

The GACC runway campaign 2014-16

- Exhibitions. The campaign started in April 2014 when Gatwick produced a consultation on three possible locations for a new runway, and held seventeen exhibitions in the towns and villages around the airport. GACC picketed every exhibition, handing out leaflets and warning of the environmental impact. The result was that a huge majority of those responding to the consultation voted against all the options.
- Local MPs. We were delighted that the nine Members of Parliament around Gatwick decided unanimously to oppose the runway. In June 2014 they formed the 'Gatwick Coordination Group' under the chairmanship of Crispin Blunt MP. GACC attended all their meetings and supplied briefing. They have done invaluable lobbying behind the scenes.
- Public meeting in Crawley. On 22 November 2014 we held a meeting at the Hindu temple in Ifield, near the end of the proposed runway. With five MPs on the platform, the meeting was attended by around 1,000 people and concluded with the singing of the rousing runway song. But apart from that meeting GACC has resisted the temptation to organise small demos, or stunts, or petitions, or asking our members to write to Ministers. Such actions make the participants feel good and get a transient headline in the local paper but for the decision takers in Westminster and Whitehall they tend to illustrate the comparatively small number of protesters.
- Council decisions. The shock decision by the West Sussex County Council in July 2013 to support a new Gatwick runway, with similar murmurs from other councils, enabled Gatwick to claim that they had wide community support. GACC debated the runway issue at several council seminars. We produced a briefing paper - *Gatwick Unwrapped* - and delivered it to all county and district councillors. All the councils held votes in the Spring of 2015, and the result was that West Sussex and Kent county councils reversed their support; Crawley, Horsham, Mole Valley, Mid Sussex, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Councils all voted strongly to oppose a second runway.¹ Gatwick had to stop claiming they had community support. Significantly, unlike Heathrow, GAL have never been able to publish polls showing local backing.
- The Airports Commission. GACC worked with the Commission from the time they were set up in October 2012, forming a friendly relationship with the chairman and staff. We responded to many of their consultation documents. The impression we got was that they were annoyed by the brash advertising campaign by Gatwick which was the obverse of their logical approach.
- The Department for Transport. Similarly we formed a good working relationship with the DfT officials working on the runway issue. We found they too had an antipathy to the American style lobbying tactics of Gatwick, having a deeply ingrained belief that it was their job to give impartial advice to Ministers who then took decisions on the basis of what is best for the nation, not on who supplied the

most champagne.

- Judicial review. We ‘retained’ a senior QC and with his advice wrote to the Transport Secretary to threaten judicial review if a decision was made for Gatwick as a result of a ‘personal interest’ of some members of the Cabinet, such as Boris Johnson. We were glad to hear Chris Grayling say in answer to a question about opposition at Heathrow that ‘there would be opposition at whichever option was chosen.’

- Parliament. When it looked as if the decision would be made in autumn 2015 we produced two glossy and hard-hitting booklets *Gatwick Grounded* and – in conjunction with the Aviation Environment Federation – *The Great British Runway Myth*.ⁱⁱ We posted these to all MPs (thanks to all our members who helped stuff envelopes). When the decision was postponed and we found we had a thousand spare copies of *Gatwick Grounded*, we posted it again in October 2016 to all MPs (on the assumption that they would have forgotten having seen them before). Although a vote was not taken on the runway decision, the whips will have reported to the Cabinet whether there was support for the Gatwick option.

ⁱ For voting figures see <http://www.gacc.org.uk/the-runway-issue.php>

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