

Gatwick Airport Northern Runway Proposal Consultation

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Gatwick expansion is a fabulous idea if you are Gatwick Airport Limited and you are driven by the profit motive. Why would you not invest in airport expansion so more passengers can take more flights even though more fossil fuel is burnt and more carbon dioxide is produced. It makes perfect business sense. GAL exists to generate profits and not to take account of externalities unless legislation or regulation forces them to do this. It does not take account of the local impacts in relation to noise and air pollution, traffic congestion, water resources, river pollution. It does not take account of the carbon emissions produced by those flights. Further more GAL has compared environmental impacts against a future baseline of 67 million passengers per annum in 2047, just one third of the increase from 40.9m in 2023 to 80.2m in 2047. Environmental Assessment guidance is that assessment should be against the realistic worse case. This has not been done.

Don't worry, there's going to be new technologies to enable low carbon flying. We are going to make aeroplanes more efficient. But those efficiency improvements get smaller and smaller. It is not a linear relationship. And we are talking about a huge increase in the number of flights making any small increments in efficiency irrelevant. This proposal is enabling a large increase in carbon emissions.

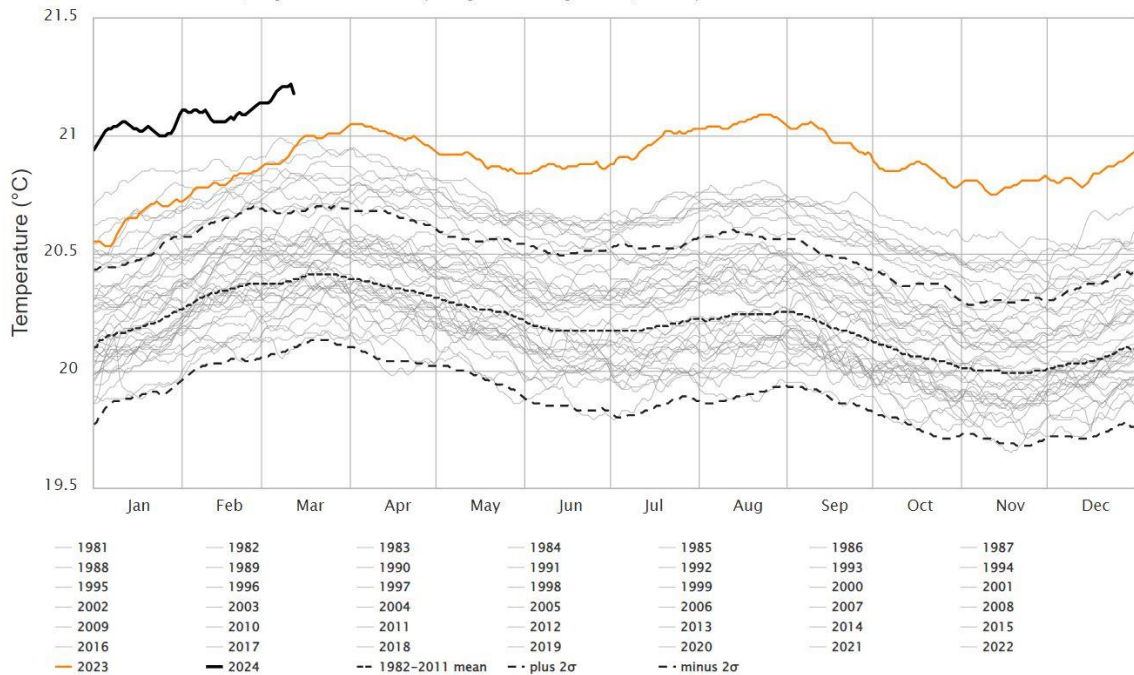
On 28th February 2024 we heard from the Climate Change Committee that the government met its 2022 carbon budget target (let's have a round of applause for all those foreign countries now producing the goods we consume). The government is not on track for the next carbon budget targets. So let's get the country moving on reducing carbon emissions: let's encourage them to buy electric vehicles, let's encourage them to buy solar panels, let's encourage them to install insulation and heat pumps. Let's get individuals to spend money to solve the problem so we can support business and put money in people's pockets, well some people's pockets anyway. So individuals have to do something and spend their money but government can hand out oil and gas extraction licences and allow airport expansion to sustain growth even though it is affecting the climate.

What about demand management. That doesn't look good does it. Taking something away. Let's make sure cheap flights to holiday destinations keep our travel industry on track and profitable. The future demand for flights has been questioned and I think we can add to that the emerging picture of climate change. Greek holiday resorts consumed by forest fire damaging homes and endangering life. Extreme temperatures in European city tourist destinations causing the shutting down of attractions. Tourist hot spots you might call them. Ski resorts creating snow to maintain a white line down a green mountain. Some areas are beset by war and conflict and unlikely to attract visitors other than intrepid journalists. Is there really going to be the predicted demand for flights even without demand management.

Daily Sea Surface Temperature, World (60°S–60°N, 0–360°E)

Export Chart

Dataset: NOAA OISST V2.1 | Image Credit: ClimateReanalyzer.org, Climate Change Institute, University of Maine



Why is this important? Just look at the graph. Global sea surface temperature has been at the highest recorded level every day since starting in April 2023 and climate scientists are not exactly sure why this step change is occurring. Is it El Nino? Is it the drop in sulphur aerosols from marine traffic? Is this just a small upward fluctuation in a lower progressive upward trend. Shall we wait and find out or shall we put our minds and our might behind reducing carbon emissions because this is the underlying cause. This proposal does not help reduce carbon emissions.

Gatwick must take responsibility for the emissions of flights from the airport in considering both its current and proposed future climate impact. Increasing Gatwick to the size of Heathrow, would make it as big as the UK's single largest climate polluter. There is a climate emergency. Aviation must play its part in reducing carbon emissions. This must include constraining demand at the airport level or efficiency savings and tax breaks will continue to drive growth. The airport's expansion should not be supported when taking into account just the climate impact outside of the more local impacts.