

## Bristol Airport Appeal Inquiry, 23 July 2021

Thank you so much for the opportunity to address this Inquiry.

I'd like to make 4 brief points this afternoon:

- On local democracy
- On **new recommendations from the Climate Change Committee** about the importance of demand management measures for aviation
- On ensuring **fairness** is at the heart of policy making
- On the **local economy and jobs**

But first, I'm sure I'm not the first witness to point out the bitter irony of debating the expansion of infrastructure to enable further growth in what is already one of the fastest growing sources of GHG - at exactly the time that the evidence of climate breakdown is even more visible all around us – deadly floods in Europe, wildfires in Siberia, heatwaves in North America.

### 1. Local Democracy

As a Member of Parliament from the Green Party, while I'm alarmed on a daily basis by the Government's ongoing failure to respond to the climate crisis at the speed and scale that the science demands, **I'm also encouraged by how local communities are coming together** to take action to address the climate emergency themselves.

These local sustainability initiatives may well prove to be essential to our survival. We should value them, knowing they work best when locally generated and regionally supported.

So here with Bristol Airport, we have local people challenging plans to expand the local airport, in an era of accelerating climate crisis.

Local democracy thoroughly considered the airport's plans and decided against them. Despite this, the airport has now ignored these voices and called for this appeal.

**Not only does this threaten to override local democracy, it also threatens the efforts that local communities and councils are trying to take to address the climate crisis themselves.**

I understand that - as well as in North Somerset where the airport is situated - all the surrounding councils and administrative areas have declared climate emergencies and have plans to be carbon neutral by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

This isn't just rhetoric – it's backed by clear plans to reach carbon neutrality and to ensure the climate crisis is considered in every council decision.<sup>2</sup>

Just last month, for example, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) agreed to review its climate change policy to make it more ambitious and accountable<sup>3</sup>. This will be embedded into local planning, to facilitate change.

North Somerset Councillors understood this future direction of travel and showed foresight when making their decision about the airport.

If airport expansion goes ahead, **it will fundamentally undermine these local efforts because of the extra carbon emissions associated with two million additional passengers.**

And the cost of these emissions simply isn't being reflected in decision-making.

As the thinktank, the New Economics Foundation has explained, and I quote,

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<sup>1</sup> North Somerset <https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/council-democracy/priorities-strategies/climate-emergency/our-plans-tackle-climate-change>  
Bath & North East Somerset <https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/climate-emergency>  
South Gloucestershire <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/climate-emergency-in-south-gloucestershire/>  
Bristol <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/policies-plans-strategies/council-action-on-climate-change>  
WECA <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/clean-growth/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/North%20Somerset%20Climate%20Emergency%20Action%20Plan%20Update%20Jan2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://thebristolcable.org/2021/07/weca-scraps-its-climate-plan-not-ambitious-enough/> and <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/clean-growth/>

*‘Expansion scheme promoters have failed to account for the monetised cost of emissions caused by expansion, collectively worth £2.4 billion to 13.4 billion, and have overstated the economic case for expansion. Around 65% of this emissions cost will not be captured by current regulations on the aviation sector and will therefore be borne by society, either in the costs of capturing emissions elsewhere in the economy or in the social damage resulting from climate change.’<sup>4</sup>*

If expansion goes ahead, what message does it send to the public, already unsure about how best to contribute to climate mitigation? What message does it send, in the lead up to COP26, of our seriousness about playing our part in dealing with the climate crisis?

## **2. Demand management**

The Committee on Climate Change published its Progress Report last month, and had an important section on recommendations for the aviation sector, from which I’d like to quote.

They say:

“The UK already has **more than enough capacity** to accommodate the demand increases in our Balanced Net Zero Pathway. Our advice in the Sixth Carbon Budget was therefore **that there should be no net expansion of UK airport capacity**, unless the sector is on track to sufficiently outperform its net emissions trajectory and can accommodate the additional demand.”

There is no evidence that the sector is on track to outperform its net emissions trajectory, and **therefore we need to look at measures to reduce demand rather than increase supply**. And that means rejecting the idea of expanding airport capacity.

To quote from their report again:

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Turbulence Expected’: The Climate Cost of Airport Expansion May 2021  
[https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF\\_Turbulence\\_Expected.pdf](https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF_Turbulence_Expected.pdf)

“Government should not plan for unconstrained leisure flying at or beyond pre-pandemic levels in its strategy for airport capacity and demand management. .. This year should be used as an opportunity to develop a strategy for managing aviation demand. . Government must recognise that planning for an ever- growing aviation sector is not consistent with the UK’s Net Zero target.”

To press ahead with the expansion of capacity at Bristol airport would be to fly in the face of this advice

The measures we take, however, need to be fair – and that brings me to my third point.

### **3. Fairness**

We take more per capita international flights than any country in the world<sup>5</sup> and because of this 25% of our emissions are projected to come from flying by 2050.<sup>6</sup>

Those in favour of airport expansion, play on the idea of fairness in freedom of choice, but our uptake of aviation is anything but fair and is destined to become less so.

Just 15% of passengers in the UK take 70% of the flights, whilst nearly 50% of the population don’t fly at all in a given year. This is a hugely unequal division of the carbon budget for aviation.

The issue of expanding airports and increasing the number of flights must be seen as a social justice issue as well as an environmental one.

Participants in the UK Citizens Assembly on Climate Change were in favour of ideas such as a frequent flyer levy, to address unfairness in the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-travellers-iata-world-air-transport-statistics-a9029366.html>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Pages/ClimateChange\\_Trends.aspx](https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Pages/ClimateChange_Trends.aspx)

current system.<sup>7</sup> and this is also recommended in a report from the New Economics Foundation published two weeks ago<sup>8</sup>

The levy would replace Air Passenger Duty with a fairer levy, starting at zero for the first flight in any given year, but increasing steeply for every subsequent flight.

Under such a levy, demand for flying is likely to decrease, making expansion unnecessary. This isn't about trying to stop people taking their annual holidays but we do want frequent flyers to recognise how damaging and unfair their behaviour is.

#### 4. Local Economy and Jobs

We are told that airport expansion is good for the economy. In fact, when the figures are examined more closely, it can be seen that what expanded airports actually do is impoverish our regions through the 'tourist deficit'. Figures from the Office for National Statistics shows that overseas travel and tourism led to a £7.6 billion deficit to our economy.<sup>9</sup>

The New Economics Foundation has recently shown that for every 6 people leaving from Bristol Airport and thus spending their money abroad, one person arrives here.<sup>10</sup> So Bristol Airport doesn't really create jobs in this region - it facilitates a deficit. Conversely, I understand the West of England would be a prime location for a healthy, vibrant **domestic** tourist industry.

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Path To Net Zero' Climate Assembly UK Report.2020 Recommendation Three, chapter 4 'How we travel by air' [https://www.climateassembly.uk/documents/86/Chapter\\_4.pdf](https://www.climateassembly.uk/documents/86/Chapter_4.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> 'A Frequent Flying Levy: Sharing Aviation's Carbon Budget in a Net Zero World 10/7/2021' <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/frequent-flyer-levy.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/overseastravelandtourism2020/2021-05-24>

<sup>10</sup> Para 8.2.2 of the proof of evidence of Dr Alex Chapman (NEF) submitted to this inquiry

What's really needed are sustainable, green jobs. The government could use the billions of pounds it currently gives in tax breaks to aviation and fossil fuel companies<sup>11</sup> to invest instead in green jobs which would benefit our local environment.

## **Conclusion**

This is a cross-roads moment in our relationship with aviation.

Even the Transport Minister Grants Shapps has said "We need to get to grips with commercial aviation greenhouse gas emissions for the sake of our children and our fragile environment".<sup>12</sup>

Please listen to the people of this region who have spoken clearly and reject this appeal.

Please

Thank you

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.if.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Aviation\\_Report\\_Intergenerational\\_Foundation\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.if.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Aviation_Report_Intergenerational_Foundation_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.internationalairportreview.com/news/103638/shapps-electric-revolution-in-the-skies/>

