

Statement to the Bristol Airport Expansion Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Susan Sidey and I'm a retired civil servant.

I would like to share my reflections on the first two sentences of paragraph 7 of The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Ref 1), as amended in July 2021, and how they relate to the proposed expansion of Bristol Airport. The framework says, and I'm sure you are already very familiar with these words:

"The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, 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."

So, what 'needs' are being met by this expansion and whose needs are they? And what are the needs of the future generations that should not be compromised?

According to the various documents, the main purpose of the expansion is to ensure the airport can continue to meet demand for air travel to and from the South West; an extra 2 million passengers per annum.

Who is demanding this air travel? Is air travel a 'need'? Well, the pandemic, terrible though it is, has given us a hard lesson in what things are important... it confirms what we already know, that people can actually survive without any air travel. And recent research (Ref 2) shows that in the UK, 70% of flights are made by a wealthy 15% of the population, with over 50% of the population not flying at all, further illustrating that most UK air travel is not a 'need'. This echoes my own experience; none of the many flights I have taken in the past, work or leisure, was essential: a 'city-break' here, a beach holiday there and an occasional quite interesting conference. They were 'nice to haves' in a consequence free world. Perhaps the majority of air travel might more accurately be described as just one way through which some 'wants' can be met. The expansion is, therefore, seeking to satisfy yet more non-essential 'wants'; 'wants' that could be met by means other than by flying.

What of the 'needs' of future generations which should not be compromised by the expansion? Are their 'needs' really just 'wants' as well? Are we comparing like with like?

Unfortunately not; evidence shows that the most basic necessities of life – food, clean air and water, shelter, safety – all will be severely compromised by climate change fuelled by the continued emission of green house gases, something that flying provides by the ton. Flying is not so 'consequence free' after all. The airport expansion allows for an increase in carbon emissions, at a time when we know from the Government's own Committee on Climate Change (CCC) that the UK is failing badly in its task of curbing them (Ref 3).

And let's not kid ourselves that climate change is a problem of the distant future. Even since this Inquiry started its work, we have seen; devastation across the world from droughts, wildfires, hurricanes and flash floods, the scale of which has shocked even climate scientists; an IPPC report, described by the UN Secretary General as representing a 'code red for humanity' (Ref 4) ; and a Unicef study that shows 1 billion children are already at risk from the impacts of climate change (Ref 5).

So, it seems to me that, at its heart, this expansion of Bristol airport aspires to meet the 'additional wants of a current local few' at the expense of the 'essential needs of the future global many', something which is surely the very opposite of 'sustainable'.

Thank you for listening.

References

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf
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