

2023 Annual Report



The year in review

Lower levels of emissions and noise associated with reduced flying during and after the pandemic seemed a distant memory in 2023 as air traffic and passenger numbers returned to close to 2019 levels. This growth, and perhaps a fear that permissions will be hard to obtain in the future, prompted another wave of airport expansion applications: three London airports submitted plans that, if approved, would increase UK airport capacity by a further 45 million passengers per annum. During the year we supported our local member groups in responding to these plans and providing input to public examinations. But there was also a timely reminder from the Netherlands that airport decisions don't always have to be about growth, with our Dutch AGM guest speakers discussing how their government is examining the case for reducing capacity to meet noise and emissions commitments.

You can read more about our activities in the following pages, but we were particularly pleased to secure funding to follow up 2022's commissioned report scrutinising the risks associated with the Government's Jet Zero strategy, with further expert commissions critiquing the aviation sector's economic contribution, the claims made in relation to so-called 'sustainable aviation fuels' (this was the big policy theme of 2023, both nationally and

internationally), the potential for ammonia as a future aviation fuel, and the 'non-CO2' impacts associated with the use of hydrogen fuels. These reports have all been completed with plans to launch in the new year.

With airspace modernisation gathering pace, our Airspace and Noise Community Forum was active in setting out its agenda for policy change to give more protection, and compensation, to impacted communities. We also launched a general aviation noise campaign to raise the visibility of environmental and planning issues associated with helicopters and smaller airfields.

Finally, a big thank you goes out to all our staff who helped deliver the work programme and keep the organisation, and its messages, in the media throughout the year.

The AEF Team:

Tim Johnson, *Director*

Cait Hewitt, *Policy Director*

Florence Long, *Communications & Administrative Officer*

Max Thrower, *Campaign Communications Officer*

Deborah Lovatt, *Head of Planning & Outreach*

Tim Thomas, *Financial Officer*

Charles Lloyd, *Lead, Airspace & Noise Community Forum*

January

2023 began with a meeting between AEF, our NGO colleagues, and the (then) aviation minister Baroness Vere and her staff. We talked about our policy priorities for tackling the climate change impacts of aviation and heard about the Government's plans, which were somewhat different! There was at least a shared intention to tackle aviation emissions.

AEF's views on the climate challenge facing aviation were captured on film, with Policy Director Cait Hewitt interviewed for a BBC Ideas short film as well as recording a 30-minute lecture for Oxford University's "Global Challenges in Transport: Climate Change" course for transport professionals. We also welcomed community noise groups to the third meeting of AEF's Airspace and Noise Community Forum (ANCF). This was an important moment to reflect on the progress made in the Forum's first year, and to set out the ANCF focus for 2023 on night flights and the framework for airspace modernisation.

February

[A new report](#) by the Royal Society concluded that there is no clear low-emission alternative to jet fuel. The report's wide coverage in national media provided us with an opportunity to reinforce our message about the limits on scaling of SAF and new technology to meet the Government's ambitions.

March

Airspace modernisation issues had been progressing slowly in the wake of the pandemic, but in March we replied to the CAA's consultation, 'Airspace change masterplan: scoping the environmental assessments,' and submitted [a second](#)

[consultation](#) response to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on its proposed reforms to national planning policy. AEF took the opportunity to highlight serious planning policy issues concerning the framework for considering applications for airport expansion.

April

AEF has been supporting the T&E campaign Travel Smart, and Florence, our Comms Officer, wrote an article for Business Green, "[Fly less to do more](#)," calling on businesses to cut their flights. April also saw AEF coordinate a joint NGO letter to the Transport Minister highlighting the greenwash risk of the Government's plans for a 'zero-emission 2040 airport target,' which only referred to ground emissions from infrastructure, and not to the emissions from planes.

AEF began its life in 1975 as a federation of noise groups concerned primarily with noise from light aircraft. To mark Noise Awareness Day we launched [a new general aviation](#) noise campaign informed by members' experiences with noise pollution from light aircraft and helicopters.

May

May was a big month for consultation responses with AEF making submissions to the Environmental Audit Committee's call for evidence on [indoor and outdoor air quality targets](#) and the CAA's consultation on the proposed environmental assessments for the [airspace masterplan](#).

Members of the AEF's ANCF wrote to the Aviation Minister with concerns that the Department's new overarching aircraft noise statement made aircraft noise management subsidiary to growth as an objective.

Separately, we asked the Aviation Minister to reconvene the Airspace Strategy Board to provide communities with an opportunity to raise their concerns about the process for airspace modernisation.

June

Historically, non-CO2 impacts from flying have been responsible for two-thirds of the total climate warming from the sector, so we were pleased to participate in the first meeting of the Jet Zero Council's non-CO2 'task and finish' group. Non-CO2 issues have largely been missing from policy discussions in recent years, but came to the fore in 2023, with this Government initiative looking at the science, policy and mitigation options being just one of several projects and workshops to be held in Europe and the UK.

July

'I hope the era of aviation exceptionalism is over' was the headline of the [Henry Mance interview in the Financial Times](#) with our Policy Director Cait Hewitt, discussing her perspective on how campaigning has influenced the sector.

With a fresh round of airport expansions underway, we launch a new report - 'Losing Altitude: the economics of air transport in Great Britain,' by Dr Alex Chapman at the New Economics Foundation. AEF's webinar attracted representatives from the DfT, CAA, the media, MPs and NGOs, and secured a Guardian exclusive with the headline 'Airport expansion does not boost UK growth or productivity'.

We strongly support efforts to provide consumers with accurate data on the emissions associated with flying so we were pleased that our Director Tim was invited to join the newly

created Advisory Group assisting Google with its Travel Impact Model (TIM). TIM is used by some of the large booking sites like Skyscanner and Google Flights.

August

In August staff combined some much-deserved leave with the opportunity to prepare for the autumn work programme, including hosting a meeting for local groups to share their recent experiences of Airport Noise Action Plans. With the current round of noise action plans underway, AEF's ANCF developed a critique of current plans ranging from inadequate public engagement to the absence of measurable targets that can be used to hold noise management performance to account.

September

Smaller airfields also feature in our work, and included in our casework this month was an application for a new airfield in Little Mongeham, Kent. This had been rejected initially by the local planning authority and then refused at appeal by a planning inspector, but with the inspector seeming to suggest that a fresh application (dealing more adequately with habitat disturbance) should be made.

We aim to work with all political parties to press for better regulation, and with party conference season in full swing, we joined an online roundtable with Liberal Democrats' transport spokesperson Wera Hobhouse to discuss the party's transport and aviation policy.

October

AEF opposes airport expansion in the aviation sector, given evidence that it is not compatible with the need to reduce noise and emissions. In October we registered as an interested party in the process for Gatwick's expansion proposals on climate grounds. As the use of private jets continued to make headlines, we highlighted the climate [costs of expansion at Farnborough Airport](#), the largest airport servicing private jet travel in the UK. AEF was also pleased to be part of the new No Airport Expansion campaign which held its second meeting for local and national campaign groups in London.

ICAO is a specialised agency of the UN, responsible for setting standards and regulations for aviation safety, security, and efficiency, as well as for aviation environmental protection. Our Director, Tim Johnson attended the ICAO Environment Committee steering group meeting which focused on options for new noise and emission standards for aircraft, and updates to the guidance on alternative fuels.

November

Guest presentations are always a popular feature of our AGM and this year we welcomed, virtually, two campaign groups from the Netherlands to talk about their work related to greenwashing, and a possible Government cap on flights at Schiphol Airport.

AEF launched a major new report, with a press conference, from consultants Cerology [scrutinising the future role of alternative fuels](#) in delivering aviation decarbonisation. Together with [our press briefing](#) '5 things the industry doesn't want you to know about Sustainable Aviation Fuels,' this helped us secure strong press coverage providing a counter-narrative

to some of the industry hype around Virgin Atlantic's 100% alternative fuel transatlantic flight.

December

On behalf of a coalition of environmental NGOs, we participated in the UN ICAO conference on alternative aviation fuels that set a non-binding target to reduce global emissions by 5% by 2030.

Following Max's departure at the end of October, the recruitment of a new full-time Policy and Campaigns Officer drew lots of interest with around eighty high-quality applications. The interview process took several weeks but we were pleased to be able to confirm the appointment of [Bertie Lloyd](#) prior to the seasonal break.

Key insights into AEF's impact

AEF had several notable media successes in 2023, in both national and international media coverage. Kicking off the year, the publication of the Royal Society's report concluding that there was no clear low-emission alternative to jet fuel led to renewed media scrutiny of so-called sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs). AEF was asked to comment on the conversation, and we took the opportunity to highlight our work in this area. Private jets were also highly topical in 2023, with AEF often being asked to give its perspective on the divisive issue of whether we should have such carbon-intensive travel in a climate emergency. Other key topics that AEF highlighted throughout the year were: ghost flights, the risk of aviation missing its climate targets, airport expansion, noise and air pollution. In July Cait's interview with Henry

Mance in the FT brought many new people to our work, with an uptick in website traffic and calls for comment from other media outlets. In November, we coordinated a press conference with other NGOs ahead of the first 100% SAF transatlantic flight, which led to the media widely reporting our counter-narrative to the industry's line that this was the answer to the aviation decarbonisation issue. This story was picked up by Open Democracy, The Guardian, the BBC, the Financial Times and many other publications.

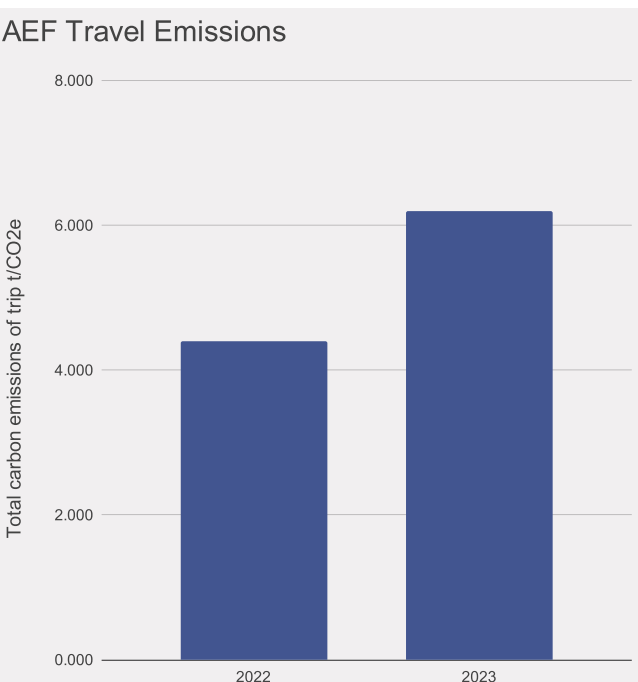
Key stats:

- 104 media publications, a 6% increase from 2022.
- 174 more followers on Twitter, a 5% increase from 2022.
- The AEF website was accessed in 162 countries and regions.

The main objective of the campaign is to reduce corporate air travel emissions by 50% or more from 2019 levels. Business travellers make up some 12% of passengers, but up to 75% of revenues on certain flights, so their choices have important leverage on the aviation industry.

To match the transparency we ask of businesses, AEF also committed to publishing its emissions from business travel. The graph shows our travel footprint for 2022 and 2023 based on the GHG reporting guidelines published by DESNZ, including the use of a multiplier to account for non-CO2 impacts. The majority of our travel footprint is associated with our international work programme, primarily ICAO activities.

AEF and the Travel Smart Campaign



In 2022, AEF joined a coalition of international partners calling for a reduction in business flights, as part of the Travel Smart campaign.

Special thanks:

A special thanks to Max, who joined AEF in early 2022, and left to become External Communications Officer for Bristol Green Party at the end of 2023, after 2 years working as AEF's Campaign Communications Officer. While at AEF, Max used his campaign and comms experience to help communities address the effects of aviation. His main interests lay at the intersection between politics, social and environmental justice and effective communication strategies.

Fundraising and finances

We aim to keep membership fees affordable to ensure that everyone can have access to our advice and information service. We are grateful to our funders and donors for helping to subsidise the costs of providing these services, and for supporting our work programme more generally. Apart from membership fees, AEF's work is dependent entirely on philanthropic and charitable funders. We do not receive public funds or donations from industry. AEF continues to operate within budget and maintains a positive balance of funds. To ensure appropriate scrutiny of our work programme and to promote good governance, we are grateful for the oversight provided by our Executive Council, which is elected annually by our membership.

AEF's aim is:

- to protect the environment, public health and quality of life through securing policies and measures that ensure effective limits on noise, emissions and other environmental impacts from aviation.

AEF's objectives are:

- to seek effective legislation, policies and other measures by working with local, national and international policy-making and legislative bodies;
- to promote practical solutions through consultation and co-operation with AEF members, regulatory and public bodies, the aviation industry, and others;
- to support our members and affected communities in liaising with decision-makers and other stakeholders;
- to provide advice, analysis and information;
- to publicise and promote the role and responsibilities of the Federation.