

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Appeal by Bristol Airport Limited

Bristol Airport, North Side Road, Felton, Bristol

Appeal Reference: APP/D0121/W/20/3259234

Opening Statement on behalf of BALPA

July 2021

Introduction

1. My name is Andrew Renshaw. I am a chartered town planner with some 40 years experience.
2. I am representing the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA), which is the professional association and registered trade union established to represent the interests of all UK pilots. BALPA represents over 85% of all commercial pilots flying in the UK and represents pilots of all the airlines based at Bristol airport. Staff working for airlines based at Bristol airport account for over 30% of the total employees.
3. BALPA's case relates to a relatively narrow area of the appeal, reason for refusal 4, which concerns the proposed extension to the Silver Zone car park, which is situated within the Green Belt. The decision notice states that there are no very special circumstances which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt caused by inappropriateness. The appellant accepts the need to justify inappropriate development.
4. BALPA agrees with North Somerset Council that the appellant has not demonstrated that very special circumstances exist in this instance.
5. BALPA's objection to the proposal relates to the Parking Strategy, and particularly the parking arrangements for staff. Its objections are two-fold:
 - a. Firstly, that the appellant has not considered the reasonable (and we say preferable) alternative to the proposed extension to the Silver Zone car park of relocating some or all of the Staff Parking closer to the terminal, within the Green Belt inset;
 - b. Secondly, the proposal perpetuates a parking arrangement for staff – and specifically for air crew – which is inadequate, gives rise to very real flight safety concerns and generates massive unnecessary vehicle mileage.

Context

6. BALPA's case starts with an examination of the changes that have been made to staff car parking through the previous outline planning permission, changes that BALPA and other unions were not made aware of at the time. BALPA was not even identified in the list of stakeholders meriting direct consultation prior to the submission of the present appeal application.
7. The changes proposed in the 2011 outline planning permission removed staff car parking from the north side of the airport (near to the terminal, outside the Green Belt) to the Silver Zone area (within the Green Belt and about a 7 minute bus ride away), which was substantially enlarged as part of the outline planning permission. It is clear that the implications of such a change were not fully

appreciated by the planning authority. At the same time outline planning permission was granted for two multi storey car parks in the Green Belt Inset area to the north of the airport.

8. After the staff car parking was moved to the Silver Zone to the south of the airport in 2018, displacing passenger parking, part of the relocated staff car park was then used to develop the replacement administration building under permitted development rights (though contrary to the development plan approved under the 2011 outline planning permission.) The consequence was a further loss of low cost parking as the car parking area had to be reconfigured.

Very Special Circumstances/Reasonable Alternatives

9. The appellant's parking demand study submitted with the appeal application points to a growing need for low cost parking, the size of which is contested by North Somerset Council. The appellant wants additional space by way of an early extension to the Silver Zone car park into the Green Belt for an additional 2,700 low cost car parking spaces. It would appear that, at the same time', the appellant does not see the need for the early provision of the multi-storey car parking in the Green Belt inset.
10. BALPA will demonstrate the inefficiency of using former Silver Zone car parking for staff parking. It will show that if staff parked in the north side within the Green Belt inset (either on surface parking or within a multi-storey car park), potentially 1400 low cost car park spaces could be made available in the Silver Zone without the need to develop Green Belt land and this could be achieved quickly.
11. BALPA will demonstrate by way of empirical evidence that there is spare capacity for staff to park northside even in the summer months, when the demand for airport car parking is greatest.
12. In its evidence BALPA also considers the cost implications of such an arrangement and, on the evidence available to it, demonstrates that this would appear to have a minimal financial impact on the airport. Furthermore that assessment takes no account of the significant cost to the airport of the buses it provides to ferry staff daily back and forth from the car park to their place of work northside.
13. Therefore, BAL has failed to consider the relocation of some or all of the staff car parking as a reasonable alternative to the extent of development in the Green Belt that they are seeking by way of the proposed Silver Zone extension.
14. Indeed, not only would the relocation of staff car parking to the Green Belt inset be a *reasonable* alternative to at least some of the proposed Silver Zone extension, BALPA considers that it would be the *preferred* solution.

15. Principally this is because it would overcome the flight safety concerns which I touch upon later. However, such an alternative would also give rise to sustainability benefits.
16. In normal times, for most employees (the exceptions being Air Traffic Control staff and the airport's own administrative department), there is a daily exodus of staff parked in the remote car park back to the airport adding unnecessary traffic on the A38 and generating massive unnecessary bus mileage, which is not sustainable.
17. The airport is rightly looking to ensure that sustainable travel by passengers and staff is maximised. The proposed strategy for staff parking is simply that the airport won't be providing any more car parking so employees will just have to change their mode of travel. However, BALPA will highlight the discrepancy between the comments in the draft Workplace Travel Plan, which notes the difficulties that the 60% of staff working variable shifts, such as air crew, have in travelling by means other than the car early morning and late at night, and the target for sustainable travel by staff.
18. It follows that the failure by the appellant to consider the reasonable alternative to the Silver Zone extension of relocating some or all of the staff car parking to the Green Belt inset, nearer to the terminal, undermines BAL's very special circumstances case.

Adequacy of Parking/Flight Safety

19. BALPA will argue that the parking strategy for staff is contrary to Core Strategy policy CS11, which states that adequate parking must be provided and managed to meet the needs of anticipated users.
20. In particular, BALPA's evidence also illustrates that there are significant flight safety implications arising from the separation of the staff car park from the northside of the airport, where the aircrew report. BALPA's evidence has set out the legal requirement on aircrew to ensure sufficient rest between duties. The location of the staff parking threatens the achievement of sufficient rest for certain crew who have a longer commute, as a result of the additional time required to get to the airport from the car parking, due to the extra journey time allowance caused by the need to transfer to the staff bus. It also adds additional and unnecessary uncertainty caused to the length of the commute. As will be explained these are legitimate and real concerns that have been shared by pilots with BALPA's representative.
21. Indeed, BALPA will show that the airport has previously recognised that the sensible and appropriate location for most staff car parking is close to the terminal.
22. BALPA understands that the Inspectors have preliminary concerns in respect of the appropriateness of considering the merits of the location of the staff car

parking – and its impact on flight safety - because its relocation was undertaken following an earlier permission and would have been considered by the Council at that time.

23. BALPA considers it is reasonable and appropriate to address this matter as part of the appeal for the following reasons.
24. First, the application proposes the retention of staff car parking in its current location as part of the Parking Strategy. Moreover, the staff car park falls within the red-line boundary on the proposed site plans. The retention therefore forms part of the proposal under consideration at this appeal.
25. Second, it is clear that the location of staff car parking was not considered in any depth by the Council as part of the 2011 outline planning submission, but only as part of the overall justification for expanding the Silver Zone car park into the Green Belt. As noted earlier, BALPA considers that its location raises significant issues regarding flight safety.
26. Third, the inadequacies of the current (and proposed) arrangements are such that the proposed relocation to within the Green Belt Inset in BALPA's view is an obvious reasonable alternative to extension of part or all of the Silver Zone.
27. There was a meeting last week with the airport management regarding the location of staff car parking, but I understand the airport did not consider that any change was necessary.
28. Accordingly, BALPA considers that the location of staff car parking is a material consideration for the determination of the appeal. It contends that it would be reasonable and proportionate to hear its evidence in relation to the location of the staff car parking and in particular flight safety issues (which would not be of significant length in the context of this appeal).
29. However, BALPA would only wish to give evidence on these matters, and take up what it recognises is valuable inquiry time, if the Inspectors consider it to be capable of being material to their determination (including material to the imposition of conditions). If having heard this opening the Inspectors remain of the view that such matters are immaterial to their determination, BALPA will not call evidence on this matter and will restrict itself to the very special circumstances case (albeit inevitably there is a degree of overlap). BALPA would request further guidance from the Inspectors on this matter.

Conclusion

30. To conclude, BALPA will demonstrate that the car parking strategy has failed to justify why there are very special circumstances to permit the scale of expansion of car parking into the Green Belt and, subject to clarification of the Inspectors' position, will also wish to present evidence that the location of staff car parking has potential flight safety implications.