

## Aviation & the Planning White Paper

### Who we are

AirportWatch is an umbrella movement which unites the national environmental organisations and the airport community groups opposed to the aggressive go-for-growth policy of aviation expansion outlined in the Air Transport White Paper.

AirportWatch aims to oppose any expansion of aviation and airports likely to damage the human or natural environment, and to promote an aviation policy for the UK which is in full accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

### The Planning White Paper

Following the controversial reports by Kate Barker and Sir Rod Eddington, the Government has published the White Paper "Planning for a Sustainable Future". The proposals were partly initiated by BAA (now Ferrovial).

The White Paper proposals, if passed into law, will fast-track massive new developments and reduce the ability of local people to question schemes that threaten their communities. The proposals threaten to remove public scrutiny of national policy on issues of need and economic justification. Green campaigners have condemned ministers for "steamrolling" objections to major new schemes for airport runways, motorways, nuclear power stations, waste incinerators and even wind farms.

Contained in the White Paper are proposals to:

- **Define major airport developments as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) which will be decided by a new Planning Commission, rather than by the relevant Minister, thus reducing democratic accountability.**
- **Ensure that the Planning Commission must normally decide in line with national policy statements, such as the Air Transport White Paper 2003 (ATWP), thus stifling proper debate.**
- **Replace cross-examination by meaningless and ineffective 'consultation'.**
- **Reduce the scope for 'call-in' so that local authorities, who often own airports, can give themselves planning permission for expansion.**

### Planning and future airport infrastructure

Airports across the country are expanding at a relentless pace, with thousands more passengers travelling each year, and flights and destinations added monthly. Air travel is growing by around 6% annually in the UK.

The ATWP, reviewed at the end of 2006, supports growth in air travel across the country, encouraging expansion in airport capacity to meet anticipated demand - up to three times the number of passengers in 2030 as in 2000. This demand is artificially high, due to the anomalous tax benefits that aviation enjoys, paying no tax on aviation fuel, or VAT on tickets.

**We are strongly opposed to all the White Paper proposals relating to large infrastructure projects.**

Planning applications for new airport runways, or new terminals or new airport infrastructure which would lead to increases of more than 5 million passengers per year would be classed as major infrastructure projects - or NSIPs. Smaller applications would continue to be determined in the normal way, but with less scope for public inquiries.

The major aviation expansions during the next few years, for which the government expressed "support" in the Air Transport White Paper are:

- increased use of the current Stansted runway
- a 3rd runway at Heathrow
- a second runway at Stansted
- a 2nd runway at Edinburgh
- a 2nd runway at Glasgow before 2030
- increased airport building at Birmingham
- Nottingham East Midlands - doubling or tripling capacity by 2030.

In addition, figures in the master plans of UK airports such as Belfast, Bournemouth, Exeter, Leeds, Liverpool, Luton, and Southampton, indicate they intend to expand passenger numbers significantly - up to 3, or even 4, times the 2000 level by 2030 - requiring considerable extra airport infrastructure.

Aviation is the industry with the fastest growing contribution to climate change. The Government recently stated that, after taking into account the additional damage caused at high altitude, aviation accounts for 13% of UK climate change damage. The figure is nearer 20% if return flights by UK citizens are included. Permitting, or encouraging, aviation growth is contradictory to Government policy on climate change.

Moreover, airport and flight path extensions have many adverse effects on both residents close to airports, and those further afield. Noise, pollution, additional traffic, loss of countryside, habitats and historic buildings are all issues which need careful debate so that, even if the development is given the go-ahead, proper conditions can be attached.

The ATWP contained frequent statements such as “The Government’s under-pinning objectives are to limit and, where possible, reduce noise impacts over time, to ensure air quality and other environmental standards are met, and to minimise other local environmental impacts.” Note the “where possible” and “minimise”–typical weasel-wording.

## **AirportWatch Comments on the White Paper**

### **A flawed diagnosis**

The Planning White Paper asserts that public inquiries for nationally significant infrastructure are too lengthy, and the system needs to be speeded up. This is largely based on the experience of the Heathrow T5 Inquiry, but that was exceptional with the length of time largely due to poor preparation by the Government and BAA, and public fury that conditions set as a result of previous Inquiries were being cast aside. The White Paper actually shows that in many other recent cases more time was spent by the Inspector writing his report and the Government reaching a decision than at the public inquiry.

Anyway the problem of over-lengthy inquiries has already been dealt with by regulations which now allow Inspectors to set a strict timetable.

### **Cross-examination better than ‘consultation’**

The Devil’s Dictionary definition of “consult”: to seek another’s disapproval of a course of action already decided on.

The suggested reforms rely more on consultation but the process of consultation has been discredited. Whether the airport development plans are produced by civil servants, working hand-in-glove with airlines and airport companies, or by airport companies working hand-in-glove with civil servants, it is often the same people who produce the plan who then receive – and disregard – the views expressed by the public.

A full and proper public debate of the issues, operated under rigorous quasi-legal conditions, is vital if the public is to feel engaged in the process. Consultations in which there is no specific response to matters raised by consultees (eg the ATWP consultation) attract cynicism about the process. Further, consultations in which the questions restrict public input make matters worse.

“Consultation” as envisaged by the Planning White Paper would prevent rigorous examination of the economic aspects of any specific expansion proposal, and for the real need for it.

Cross-examination would be replaced by questioning by members of the Planning Commission. We regard this as much less satisfactory. Only by rigorous cross-examination can objectors prise out the inconsistencies in government policies, or the false or loose assumption on which planning applications may be based.

### **National Policy Statements**

The ATWP may have been used as a model for the proposal that the introduction of national policy statements for key infrastructure sectors should help to clarify government policy and provide a clearer strategic framework for sustainable development.

Yet the ATWP is repetitive and discursive, which results in wide differences of interpretation as is presently being demonstrated at

the public inquiry into the Stansted G1 appeal. Drafting to Parliamentary Bill standard will be necessary to minimise uncertainty over the Government’s intentions.

It is suggested that there must be Parliamentary ‘scrutiny’ of National Policy Statements, but this may be no more than examination by a Select Committee – with the

Government able to ignore their conclusions. We believe that all National Policy Statements must be approved by both Houses of Parliament.

This would, in fact, rule out the ATWP as it has never been approved by Parliament – the Government was probably afraid that the Lords would vote it down on climate change grounds.

The Government issued a Progress Report on the ATWP in December 2006, which hinted that the first new runway might be built at Heathrow instead of Stansted. Would such changes in policy also require Parliamentary approval? Or would the Planning Commission be instructed to take Statements by Ministers as gospel? That would be getting close to dictatorship.

The Planning White Paper asks whether policy statements in existence already should acquire the status of national policy statements. We believe that in the case of the Air Transport White Paper, it definitely should not. The ATWP has been overtaken by the growing awareness that aviation cannot be permitted to grow at the rates assumed if global warming is to be controlled.

Problems also arise with the EU requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessments. Are these to be undertaken before Parliamentary consideration, thus restricting the scope for MPs to amend the plans?

### **The need for public consent**

The Planning White Paper is clearly inspired by BAA and other business interests who wish to get their expansion plans approved with minimum delay. But in fact the process of seeking Parliamentary approval, and the shortage of Parliamentary time, may actually slow the process down.

Major infrastructure developments, such as new airport runways, are always going to create massive opposition. There is always likely to be some public protest but the aim of the planning system should be to try to reach as much consensus as possible.

**AirportWatch believes that the proposals in the Planning White Paper - by cutting down on public debate, by denying national NGOs the opportunity to question government policies, by eliminating rigorous examination of expansion proposals on a case-by-case basis and by reducing democratic accountability - will greatly increase the probability of civil disobedience.**

**In a democratic Britain - however great our need for new infrastructure - controversial projects such as new runways cannot be forced through by means of riot police and mass imprisonment of protesters.**

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