



land owned by John Woodhouse adjacent to the airfield. "There is no reason why the airfield should be lost – both it and the holiday park can co-exist," he says. "A land swap would allow them to realise their investment, while preserving Sandown for general aviation. We have not had an official response from the company to this proposal."

Sandown has a fascinating history. Aircraft began using the site – then called Lea Farm – in 1935 when a company called Spartan Airlines began offering flights from London to the Isle of Wight in just 45 minutes using a Spartan Cruiser. The fare was 26/6 (£1.32) which included free transport to and from the airfield.

When the airfield reopened after the war, several scheduled services were offered to the

**Far left: John Woodhouse and Chris Williams, who are fighting to save Sandown airfield**  
**Left and below: Spartan Airlines poster and Spartan Cruiser**



# Sandown airfield alive and kicking

To paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of the death of Sandown airfield are an exaggeration; an eleventh-hour High Court injunction means Sandown is still very much in business and is happy to welcome fly-in visitors. The Isle of Wight airfield is under extreme pressure from a Channel Islands-based property development company which wants to turn it into a holiday camp, but Chris Williams and John Woodhouse, owners of Specialist Flying School and Embassy Air Services Ltd, continue to fight them every inch of the way and currently have the upper hand. Sandown has been open since 1935 but was officially said to be closing on October 1st. The closure was confirmed by the CAA in the notams, and Williams and Woodhouse have been unable to get a full explanation of why that happened when people at the CAA apparently knew of a High Court injunction preventing it.

The situation is complex, but the holders of a lease on parts of the airfield, a Jersey-based company called Sandown Isle of Wight Airport Ltd, want to turn it into what they call a 'high quality leisure complex'. The company, whose affairs are managed by London-based Wharf Land Investments, chaired by former Cabinet

Minister David Mellor, originally denied it had any such intention but later made out that economically they had no alternative.

The High Court injunction springs from a tangled legal situation involving freehold, leasehold and guaranteed rights of access. While the ownership of various parts of the airfield has changed over the years, Woodhouse and Williams have always had free right of access to the taxiways and runways for their aviation interests. The property developers presumed these rights would be void if they closed the runway, but Woodhouse and Williams begged to differ, and the High Court has agreed. An injunction has been served on the property developers which prevents them closing the airfield.

"We do not believe that our rights disappear because of the actions of a leaseholder," John Woodhouse says. "We are waiting now for the developers to make their next move, but we are not simply obstructing their plans – we have offered them a viable alternative which I believe would give them what they want, while preserving Sandown as a general aviation airfield."

This proposal involves a 'land swap' – the lease on the runway in exchange for freehold

mainland, and Derby Airways – later renamed British Midland – flew DC-3 and Herons from Sandown between 1963 and 1968. At one point the airfield had three runways, 15/33, 18/36 and 05/32, but by the mid-1970s Sandown was GA-only and two runways had been abandoned, leaving 05/32.

Desmond Norman, of Britten-Norman fame, built the NDN-1 Firecracker at Sandown, followed by the Fieldmaster crop-sprayer, and Richard Noble built his ARV-2 kits in the former Spartan Airlines hangar, as well as his speed record-breaking Thrust 2 car.

It is unclear exactly what the property developers' next move will be, and Woodhouse and Williams need your support. A fly-in rally in October attracted more than 70 aircraft, together with vintage cars and motorcycles. The airfield is open seven days a week; every pilot who flies in make his own statement of support, and as well as making a small contribution to the financial wellbeing of Sandown's aviation interests – the landing fee is £10 – you can sign a growing petition to keep the airfield open. The 800-metre runway and northern taxiway are in good condition. Prior permission is required on O1983 402402 – not the number in the flight guides – and there's a restaurant on the field seven days a week. The airfield is unlicensed. If the radio is unmanned, please make blind calls on 119.27. Hangarage is available this winter. And if you can't make it, perhaps you'd like to make a contribution to the Sandown Fighting Fund anyway – Woodhouse and Williams have spent £20,000 in legal fees so far. ■