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Case Ref. 2032278

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 Stop Stansted Expansion

Community Cohesion (Erosion of the Community)

Maggie Sutton

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www.stopstanstedexpansion.com
info@stopstanstedexpansion.com

PO Box 311
Takeley
Bishop's Stortford
Herts, CM22 6PY
Tel: 01279 870558

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal details

- 1.1.1 My name is Maggie Sutton and I appear at the Public Inquiry on behalf of Stop Stansted Expansion ('SSE').

1.2 Qualifications and experience

- 1.2.1 I live at Browns End Cottage, Broxton in a Grade II listed building which, until January this year, had been under the threat of demolition since 2002 to make way for a second runway at Stansted. My home is about three quarters of a mile from the flight path used by arriving aircraft (two out of three days) and is regularly directly overflowed by many departing aircraft on the days when planes take off to the North East.
- 1.2.2 I have lived here for 11 years with my husband and five children age 12 to 20, while two of my sisters and their families live within five miles. I am a former legal secretary, hold the position of Governor at Takeley Primary School and have formally served as a member of SSE's Executive Committee as Community Representative since 2003. I consider myself to be an active member of the local community. In the time I have lived here, the airport has grown to handle five times as many passengers as when I moved in.

2 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

2.1 Core evidence

- 2.1.1 The core of my evidence is based on the 'Erosion of the Community' report (SSE/20/a) which Mrs Irene Jones and I submitted to Uttlesford District Council ('UDC') in August 2006 on behalf of SSE.

2.2 Public presentations to UDC

- 2.2.1 During the week commencing 3 July 2006, in addition to representations from councils, public bodies, industry and environmental groups and various 'experts', approximately 50 members of the public gave oral evidence to UDC's Development Control Committee. These presentations (on 5 and 6 July) are an important source of evidence for this Inquiry, in assessing the impacts of the proposed development on the local community and I would like to present a sample of these webcast presentations¹ in my evidence to the Inquiry.

¹ Copy included in SSE/20/c Appendix 1.

3 SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY COHESION ISSUES

3.1.1 The Department of Communities and Local Government describes a cohesive community as one where 'there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities'. It makes clear that:

*'Community cohesion cannot be forcibly imposed by external agencies but has to be achieved through community members working together for the benefit of all.'*²

3.1.2 During UDC's Community Engagement Week many people came forward to describe the very severe impacts which the airport's operations are already having on our lives and the shape of the community, and how these impacts have worsened in recent years as a result of growth at the airport.

3.1.3 The nature of the questions which emerged, particularly in response to my own presentation and that of Irene Jones at the meeting on Wednesday 5 July, led to our decision to compile the Erosion of the Community Report, describing the experiences of people living in the villages in the immediate vicinity of the airport to give a flavour of current problems to those considering the planning application.

3.1.4 We live in a beautiful part of Essex which is treasured by many for its special character, countryside and community. Our neighbourhood extends from Broxton to include Takeley, Coopers End, Woodgates End, Chapel End, Bambers Green, Molehill Green, Little Easton, Great Easton, Duton Hill and Pledgdon. In the five years since consultations began on expanding airport capacity we have become firm friends with those in The Hallingburys, Hatfield Broad Oak and Hatfield Heath, Lindsell, Thaxted and beyond, sharing the great anxieties and concerns which have arisen because of BAA's plans.

3.1.5 We have suffered many untruths, misinformation and broken promises from BAA with regard to its relentless expansion plans for Stansted and we have watched the life being sucked out of our villages because of fears of further expansion.

3.1.6 Since permission was granted for growth from 15 to 25 million passengers per annum in 2002, a great many changes have taken place. The airport is very rarely still. So many of us suffer constant air noise throughout the day and for much of the night. We are awoken repeatedly by airport activity and large, noisy cargo flights. Bed and breakfast establishments have begun to spring up around us together with airport related industrial units. We suffer air and light pollution, fly parking and increased road traffic. There are a great many accidents on our tiny lanes because the roads are so busy now. Airport cabs and other vehicles cut through our villages constantly and at speed at all times of the day and night.

3.1.7 We have suffered great loss to our community through people leaving because of the fears of what may come with further expansion. Expansion proposals have caused massive blight throughout the area on a scale which BAA has repeatedly refused to recognise, leading to widespread worry and stress which inevitably takes its toll on wellbeing and quality of life.

3.1.8 We have seen our villages fall into disrepair because of neglect by BAA which now owns so much property here. BAA's short term tenants are not generally interested in getting involved in local or parish activities and do not have children at local

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1503278>

schools. I have watched as 14 of my closest neighbours have moved because of the impacts and further fears about what expansion would bring, not least the worry and uncertainty of it all. I am sad to say that while I love my home, without near neighbours who share a sense of community, and little prospect of being able to find this at such an important time in the development of my children, we have taken the decision to move to a village five miles away to rejoin two of our former and closest Broxted neighbours and their families.

3.1.9 My experience is not unique and the accounts related in the Erosion of the Community Report, incorporated into my proof of evidence, reveal the impacts as they are perceived by others, for example:

- Worsening noise disturbance from the increased frequency of overflying aircraft and of airport related road traffic;
- Light pollution;
- Increasing numbers of cars on rat runs on local roads and lack of adequate public transport;
- Blight from expansion proposals;
- The breakdown of the social fabric of the community;
- Increased evidence of neglect of BAA-owned properties;
- The worry created by the mass of houses on the market, house price devaluation and the failure of BAA to pay compensation arising from previous expansion;
- Falling school numbers and fewer volunteers for community activities because of the rapid changes in the population profile (multi-occupancy rentals and relatively few families).

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The impacts of current airport operation are already taking a heavy toll on people's wellbeing and community cohesion. To allow further expansion would make life intolerable for many local people across a wide catchment, extending well beyond the immediate vicinity of the airport and long term would have a deleterious effect on the fabric of the community.

4.1.2 To overturn the Inspector's recommendation following the 1981-83 Public Inquiry into Stansted expansion of a maximum passenger throughput of 25 million passengers per annum – unequivocally accepted by the Government – would be a travesty for those who have settled in this community on the fully justifiable understanding that there was a finite limit in place, endorsed by the Government, on the scale of the intrusion they would face from Stansted Airport's operations.

4.1.3 The sacrifice of the community and the social costs arising from further expansion at Stansted cannot be warranted on the basis of providing more cheap flights for holidaymakers.