

Cabinet 30 June 2003

29. THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT IN THE SOUTH-EAST – SECOND EDITION

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder presented a further report on "The Future Development of Air Transport in the South-East (SERAS)" consultation by the Government. A number of comments had previously been sent to the Department of Transport as the District Council's response to the consultation. In its initial consultation the District Council had asked that Gatwick Airport also be taken into account and its viability for expansion be assessed to allow comparisons of airports on a like for like basis. A Judicial Review was sought by Essex County Council, Kent County Council and Medway Council to include Gatwick in the consultation, and at the end of November, the High Court had determined that it was wrong to exclude from that consultation options for the development of new runways at Gatwick. The Government had decided not to appeal this judgement and as a result a second round of consultation had begun, including options looking at new runways at Gatwick Airport. The Portfolio Holder advised that following this second consultation it was still the intention that a Government White Paper would be produced that would formulate a UK airport policy and new policies on civil aviation. Members felt that the observations previously made were still relevant and should be reaffirmed in the proposed response as well as additional observations about constraining or managing air travel demand and the importance of surface public transport links.

Decisions:

(1) That the Department of Transport be advised that the District Council reaffirms its previous views about air transport taken by the full Council on 26 November 2002, namely:

(a) urges the Government to reject the 'predict and provide' approach and introduce measures to constrain unfettered air travel demand in order to better match air transport provision generally with environmental and infrastructure capacity in a sustainable manner; and therefore not assume an overriding need to provide a second or alternative hub;

(b) urges the Government to direct proactively demand to regional airports elsewhere in the country, where there is potentially greater capacity and local benefit e.g. Doncaster;

(c) stresses that, so far as Stansted is concerned, the consultative documents and the cost/benefit analysis therein fail to deal adequately with a fundamental issue, namely the adverse impacts of large scale urbanisation, economic stimulus and traffic generation upon the predominantly rural character and limited infrastructure of West Essex/East Herts - long recognised as a fundamental constraint for strategic planning purposes (the outcomes of the current development capacity studies of the central part of London – Stansted – Cambridge corridor must be taken into account); in addition, noise disturbance is particularly intrusive in a rural (as opposed to urban) environment; and no account has been taken of the provision of education or health services;

(d) is therefore opposed to any further runways at Stansted;

(e) is of the view that:

(i) any further significant increase in passenger numbers at Stansted should be accompanied by appropriate new public transport links at a very early stage in order to ensure adequate and sustainable access comparable with other airports; and

(ii) whilst maintaining opposition in principle to further runways a second runway not located close to the existing runway will result in unnecessary land-take;

(f) seeks firm assurances that sites within Epping Forest District rightly discounted at the preliminary site search stage will not be revisited; and

(g) seeks clarification about operational consequences of Stansted expansion for future aviation use of North Weald and Stapleford Airfields.

(2) That in addition to (1) above and having regard to the second edition consultation document the Government be urged to:

(a) review tax exemptions currently in place for the aviation industry so that these are withdrawn over a phased period to provide a level playing field for all transportation types;

(b) introduce significant public transport links between the UK's largest airports so as to allow more flexibility in travel choice;

(c) introduce significant additional public transport links to all UK airports, to increase a shift in modal use away from cars as the primary method for both employees and travellers getting to UK airports.

(3) That members would oppose any further runways and note that a non-land based option has not been put forward by the Government; and

(4) That the Council's observations to the Department of Transport be made known to local MPs and to other Essex authorities.

Reason for Decision:

The Cabinet considered it vital to make comments on proposals with such far-reaching implications because ultimate guidance would influence the future development in and the protection of this District.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

The only other option was to make no response to the Government consultation. This was rejected because this would fail to record the views of the local community and the Council.