

From the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson



Our reference: **PO46/2006**

2nd May 2006

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Dear 

Re: Stansted Airport expansion

Thank you for your letter of 27th March 2006 in regards to health issues relating to airport expansion in the United Kingdom. I am sorry for the delay in replying, but I wanted to consult with colleagues in the Department for Transport on one or two of the matters you raise.

There look to be essentially two sorts of issue. The first relates to the planning process, and what part the various bodies, including the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and Primary Care Trusts are playing to discharge their responsibilities. The second is the nature of the evidence on which to base statements about the potential effects of airport expansion on human health.

As far as the first is concerned, I note your reference to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs policy that local councils should take measures to mitigate the effect of climate change. You and your colleagues will clearly want to continue to ensure that the local decision makers in the planning process are well aware of that advice, and feel that they are acting in accordance with it. You also make a broader point about the way the local bodies are approaching the issue of how best to incorporate the health and environmental dimensions of the airport expansion into their deliberations. Essentially this is a matter for the local planning authority, but if you do wish to raise concern, particularly relating to lack of transparency, at Government level, the responsible Department is the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It is vital that whatever structures and processes are established to underpin the planning decisions, they command public confidence.

I note the comments made about the SHA, but as you know, SHA's have a separate legal persona, and are independent of Government. I am taking the liberty though of sending the SHA Chief Executive a copy of your letter to me, and this reply, in the expectation that the SHA will want to be sure that the National Health Service has



properly sustained its responsibilities in the way it has participated in the planning process to date.

On the second issue, and related to the health effects of noise, the Department is leading on the production of an up-to-date systematic review. We expect this to be available later in the year.

You may also be aware that the Department for Transport has commissioned a piece of research designed to throw light on public perceptions of aircraft noise. Department for Transport expect this to be completed and published later in the year.

In the meantime, Government policy on aviation is as stated in the White Paper *The Future of Air Transport*.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. Donaldson', written over a faint horizontal line.

**SIR LIAM DONALDSON
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**

Cc Terry Hanafin, Chief Executive, Essex Strategic Health Authority