

Councillor Alan Dean
Member for Stansted South
Airport Community Champion
Uttlesford District Council

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Essex
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Mr John Mitchell
Executive Manager, Development Services
Uttlesford District Council

Dear Sir

STANSTED AIRPORT AVIATION EMISSIONS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The publication in October of the Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change has shifted the debate about climate change from primarily one on environmental grounds onto a strong economic agenda. This has significant implications for the balance of arguments about the merits of the current planning application for increased use of the runway at Stansted Airport.

Stern has quantified the impact of climate change on the global economy as being potentially catastrophic; in a worst-case scenario 20% of GDP would be lost if action is not taken to reduce carbon emissions. Stern says that the cost of taking action to reduce emissions, though significant at around 1% of GDP, would be outweighed by a factor of up to twenty by the cost of not acting.

BAA has claimed economic benefits of growth at the airport as one of its principle justifications for its planning application. This is indeed a material consideration. The applicant has not made a convincing case that the balance of economic arguments is a net benefit to the UK economy when account is taken of the negative balance in terms of outward and inward tourism. There is also growing evidence that the existing business model at Stansted supports employment practices that are dependent on the exploitation of immigrant labour. This must cast doubt over the economic sustainability of the business itself.

Stern has now raised the stark prospect that continually escalating carbon emissions will depress the global economy and hence the UK economy and this region's economy in a way comparable with the effects of two world wars and the 1920's Depression.

Therefore, major sources of carbon emissions, of which transport overall and aviation in particular are the fastest rising sources, must now be viewed as potentially damaging to the economy and hence to social well-being when considering proposals for growth. The current planning application from BAA is a request to grow carbon emissions.

Various mechanisms for dealing with this situation are referenced in Stern. These include emissions trading schemes and taxation. The Government has indicated that it is considering these measures but has so far given no clear indication about how and when these will come into effect. Nor, from ministerial statements following the publication of Stern, is it clear in the case of aviation what the Government's intended outcome is.

Unless the growth in aviation emissions is arrested in the next few years, the steady pathway towards the apocalyptic consequences reported by Stern will continue. It is not yet clear whether taxation and emissions trading will arrest growth. It is possible that they will perversely become mechanisms for people to pay extra money for permission to continue to undermine the economy and the environment. If these measures are successful in suppressing demand, then extra capacity at airports will not be needed. It is too early to predict what will be achieved and what success will look like.

Either additional airport capacity is not desirable or is of questionable need.

Uttlesford's Development Control Committee has not yet received a comprehensive assessment of the implications of carbon emissions for the planning application. It has received claims from BAA that its own and its airport users' contributions to global emissions are so small as to be insignificant. That has always been a scientifically and morally unintelligent argument. After Stern it is an economically vacuous position. The committee has heard representations against the application from several organisations that have presented quantified evidence about the potential impact of Stansted on global carbon emissions. I will not repeat them here other than to restate the claim that there is the potential for Stansted Airport with two runways to be responsible for a level of annual carbon emissions equivalent to the total domestic emissions created in the East of England. Full use of the single runway would contribute about half this amount.

A balanced report on climate change and aviation was not presented at the Development Control Committee on 27 September 2006. In fact, some errors were made in the report to Members. These need to be corrected. Moreover, in the light of Stern, I request that a comprehensive picture of the scientific, environmental, economic and social impact of carbon emissions from a fully used runway at Stansted is given to the committee in November. It is difficult to attribute to any single source of carbon emissions any single effect but it is possible to put the impact of Stansted Airport into the wider context in both quantifiable and qualitative terms.

It will not be enough to address only the incremental effect of growth beyond present permissions for passengers and all traffic movements. The Council already addresses the original contribution of private properties on emissions when considering new permissions for house extensions. It would be ethically indefensible to treat a much greater contributor to carbon emissions more leniently than private householders. This would understandably be interpreted by the community as 'one rule for local people and another for big business'.

In view of this uncertainty and the massive significance for the people of the district, region, UK and the world of getting it wrong, extreme caution is essential at the present time. All possible steps should be taken by individuals and authorities to place a cap in carbon emissions increases in the absence of a national and international framework. The risk of waiting several years in the hope of a positive outcome to international negotiations and national legislation is now too great after Stern to take a complacent or trusting view that someone else will come up with a solution.

I conclude that the risks involved in giving approval to BAA's planning application are too great in terms of the direct contribution to climate change that the proposed growth would generate. The example of impotence that an approval would set for all regulatory authorities must be avoided. In the context of the Stern Review, growth at Stansted cannot be classed as necessary to the survival of humankind as we have known it. The balance of argument is for no more growth. The application should be refused.

Sincerely,

Alan Dean
Airport Community Champion