

The Sywell Saga

This is a brief sketch of a seven year story of schemes to turn a small grass airfield into eight hectares of concrete runway to take jet aircraft.

You may well ask why an East Anglia peppered with hard runways able to handle the largest planes needs another. Putting a new airport on the meagre bit of countryside remaining between three large towns seems beyond reason.

Surely a Government pledged to set a World example on the environment would send the developers packing on the first application?

Alas, locals have been forced to wage long battles of attrition against a series of planning applications and raise funds well into six figures fighting them. The Borough Council's charge payers have paid a great deal more.

At one stage the Council caved in and passed the application to save the costs of an appeal, but it was overturned in the High Court by two heroes who put their houses on the line to finance it. The Council again had to pick up all the bills.

Another application followed in April 2005 and was fought every step by a newly formed group "STARE", many parish councils and others. This time the Council turned it down. Developers appealed and briefed lawyers. Council and STARE appointed theirs. At a public hearing in August 2006 the proposal was overwhelmingly opposed by people and organisations from a wide area.

The Inspector is currently reporting to the Secretaries of State. We await the handing down of wisdom. In the meantime, the developers have put down another derisory £150 for yet another application for the same thing! Presumably it is hoped we will all go away!

The price of Freedom is Eternal Vigilance.

Derek Broome

news in brief...

General Aviation campaign

In the last edition of *Flying Green*, we reported on a campaign to limit noise from light aircraft being mounted by UECNA, a Europe-wide coalition of residents' groups. We have just learnt that the petition presented to the European Parliament (and reproduced in the last pullout) has been officially accepted and its contents deemed to be within the competence of the EU.

The Petition Commissioner has passed the letter to the European Commission with a request to carry out a preliminary inquiry, and to the Parliament Committee on Tourism and Transport for information.

AEF is monitoring the situation and will be calling on members in due course when we feel that lobbying can be most effective.

Civil Aviation Bill

The Bill is finally awaiting Royal Assent, having had a final reading in the House of Lords on 25 October. The Lords' victory over maintaining the numbers limit on night flights was retained, but their attempts to make it mandatory for aerodromes to set noise charges were eventually dropped.

Climate March and Demo 4 November

Grosvenor Sq: 11am / Trafalgar Sq: 1pm

Join Campaign Against Climate Change and Stop Climate Chaos for the biggest climate campaign event of the year. Help needed to distribute AirportWatch postcards – come and join us under the aviation banners. See www.airportwatch.org.uk for more details.

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Aviation and Climate Change

A temperature check

By the end of the year the Government will publish what it insists on calling a 'progress report' on its controversial *Future of Air Transport* White Paper. AEF believes that there are fundamental flaws in the White Paper and has been instrumental in developing and promoting AirportWatch's **rethink!** campaign, which is calling on the Government to reconsider the assumptions which underpin its massive programme of airport expansion.

AirportWatch is not alone – more and more groups, from Government agencies to direct activists, are highlighting the unsustainable growth in air travel. The issue is constantly in the media, and has risen up the agenda in Westminster too, as David Cameron pushes environmentalism centre stage. This special edition provides an update on the **rethink!** campaign, and places it in the wider context of recent developments in political and environmental thinking.

rethink!

Over 3,500 people have contacted the Department for Transport in support of the **rethink!** campaign. Numerous MPs have written too, prompted by letters from constituents. A recent series of high-profile adverts by spoof aviation lobby group SPURT led readers to a website where they could e-mail DfT in support of **rethink!** Well over 1,000 have done so.

Fringe events at the three main party conferences provided a prominent showcase for the campaign; our approach to Aviation Minister Gillian Merron should result in a meeting; and a Commons debate and parliamentary questions are planned for the coming months.

If you haven't done so already, please visit www.rethink.airportwatch.org.uk to send a letter. We also now have several thousand **rethink!** postcards for direct mailing to DfT – please contact the office if you can help distribute these either locally or at the huge demo planned for November 4th – see AirportWatch site or call for details.

Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the Federation are as follows:

- to foster a climate of opinion which takes full account of the environmental issues arising from aircraft and aerodrome use;
- to promote a relationship between the environment and aviation in which the detrimental effects of aviation on quality of life and on the natural and man-made environment are kept to a minimum;
- to encourage wide discussion of the problems involved and to seek practical solutions;
- to consult and co-operate with local, national and international governments, the aviation industry, regulatory authorities, universities, professional institutions, research bodies, and any others for the purpose of reducing noise, disturbance and all forms of pollution by technical and operational means;
- to pursue these objectives with policy-making and legislative bodies - local, national and international - so that laws and policies include measures for effective environmental protection;
- to provide relevant advice and information to assist its members;
- to publicise and promote the viewpoint of the Federation through the media and through representation among bodies responsible for aviation matters as appropriate

Flying Green is now published on a regular quarterly basis. We hope to publish members' letters in the next issue, so do please send them in on any subject.

REPORTS

MORI poll for AET

When politicians have lost an argument, they fall back on the claim that ‘the public would never accept it’. Hearing this endlessly, AET commissioned an MORI poll investigating public attitudes to taxing air travel. The results showed that a clear majority understand the issue of aviation and climate change and believe that they should pay for the environmental damage they cause, even if this means higher airfares. An overwhelming 73% were in favour of substantial tax increases, if the proceeds were to be spent on the environment.

www.aef.org.uk/publications/detail.php?art_id=230

Predict and Decide

The UK Energy Research Centre, a body affiliated with Oxford University, recently published a comprehensive report into the policy questions surrounding aviation and climate change. *Predict and Decide* synthesizes a wide range of research into climate science, aviation growth, and the economics and socio-demographics of air travel. The report finds that the problem is too urgent to be left to the distant prospect of emissions trading and that the Government can and should raise Air Passenger Duty without delay; this would not cause the economy to collapse, hit poor people hardest or be unduly unpopular with the public.

The report can be found by Googling the title.

Pie in the Sky

Friends of the Earth examine the economic case for airport expansion and conclude that the costs of expansion actually *outweigh* the benefits. They identify three main ways in which conventional analyses distort the true picture: by exaggerating the benefits (inflating GDP gains, double-counting jobs), ignoring the environmental costs; and ignoring the costs to other economic sectors (for instance, UK tourism).

www.foe.co.uk/resource/press_releases/costs_of_airport_expansion_21092006.html

ALLIES

Natural England

In August the bodies now known as Natural England wrote to the Department for Transport, expressing their concern over the environmental protection measures contained in the White Paper. Although they stopped (just) short of calling for a policy rethink, they insisted that the Government report progress in a meaningful way on its own environmental targets. The letter was accompanied by a detailed analysis of commitments in the White Paper, with the agencies’ views on how they should be implemented.

Sustainable Development Commission (SDC)

The SDC is the Government’s own watchdog on sustainability, and has frequently and frankly criticised its aviation policy. Since all Government policies should be informed by its Sustainable Development Strategy (which has been updated since the White Paper), SDC and AEF presented a joint analysis to the DfT of how aviation should conform to these principles. Crucially, the old notion of balancing the economy against the environment has been replaced by a more holistic view, which recognises that a stable environment is a precondition of a strong economy.

As with the submission by Natural England, these demands are in fact no more than what is required for internal consistency with Government policy. The SDC is following up this work with a detailed submission to the DfT.

Plane Stupid

Meanwhile, a new group has been growing in strength and ambition. Plane Stupid takes direct action to highlight the unsustainable expansion of aviation. Twenty-six protestors recently invaded Nottingham Airport and peacefully occupied the runway, making national headlines. Founder Joss Garman has since appeared on Newsnight, bringing ever more attention to the topic. The group has vowed to wage a campaign against any new runways in the UK.

www.planestupid.com

Development groups

Groups working on poverty reduction in the developing world are increasingly adding their voices to our campaign. War on Want signed the ‘great and good’ letter that launched the *rethink!* campaign; the author of Christian Aid’s recent report into climate change spoke at Airport-Watch’s Labour fringe meeting, and we have been in discussion with other groups around an aviation campaign for 2007. These groups have a huge and committed membership and co-ordinated the unprecedented Make Poverty History campaign.

www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/605caweek/index.htm

Faith groups

Readers may have noted the Bishop of London’s well-publicised remarks that flying is ‘a symptom of sin’. The Bishop sparked a debate within the Church, reflecting the growing awareness of climate change amongst faith groups. AEF recently spoke to the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility, who proved to be a warm and receptive audience.

www.eccr.org.uk/news_main.html

POLITICS

Conservatives

David Cameron has put environmentalism at the core of his party’s modernisation, setting up the Quality of Life commission to examine all areas of policy, including a sub-group on aviation. Environmentalists, including AEF, are well represented on the group, and although there will be no official announcements for some time there are indications that the party is moving towards a more restrained approach than that espoused by New Labour.

Shadow Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has publicly expressed his reservations about the scale of expansion envisaged in the White Paper, while David Cameron recently told the BBC: “If [tackling climate change] means putting a tax on air travel, then yes, that’s something we’d be prepared to do.”

Liberal Democrats

The Lib Dems published their aviation policy in March and it was endorsed at their spring conference. The policy is the greenest yet backed by any of the three main parties, ruling out new runways at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, but keeping regional expansion options open. It contains the goal of stabilising aviation emissions, and aims to achieve it by internalising aviation’s costs through a reformed, increased Air Passenger Duty tied more closely to actual carbon emissions, and extended to cover freight aircraft.

Labour

Many backbench Labour MPs have long expressed concern over aviation policy. More recently, junior ministers and even members of the Cabinet have been heard discussing how the Government might go further and faster. Climate Change Minister Ian Pearson told a meeting of the Royal Aeronautical Society that ‘we are exploring using [air passenger duty] to capture emissions costs’, while a leaked letter from his boss David Miliband to Gordon Brown called for a rise in APD, as well as an examination of the VAT status of air travel (currently zero-rated, the rating most beneficial to the airline industry).

Hope springs eternal.

Environmental Audit Committee (EAC)

In August the EAC published *Reducing Carbon Emission from Transport*. The report noted wearily that ‘between July 2003 and September 2004, our predecessor Committee produced no fewer than four very critical reports on the Government’s aviation policy.’ Their latest report is a return to the fray, repeating earlier calls to ‘grasp the nettle’ of aviation taxation by raising Air Passenger Duty, and (gratifyingly) urging the DfT to ‘widen the terms of its current progress review... into a fundamental **rethink** of its airport expansion policy’.

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmenvaud/981/98108.htm