

Good morning, my name is Jerome Thomas, until May 21 I was a Green Party city councillor in Bristol. I proposed the motion that was passed by Bristol City council in December 2020 opposing the expansion of Bristol airport. I am now speaking in a personal capacity as a local resident, as a parent and as a business owner.

One of the business representatives at the inquiry yesterday stated that the rejection of the airport's proposed expansion plans was an ad hoc decision by one local authority. As you have heard from other speakers North Somerset's reasons to reject the proposed expansion plans were robust, well considered and are supported by the formal democratic decisions of local authorities across the region: North Somerset, Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset and now the new incoming Metro Mayor, Dan Norris.

At a national level there is some ambiguity about what guidance takes precedence when deciding about airport expansion, and no doubt this will be debated at this inquiry expansively and with rigour in the coming months.

The highest guiding principle when deciding whether developments should go ahead is the stated objective in the latest National Planning Policy framework that the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is supported by specific policies in the National Planning Policy Framework that turn this general principle into formal guidance. As a parent this commitment to protecting the next generation is particularly important to me, as it is to many others and currently we are failing.

We have seen accelerating evidence in the last two years of the devastating impact of climate change because of carbon emissions from human activity. Over a billion animals killed in the Australian wildfires of 2020, the recent floods and loss of life in Germany, unprecedented wildfires in the US, and rising temperatures and failing crops around the world. Our global and national response to this challenge has been inadequate and that has been increasingly recognised with the numerous declarations of climate emergency.

Global and national policy frameworks are quickly catching up with the requirement to act on multiple fronts simultaneously. What was Climate Change Committee non binding guidance late last year is now set in national law. While I recognise that there is currently ambivalence and a lack of clarity in national guidance, this is fast disappearing in the UK as policy and law catch up with planetary reality. North Somerset is right to follow the general and specific national principles on sustainable development and the environment that guide planning decisions in this area and balance those against the strength of the case of the applicant. It has done this.

The airport in its supporting case states that North Somerset has not provided any proper justification for reaching its decision to oppose the recommendation of its officers and reject the proposed expansion of the airport.

This is simply not the case.

North Somerset acknowledges that the National Aviation Strategy supports the expansion of regional airports, but that is only the case if it can be demonstrated that the environmental impact of that growth is acceptable. North Somerset has clearly demonstrated that the environmental and others impacts are unacceptable and is supported in that evaluation by its neighbouring local authorities.

We heard the argument yesterday from Business West that Bristol Airport expansion should go ahead because airport expansion should be regulated at a national level by Government. Quite rightly North Somerset states that without certainty of deliverability, the airport's proposals to reduce carbon emissions resulting from flights can be afforded little weight in

the planning balance and it needs to make a decision based on the impact of the specific proposal with which it is presented.

On the grounds of noise, air quality, green house gas emissions, destruction of the green belt and public transport provision North Somerset council is absolutely sound in the justification of its position, and this is why it has been supported by its neighbouring authorities.

While N Somerset is rigorous in its reasoning to oppose the airport the airport itself has massively exaggerated the economic benefits of its proposal and refuses to listen or acknowledge legitimate challenges. In its July 2019 submission for the original application for the expansion of the airport the New Economic Foundation commissioned by the Council for the protection of Rural England stated that the calculated economic benefits, known as GVA of the proposed airport expansion were one third of the level put forward by the airport. In its revised submission the airport appears to have done nothing to address this evidence based challenge.

Sadly this lack of rigour is also evident in the statements of the expansion of the airport. Business West argued yesterday that the airport must expand in order that business can travel further and more frequently, significantly increasing their carbon footprint, so that they can make the money to decarbonise. The limitations in this argument are fairly self-evident, and echo Saint Augustine in his request, 'Please God, make me good, but not just yet.' Sensible restrictions of the size of Bristol airport will not unreasonably impact on the ability of business in our region to generate sales and profit. As a business owner with over 50 employees, I have seen how the world of business has changed - the world of online working has made business travel far less necessary than it was in a non-digital world and corporates are now even more committed to zero carbon than government. Tesco has committed to being net zero by 2035, Legal and General and PWC have committed to being net zero by 2030 and Astra Zeneca has committed to being zero carbon by 2025. These companies know that they can grow and prosper without needing to fly everywhere. From the evidence that was given yesterday it seems that our local business organisations have failed to properly consult or represent the wider business community.

And we can see with our own eyes during the pandemic and with the restriction of air travel that economic activity is diverted to lower carbon alternatives in the absence of higher carbon choices. Money that was being spent in Malaga and Tuscany is now being spent in the resorts of Devon and south Wales, creating jobs and value in our region.

So in summary, I believe a sensible cap on airflights still allows people to fly with all the associated pleasure and benefit this brings but without wrecking the climate or our local environment and it can divert economic activity to lower carbon activities now, without needing to wait fifteen years. The case of Bristol airport and its supporters for its expansion is weak and overstated. North Somerset is right in rejecting the application and in making that decision is fully supported by neighbouring local authorities and democratic representatives.