

Appeal by BAA Ltd and Stansted Airport Ltd following the refusal by Uttlesford District Council of planning application UTT/0717/06/FUL

Summary Proof of Evidence on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural Essex and Stop Stansted Expansion

Landscape, Visual Impact and Quality of Life

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1 INTRODUCTION

CPREssex supports the totality of SSE's case. A number of aspects of this joint proof are covered elsewhere in other proofs of evidence. To avoid duplication this document confines itself directly to Countryside and Landscape matters and their effect on Quality of Life.

1.1 Personal details

- 1.1.1 My name is John Drake. I appear at the Public Inquiry jointly on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural Essex ('CPREssex'), the Essex branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, and Stop Stansted Expansion ('SSE')
- 1.1.2 Lady Suzanne Walker is co-author of this proof of evidence and also appears jointly at the Inquiry on behalf of CPREssex and SSE.

1.2 Qualifications and experience

John Drake

- 1.2.1 I have a BSc (hons) in chemistry and was subsequently awarded my Associate Membership of the Royal Institute of Chemistry (ARIC). Following time spent in industrial chemical research I worked in technical sales and marketing in manufacturing industry and finally in consultancy, relinquishing my membership of the RIC. Three years ago, following retirement, I joined CPREssex, of which I am a trustee, as a volunteer member. I have no special knowledge in the field of aviation or planning but I do have a love of the English countryside and a strong commitment to help protect it for present and future generations.

Lady Suzanne Walker

- 1.2.2 I have lived in Uttlesford since 1966. We brought up our family of four children in the district where they all attended local schools. Two of our adult children, with their children, also live in Uttlesford. For nearly 30 years I ran a small riding establishment in Thaxted and although I do not hold any relevant professional qualifications I have spent about ten years working in a voluntary capacity for the CPREssex. I was county vice-chairman and for three years county chairman. I am a Deputy Lieutenant of the county.

2 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

2.1 Core evidence

- 2.1.1 Volume 9 of the BAA Environmental Statement ('ES Vol 9') [CD/12], 'Landscape and Visual Impact', is not a reliable document as an assessment of the impact of future development. Our principal criticisms are set out in our proof of evidence SSE/18/a of which this is a summary. Our evidence focuses on four issues: damage to the landscape, loss of tranquillity, light pollution and quality of life. In all of these areas the proposed development would have unacceptable impacts.

3 SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

3.1 Damage to the landscape

- 3.1.1 The original concept of 'an airport in the countryside' is being destroyed by continuous erosion of the rural landscape through airport-related commercial and ancillary development both on-site and off-site. That destruction would accelerate if the application were to be approved.
- 3.1.2 BAA has addressed only the landscape within the airport boundary but the impacts of Stansted's activities do not stop at the airport perimeter. Hatfield Forest is a case in point. It would suffer serious adverse impacts if the development were permitted.
- 3.1.3 BAA appears to regard landscaped areas as landbanks for future development. Areas with nature conservation benefit have been pushed aside over the years to make room for more car parks, roads and airport buildings and it is hard to see how BAA could carry out effective landscape mitigation of any further development.
- 3.1.4 BAA has ignored the impact of increasing volumes of road traffic upon the character of the landscape and the physical damage caused by traffic to lanes and verges and other areas with potential nature conservation benefit.

3.2 Loss of tranquillity

- 3.2.1 Tranquillity is not just peace and quiet. It is the quality of calm experienced in the countryside where it is possible to be free from disturbance and where there are few, if any, man-made features or intrusions. Tranquillity can therefore be seen to be a public good and an indicator of environmental quality.
- 3.2.2 The adverse environmental impacts of an airport are often oversimplified as being only down to aircraft noise but it is the cumulative effect of many issues that erodes tranquillity. BAA's proposals would mean further erosion of tranquillity as a result of substantial increases in airport-related noise, visual intrusion, road traffic and further new development all having an adverse impact upon the rural character of the area.
- 3.2.3 Tranquillity is harder to measure than adverse impacts in relation to noise, air quality and traffic, where quantitative data is easier to come by. However, CPRE, working with Northumbria University has been pioneering 'tranquillity evaluation' to enable quantification of tranquillity. On the basis of this work, airport development can be shown to have a particularly negative impact upon tranquillity, especially for an airport in a rural setting.
- 3.2.4 CPRE's tranquillity maps illustrate the comparatively limited areas of true tranquillity now left in Essex, Hertfordshire and South Suffolk.
- 3.2.5 In our evidence on this subject, we cite a number of studies/surveys which show the importance of preserving the tranquillity of the countryside and also show that tranquillity contributes to the health and wellbeing of individuals. We also refer to the growing acceptance of tranquillity as a material planning issue.

3.3 Light pollution

- 3.3.1 The growing problem of light pollution from Stansted means that even when darkness falls there is no escaping the visual impact of the airport and its effect upon the landscape. If the expansion were to be approved, the adverse impact of airport light pollution would be even greater. We draw upon studies by CPRE and the British Astronomical Association in order to illustrate this – an impact that is damaging to enjoyment of the countryside, to tranquillity and to QoL.
- 3.3.2 We have reviewed BAA's assessment of light pollution impacts¹ and have found a number of significant shortcomings which lead to the impacts being understated. In our main proof of evidence we explain why BAA's assessment is unreliable.

3.4 Quality of Life

- 3.4.1 The concept of sustainable development (which is inextricably linked to QoL) was until relatively recently a largely meaningless piece of political rhetoric. But this is now changing; there is increasing recognition of the importance of QoL and the earlier rhetoric on sustainable development is now evolving into concrete policy.
- 3.4.2 The Audit Commission has recently published 'a definitive set of [QoL] indicators' agreed with DEFRA and ODPM (now DCLG) which:

'... cover aspects of community safety, the environment and other measures that contribute to the development of genuinely sustainable communities as set out in Securing the Future, the Government's recently published Sustainable Development Strategy.'

The Audit Commission explained its rationale for publishing QoL indicators as follows:

'the importance of qualities of life factors that may not be quantifiable, bringing into our planning and other decision-making what cannot be valued but may be priceless.'

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The significant adverse impacts caused by Stansted Airport to the character and appearance of the landscape over the years would be exacerbated if further expansion were to be allowed. There is no mitigation that can substitute for what has already been lost and there is no room for mitigation of what would be lost in the future if this application were to be approved. Placing all new car parking underground, for example, would offer some mitigation for the visual impact of the airport and for light pollution but if the airport was allowed to expand as proposed, the scale and range of other adverse impacts – locally and globally – would overwhelm the value of token concessions.
- 4.2 Tranquillity is important to human health and wellbeing and a number of highly adverse impacts upon tranquillity would stem from further airport expansion. Such impacts arise from airport expansion generally but are particularly pronounced in the case of Stansted, given its countryside setting.
- 4.3 Light pollution from the airport is a growing problem. This is a very specific impact but an important one which has not received enough recognition in the past. We do not accept BAA's assertion that the additional light pollution would not be too serious. For

¹ ES Volume 9 [CD/12]

many the issue is already very serious and it is no consolation to be told that it would not worsen, especially when BAA is doing the telling.

4.4 Quality of Life should be at the heart of this Inquiry. There is now a global imperative as well as a local imperative for this to be so and there are now also very sound planning reasons for endorsing this view.

4.5 For the reasons we set out in our proof of evidence this application should be refused.