

Press Release - 21 May 2009

BAA SEEKS FURTHER DELAY ON SECOND RUNWAY INQUIRY

SSE condemns as "outrageous and wholly unacceptable"

Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) has condemned as outrageous a request by BAA for the Public Inquiry into its plans for a second Stansted runway to be put on hold for what could turn out to be a period of three years.

The proposal was made by BAA in a letter sent yesterday (20 May) to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, copied to SSE. BAA has asked that the inquiry be deferred pending the outcome of its appeal against the Competition Commission's ruling that it must sell Stansted and until such time as any future owner's intentions are made clear.

If BAA's wishes were to be granted, it could mean that a final decision on whether Stansted should be allowed a second runway may not be known until the end of 2014. This assumes an extended period of sale is allowed to BAA followed by an 18 month Inquiry, six months for the Inspector to produce his report and six months for a decision by Ministers [see Note 1].

It is now almost seven years since the spectre of major expansion of Stansted was raised by the Government (July 2002). SSE believes that it would be wholly unacceptable for the prospect of another five years of blight and uncertainty to hang over local families, many of whom are threatened by compulsory purchase, inhibiting major life decisions such as whether to move home and which school to choose for their children.

Natural justice dictates that BAA should not be allowed to keep its options open indefinitely at the expense of the local community. BAA should either proceed with its planning application now or withdraw it altogether. SSE's preference is for the application to be withdrawn but, since BAA is refusing this course of action, the Government should insist that the Inquiry proceeds forthwith. An early Public Inquiry would be a lesser evil than the prospect of five more years of uncertainty.

SSE will be writing to Hazel Blears urging her to reject BAA's request and will be pressing the local authorities to take similar action. SSE is also seeking legal advice, including in relation to the Human Rights Act, on whether BAA can put its planning application into indefinite suspension without regard for the impact this has upon local families in terms of property blight and uncertainty.

SSE Campaign Director Carol Barbone commented: "BAA is trying to have its cake and eat it. The actions of Stansted's owners demonstrate a callous disregard for this community and a mindset focused only on protecting BAA's commercial interests."

Ms Barbone concluded: "This is the company which tries to preach to us about how seriously it takes its responsibilities to its neighbours. Never before has the hollowness of these claims been clearer for everyone to see."

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Appeals to the Competition Appeal Tribunal (CAT) are normally completed within nine months and so the outcome should be known by early 2010. There are three possible outcomes:

(i) BAA's appeal is upheld, in which case it would not be required to sell Stansted and could proceed with its second runway planning application to Public Inquiry with the Inquiry beginning around this time next year.

(ii) BAA's appeal is refused outright, in which case the airport would need to be sold (we assume completion of the sale process by the end of 2010). The new owner would need a few months to decide whether or not to proceed with the planning application. If the new owner decided to proceed, notice would be needed before the Public Inquiry could begin. Under this scenario we assume the Inquiry would begin around May 2011, i.e. about two years from now.

(iii) BAA's appeal is refused but, in view of the current difficult market circumstances (a key part of BAA's case), the CAT allows BAA an additional year to sell Stansted. Under this scenario the airport would need to be sold by the end of 2011 and the new owner would need a few months to decide whether or not to proceed with the planning application. If the new owner decided to proceed, notice would be needed before the Public Inquiry could begin. This would result in the Inquiry beginning around May 2012, i.e. about three years from now.

2. A copy of the BAA letter of 20 May to Hazel Blears is [available online](#).