



Ashburton Airport Development Plan

Submission from; Mid Canterbury Aero Club

Compiled by; David Wright (Secretary of MCAC)

Wish to speak; **YES**

Background

The Mid Canterbury Aero Club (MCAC) has been based, under various governance structures, at the Ashburton Airfield for 92 years.

We are a club of about 120 members and exist to provide training for new pilots and also to support trained pilots through formal ongoing training and flight reviews. We also encourage general collegial support through flying opportunities, competitions, social and educational events.

As all sectors of the aviation industry must, we have a focus on safety.

As a club we own or lease several aircraft for members training and hire and endeavour to keep the cost of flying affordable for as many people as possible.

MCAC facilitate a [Young Eagles](#) group who encourage and support young people who are interested in flying as hobby or a career.

Rate Funding

As the Ashburton Airfield is a public amenity and provides enjoyment for many people we feel the rates funding of 60% is fair.

The airfield contributes a lot to the Ashburton district being the site of our own club and also the speedway and the Aviation museum, all not for profit organisations.

The airfield may have potential to contribute more in the future as a commuter airport as technology allows.

Hangar Houses

The MCAC supports the hangar house proposal given that some of our members may be potential buyers. The homes will create a further link between the airfield and the community and thereby promote aviation in the community.

We envisage that the structures will be restricted to actual "Hangar Homes", be sympathetic to a working airport and will not encroach on airfield operations or constrain future airfield growth. We ask that experienced airfield users be included in the further development of the Hanger House proposal.

Commercial Hangars

The MCAC supports the commercial hangar proposal with the proviso that the businesses are aviation oriented.

Speedway

The MCAC support the ADC's commitment to improve the access to the speedway and would also like to see better demarcation between the speedway and the airfield

Flight School

The MCAC has some concern about the flight school proposal.

The Ashburton airfield has a friendly calm but safe culture. It has multiple runways, high standards of maintenance with lowish aircraft movements. It is an uncontrolled aerodrome outside of controlled airspace.

These factors lead to it being popular place for cross country pilots to stop at and training pilots to build their skills in an unflustered and safe manner.

The MCAC and Ashburton airfield host regular nationally significant events such as the [Akrofest](#) and the Royal New Zealand Aero Club's Flying New Zealand [competitions](#). These events come to Ashburton because of the exceptional airfield and understanding users along with it being far from controlled airspaces. The safety benefits of such an environment have motivated some events to move here from other locations. Many pilots come from all over the country for these events, stay in local accommodation, eat at restaurants, and provide great, free, entertainment for the community. The uncomplicated nature along with the safety benefits that the airfield currently enjoys would cease to exist with a commercial flight school in residence without very tight controls.

We are concerned that a commercial operation with many aircraft movements per day will destroy the inviting aviation environment for which Ashburton Airfield is known around the country and could lead to less use by pilots and training organisations from outside Ashburton. It is not unusual for flight schools to limit flights to uncontrolled airfields with intensive training organisations in residence because of increased safety risks.

We have reason to believe that a potentially insular commercial operation may not have respect for the other organisations and individuals on the airfield or their operations.

Part of the curriculum of airline training organisations is night flying. This will lead to a lot more night time activity which may not be appreciated by Ashburton residents. Ashburton aerodrome only has one lit runway and the downwind part of the circuit is over residential Ashburton. We realise that this has always been the case but MCAC and other organisations who use the airfield regularly restrict night flying to the winter months whereby we can train at relatively early hours and also have always followed unwritten understandings to prevent disruption to the community as evidenced by the lack of complaints (at least that we are aware of) over the last approx. 90 years. A commercial training organisation catering for the predicted numbers will need to night fly all year round and obviously this will be late into the night during summer. We request that due consideration be made not only to the type of operators (commercial, private, etc), but to the type of operations that will be conducted by them and the effect it will have on the Ashburton community. We have already seen the consequences of an unfamiliar organisation using the airfield for night training.

We understand that there is a commercial skydiving company starting operations from the aerodrome this year. Although it is not ideal to have skydiving and training on the same field the communication we have had so far has assured us that they are very professional and happy to work with the MCAC training program. However we request that a memorandum of understanding be developed between them and other airport users before their operations commence. Having a skydiving operation and flight training school added to the airfield (not even considering the other already established airfield operations) will substantially increase safety risks and, based on industry evidence, requires very thorough safety management as well as an excellent operational relationship and rapport to exist between all airfield operators.

The Ashburton airfield has grass runways and taxiways. The MCAC has a contract to maintain these runways and we believe that they are some of the best of their type in the country but there are times of the year when we struggle to maintain them to the standard that we would like. One of the tools we have to maintain a high standard is to advise our members and fellow pilots to avoid worn areas and land off the centre or further down the runway. Although a trainee pilot is taught to land down the centre of the runway and use all of it we have a good mix of experienced pilots who oblige. If the movements on the field were to increase to the numbers you are predicting and primarily with trainees we believe that the runways will deteriorate rapidly and require the regular closing of areas for repairs. There will obviously cause disruption and increased costs. We cannot think of any other grass airfield in New Zealand that has a resident commercial training organisation such as proposed in the draft plan. The obvious solution is to seal a runway but from the minimal research we have done into sealing any one of the runways, costs would be well in the millions of dollars.

If the Ashburton District Council were to accept the flight school proposal the MCAC would like to take part in the proposals development. The MCAC have been a part of the Ashburton Airport Authority in the past and we have people who are aviation professionals and those who have many years of experience in managing the airfield. There will be a memorandum of understanding and many policies and procedures that need to be developed. They will include, but not be limited to, restricting movements when ground conditions are poor and restricting night flying. These policies will be essential to ensuring that the airfield is operated safely and continues to be an asset for the community.