

Evidence to Bristol Airport Inquiry

I am George Ferguson CBE

I was the first Elected Mayor of Bristol (Independent) – serving from 2012-16
President Royal Institute of British Architects 2003-05

I was joint founder of Ferguson Mann Architects Ltd, and founder Acanthus Associated Architectural Practices Ltd up until my election as Mayor in 2012
I am currently Director of 6 Bristol based food, drink and hospitality companies.

My qualifications include: HonMA (UoB) HonPhD (UWE) HonAoU
HonAIA HonFRIAS Fellow of University of Bristol Cabot Institute Hon
Citizen of Seoul

I wish to give evidence from a Bristol business point of view, having been in various businesses in Bristol for some 50 years, however I was an elected member of Bristol City Council from 1973 to 1979 when I briefly served on the Airport Committee when it was in public ownership. I was subsequently removed from the committee for proposing that Bristol Airport be moved from Lulsgate to Filton or Severnside because of its unsustainable location. It then had well under half a million passengers a year, since when it was privatised and has grown into the principal regional airport that it is today.

Bristol has been my airport of choice for international travel for some 50 years and I have always found it one of the better airports to use apart from its lack of sustainable transport connections, making it largely car dependent.

As an international conference speaker I confess to having been a relatively frequent flyer until Covid hit, since when I have lost the desire to travel by air, have spoken at many international and domestic conferences and seminars by Zoom, Team and other means, and had in any case been significantly reducing European and domestic air travel in favour of train.

I am concerned that the Inquiry may have been unintentionally misled, with little or any real evidence, that the business community is generally in favour of expansion. I find the opposite to be true. Starting with the half dozen or so businesses that I am involved with as Director and Shareholder, each one of their management and board see no good reason for the expansion of Bristol Airport.

However I wished to conduct a more widespread survey, albeit a random one, and contacted some 75 local businesses on my email contact list asking them to state YES or NO to expansion. This was only sent out on 9th September – one week ago today.

I have to date received responses from about half those sent to:

NO TO EXPANSION

Agenda Salon Concepts Ltd: *'I never seem to have any issues booking what I need'*

Arcadia Ltd *'Even as an international touring company we have never found there to be a limit to flights, almost all of my international tour flights have originated from Bristol in the last 14 years. We and many others in our industry are also planning to reduce the number of flights we take anyhow.'*

Autonomous Investments: *'Innovative, future looking businesses do not need more or cheaper air travel'*

Berkeley Place Property: *'The airport expansion is not necessary for Berkeley Place'*

Centre for Thriving Places

CJE Property Ltd *'There are currently plenty of destination routes, and ample departures and arrivals'*

Clik Ltd *'about the right size to accommodate both businesses and domestic customers, any further expansion will have an impact on our local infrastructure and environment'*

Fighting Films Ltd *'My company sends it's production team all around the world flying from Bristol airport with KLM via Amsterdam. The service is good and the airport does not need expanding.'*

Forward Space Ltd *'I think the emphasis should be on creating better train links to a central uk airport hub... rather than creating a network of ever growing regional hubs'*

Greenhouse PR *'We avoid flying for work at all costs (and have a 'slow travel' policy which rewards people with additional leave)'*

Intelligo Ltd *'No -we have so many other, better, more accessible options'*

Jo Sarsby Personal Management Ltd

Kaleido Grafik

Karena Batstone Design *'NO. And feel free to quote'*

Kensington Arms, Redland *'Long Haul will surely always mean a trip to a larger Airport designed for the purpose'*

LettusGrow Ltd *'The airport does not need to get any larger, and "business" should not be used as an excuse to justify it'*

Oak Frame Training Forum

Nania's Vineyard *'Isn't it owned by a pension fund from another country? I suspect they just want to maximise their returns!'*

Pad Design

PJE Chartered Accountants *'I am consciously trying to reduce the miles I travel for business each year as I am sure many other people in business are too.'*

Primary VFX *'Any expansion now will not only be an environmental travesty but also a terrible investment.'*

Pytch Ltd *'Air travel is far too cheap - and this is simply because we are not paying the "real" price for environmental damage and use of finite resources'*

Salt & Malt Ltd *'The Airport is currently ample for my needs, which are reducing rather than increasing these days'*

The Stable Weston-Super-Mare

Sundial Kitchen

Umberslade Corporate Management Ltd *'Umberslade does not want or need expansion'*

Anon Architectural Practice

Anon Bristol Law firm

YES TO EXPANSION

Queens Arms, Chew Magna *A reluctant Yes. We have letting rooms so could potentially feel a benefit*

Anon Bristol Pub Co: *'Yes to expansion, would prefer not to be quoted!'*

Anon Events Co *'Naturally US travel from Bristol would be a huge plus. But I suspect I'm the exception.'*

The above list does not include any one of the 6 Bristol catering and hospitality companies that I am a Director of, all of which are adamantly opposed to expansion of the airport.

In addition to this email survey I talked with owner/directors of several of Bristol's leading companies last night at a large gathering at the SS Great Britain, the first of its kind for 18 months, and was impressed by the vast majority being against the expansion, some of whom had changed their minds

over the past 18 months and felt that both from both a practical user and ethical point of view that expansion was unnecessary and now unjustified.

This gathering of the Bristol Initiative was hosted by Business West and was preceded by talks by the Chief Executive, Chair and new President, all referring to Climate Action and not going back to the old 'Normal' post pandemic, but with no single mention of air travel or the airport.

The head of climate strategy gave an excellent talk on Business West's environmental and sustainable transport initiatives, and finishing with a plea to "walk the walk". In conversation with her and others afterwards there is clear equivocation and some outright opposition within the organization as to the stance that Business West has taken over the airport.

What is very clear is that their evidence regarding business support has not been tested in recent times and that there is considerable embarrassment at this stance within the organization and its membership.

Interestingly I have just been sent the South West Infrastructure Partnership Manifesto for Bristol by its chairman: 'Our Journey to Net Zero' published in April for the Mayoral elections in May. The only mention of the Airport is a passing one at the end, referring to: *'the strategic importance of the Port of Bristol and Bristol Airport and supporting them to achieve net zero'* but no mention of expansion.

Not only has the way we do business changed but attitudes have changed amongst business leaders who are more aware than ever of the need for behavior change, of which flying less is at the top of the list.

Based on all this direct evidence it is clear that business users of Bristol Airport are generally satisfied with it and see no need for expansion, ironically with many preferring it when it was smaller and more user friendly prior to it becoming the 'bucket & spade' and 'hens & stags' airport, as has been described to me recently!

George Ferguson
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