant to provide a more detailed analysis of this issue within the overall Environmental Impact Assessment for the site.

QINETIQ COMMERCIAL MARKETS

QinetiQ was born from the most commercial aspects of what was the Defence Evaluation Research Agency (DERA). DERA was split on July 2nd into a Public Private Partnership (QinetiQ) and another government Agency called the Defence Scientific Technical Laboratories (DSTL). DSTL retained the most sensitive parts of DERA's previous research portfolio with the most commercial aspects (approx. 75% of DERA) brought into the commercial world via QinetiQ.

QinetiQ is in effect a fledgling company in terms of its commercial portfolio with the vast majority of its current workload serving one customer namely the MoD. However QinetiQs long-term success will depend on its ability to commercialise its expertise and patented technologies allowing it to grow and invest in new markets and new opportunities. QinetiQ is at a critical time in terms of its commercial growth with many initial opportunities available for decentralisation through regional developments, Joint Ventures and new commercial opportunities through spinout of existing technologies and expertise.

Aberporth Technology Park has all the credentials of being a significant player in this growth through its existing and future low cost IT links with QinetiQ/MoD and the WWW, effective air logistics, commercially low cost environment through aid from Objective 1 and regional support grants. Other benefits are staff recruitment and retention, family quality of life opportunities and low cost housing.

WEST WALES AIRPORT

The potential for access to a regional airport for people and small goods logistics in this part of the UK cannot be over-estimated, many commercial opportunities for Mid and West Wales have been thwarted through its lack of logistics access. A significant investment in new road infrastructure would be both unwarranted and environmentally harmful.

However the current airfield at Blaenannerch is a unique opportunity to take advantage of a currently unused piece of infrastructure and utilise it through private investment to provide a fully operational and reliable air logistics service. Serving both the technology park tenants and the wider commercial and public transport aspirations for the region, its potential as a catalyst for inward investment and indigenous commercial growth are significant.

It should also be borne in mind that the existing MoD Range site at Parcllyn, which is a significant employer in this area is already gaining benefit from this private investment. The sustainability and commercial growth of this employer can only be enhanced through its close co-operation with the private airfield operator as it can provide a greater portfolio of airfield services to existing and new customers through a mutually & beneficial sub contract agreement.

ABERPORTH TECHNOLOGY PARK TRAINING CENTRE

It is universally recognised that the existing apprentice and engineering training provision through

the Aberporth range training operation at Parclyn is second to none both within Wales and indeed the UK as a whole.

The current training provision is split due a lack of sufficient facilities between Blaenannerch airfield and the MoD Range site at Parclyn. This is both inefficient and wasteful in its provision of training delivery.

It is proposed that a new state of the art training facility be constructed within phase 1 of the technology park. This would provide both a welcome enhancements of the existing dilapidated training facilities on both sites as well as providing a more effective and efficient training delivery provision through rationalisation of existing services and structures.

However, significantly this new training facility could also provide a unique and innovative multi-discipline approach to SME commercial growth to the Technology Park. By combining training facilities with SME incubator provision within a single structure on the Technology Park, a significant hurdle to SME development and growth is lowered. Much technology based SME's within both Wales and the UK suffers from a lack of recruitment of quality technician/engineering personnel. This initiative would provide a catalyst for technology based SME development within the technology park whilst simultaneously providing valuable opportunities for increasing the apprenticeships and engineering based training provision for our young people in Wales.

In summary the current and future growth of this training provision will be paramount towards both the success of employment opportunities on the park as well as a wider catalyst of technology based inward investment into the region as a whole.

CURRENT POSITION

Outline planning approval has already been given to phase 1 of the proposed development. However although significantly this allows initial investment into the site in terms of infrastructure and early facilities provision, it will be the development of phase 2 to provide a critical mass of commercial involvement to realise the significant employment opportunities on offer. This is true for both the technology park site and indeed the wider economic development platform for West Wales as a whole.

Early planning approval for phase two will also allow an effective marketing strategy to be taken forward as well as enabling a more urgent investment into the regional airport facility.

The current planning objection from Welsh Water is untenable as far as planning approval of phase 2 of the Technology Park is concerned. If the long term solution is expected to take longer than 1 year to provision then clearly a short term solution must be found in order to allow an assessment of the phase 2 planning application as soon as possible.