

## Bristol Airport statement

Adrian Tait: background.

I have lived in Somerset since 1982, currently at Barton St David, near Somerton. I am a retired psychotherapist – my work for the NHS in Devon included the teaching and supervision of trainee psychiatrists. I have a long involvement in environmental issues, having chaired a Transition initiative on the Somerset Levels for over ten years. I am now on the board of directors of Reimagining the Levels (instrumental in planting 20k trees on the Somerset Levels in the Winter of 2020-21) and am a director of Somerset Climate Action Network (Somerset CAN). I am a co-founder of the Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA) an international network of concerned mental health professionals which originated in the UK, where it is registered as a charity. I am also a chapter author in the recently published book *Deep Adaptation – Navigating the Realities of Climate Chaos* (Ed. J. Bendell & R. Read, Polity)

Others better qualified than me will have furnished the planning inspectors with scientific, legal, local environmental and technical evidence. I will limit my statement mainly to my current field. I will begin with a brief explanation of the focus and purpose of this field of work, as background for my argument.

Climate Psychology draws widely from psychology and the psychological therapies. Given the human causes behind the current climate and ecological emergency, the first aim of this discipline is to understand and help to address collective failure to remedy the situation. Secondly, as the consequences and implications of that failure become ever clearer, climate psychology promotes support for those who have been traumatised by extreme weather impacts, or profoundly troubled by the very evident acceleration in extreme weather events associated with climate disruption. Climate Psychology is a psycho-social enterprise, which reflects the inseparability of the culture in which we operate from our functioning as individuals.

The Bristol Airport expansion proposal and the appeal by the airport's owners against the planning committee's rejection of that proposal is a striking example of the clash between two opposing mindsets and forces in our culture, resulting in conflicting definitions of progress. That clash is occurring on a national and global level and it is being fought out in many locations such as this one.

On the one hand we have the momentum of two centuries of fossil-fuelled economics which have created wealth, mobility and comfort for a portion of the world's population. But a feature of this economic system is the "externalisation" of environmental and human costs, for the benefit of those who use and/or profit from the products of the system. The bearers of those costs are somehow deemed not worthy of attention. In the case of highly energy-hungry activities such as aviation, escalating emissions from burning fossil fuels at a phenomenal rate constitute the single greatest factor in our rapidly deteriorating climate stability and air quality as well as a significant factor in environmental degradation more generally.

Climate stability and a thriving global ecosystem are the bedrock on which human civilisation has developed over the past 12,000 years. For the last 200 of those years fossil fuels have propelled economic development and their consumption has risen almost vertically during the past 75 years.



The opposing perspective on our meteoric development is that the Earth System lights are all flashing red. We (some of us) are flourishing at the expense of the life support system on which everyone depends. So fossil-fuelled growth has become a perverse indicator of progress. This predicament was ably expressed by Al Gore in his 2006 film *An Inconvenient Truth*, with the image of a pair of scales – all that gold on one side and the whole Earth on the other. There are solutions but they involve an economic and energy transition far more rapid than is currently being accomplished – one that is getting more challenging all the time, while irreversible damage is also mounting.

Given this scenario and the vested interests in business as usual, it is not surprising that efforts have been continuing for decades to deny, avoid or fudge the issue. But the stakes are almost unimaginably high – the hospitability (if not habitability) of our Earth. For this reason, commitment to a tolerable future must include speaking truth to both fossil-fuelled power and fossil-fuelled convenience. That is the meta-issue at the heart of this appeal hearing. To permit expansion of Bristol Airport at this time would therefore be a battle lost in the urgent struggle to stabilise our dangerously deteriorating planetary systems.

Even the term “business as usual” is an unsatisfactory one. A decision which aligns with prolonged fossil-fuelled activity would yield some short-term gains for relatively few people but in the not-so-long term it would contribute to a catastrophe for everyone, well beyond anything usual. The Paris goal of heating in the 1.5-2 degree C range is itself dangerous (as per a 6/7/21 University of Copenhagen news release <https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/643924> ). And current policies point to a catastrophic 2.9 degrees of global heating (Climate Action Tracker [https://climateactiontracker.org/documents/853/CAT\\_2021-05-04\\_Briefing\\_Global-Update\\_Climate-Summit-Momentum.pdf](https://climateactiontracker.org/documents/853/CAT_2021-05-04_Briefing_Global-Update_Climate-Summit-Momentum.pdf) ). The risk of positive feedbacks taking heating beyond even that level is a substantial one. There is no prosperity on a dead planet, no jobs, no convenience, no future. This is not a crazed dystopian vision; it is grounded in the findings of copious peer-reviewed science and accelerating extreme weather events.

The Bristol Airport decision rests partly on unique local factors, all of which are important. I hope I have made clear that it is also part of a far wider issue. If the opponents of rapid decarbonisation of our economy should win then we, and certainly our children or grandchildren will all be the losers.

I will end with one further reference to psychology. The world for which we are heading without a radical and progressive cut in greenhouse gas emissions is so unpleasant that it is hard to imagine. Because it is hard to imagine and so unpleasant, people have great difficulty believing that it is a distinct possibility, for which we are still on course. It is natural to imagine that things will be fine, that we will muddle through or (like Dickens’ Mr Micawber) that something will turn up. But taking responsibility rather than wishful thinking is what the current situation calls for. A heavy burden of responsibility rests on those who are charged with making decisions between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century economics, or a sustainable future. It is important that those charged with such responsibility (you the inspectors) know that this burden is understood by the Climate Change Committee, that 80% of UK residents have concern about climate change (Statista, May 2021) as, in my direct experience, do environmentally-minded people in our County, along with a very clear sense of what the correct decision will be in this case.



I have received support for this submission from the Steering Committee of Climate Action Athelney (formerly Transition Athelney), the board of directors of Reimagining the Levels, also the board of Somerset CAN.

Adrian Tait