

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE ST HELENA AIRPORT AND SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE SCHEME

The Department for International Development (DFID) and St Helena Government (SHG) propose to construct an airport on St Helena. Access to St Helena is currently provided by the Royal Mail Ship St Helena, the RMS St Helena, which calls at the island approximately 25 times per year at irregular intervals. The RMS St Helena is due to be retired from service shortly after 2010.

St Helena rises from the South Atlantic Ocean some 1,200 miles from the coast of Africa (See Figure 1.1 and 1.2, Volume 3). Although one of the primary factors in shaping a unique and close knit community, the isolation of the island presents the residents with a number of significant social obstacles including limited employment opportunities. It is considered by SHG and DFID that the development of an airport on the island would enable growth in business and tourism and provide a more robust foundation for the community to develop in the future.

The island's remoteness, dramatic geology and climate have created a habitat which supports a number of rare species of flora and fauna, some of which are unique to the island, including the critically endangered Wirebird. It is also has a rich and diverse landscape. Figure 1.3 in Volume 3 of this ES illustrates some of these characteristics.

A comprehensive study of the island's demographics (WS Atkins 2004) demonstrated that unless some form of improved access is provided that would allow development of the economy, through tourism, the economy and with it, the population, are likely to continue to decline.

1.2 THE AIRPORT AND ITS SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

The proposed airport would be located on Prosperous Bay Plain in the east of the Island (See Figure 2.1 in Volume 3 of this ES). The runway would be 1,950m long and would be encompassed by an area of cleared and graded land some 300m by 2,250m. It would be designed to operate Boeing 737-800 or similar aircraft. All components of the proposed aerodrome would be designed to meet the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

In addition to the airport, other permanent infrastructure will be required:

- A wharf at Rupert's Bay;
- A Bulk Fuel Installation (BFI) in Rupert's Valley;
- A permanent access road between Rupert's Bay and the airport on Prosperous Bay Plain;
- Essential support facilities for the airport at Prosperous Bay Plain;
- Remote obstacle lighting (ROL) and navigation aids; and
- A permanent water supply system from Sharks Valley to the airport.

A detailed scheme description is provided in Chapter 2 and this is accompanied by a number of illustrations and figures enclosed in Volume 3 of this ES.

1.3 THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

DFID and SHG are seeking development permission to construct the airport and its supporting infrastructure. Although not a legal requirement in St Helena, DFID and SHG require that the application for development permission be accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES) which summarises the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). In undertaking the EIA the aim has been to ensure that:

- The St Helena Airport and Supporting Infrastructure Scheme meets the highest possible standards of environmental management; and
- Notwithstanding the law on St Helena, the EIA and application for development permission are defensible in terms of the normal expectations of the planning process in the United Kingdom.

An explanation of the approach to undertaking the EIA and producing the ES is set out in Chapter 3. In summary, EIA is the process of compiling, evaluating and presenting all the significant environmental impacts of a proposed development. The assessment is designed to help produce, as far as possible, an environmentally sympathetic project by detecting potentially significant adverse environmental impacts thus leading to the identification and incorporation of appropriate mitigation measures into the scheme design.

The main steps in the assessment procedure can be summarised as follows:

- Examine the environmental character of the area likely to be affected by the development through baseline studies;
- Predict the possible effects on the environment, both beneficial and adverse, of the development;
- Introduce design and operational modifications or other measures to avoid, reduce or offset adverse effects, and where possible, achieve positive effects; and
- Summarise the results of the EIA in the ES. A Non-Technical Summary of the ES is also produced.

DFID and SHG commissioned a Socioeconomic Impact Assessment to identify the potential social and economic effects of the proposed airport and supporting infrastructure. For completeness this is included as Volume 6 of the Environmental Statement.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

The ES is made up of six volumes:

Volumes of the ES

- **Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary** – provides a short, easy to read summary of the scheme and key impacts.
- **Volume 2: Environmental Statement: Technical Summary** – due to the scale and complexity of the assessment an extended summary document has been produced. This volume focuses on the significant effects that could occur during the construction and operation of the proposed scheme. Some topics (such as Land Use and Combined Effects are included in full in Volume 2). The information is supported by the detailed technical information presented in Volume 4.
- **Volume 3: Environmental Statement: Figures and Photographs** – this volume contains the maps, photographs and figures and other illustrations referred to in Volume 2 and 4.
- **Volume 4: Environmental Statement: Technical Appendices** – this contains the detailed assessments for the environmental topics covered in the ES. It also includes supporting technical reports and survey documents.
- **Volume 5: Environmental Management Plan** - this volume sets out the mitigation measures that the must implement during the construction and operation of the Airport and supporting infrastructure
- **Volume 6: Socioeconomic Impact Assessment** – this volume provides an overview of the social and economic impacts of the project during construction and following the opening of the airport.

Volume 5 of the ES comprises an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) which sets out commitments and contractually binding measures to avoid, reduce or offset environmental effects. In addition, the ES is accompanied by a Landscape and Ecological Mitigation Plan (LEMP). The LEMP can be found in Appendix 10.2 of Volume 4 of the ES.

1.5 AUTHORS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

The EIA was undertaken by Faber Maunsell who prepared all chapters of the ES with the exception of the scheme description in Chapter 2 and Volume 6 of the ES which were prepared by Atkins, incorporating material provided by DFID and SHG. Traffic forecasts for construction and operation were also provided by Atkins and are included in the Traffic Statement in Appendix 12.2 in Volume 4 of the ES.

Figures 10.4 Zone of Theoretical Visibility and Figures 10.6 Viewpoints included in Volume 3 of the ES and referred to in Appendix 10.1, Volume 4 were prepared by Cody L. Thornton.