

Peter Brownlee      Statement to the inquiry into Bristol airport expansion.

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I have lived in Chew Magna at the top of the High Street ( the B3130 ) for over 35 years, and I've seen traffic increase dramatically over that time. I believe that's in a large part due to the growth of the airport. Flights have greatly increased over the years but because of the lack of a rail or motorway link many passengers have to rely on private cars and taxis to travel there and back and the B3130 is the most direct route from Bath and the South West connecting the A37 to the A38 and the airport.

There are a number of places, including outside my house, where the road narrows and often due to a delivery van or parked vehicles only single file traffic is possible. Queues soon form with drivers unable to pass, leading to long lines of stationary cars full of angry frustrated drivers. This is a regular occurrence with traffic sometimes at a standstill for fifteen minutes or more. The vehicle exhausts from such heavy congestion create a very unhealthy environment for pedestrians, especially children, cyclists and other road users. Not to mention stress for the car users, many trying to get to a flight on time. The same situation also regularly occurs at a number of similar pinch points, including the centre of Chew Magna, just 500 metres down the road. A real recipe for traffic mayhem.

I believe the Inspectors drove around the area at the end of August to see what road conditions were like for themselves, but you did so when the schools were closed and with the airport running at a much reduced capacity. I don't know what you experienced but it's unlikely you saw what it's usually like. Even a slight increase in traffic or one vehicle in the wrong place can cause complete gridlock. The truth is our villages are already being choked by traffic, much of it due to passengers using Bristol airport.

Of course not all traffic through Chew Magna is generated by the airport and it's hard to know exactly how much is, but there was one event that gave me a good idea how much traffic is directly connected to the airport, the Icelandic volcanic eruption in April 2010 which led to the closure of air space. All planes were grounded and there was little or no airport traffic while all other road users were unaffected.

During those weeks I was amazed how much less traffic there was through the village. It was very clear to me and my neighbours that airport traffic is a major contributing factor to the congestion in Chew Magna. We also saw that with less traffic the air felt noticeably cleaner. Back in 2010 there were under 6 million passengers, in the years since and up to the pandemic, passenger numbers have of course greatly increased adding to the problem.

The two biggest issues for me are the location of the airport in such a rural position and the lack of any rail or motorway connection – Bristol is the only international airport in the country not to have one or other. The airport's plans for slight changes to the road layout of the A38 are completely inadequate and will do nothing to ease the increased pressure on our already congested local routes. Passenger numbers before the pandemic were nearly 9 million a year, the airport want to raise that to 12 million. That's a lot more cars.

The airport plan to build another large multi-storey carpark as part of their expansion. They want to make a lot more space for cars at the airport, but all those extra cars will have to get there and back, many of them using our narrow village roads where there is not enough capacity already.

For this reason alone, I am against Bristol airport's expansion, but even more worryingly I've watched with great concern the increasing number of news reports of climate chaos around the world. For many years now I have been listening to what all credible scientists have been saying about the need to lower carbon emissions. We can all clearly see that their warnings are already coming true. I believe you are scientists and I think the science is screaming at us right now. Please listen. Time is rapidly running out for the situation to be turned around. The important discussion you reach at this inquiry can help to set us on the right path or it could add to the rise in global temperatures and all the impacts that will have.

An expanded airport will be damaging both on local and global levels. It will do untold harm to the quality of life for us, our children and generations to come.

Thank you for listening.