

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-020-2008/09
Date of meeting: 1 September 2008



Portfolio: Planning and Economic Development

Subject: Stansted Airport Generation 2 proposals - a Second Runway and other related Infrastructure.

Responsible Officer: Ian White (01992-564066).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To object to the applications on the grounds that:
 - (a) urbanisation pressures, traffic generation and air noise would in the long term seriously damage the quality of life and the predominantly rural/small town character of the surrounding area, including the northern parts of this District;
 - (b) insufficient arrangements have been made for infrastructure and its timely provision; and
 - (c) the project is inconsistent with Government's carbon reduction targets.
- (2) To support the recommendations of the Sustainable Development Commission and the Institute for Public Policy Research calling for an independent review of the Air Transport White Paper (ATWP) 2003.

Executive Summary:

BAA submitted 38 planning applications to Uttlesford Council in March 2008 for a second runway at Stansted Airport with associated buildings and other facilities, highway works, the change of use of agricultural land to use for nature conservation, common land and village green, and the demolition and reconstruction of numerous listed buildings. The applications were supported by a number of statements, some of which were extremely lengthy and detailed (eg the Environmental Statement alone comprised 17 volumes, some of which were over 400 pages long).

Uttlesford extended the original consultation deadline from the end of June to the end of September to allow some extra time for consideration of this material. On 21 July the Government called the applications in so that they will be considered at a Public Inquiry. This is expected to start in 2009 and to take around 12 months to hear all the evidence. A final decision is not expected before 2011.

The recommendations of Cabinet will be sent to Uttlesford to meet the revised 26 September deadline, and that council will pass all such comments on to the Public Inquiry.

From this District's perspective, the main issues to be considered are:

- Impact on climate change;

- Environmental safeguards dealing with noise and urbanisation;
- Timely provision of infrastructure including public transport, roads, education, health and a range of housing, including affordable housing;
- “Surface access” strategy which reflects and responds adequately to the aim of the East of England Plan to achieve a major modal shift away from use of the private car; and
- Achievement of the claimed benefits for the West Essex/East Herts area – eg job growth and regeneration of Harlow.

Despite the huge bulk of supporting material for the applications, off-airport issues appear to be given relatively little attention. This is worrying and contrary to Government exhortation to pursue “joined-up” or holistic planning, particularly for a scheme which inevitably has much wider implications and consequences. The sheer volume of material is almost self-defeating and it does raise questions about the ability of small-staffed councils to deal with consultations of this type. In this case, much of the background reading and analysis was carried out by a planning consultant.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Council has always opposed a second runway at Stansted because of long-term adverse effects on the character of the area and on the quality of life of affected residents. These issues include aircraft noise, traffic generation, urbanisation pressures and infrastructure provision. Nothing in the applications or the supporting documentation alleviates these concerns.

Climate change is a different type of problem, requiring collective international action on an unprecedented scale. The Government should heed the concerns of the Sustainable Development Commission and Institute for Public Policy Research about contradictory data and evidence, and postpone any decision on expansion of Stansted and Heathrow Airports until after the 2003 Air Transport White Paper has been reviewed by a Special Commission.

Other Options for Action:

Not responding to the consultation would lose the opportunity to press the Council’s case for greater consideration of the adverse effects of the development on the locality, and would be inconsistent with the Cabinet recommendations of 25 November 2002 on “The Future Development of Air Transport in the South-East”.

Report:

Growth of Stansted Airport

1. Civil aviation flights began in 1946. Operations remained fairly low key until 1985 when outline planning permission was granted for the current passenger terminal. This increased capacity from about one million passengers per annum (mppa) to fifteen million. The terminal opened in 1991.
2. A further planning permission in 2003 increased the capacity to 25mppa, with an extension to the terminal and other infrastructure improvements. The annual number of flights was set at 241,000 air transport movements (ATM) of which no more than 22,500 could be cargo ATM. The airport is now the third busiest in the UK and handled 23.7 mppa in 2006. Between 1995 and 2006 throughput increased six-fold from 3.9 mppa to nearly 24 mppa.
3. In November 2006 Uttlesford Council refused an application (Stansted Generation 1)

to increase the number of annual ATMs to 264,000, of which only 20,500 would be cargo flights. The increase of ATMs would have raised Stansted's capacity to 35 mppa. This Council objected by letter to that application and prepared statements for the subsequent appeal and Public Inquiry which commenced in May 2007. A final decision has not yet been reached as more information is being sought by the Government about issues involving night flights.

4. The Air Transport White Paper 2003 contains the Government's strategy for the development of air travel to 2030. Among its recommendations is a proposal for a second runway at Stansted Airport. The current set of applications (Stansted Generation 2) is a consequence of that recommendation.

Outline of the Stansted Generation 2 Project

5. There are 3 elements:

- (a) expansion of the airport by the provision of a second runway and associated facilities;
- (b) new junctions on the M11 and A120 to provide improved access; and
- (c) provision of a second rail tunnel and fourth platform to improve rail access.

38 applications were submitted to Uttlesford Council in March covering these issues.

6. Airport expansion itself can be split into five discrete parts:

- (i) development on the airport itself which includes the new runway, terminal building and associated engineering works, demolition of listed buildings and removal of scheduled monuments;
- (ii) stopping up and diversion of local roads, and construction of replacement routes;
- (iii) offsetting measures which include nature conservation and landscaping, erection of barns and reconstruction of formerly listed buildings;
- (iv) off-site utilities including surface water drainage and an aviation fuel pipeline; and
- (v) airspace changes.

7. Supporting material to the applications advises that changes to airspace are governed by the Civil Aviation Authority, and that proposals for airspace change are dealt with as close as possible in time to the date when they are required to be implemented. This ensures that any changes take account of the most recent developments in technology and airspace management. As the second runway would not open until 2015, it is premature to include details now. It is intended, however, that the runways would operate in segregated mode – ie all take-offs from and landings on the new runway would take place to and from the north east, while all movements to and from the existing runway would take place to and from the south west. This latter arrangement obviously has potential noise implications for the north and west of the district. The Planning Statement accompanying the applications acknowledges this giving the following description: "Flying activity would be intensified to the south-west of the existing runway...changes to the noise preferential route move the contours further west, now travelling south-west of the M11 motorway, just east of Sawbridgeworth."

8. By the time the project is expected to be completed (2030) annual ATMs should total 495,000, and this would include 68mppa – almost doubling the current capacity.

UK Aviation Policy and Climate Change

9. Despite the continued existence of some doubters, there is now widespread agreement in the scientific community that the climate is changing, and that this is occurring mainly because of human activity, in particular the production of greenhouse gases. The Government has set strict carbon reduction targets for the period up to 2050 in an attempt to address the problem, although similar, or even tougher, action is required on an international scale in the interests of controlling or reversing climate change.

10. Projections for large increases in aviation volume, as outlined in the 2003 Air Transport White Paper, have raised questions about the Government's commitment to carbon reduction, and the contribution the aviation industry makes to greenhouse gas emissions. The Stansted Generation 2 Sustainability Report, for instance, anticipates that carbon emissions from aviation will increase from 6% of the UK total to 30% by 2030. As a result of these questions the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), with the Institute of Public Policy Research, ran a "Stakeholder Assessment" on aviation in 2007 and 2008, inviting the views of business, industry representatives, governments, academia, NGOs and citizen's groups. (The SDC is the Government's independent adviser on sustainable development and produces evidence-based reports on contentious environmental, social and economic issues. It also acts as a watchdog on Government progress to achieve sustainable development.)

11. The Assessment discovered that there is general frustration and confusion about a lack of agreed data and transparency in the debate on UK aviation. It also established that much basic evidence on which current and future policy is based is in dispute.

12. The SDC therefore recommended this year that a Special Commission be established to undertake a major independent review of UK aviation policy. Issues to be covered would include economic benefits, emission and noise reduction targets, and a fair fiscal climate for aviation (eg the proposal to replace air passenger duty with aviation duty). Crucially, the SDC also recommends that the Government should commit to revise the Air Transport White Paper, informed by the findings of the Special Commission. It is not known what the Government's response has been to the SDC report, if any, but timing is very important. In 2008 and 2009, the Government is expected to make major decisions on airport expansion at Heathrow as well as Stansted, and between 2009 and 2011 to develop the ATWP into a National Policy Statement on aviation, looking forward to at least 2030.

13. Officers believe that the recommendations of the SDC are sensible and should be supported, given (i) the disagreements and concerns underlying previous policy work on aviation, and (ii) the sheer importance and magnitude of the issue of climate change. The decision on establishing a Special Commission obviously lies with the Government, but the implications for Stansted Generation 2 are potentially profound. At the very least the timetable for implementation could be affected, but it is also conceivable that the principle of the entire project could be questioned.

Localised Issues Potentially Affecting the District

14. Urbanisation – policy E7 of the East of England Plan (EEP) advises that employment development not directly related to the airport's operation, and housing related to employment growth at the airfield, should be located at Harlow "and nearby towns". The EEP already requires urban extensions of Harlow into this district to meet some of the target of 16,000 new homes by 2021. These urbanisation pressures could further increase if Stansted was required to deal with more long haul flights, or if its role was increased to that of a hub airport – a second runway is likely to increase these possibilities. Officers believe that the

environmental capacity to accommodate such pressures does not exist, either in the countryside around Harlow (i.e. including East Herts), or through intensification or expansion of existing built-up areas in this district. The current EEP proposals are challenging enough, particularly as no figures have been given for the sizes of the various proposed urban extensions to Harlow.

15. Aircraft noise – the Environmental Statement uses “average” noise contours to give the impression that the more serious problems are not anticipated within the district. But averages do not give the whole picture. Previous submissions by the Council show that local residents, particularly to the west of Harlow, have been disturbed or upset by excessive noise during the night and outdoors in summer months at peak travel times. Paragraph (7) above shows that ATMs to the southwest of the existing runway could increase greatly, with potentially significant adverse effects for residents in the north and west of the district.

16. Surface Access Strategy – policy T2 of the EEP is about changing travel behaviour, ie encouraging a modal shift away from private car use to more sustainable forms of transport. It is vital that a co-ordinated access strategy, involving improvements to existing public transport services, is in place to serve the airport as the project develops, otherwise there could be significant congestion on roads in the district and on public transport networks. Policy T12 of the EEP (Access to Airports) emphasises that “a key priority is to ensure airport surface access provision reinforces the shift to more sustainable travel”.

17. Given the proposed increase in passenger numbers over the period 2015 to 2030, it is particularly important that public transport plays a significant role in the London to Stansted travel corridor. There is some confusion in the supporting documents about the percentage of passengers who may use public transport. The Sustainability Report includes an aim that the public transport mode share should increase from 39% in 2005 to 50% by 2030. The Environmental Statement: Transport chapter includes a “base case stabilisation” figure of 44% between 2015 and 2030. Officers are concerned that neither target seems particularly ambitious and that increased car traffic between London and Harlow could have severe negative impacts on local roads, with consequent effects on local businesses and the quality of life of residents.

18. BAA states that bus and coach services to and from Stansted could quadruple by 2030, using a variety of origins/destinations in London. It is working with operators and local authorities to improve services. Officers believe there is an opportunity here to bring about increased coach services for Epping Forest residents, as well as for airport employees and users.

19. The capacity of the West Anglia Main Line (WAML) will be increased by:

- (i) introduction of longer trains and airport dedicated peak period services; and
- (ii) in the longer term providing additional track to the Lee Valley network, improving Tottenham Hale station and lengthening some platforms.

20. The Government has initiated a study of these proposals but at this stage there is no commitment to a scheme, programme or funding. Officers believe that, if a detailed scheme is produced, it needs to take into account impact on local commuter services and on local roads with level crossings ie in Roydon and Lower Sheering/Sawbridgeworth. With the former, if peak period services to and from Stansted are increased, this could of necessity reduce the frequency of services to Roydon station with a negative impact on local commuting, contrary to EEP sustainable travel aims. Overcrowding on some of the remaining services is inevitable. With the latter, the problems of traffic build up in Roydon have been reported in detail in previous comments on Stansted expansion. Increasing the frequency of

peak period trains to Stansted can only worsen this problem, as the level crossing will be used more often and possibly for longer periods.

21. The capacity of the M11 between the M25 and Stansted is forecast to be exceeded while the Airport expands. Initial consultation on a widening scheme for this section of the M11 was carried out earlier this year but, as with the WAML, there is no commitment to a scheme, programme or funding. A major criticism of the consultation was that it took no account of Harlow growth, the need for a bypass, and the need for that road to link with the M11 (ie new junction 7A). The EEP obviously does not help here, as it side-steps a decision on the bypass, but officers contend that planning the future of this section of the M11 is a prime example of where there should be “joined-up” strategic thinking. The existing junction 7 is notorious for being over capacity at peak travelling periods.

22. A “resilience” strategy is needed for those occasions when the M11 has to be closed. Officers believe that traffic should be diverted to strategic roads designed to take this type of traffic – ie A10/A12/A120, rather than burdening unsuitable roads in this district. Such a strategy is still under discussion, which is rather unsatisfactory.

23. Infrastructure – timely provision is crucial, not only for the airport itself and access to it, but also for the airport-related off-site employment and housing. This has implications for the success of Harlow regeneration and for future development in this district. As the Stansted Generation 2 project is partly complementary to Harlow’s growth and regeneration, progress with the latter cannot take place without new infrastructure matching the Stansted growth timetable, and officers therefore believe that there is a clear case for BAA to contribute to the funding of some of Harlow’s infrastructure. Facilities key to Harlow’s future success include internal public transport, increased healthcare and education provision, and a northern bypass linking to the M11.

24. Provision of affordable housing should also be seen as an important aspect of infrastructure. The airport will provide employment opportunities mainly for lower income groups, but the presence of off-site businesses is likely to have an upward effect on house prices in the catchment area. The 2003 Housing Needs Survey identified a considerable need for affordable housing in the district, and recent surveys suggest that this need has increased. The Stansted project will only add to that need and, because of this and the fact that the district is within the airport’s construction and operational employment catchment areas, there is a similar case for BAA contributions to the cost of providing affordable housing in this District.

25. Economic benefits – BAA argues that the district will gain from Stansted growth through increased access to a range of jobs and the fact that the expanded airport will be a stimulus for new businesses. It seems likely that such benefits will only accrue if, as has been argued above, there is convenient access by public transport and if there is sufficient information/advertising and training to encourage interest. The District is not a priority area for economic regeneration but it does have pockets of high unemployment, and BAA or its economic development advisers should not overlook this.

26. The Council would not wish to stand in the way of new small and medium-sized businesses, as long as their location satisfied other planning criteria, but officers are concerned that high house prices and evidence of significant out-commuting can deter investment. For these reasons they believe that opportunities for new businesses to locate in the area are more likely to occur in Harlow, reducing the potential economic benefits for this District.

Conclusions

27. Officers remain concerned about urbanisation pressures, traffic generation and aircraft noise. They are not persuaded that adequate arrangements have been made for the timely provision of infrastructure, or indeed that all infrastructure needs have been identified. There is also a lack of conviction concerning the claimed economic benefits. The conclusion from a district perspective has to be that the Stansted Generation 2 Project would, in the long term, seriously damage the quality of life enjoyed by many local residents and adversely affect the predominantly rural/small settlement character of much of the locality.

28. While obviously not part of the applications, officers feel it is worth endorsing the recommendations of the Sustainable Development Commission on the future of UK Aviation Policy – ie that the 2003 Air Transport White Paper should be fundamentally and independently reviewed before any long-term strategic decisions are taken on Stansted (and Heathrow) expansion.

Resource Implications:

The Council may need to be represented at the Public inquiry in 2009.

Legal and Governance Implications:

No obvious implications.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The report outlines concerns about aircraft noise, urbanisation pressures and traffic congestion.

Consultation Undertaken:

The report is the response to a consultation from Uttlesford Council.

Background Papers:

Cabinet Report 25 November 2002 on The Future Development of Air Transport in the South-East; BAA Planning Statement on Stansted Generation 2 (March 2008); BAA Stansted Airport Project Non-Technical Summary (March 2008); East of England Plan (May 2008); Sustainable Development Commission – Breaking the Holding Pattern: a New Approach to Aviation Policy Making in the UK (2008).

Impact Assessments:

The applications have been subject to a number of assessments which are documented in the voluminous supporting material. Much of this remains unread.