

Press Release 30th January 2025

GACC RESPONDS TO RACHEL REEVES' GROWTH SPEECH

Rachel Reeves announced yesterday that the government backs the building of a new runway at Heathrow and has indicated there will be support for applications to expand both Gatwick and Luton Airports.

The Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC) stands in unity with our counterparts at Heathrow and Luton in strongly opposing airport expansion as an unnecessary project which prioritises 'growth' over disastrous climate change consequences and drastic damage to our environment with no concern for our future generations.

Today the Chancellor spoke of the growth to the economy that airport expansion will bring, and yet the economic benefits of expanding Gatwick Airport are based on misleading or inaccurate analysis and have been grossly over estimated. Independent analysis by the New Economics Foundation shows that more airport capacity does not benefit the UK economy [1]. Business air travel has been in long term decline for decades. The UK sends three times as many tourists out of the country than it brings in. In 2023 £41bn left the country due to UK tourists spending more abroad than foreign tourists spent when visiting the UK.

While Gatwick's own consultants have made it clear that expanding the airport would not increase employment or wealth at the national level. Independent analysis shows that there has been no increase in air transport sector jobs since 2006 despite significant passenger growth and that air transport saw the fastest decline in real wages of any sector in the UK economy between 2008 and 2022. Claims of huge employment benefits are false.

Expanding Heathrow – or Gatwick or Luton – would be completely incompatible with the government's net zero legal commitments and the global imperative to limit warming to less than 1.5°C. A recent Met Office study reveals that if global warming is to be limited to the international target of 1.5°C, we already need to be slowing the build up of CO2 in the atmosphere [2]. Urgent action is needed internationally to cut emissions and limit global warming. Aviation emissions have risen relentlessly and the industry does not have credible plans to reduce them. The Chancellor's reported claim that so-called 'sustainable aviation fuels' can undo the climate harm caused by new runways is a fantasy. The supply of genuinely sustainable fuels for aviation is very limited, and insufficient to supply aviation's current demand, let alone new runways. [3] We are already seeing the devastating effects of climate change across the world and in the UK, most recently Storm Eowyn which saw huge disruption across the country. Allowing growth in the hope that effective and scalable future technologies will emerge is reckless and irresponsible. The Climate Change Committee has consistently advised that there should be no airport expansions until an effective capacity management framework is in place.

Chairman of GACC, Peter Barclay said: "sustainable aviation fuels in the volumes needed are still in the fantasy stage.."

Vice Chairman of GACC, Jonathan Essex said:"the need to reduce emissions not grow them is critical to survival "

Aviation is the worst possible sector to expand: the only benefits would be to the foreign owners of airports and frequent flyers; the global risks are huge and the local impacts profound.

The Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign strongly opposes Gatwick Airport's expansion proposals – Gatwick's Big Enough!

Ends

Notes

[1] NEF report: https://www.gacc.org.uk/resources/NEF%20Gatwick%20Airport%20consultation_08.11.2021.pdf

[2] Met Office article: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2025/rise-in-carbon-dioxide-off-track-for-limiting-global-warming-to-1.5c>

[3] <https://www.aef.org.uk/2025/01/30/aef-response-heathrow-expansion/>

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