

Luton Airport Public Inquiry: Statement to the Inspectors

My name is Nigel Tully; I have lived between the villages of Flamstead and Markyate for over 20 years.

I am delighted to have the opportunity of making a statement to the Inspectors in charge of this very welcome Inquiry. Like thousands of others I am concerned about the effects of the expansion of Luton Airport – noise, traffic, and above all the disastrous consequences on climate change which are endangering our planet – but in my statement I will concentrate on a single issue which I believe has been a root cause of the excess aircraft noise and disturbance we experience: the conflict of interest within Luton Borough Council between its understandable wish to maximise its revenue from the airport and its statutory duty to enforce planning conditions.

I have some sympathy with members of the Council and its Planning department, who face an impossible choice between the short-term economic benefits of expansion to some of their constituents and their duty to enforce planning conditions which reduce those apparent benefits. (In parenthesis - I salute the two brave Councillors who voted against permitting further expansion at the last Development Control meeting on 1 December 2021: they lost 7:2.)

In 2013 there was a robust consultation on a near-doubling of airport capacity, which established planning conditions, noise controls and mitigations to balance commercial benefits. It is clear that, since 2013, that balance has wrongly been tilted in favour of the supposed benefits of expansion and against the conditions which protected people from noise and carbon emissions. The Airport Operator and the Council have profited from noise breaches by increased revenues, and nothing has been done to enforce the conditions despite a statutory duty to protect residential amenity. The planning system is supposed to ensure a balance between benefits and disadvantages: in this case the system has clearly failed, and the disadvantages are felt by people who do not elect Luton Borough Council or benefit from it, and whose interests – as well as those of long-suffering residents of South Luton – have not been safeguarded by LBC's own planning department.

In other words: Luton Borough Council has been marking its own homework and wrongly awarding itself top marks when it should have been reproving itself for failing to enforce its own planning conditions.

I therefore welcome this Inquiry and urge it to redress the balance between pain and gain in line with national guidelines and not in line with unbalanced local interests.

One last point. Fifty years ago, the UK coal industry was under threat; the main argument for its survival was economic benefit, ie jobs. Today, everyone knows that that short-term argument has been overwhelmed by the environmental damage caused by burning fossil fuels and that there is more economic benefit in green jobs. In fifty years' time the thought of airport expansion with planes causing the environmental damage they currently do will seem as bizarre as opening a new coalmine would today. Please be on the right side of history !

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