

Oral Submission to the DCO Inquiry, Thursday 2nd May

By Rt Hon Sir Jeremy Quin, MP for Horsham

May I start by thanking the Inspectors for their work on this DCO and for giving myself and others the opportunity to contribute.

I have served as MP for Horsham since 2015. I hope you will forgive me for saying that I am bemused that we are here at all.

My first year as an MP was dominated by the debate on where airport expansion should be progressed in the south-east.

That was advised on by the thorough Davies Report and agreed by Government and Parliament. Although an excellent airport in many ways it was accepted that there were real constraints on Gatwick especially around its transport links. There were very strong arguments in favour of Heathrow being preferred.

That was indeed the conclusion and the Airport National Policy Statement makes clear that the preferred scheme to increase airport capacity is a Northwest Runway at Heathrow.

The Government is fully supportive of other airports maximising the throughput on their existing footprint. Gatwick is an important local employer and I too am keen to support them in doing so.

However that is not what is under discussion in this inquiry. There is no question in my mind that the proposal is in practice the creation of a new second runway with all that that entails.

On the question of demand and the practicalities of such a substantial expansion I was particularly struck by the submission to this inquiry of Easyjet.

I am deeply concerned that not only might the expansion have adverse impacts on many local residents it could apparently, from the perspective of Easyjet, risk operations at Gatwick becoming less reliable, more expensive, noisier and worse for carbon emissions.

Easyjet also raised major questions on the provision of supporting infrastructure within the airport perimeter and the lack of transparency on financing which I fear are consistent with the concerns being raised by local Councils regarding infrastructure provision and engagement with stakeholders outside the perimeter.

Given the ANPS, the questions over demand, the apparent risk of this project being half-baked but having a detrimental effect on local communities and the planned expansion at Heathrow, I am very sceptical about this DCO.

I would however like to touch on the impact to local communities were this proposal to go ahead.

First the Impact on Local Transport and local infrastructure

The DCO aims to increase the capacity to over 80 mppa. The Joint Local Authorities see this as a far greater increase in capacity than GAL claim, it is undeniably a potentially very significant increase in passengers.

For many of my constituents Gatwick already has an impact on their transport links from home, school and work due to passenger and staff movements whether that is by road or on the relatively constrained train line. This risks becoming far more pronounced.

We are already an area with a growing population which is under pressure to increase housebuilding. This has already had a significant impact on local infrastructure and has impacted our water aquifer to the extent that any major new house building has had to be essentially paused until mitigations, which need to be significant, are put in place.

In terms of infrastructure many of my constituents having lost A&E services first from Horsham and then from Crawley are now reliant on East Surrey Hospital on the far side of Gatwick. This is often a 45 minute journey and increasing congestion extends these times.

My constituents will be deeply concerned by the representation by West Sussex County Council [October 2023 2.6 viii (a)] which states that the proposals will increase some journey times (Including potentially for emergency response vehicles)....”

The DCO posits thousands of additional jobs at the Airport most of these, given the local employment circumstances, are likely to involve travelling in to the airport; increases will be expected from the millions of additional passenger journeys and the aspiration to significantly increase freight.

These will all be expected to have an impact on my constituents whether they are going about their daily lives or in the worst case scenario trying to reach A&E.

This is troublesome throughout but particularly in the construction phase taking place over no fewer than 14 years.

We need the right road infrastructure to meet this challenge. While I appreciate the rail network to Gatwick, unlike Heathrow, is limited and constrained we need a real seriousness around the modal shift to public transport.

I am concerned that WSCC have also flagged that the proposals “have not incorporated sufficient additional measures to make using sustainable modes of transport a more attractive option for staff and passengers than using the private car [and that]....they are unlikely to support the achievement of the proposed surface access mode share targets.” [WSCC submission July 2023 (5)]

A second issue is Aircraft Noise.

I am concerned by the issues flagged by Mid Sussex District Council [MSDC submission, 27th October 2023] around the noise modelling and validation [4.1.6].

The benefits of noise reductions from future aircraft improvements should be shared between the airport and the local community this requirement is set out in the Aviation Policy Framework [Department for Transport, 2013].

The Council has raised concerns on this; and of how pressure would, under the proposal, be brought to bear on operators to actively reduce noise levels.

I would also add that the concerns around the health impact of night flights are growing. Without a specific ban any expansion in flights from Gatwick will increase long term concerns.

Lastly both Air Quality and Carbon emissions are a subject of concern. An Air Quality Action Plan is a core demand of local councils and reflects growing local concern.

On Carbon emissions the UK Committee on Climate Change highlighted factors that could compromise the UK's net zero trajectory including Airport expansion and reliance on nascent technology.

We absolutely must look at the proposal in the context of eight of the biggest UK airports planning to increase to nearly 150m more passengers by 2050 compared to 2019. This is especially pertinent to Gatwick given the choice already made that it is in the national interest for Heathrow expansion to be preferred.

Conclusion

Given the decision already taken in the ANPS, given the questions over demand and risks in delivery I am a deep sceptic on this DCO.

If however a decision is taken to allow expansion. I sincerely hope that this would be contemplated not on the basis of "with one leap you are free" but under the aegis of a proper control framework.

We are being assured that on local surface transport, on noise, air quality, on sewage treatment, on carbon emissions all will be well. Local residents want more than just assurances.

If expansion proceeds I would strongly support the proposal of the Joint Local Authorities for a "control growth" pattern. This approach is consistent with Heathrow's "Airport Managed Growth" and Luton's "Green Controlled Growth".

This fundamental underpinning of promises by a structure with teeth to constrain expansion if commitments to local communities are not being met is the very least local residents should expect.