

PRESS RELEASE

From Concerned residents Against Staverton Expansion (CASE)

For Immediate Release: 11th Jan 2009

The flawed case for Gloucestershire Airport – a challenge to councillors

Proposals to develop Gloucestershire airport are one of the biggest threats yet to Gloucestershire's environment and to the wellbeing of people in Gloucester and Cheltenham.

Local groups Concerned residents Against Staverton Expansion (CASE) and Gloucestershire Airport Action Group (GAAG) are calling on Gloucester City Councillors to reject the airport's development proposals at their 15th January meeting.

These groups have issued a checklist to councillors on why the airport plans should not proceed, set out below. The checklist shows why the airport's case for the developments is without any foundation. The developments are about equipping the airport for intensifying its operations.

The campaigners have also issued three challenges to local councillors, covering the non-existent housing threat to the airport, the councils' failure to consider the airport's environmental and social impacts, and that lack of independent scrutiny of the airport's business case.

Addressing aviation growth is one of the most crucial environmental issues of our times – it is not something which councillors should shrug off and go through the motions on. Councillors must act responsibly to halt the airport developments, for the sake of local people, Gloucestershire's environment and the drive to combat climate change.

“We urge councillors to face the real impacts of aviation growth. This will mean more jets and helicopters in particular, with all their impacts. They will be like buzzing insects permanently in your face – only you can't swat these ones away. If the lid comes off Gloucestershire airport we will all pay a heavy price” said Neil Marshall, of CASE.

“The airport has not indicated how it will manage in the face of the 80% CO2 cut legislated by the climate change bill” said Kevin Lister, of GAAG

Finally, In the words of the Government's own Sustainable Development Commission, Chaired by Sir Jonathan Porritt, the supposed benefits of airports are played up by aviation proponents: “With so much evidence in dispute, we believe that those who are in favour of increasing the use of flying have not yet sufficiently demonstrated the case”.

THE CHECKLIST

Expansion now:

The proposals amount to expansion and intensification of the airport's current operations. The airport is pushing for a cap that is 22,000 flights per year greater than current levels. The airport has refused to rule out extending opening hours, and have proposed that hours should be 6am until 10.30pm¹.

Expansion in future:

The developments would equip the airport to take opportunities to expand in future. An airport will seek opportunities to grow and expand. In particular, Gloucestershire Airport will have to grow to pay for the investment needed to implement these plans.

No CAA requirement for the airport's proposals:

Contrary to the airport's insistence that its plans are needed to comply with CAA requirements, it has now been confirmed that the Civil Aviation Authority is content that the existing runway and infrastructure complies with the airport's current activities.²

No proper scrutiny:

The supposed scrutiny of the airport's case by Cheltenham and Gloucester councils has been superficial and partial. It has amounted to aviation consultants and business consultants asking for the views and clarifications of the airport and airport related businesses. This does not amount to a rounded view on the economic costs and benefits of the airport and it has ignored any consideration of the environmental and social costs.

Sending the wrong signals on fighting climate change:

Combating climate change is a political priority. A return flight from Gloucestershire airport amounts to half on a person's annual carbon balance under the Climate Change Bill. At a time when people are travel planning, car sharing, using public transport, and teleconferencing, our councils must show some responsibility and curb the amount of flying, not permit ever more of it.

No threat of housing:

There is no planning context for housing at the airport and the area's housing allocation is already set. The housing issue is a scare story advanced by the airport. Scaremongering about housing should not be used as a smokescreen for permitting airport developments.

No jobs are at risk:

Less than 10% of the jobs based around the airport site are directly related to aviation, corresponding to 0.16% of the Glos economy. There is no evidence that any of these jobs would be threatened if the airport developments are not implemented.³

¹ Report by Chief Executive to Gloucester City Council, 15/01/2009 (RMD200818) p.43 para 6.5

² Report by Chief Executive to Gloucester City Council, 15/01/2009 (RMD200818) p.53 para 14

³ Report by Chief Executive to Gloucester City Council, 15/01/2009 (RMD200818) p.44 para 7.2,3

THE CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE ONE: Specify the housing threat

Some councillors have stated that houses would be built on the airport if its developments did not go ahead. This is a scare story from the airport lobby with no foundation. It should not influence crucial decisions on whether airport developments go ahead. We challenge the councillors making these claims, who include Jeremy Hilton and Bill Whelan, to substantiate these claims or to retract them.

CHALLENGE TWO: Address the airport's environmental and social impacts

There has been no review of the airport's negative impacts on the environment and on people's wellbeing. The airport's planning applications are bitterly contested by individuals, Parish Councils and local organisations, but Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City have taken no action to study the negative effects of the airport. The Green Policy is a toothless set of guidelines which the airport has already asked to be diluted, and which a private owner of the airport would not be bound by. We challenge councillors to point to an assessment of the environmental and social impacts of the airport. In the absence of this, it would be wholly irresponsible to proceed with the developments.

CHALLENGE THREE: Undertake an independent review of the airport's business case

An assessment of the airport's business case was presented by CASE to Gloucester City Councillors in December. It was met with stony silence because councillors are not informed about this matter. They have only heard the airport's special pleading. We challenge the two councils to undertake an independent review of the business case, to proceed without one, and to ignore the worrying evidence on the business plan presented in the CASE presentation, would not be responsible governance.⁴

Contacts:

Kevin Lister (GAAG) - 07768 991063
Neil Marshall (CASE) - 01452 854483 / 07973 327375

Notes For Editor:

[1] On Thursday 15th January 2009 at 7:30pm Gloucester City Council will meet and appear minded to approve the expansion of Gloucestershire Airport. Protesters from CASE, GAAG and Plane Stupid will be attending the meeting to ask public questions about the development.

[2] The Concerned residents Against Staverton Expansion have a website giving an excellent account of their objections to the Airport's plans. See www.case-online.org.uk.

⁴ Report available on CASE website :
<http://www.case-online.org.uk/docs/CASE%20Report%20for%20GCC.pdf>