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From the Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP  
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*Dear David,*

Thank you for your letter of 17 August (your ref: DC/HP/H) enclosing correspondence from your constituent, Brian Heywood of [REDACTED], about the proposed construction of an airport on St Helena.

Your constituent raises three main concerns about the development of the airport: the ongoing annual operating costs; the technical difficulties of providing an airport with an acceptable approach given St Helena's challenging topography; and the lack of availability of Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island for use as a designated alternate.

The ongoing operational costs are well understood, and have been factored into long term economic planning. The benefits from tourism and a revived economy are expected to more than outweigh the fact of having to provide any subsidy.

The technical difficulties have been carefully considered, both in Atkins' 2004 Feasibility Study and in the run-up to flight trials of the approaches that were successfully undertaken in 2006. Weather conditions at the site have been recorded since 2005. While it remains a challenging approach, it is one that a number of airlines were prepared to accept when holding discussions over air service provision in 2007.

While several airlines have indicated their willingness to commence operations on the basis of 'island holding', the use of Wideawake Airfield on Ascension would make operation of air services to St Helena

considerably easier. The current Wideawake Agreement does not allow it to be used as a designated alternate for flight planning purposes, though emergency landings could not be refused. Her Majesty's Government is in ongoing discussions with the United States over the use of Wideawake Airfield to support air services to St Helena.

I hope this information is helpful.

*Baroness  
Joan  
Aub*

ANDREW MITCHELL

