

PART OF OUR HERITAGE

Introduction

1. In all the long controversy about a third London Airport one very important feature of the environment of the coastal site - the Crouch/Roach/Havengore system of sailing water - has received only belated attention. It is remarkable that in an extended public debate that has focussed on environmental issues this area of major recreational significance was largely overlooked until the detailed examination of the Maplin Development Bill by the House of Commons and House of Lords Select Committees. Even now, despite the large measure of protection that the Committees have sought to give these waters, the Department of the Environment in their two recently published consultative documents propose motorway alignments and centres of population that would reduce the essential Roach component of the system to an urbanised rump.

"Countryside Conservation"

2. Map 3 in the New Town document and the accompanying discussion at paragraph 3.4 ignore the Roach and its creeks in designating areas of recreational significance (the inclusion of the category "other open areas of significance" clearly shows the map to be more than a mere delineation of those areas enjoying a measure of present statutory protection).

This omission is truly remarkable. Clause 11 of the Maplin Development Bill was inserted by the House of Commons Select Committee specifically to protect these waters as well as the Crouch. Clause 10 and the Special Report of the House of Lords Select Committee are devoted to the preservation, indeed the navigational improvement, of the Havengore through route from the Thames to the Crouch. Why then is this area, to which Parliament has already given much attention, not prominent in the environmental assessment made in the document? Can any conclusion of the document be free from suspicion if there is so fundamental and demonstrable a flaw in the basic premises of the discussion.

Let it be understood quite clearly:-

- (a) The Roach and its creeks are an integral part of the whole East Coast sailing area
- (b) Paglesham is an utterly delightful waterside village with a fine anchorage
- (c) The Yokefleet, between Pottton and Foulness Islands, is one of the most protected yacht anchorages on the coast.
- (d) Considerable numbers of craft are kept on the Roach and its creeks, vastly greater numbers visit them.
- (e) The Havengore route provides a very useful safe by-pass for the long outside passage round Foulness which the Maplin Docks would render much more hazardous than it can be at present. Thus this route would have a new and vital importance for small craft after Maplin.

- (f) The green shaded area of the Dengie Hundred in Map 3 possesses no advantages that are not also found in the conveniently white area around the Roach. The one significant point of difference, which gives additional charm to the southern area, is that it must be largely enjoyed from the water. This in no way invalidates the comparison: boats, after all, are not uncommon in Essex.

3. We are pleased to note that paragraph 3.4(a) recognises the Blackwater Estuary as being of regional significance for recreation. Why are the Crouch and Roach not referred to in this paragraph. Sailing is the main recreation on all three rivers. Are there significantly less craft on the Crouch and Roach? True the noble estuary of the Blackwater provides splendid sailing; but it has little good shelter in which to anchor yet this facility abounds on the Roach. Planners seem quite unaware of the fact that on Saturday evenings in the season sailing areas are full of yachtsmen looking for somewhere quiet to spend the night.

The Urbanisation

4. One of the reasons for the attractiveness of the Roach to sailing and particularly cruising people lies in the peaceful unspoilt surroundings of this river, with miles of marsh on the one side and the rich farmland behind Paglesham and Barling on the other.

No doubt the marshes would reverberate with aircraft noise after Maplin (any hope that this would be avoided was lost when runway site 'C' was chosen instead of site 'D'). Now for good measure the Department of Environment would replace the farmland by major urban centres with all their own noise and pollution. This is a flat contradiction of earlier talk of a buffer between the airport and its city.

5. The South East Strategic Plan (paragraphs 2.5 - 2.7) spoke of South Essex as an area for future development; not the beautiful recreational north eastern corner of South East Essex. The authority of this Plan, in any case suspect since the population forecasts have now been revised downwards, cannot be sought for the destruction of this precious part of the English scene.

The Access Corridors

6. If the urbanisation would mar the surroundings of the rivers and creeks, preservation of access for sailing craft to this sheltered water would still be important because:

- (a) as previously stated and as recognised by the House of Lords Select Committee, the Maplin Docks would render the safe Havengore by-pass route vitally important
- (b) Urban surroundings, if objectionable, do not destroy sailing water in themselves and the Roach might be no worse in this respect than the built up parts of the Medway (now alas, much of the lower part of that once lovely river)

- (c) The growth in local population would make even a spoilt amenity of great value.

7. The system would thus have a different importance after Maplin and with this in mind the effects of the proposed corridors must be considered.

8. Firstly, some general considerations:

- (a) The access corridor document nowhere states the nature of the crossings of navigable waters as this would affect sailing craft. We presume the consultants envisaged low fixed bridges.

- (b) The Special Report on Havengore Creek of the House of Lords Select Committee acknowledges that fixed low (4 metre clearance) bridges would prevent navigation by the overwhelming majority of sailing craft.

- (c) There is no indication of the routes the local roads and railways would take: these could be just as destructive of sailing as the major routes.

9. It is quite clear that the corridors have been drafted with scant regard to sailing interests.

- (a) It must be presumed that all routes as intended in the document would sever the Havengore connection either at the mouth of that creek or, subsequently, in the Middleway between Potton and Havengore/Foulness.

- (b) Route F additionally destroys sailing on the Southend shore as we know it.

- (c) Routes D and E do least damage but may threaten the small Millhead Creek, the site of the Wakering Yacht Club and, possibly the important boatyard at Potton Creek which is also used by fishing craft.

- (d) Routes A, B and C cut Paglesham off from the sea and 'A' also truncates the Crouch. These routes sever the Middleway in two near the Shelford Creek entrance thus dominating the now peaceful Yokefleet anchorage as well as destroying the through route via Havengore. The statement in paragraph 5.1 (c) of the corridor document that this alignment, which is common to routes A, B and C, would not interfere seriously with the recreational facilities of the Crouch and Roach beggars belief. Perhaps a fibreglass replica of Paglesham is to be constructed in the lower Roach, the result however might be unconvincing to yachtsmen who know and love the place.

- (e) The southern variants of routes B and C appear on some versions of the maps to destroy Potton Creek; but perhaps this is a printing error. Certainly Millhead Creek and the Wakering Club and boatyard appear to be obliterated. The upper Roach also is lost but at least the major damage to Paglesham and the through route (given a Havengore tunnel) is avoided.

10. How all these losses can be reconciled with the expressed wishes of Parliament in clause 11 of the Bill we fail to see since all the navigable Roach, Potton, Millhead and the Middleway Creeks are protected (as are, let it be mentioned here, The Narrow Cuts, Barling Hall, The Voilet, Little Wakering, Fleethead, Paglesham Pool, Paglesham, Barton Hall creeks, to refer only to those on the Roach).

11. To summarise we would say that wherever significant navigable water is crossed, that crossing must allow the passage of sailing craft, with no nonsense about the lowering of masts, which as the Lords have accepted, is quite impracticable for seagoing boats. In some places high bridges might be provided; but tunnels are preferable and have already received powerful recommendation at Havengore. There are but few places where low fixed bridges would cause only acceptable loss.

Conclusion

12. It is the view of this Association that the Crouch/Roach system would have a new and important significance for sailing after Maplin; but in discussing this question with the access corridors in mind we are dealing with a totally different and worse recreational situation from that of today in South East Essex.

13. The trouble with the Government's proposals, from which they are quite unable to escape, as long as they adhere to them, is the decision to site an international airport and, quite gratuitously, a major dock and an industrial city, in one of the few remaining large recreational areas in the South East. An area in which a wild and luminous beauty can be enjoyed by those with the energy and sensibility to seek it. A place containing a significant proportion of the best sheltered sailing water in England which is quite as important to our ever increasing boating population as the sacrosanct parts of North Buckinghamshire are to others. No amount of specious argument adorned by glossy but misleading maps can conceal the great loss that Maplin would bring.

THE WAKERING SMALL BOAT USERS ASSOCIATION

Hon. Secretary: J.A. Essam, 1 Roding Close, Great Wakering, Essex.

MAPLIN DEVELOPMENT BILL

Clause 11

- (1) This section applies to the waters of -
 - (a) the River Crouch and the River Roach, and
 - (b) the creeks and watercourses leading out of those rivers, except for Havengore Creek, New England Creek and Shelford Creek
- (2) Any body certified by the Secretary of State as being a body representative of the persons whose interests are or may be affected by any mischief to which this section applies may require the Maplin Development Authority to carry out (subject to compliance with any provision contained in, or having effect under, any Act, whether general or local) any dredging or other works -
 - (a) which are necessary or expedient for the removal of the cause of the mischief, and
 - (b) which are reasonably required, having regard to the cost of the works, and of the degree of benefit likely to be derived from them;

and, subject to subsection (3) below, the Authority shall comply with any such requirement.

(3) If the Authority disputes the requirement, the question shall be referred to the arbitration of a single arbitrator, who shall be appointed by agreement between the parties or, in default of agreement, by the President of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

(4) The mischief to which this section applies is interference with the facilities in waters to which this section applies for sailing and other recreations as they exist at the passing of this Act, and the cause of the mischief is siltation, scouring or alteration of tidal flow occurring as a result of any works carried out by the Authority for the reclamation or maintenance of land under this Act.

SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE HOUSE OF LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE

Ordered to Report:-

Clause 10

The Committee have given careful consideration to the amendment proposed by the Defenders of Essex Association which would have the effect of raising the height of the bridge spanning the sea-approach to Havengore Creek from 4 to 14 metres. The Committee decided not to make the amendment sought by the Petitioners since a bridge of the height asked for would be both costly and unsightly. Nevertheless they consider that it would be regrettable if the creek were to be closed to sailing craft, as would virtually be the case under the existing provisions of the Bill. The Committee are of opinion that further and careful consideration should be given to the construction of a tunnel, which is unlikely to be more costly than a high-level bridge.

For similar reasons, the Committee are sympathetic to the idea of making the channel deeper than is proposed in the Bill. The Committee concluded, however, that the model-work was not sufficiently advanced to give any indication of the continuing cost of maintaining a greater depth; and they therefore recommend that the Secretary of State should give further consideration to this when the necessary information is available.