



stimulating ideas   broadening debate   catalysing action

# THE LUNAR SOCIETY

CHAIRMAN: Waheed Saleem

VICE CHAIRMAN: Michael Wilkes

30th October 2013

Airports Commission  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

Dear Sir Howard

As you'll be aware, the Lunar Society has an enviable lineage. Its members have included physician Erasmus Darwin, the flamboyant entrepreneur Matthew Boulton, the brilliant engineer James Watt - who harnessed the power of steam, the radical polymath Joseph Priestley who, among wide ranging achievements, isolated oxygen, and the innovative potter and social reformer Josiah Wedgwood.

Then as now, Lunar Society debates bring together philosophy, arts, science and commerce, but as well as debating and discovering, the 'Lunatics' also built canals and factories, managed world-class businesses — and changed the face of Birmingham. Today's Society encompasses many of the same values.

In the 200-plus years since the original Society, Birmingham and the region have changed beyond recognition. It is now a lively, multicultural city, open to the world. Its industrial base has high technology, medicine and legal services as well as modern manufacturing. It is also notably a young city, with a high proportion of under-35s.

Yet what is still the same is the need to adapt continuously, to connect across different agendas and perspectives, and the need to engage local energy and effort in making change succeed. We are at the forefront of this, contributing to an innovative agenda throughout this region and beyond.

For these reasons, I am writing to you following your announcement in October on 'Emerging Thinking' around UK aviation strategy.

I noted that the Commission's initial conclusion that more runway capacity is required in the South East; however, I do not understand how this is to benefit economies across the UK. Onerous long-haul trips via London airports add significant costs to entrepreneurs and businesses in the Midlands. There are negative implications for inward investment in the region.

I realise that this announcement was fundamentally regarding aviation capacity; however, I urge you to keep the focus of your decision-making on the national economy. As you heard in the Aviation Strategy backbench business debate on the 24th October, surface access policy is also immensely important. This should not be so surprising as our predecessors in the Society recognised that Birmingham's economy would be moribund without connectivity with the outside World.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to point out some recent research by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) which has good news for the West Midlands economy. The EIU benchmarked the future competitiveness of cities based on a city's ability to attract capital, businesses, talent and visitors. In a list of 120 global cities, London is number two and Birmingham is number 43 – above Beijing, Mumbai, Delhi and Moscow. No other UK city features in the index. However, the wider region and its cities will not be able to reach their full potential without the support of our main international gateway at Birmingham Airport.

We call upon the Commission to take these above points into account when announcing its 'short-list' in December. Any decision will affect market confidence and needs to be taken with the best interests of the national economy. Omitting Birmingham Airport from the shortlist will, in my opinion, be potentially damaging and imply that the Midlands is not somewhere to invest. This will have significant repercussions on the future of Birmingham and the region – and could ultimately frustrate the great vision of our forefathers.

Secretary to the Society: [REDACTED]

I look forward to the Interim Report in December and hope that it reflects the recognition that major long-haul airports across the UK are critical to the success of economies such as the Midlands.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Waheed Saleem', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Waheed Saleem  
*Chairman to the Society*