



Luton Friends of the Earth

Public Inquiry into proposed Expansion of Luton Airport

Response to Planning Inspectorate email of 23 Aug 2024 Reg no 20040317

31 Aug 2024

In this holiday period, we have no time to consult the detail in the links provided. We refer you to all our previous submissions, particularly that dated 22 Aug 2023. But in the UK and across the world, impacts on climate and nature have accelerated. Please take into account the following points, all relevant to the Inquiry decision:

National Policy, key points from Luton, updates, overarching issues, and Friends of the Earth recommendations

- 1 The government's cross-party **Climate Change Committee**, based on recommendations by the vast majority of world scientific studies, supported by the UN and COP agreements, **urges** that there should be **NO 'net' airport expansion**, or the UK will not reach Net Zero.

As the new government has **approved** expansion at London City Airport, it follows that **NO** further expansion should be allowed at any other airport if serious moves are to be put in place to tackle the Climate Emergency, declared in 2018, and if international agreements are to be met.

- 2 **The Climate Crisis recognises no borders and is not negotiable.**

Greater efforts are essential to reduce the damage that is already having a severe effect on people worldwide and the Earth's ecosystems, harming the future of today's children. The UK should try to regain its leading role on climate.

Seven times the amount of fuel has been extracted already that we can afford to burn to prevent irreversible climate change, and tipping points are now being passed which lead humanity into new, dangerous territory. Yet every flight for the foreseeable future will be burning fossil fuels. One return flight equates to all the emissions by the average person over a whole year.

The new government has a greener manifesto, but it is still far too weak. Worldwide, warming sea temperatures have fuelled more ferocious hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons, bringing floods and elsewhere wildfires, devastating human communities and ecosystems, wiping out food crops, with parts of the

world becoming uninhabitable. The date for reaching **Net Zero must be brought forward**, requiring a sharp cut in fossil fuel consumption.

Therefore flights in the UK and worldwide must be reduced.

- 3 At the end of a regional public inquiry in 2004, Luton was told by a panel of inspectors that it should 'not put all its eggs in the airport basket'. The last government loaned about £80 million to Luton due to Covid losses, **on condition that it reduce reliance on the airport.**
- 4 **A sustainable society** can only be achieved by balancing environmental and societal needs and an economy which supports the first two. For too long, economy has been allowed to dominate the other vital needs. The vast companies dominating each sector must be reined in and required to pay for the damage they do to the balance of nature and the poorest people across the world – the UK should be taking a lead in this.

5 **Two legal imperatives**

The Supreme Court ruled in June 2024 that companies extracting fossil fuels must report on emissions from burning them. This applies to **emissions from planes in the sky** as well as ground operations. Emissions from Luton: 1% at the airport, 48% from transport to the airport, and **51% from planes in the air, which Luton ignored in its case for expansion to the Inquiry.**

The previous government **lost a court case** in spring 2024 to Friends of the Earth and Client Earth, and the government is obliged to go back to the drawing board on the current **failing Climate Emergency Strategy.**

- 6 **Flying makes up about 7% of UK climate emissions.**
Flying is the fastest growing source of climate emissions.
As the fastest expanding airport, Luton in 2018 was the UK's fastest growing source of climate emissions.
Flying is doing huge damage, yet it is subsidised, so flights are far too cheap.
More people fly from the UK than from any other country in the world. In 2018, 126 million travellers were British (1 in 12 of all international travellers).

This has many **ADVERSE EFFECTS:**

- a) a huge **Financial deficit** - billions of pounds more are spent by UK tourists abroad than by those visiting the UK
- b) **Environmental damage** Luton's, and other airports, have been allowed to damage the environment without paying for it. This subsidy for flying has

prevented the creation of other green jobs, vital for a sustainable future, that can be achieved by councils focusing on partnerships with business.

c) **Congestion** on roads to airports, adversely affecting people trying to get to and from work, thus affecting local economies. In Luton, unlike many other airports, the airport is not outside the town, so local roads can be at a standstill.

d) **Pollution**, from planes at airports and in the sky; from vehicles travelling to airports – cars (air passengers and airport workers), taxis, buses, diesel lorries and vans servicing airport activities. This particularly affects people living under flightpaths and near airports, or stuck in traffic, and can cause severe health effects and shorten lives. Luton has a very poor health record, especially on respiratory diseases. Luton's airport sits on a hill above the town – much of which is a valley below, trapping pollution. It was the fastest expanding airport between 2014 and 2018, from 9 to 18 million passengers. 4 studies in 2018/19 indicated that **Luton was the most polluted town in the UK**.

e) **noise**, again for people living under flightpaths and near airport access roads, which is stressful and can lead to severe health effects.

f) **Vapour trails spread, forming clouds**, adding to climatic impacts, and polluting emissions from planes at 30,000 feet have a disproportionate effect on Earth's thin, vulnerable atmosphere.

g) **Pollution affects wildlife** too, contributing to the sharp decline in UK biodiversity (together with sewage & intensive farming run-off into rivers, and other industrial farming practices). In Luton, Wigmore Park, a County Wildlife Site that has been described by experts as being of SSSI importance, would be destroyed should a second terminal be allowed.

h) **Luton's uneven support for local organisations through airport income** is contrary to the spirit and fairness of local government. It could be described as bribery, encouraging corruption and calls for more through airport expansion. Organisations and charities who would otherwise receive funding through normal channels would be more likely to support green culture and activities. This discourages the creation of and partnerships with businesses which could create green jobs.

THIS MUST CHANGE.

Reducing flights is a quick win for cutting climate emissions and boosting the UK economy.

Suggestions for alternative strategies

- 7 **Frequent Flyers** make up a small proportion of flyers, but do the most damage. They should be heavily penalised, which should help to discourage such excess. The rich-poor divide in UK is a scandal, with the poor who never fly subsidising

the rich who do. A well-supported proposal is to introduce a Frequent Flyer tax.

- 8 **Private Jets** Luton Airport is the biggest UK host for private jets. These should also be heavily taxed, to cut emissions and provide funding to help the environment, the NHS and under-privileged people.
- 9 **UK tourism** The UK has wonderful coasts, mountains, nature, wildlife parks and historic places for people living here to experience. More focus on this would help the UK economy, but prices of places to stay must be controlled as it is cheaper to travel abroad, and half the population fly. Second homes in tourist areas should be discouraged unless they are let out in holiday periods.
- 10 **Encourage rail use** The UK needs a policy to encourage people to use rail, which means cheaper fares to compare with EU prices. It should also encourage rail travel to visit Europe, which educates people on other cultures rather than being deposited by plane in a bubble with other tourists. Many examples are given of such rewarding travel on www.flightfreeuk.org
The UK should adopt the policies of several EU countries and ban internal flights if you can get there by rail in 3 hours. The UK relies far too much on imports – this problem has increased in recent years. Climate emissions and pollution have accelerated through imports across the world from S E Asia. Goods from China are too cheap – this must be tackled. We should help to reverse this by encouraging UK and EU products, including food, re-establishing partnerships.
- 11 **Decarbonise electricity** The UK should speed installation of onshore renewables and energy efficiency – every town should have a nearby solar or wind farm. Solar panels should be on every business premises and over car parks.
- 12 **Stop sewage dumping and factory farm runoff into rivers** – it is having a catastrophic effect on UK wildlife.
- 13 **Insulate!** More help is needed to help vulnerable people and insulate to bring homes to a decent standard.
- 14 **Greener driving** Hybrid (particularly high MPG) and electric cars and vans should be encouraged.
- 15 **Cycle training** should be introduced at all schools.

- 16 **Plant trees and orchards** – especially in cities, where it has a proven cooling effect and provides wildlife habitat.
- 17 **Sustainable farming** Farmers must be encouraged to reduce pesticides and herbicides, which turn soil to dust. This has a major impact on vital insects and micro-organisms.
- 18 **Positive actions!** The government should **actively promote positive actions** to businesses, groups and individuals to cut fossil fuel use, climate emissions and pollution, to restore nature, create green jobs, cut meat consumption, and support reduction, reuse, repair, repurposing and recycling of 'waste'.