

Press Release - 19 January 2009

SECOND RUNWAY PROGRAMME: REALISM BEGINNING TO PREVAIL?

A marathon meeting held today (19 January) to discuss the timing, duration and other aspects of the proposed Public Inquiry into a second runway at Stansted has left Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) cautiously optimistic that a sense of realism is beginning to prevail.

Around 150 people attended the eight hour session determined to ensure the Inspector took on board concerns that a fair and thorough inquiry be held - not one that was quick and dirty for the sake of political expediency.

Inspector Andrew Phillipson heard detailed representations from SSE, the local authorities, Stansted Airlines, BAA and others and agreed to take full account of these before making his recommendations to the Secretary of State at the end of January.

However, whether the Secretary of State takes these on board is another matter and SSE has expressed concern that political desire to drive through plans for a second runway at any cost could overrule the Inspector's desire for a fair and thorough inquiry.

Evidence from the major parties, including BAA, led to a consensus that between 144 and 200 sitting days would be required, equivalent to an inquiry lasting between 15 and 20 months. This was significantly longer than the Inspector's provisional view of six months. Similarly, on closer examination of the potential pitfalls, he appeared to recognise that concurrent sessions could compromise the inquiry's fairness and would not necessarily be more efficient.

In addition, SSE and the Stansted airlines both argued for a deferral of the start of the inquiry until September on the basis that fundamental issues remained to be resolved and the local authorities said they had no objection to this. However, BAA clung to its position that the inquiry should start in April despite the many uncertainties highlighted by the Inspector and other parties.

Two of these fundamental uncertainties would be resolved one way or another within the next two months: SSE's pending High Court Appeal into the permission to expand on the existing runway, and the expected confirmation by the Competition Commission that Stansted Airport should be sold. Either of these issues could well lead to the cancellation of the second runway inquiry.

SSE expressed the view that postponing the inquiry until September would allow the dust to settle and thereby reduce the time ultimately required for the hearings - in the event that an inquiry was still needed. This view was endorsed by the Stansted airlines and the local authorities.

The Inspector advised that the start date was a matter for the Secretary of State rather than himself and that his own focus was on the duration and programming arrangements. His recommendations to Hazel Blears would be published shortly but it could be mid March before the outcome is known.

Commenting after the meeting Brian Ross, who represented SSE at the meeting, said: "When SSE, Ryanair and EasyJet are all agreed that it would be illogical for the inquiry to start in April, Hazel Blears will hopefully take note. It's not often that such a consensus happens."

In questions to the Inspector from the community at the end of the eight hour meeting, Maggie Sutton of Lindsell asked the Inspector for an assurance that if, as expected, BAA was forced to sell Stansted, the community would not have to go through the whole second runway process again under a new owner with a different set of plans.

"We've all had our lives turned upside down by these plans," she said. "You have your lives - we are ordinary people who want to get on with ours without all the blight and uncertainty of not knowing how this will all end. The Government should think hard about the start date for the sake of local people and our lives."

The Inspector said that he could not provide any such assurances but would report the concerns to the Secretary of State.

ENDS

NOTE TO EDITORS

People from across the region demonstrated their opposition to plans for a 'quick and dirty' public inquiry into BAA's

planning application for a second runway at Stansted Airport. Their protest took place as officials gathered for the Inquiry Programming Meeting at the Stansted Hilton described above. [See photographs.](#)