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The Planning Inspectorate

COMMENTS ON CASE (Online Version)

Please note that comments about this case need to be made within the timetable. This can be found in the notification letter sent by the local planning authority or the start date letter. Comments submitted after the deadline may be considered invalid and returned to sender.

Appeal Reference: APP/B0230/V/22/3296455

DETAILS OF THE CASE

Appeal Reference	APP/B0230/V/22/3296455
Application By	LONDON LUTON AIRPORT OPERATIONS LIMITED (LLAOL)
Site Address	London Luton Airport Airport Way Luton LU2 9LY Grid Ref Easting: 511908 Grid Ref Northing: 220942

SENDER DETAILS

Name	DR SIMON LEADBEATER
Address	[redacted]

ABOUT YOUR COMMENTS

In what capacity do you wish to make representations on this case?

- ☐ Applicant
- ☐ Agent
- ☑ Interested Party / Person
- ☐ Land Owner
- ☐ Rule 6 (6)

What kind of representation are you making?

- ☐ Final Comments
- ☐ Proof of Evidence
- ☐ Statement
- ☐ Statement of Common Ground
- ☑ Interested Party/Person Correspondence
- ☐ Other

YOUR COMMENTS ON THE CASE

I strongly oppose the expansion to 19 million passengers from 18 million passengers per year. There are a number of reasons why I object, ranging from my worries for the ecological functioning of our planet, the conduct of Luton Council and their airport, to, finally, how these proposals would affect me personally.

My first reason for objecting pertains to the cumulative impact of Luton Airport being permitted to increase its carbon emissions on our climate. Forest fires are rampant (https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/new-high-resolution-map-shows-fires-caused-one-third-of-global-forest-loss-between-2001-and-2019/), droughts in Africa are of increasing concern (https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/least-10-million-children-face-severe-drought-horn-africa-unicef), and in India birds are falling from the sky (https://www.businessinsider.com/india-birds-fall-from-sky-india-amid-record-122f-heatwave-2022-5?r=US&IR=T), all combining to create an apocalyptic portent for our changing climate across the world. And living in the UK it is impossible not to notice dry springs, hotter summers, milder winters. In this context, I have to ask, how on earth can an airport which seeks to increase discretionary services to affluent people (70 per cent of flights are taken by 15 per cent of people) be allowed to expand.

I appreciate the UK Government believes in 'jet zero,' in which technology and biofuels aim to reduce emissions. No such technology currently exists, and until it does no further increase in carbon emissions from air travel should be permitted. Moreover, the reliance on biofuels may exacerbate climate change (https://www.jeffnobbs.com/posts/the-environmental-impact-of-vegetable-oils), and the Committee on Climate Change believes that 'demand management' will be required by the mid-2020s to address increasing emissions (https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Sector-summary-Aviation.pdf). It makes common sense, as a number of NGOs have pointed out in their letter to the Minister for Aviation, Robert Courts MP (of 18th May 2022), that "the Government should not permit airport expansion until and unless aviation emissions are actually falling, and emissions are substantially below a 1.5C-compliant trajectory" (https://www.aef.org.uk/2022/05/18/ngos-tell-government-to-halt-airport-expansion/). Their reasoning is unassailable. I urge the Government to heed this advice.

Related to this point, are the increase in noncarbon emissions connected to expansion. I live in a woodland, which I am trying to restore. As most people are aware, planting more trees is a good way of tackling climate change as they suck up CO2. However, less well known is that more carbon is locked up in woodland soil than in the trees themselves, and it is the relationship between trees and their mycorrhizal network – the aptly named wood-wide-web – which sequests carbon. But "worryingly," according to Suz et al reporting in the Royal Forestry Society's Quarterly Journal of Forestry "the fungi most sensitive to nitrogen pollution are those that pump more carbon into the soil" (Suz et al, 2022: 40). This means two things. First, that the airport's existing operations, and expansion, by increasing nitrogen deposits in our woodland caused by flying directly over us, are harming the fungi which enable our woodland to sequest carbon. Second, and even worse, without these mycorrhizal fungi our woodland cannot survive. Mycorrhizal fungi are already in steep decline according to the well-known mycologist Paul Stamets, and, anecdotally, having known the woodland for over twenty years, the number of fungi fruits emerging in autumn is nothing like what it was. Perhaps this is due to climate change generally, but I submit that increasing nitrogen pollution caused by Luton Airport is a factor, and naturally I oppose further expansion as this would increase nitrogen deposition on our woodland, thus reducing its capacity as a sequester of carbon, and killing it slowly as mycorrhizal fungi gradually die out.

References: Suz, L.M., Bode, J., Byrne, A., van der Linde, S., and Bidartondo, M.I., (2022), 'Nutrients, Carbon, Mycorrhizas and Tipping Points in Forests,' Quarterly Journal of Forestry, January 2022, Vol. 116, No. 1, pp. 36 – 43. and Stamets, P., (2000), Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms, Third Edition, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley)

I would like to now comment on the behaviour of Luton Airport and Council. I spoke against their planning application to increase capacity from 12 to 18 million in December 2013. This application was nodded through, and no matter what anyone tells me, it is obvious that the Council approved of this expansion as it owns the airport and has a vested interest in its expansion. This was demonstrated by the Council providing incentives to the airport to expand quickly, before the less noisy aircraft came on stream, a condition of the expansion to 18 million. We consequently have a situation in which for years the Council has failed to enforce its own planning conditions, and to make matters worse wishes to increase the number of flights without these planning conditions being enacted. This is egregious venal behaviour and demonstrates that the people affected by noise from the airport are of no consequence in the Council's thinking. No Conservative Government should allow a Labour Council to get away with that.
Finally, I would like to refer to how the expansion would affect me. I choose to live in the countryside for reasons I hope I don't need to explain. I care for my woodland deeply, and I look after a number of animals. I cannot, therefore, simply move. And now, what was once interrupted tranquillity, is in danger of becoming an oppressive endurance, which is without doubt affecting my mental health (I will not expand on the health impacts of noise – the reader of my objection must surely know of them).
An additional 1 million passengers would equate to ten more planes every day. This may not seem much, but for people affected by plane noise the thought of a further ten planes fills me with dread. Unlike most people I fear high pressure forecasts, as they normally entail easterly departures. This means for me that planes take-off towards Knebworth, turn around, and then fly directly over me. First one plane, then another, becoming a relentless torrent. My morning routine: being woken by overflying planes from 6 a.m.; I drop off again; am woken again, and so on, until finally I rouse myself fully. By 9 a.m. the worst is over, only to be repeated later in the day. A further ten planes a day, either means being woken earlier, or the torment – I use that word advisedly – continues for longer in the day.

To conclude. It is madness to even contemplate allowing an airport to expand when the effects of climate change are already increasingly making themselves felt at home and abroad. Until such time as emissions are reducing and/or there is proven technology which actually means in a verifiable and uncontested way (unlike biofuels) that flying does not increase carbon emissions, all proposed airport expansions should be halted. There are also noncarbon related consequences of expansion, such as, in this case, the impact of nitrogen on the ability of my woodland (and others) to sequest carbon, and, ultimately, to continue to survive as woodlands.

No Government which scrutinises the behaviour of Luton Council will believe expansion could be countenanced based on their flagrant disregard of their own planning process and indifference to people outside of Luton who bear the brunt of the noise caused by their airport's operations. And finally, there is the impact on me. I can hardly bear to think of yet more noise raining down on me. I rarely fly myself (last time was in 2019, and more than 10 years before that), and I just don't believe I deserve to have to endure such punishment. If you think I exaggerate, drive to my address and arrive before 6 a.m. Stop, turn off the engine. Open the windows. And wait…

Thank you for listening to me.

Simon Leadbeater