

## BRISTOL AIRPORT EXPANSION PUBLIC INQUIRY.

Submission from SUZANNE HETHERINGTON, Bath resident. 16/09/2021.

“Code Red for Humanity” (1)

Let that sink in for a moment.

“The alarm bells are deafening and the evidence is irrefutable” (1)

“We face a direct existential threat” (1)

So says United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres of the IPCC report published this August.

Or, in the words of Sir David Attenborough:

“A sixth mass extinction is well underway. Our garden of Eden will be lost. I wish I wasn't involved in this struggle. I wish I wasn't there” (2)

I too wish I wasn't involved in this struggle and I wish I wasn't here. I wish I didn't have to be here in this room. I wish I didn't have to do this all over again. Filling my heart with grief once more for our lost Eden.

Watching the video link to the debate in these chambers in February last year, the slowly dawning realisation that our brave councillors had had the courage and willingness to face the irrefutable evidence and come to the only possible decision about the proposed expansion of Bristol Airport, made we weep. Not only with grief for our planet, but also with tears of relief that at least in the face of the truth around our climate and ecological crisis, this one small battle had been won, and in that maybe there was a tiny seed of hope.

So I am deeply saddened to have to be here today. And I feel really angry on behalf of all those local residents and campaigners who have had to spend hundreds of hours re-immersing themselves in all this pain, and to be faced yet again with the effects that expansion would bring locally of even more pollution, traffic congestion and disturbed sleepless nights.

It is truly a travesty of local and national democracy that in the face of a “planetary emergency” (3,4,5) we have to be here at all.

The science really is quite simple. The Earth's atmosphere has a finite volume. It is a closed system and the more CO<sub>2</sub> we add to the system, the more concentrated it becomes.

Reducing emissions slows the rate of build-up but does not stop it. Emissions need to be cut by 50% this decade if warming is to be limited to 1.5 degrees (6) and yet they are set to rise this year by the second biggest annual rise in history (7). If the current trend continues, the world is headed towards a catastrophic temperature rise of around 4 degrees (8).

That is pretty much an uninhabitable planet ! A sixth, our own, mass extinction.

Already, at 'just' a one degree rise we see nearly half the world's children .. one billion children .. living in countries where their lives are at extreme risk due to water scarcity and heatwaves (9). By 2070 three billion people could live in places as hot as the Sahara. That is an increase from less than 1% of the earth's land surface to almost 20% (10).

The famine, misery and worldwide unrest that would involve is nothing short of apocalyptic.

For sure it is not a world in which we will be flying around for recreation and holidays !

Ontario Teachers Pension Plan, owners of Bristol airport state on their website that:

"Climate change is the greatest challenge faced by the modern world ....we can play a critical role in addressing climate ..... we are committing to net-zero by 2050" (11).

Well, for starters 2050 is clearly too late.

Currently, the share of global emissions from aviation are estimated to be around 2.5% and are set to triple by 2050. But, due to their release at high altitude plus other gas and particulate emissions, the EU Aviation Safety Agency (24/11/2020) believe their real warming effect to be three times higher than current estimates.

Even the most optimistic projection of emissions savings due to new fuel efficiencies are, according to the International Civil Aviation Organisation, 1.37% per annum and with demand expanding at 3% annually that results in a net increase (12).

Carbon Capture and Storage is as yet a speculative and unproven technology still in its embryonic stage of development and is decades away from making a meaningful impact.

And at its current rate of expansion, aviation would require a whole two-fifths of the UK's negative emissions reductions and it is preposterous to even suggest that such reductions would be used in such a way.

Biofuels have to be grown somewhere and the land required would need to cover an area one or two times the size of India to achieve a 50% chance of us staying below 2 degrees warming (13). For sure this land will be needed for food not biofuels !

Net -zero for aviation is a fantasy.

The OTPP transition plan only covers their share of the Scope 1 and 2 emissions of companies they invest in.

For the airport this simply means only those from the buildings, energy use and some vehicles. Even if Scope 3 emissions were included, they would only actually cover emissions from take off and landing and airport access vehicles (14).

This is a plan predicated on false accounting, fairytales and greenwash !

So, what if aviation emissions were properly and justly accounted for ? What is the true cost of flying, with particular reference to the UK ?

Airlines currently benefit from tax breaks worth around double what is raised by Air Passenger Duty (15). And whilst tax on petrol averages around 65% of the pump price, there is none on aviation fuel (16). Clearly the polluter is not paying ... yet !

Europe and the US (around 15% of the world population today) are responsible for a full 53% of total atmospheric carbon emitted since 1750 (17). Furthermore, it is just a tiny 1% of world population which cause 50% of commercial aviation emissions, whilst 80% have never flown at all (18).

We have a massive problem with accountability and responsibility.

Last week, an open letter from the British Medical Journal, published in over 200 health journals worldwide stated:

“The greatest threat to global public health is the continued failure of world leaders to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5 degree and to restore nature”

“Equity must be at the centre of the global response... reduction commitments must account for the cumulative, historical contribution each country has made to emissions... wealthier countries will have to cut emissions more quickly” (19).

Developed nations will need to reduce their footprint by a factor of 30 to stay in line with Paris Agreement targets (19).

Incredibly however, emissions from international flights are not counted towards any particular country ... and because of that they are not counted or allocated towards an individual country's goals in the Kyoto or Paris Agreements !

If we allocate per capita emissions from the country of departure and adjust the figures for the ratio of inbound to outbound travellers, we see that in the UK - where locals travel to elsewhere much more frequently- per capita emissions leap from 422 to 818 kilograms. This ranks the UK in the top five per capita emitter for aviation and higher even than the US (17).

So what of the true cost of flying ?

An extensive body of research this year (summarising over 139 studies, covering more than 700 estimates) concludes that the negative externalities, that is to say, the hidden social, environmental and health costs of the transport sector totals £9.3 trillion annually (20). Based simply on their share of emissions that would make aviation responsible for somewhere in the region of £1 trillion. And again, if we account for the ratio of inbound to outbound travellers that would leave the UK with a responsibility of costs to people and planet with a figure in excess of £66 billion !

Imagine what the UK aviation business model look like if the true cost of negative externalities had to be factored in !

In this year's BBC Reith lectures Canadian and ex-governor of the Bank of England Mark Carney speaks of the need for a whole economy transition in which everyone will have to adjust their business models ...to completely re-think market economics, such that “individual actions can [no longer] drive social disasters, like the climate crisis.” (21).

The UK Future Industrial Strategy Research Group this year said:

“If the British economy is to hit net-zero by mid-century... the aviation industry ‘faces rapid contraction’, with ‘all aviation activity phased out within 30 years’ and all British airports except Glasgow and Heathrow shut down by 2030 (13).

I end with a short quote from Mark Carney:

“ ‘The world is waking up and change is coming whether you like it or not’ There. With the clarity and certainty of youth, Greta Thunberg was telling us that we were failing... [he goes on]...society won’t settle for worthy statements followed by futile gestures. It won’t settle for countries announcing plans in Paris five years ago for 2.8 degrees warming, far too high, that they don’t even meet. Society won’t settle for companies that preach green but don’t manage their carbon footprints, or financial institutions who can’t tell us whether our money is on the right or wrong side of climate history” (21).

So, please ... for yourselves, your children and you grandchildren, for children everywhere, find your moral compass, reject this appeal and stand firm on the right side of history.

## References

1. Antonio Guterres. UN Secretary General (2020 & 2021).
2. Sir David Attenborough (2020).
3. Prof. Sir James Hansen, Former Director NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies.
4. Prof. Johan Rockstrom, Director of Potsdam Institute for Climate Research.
5. Ban Ki-Moon, Former UN Secretary General.
6. Sir Nicholas Stern (2021).
7. International Energy Agency Global Energy Review (2021).
8. UN Environment Programme Emissions Gap Report (2020).
9. UNICEF Report (August 2021).
10. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences “Future of the human climate niche” (May 2020).
11. OTHP.com (2021).
12. International Civil Aviation Organisation Environment Report (2019).
13. The Ecologist (31/08/2021).
14. Verifavia.com (2021).
15. Nef/Possible Research (June 2020), and Wikipedia.

16. Chicago Convention 1944.
17. Our World in Data.org (2020).
18. Stay Grounded & PCS (February 2021).
19. British Medical Journal (06/09/2021).
20. University of Sussex (02/03/2021).
21. BBC Reith Lectures 2021.

