

Heathrow Expansion Consultation Response

September 2019



Sustainable Merton objects to the proposed expansion of Heathrow airport. The planet is facing a climate emergency and, as an environmental charity, we want people to reduce the number of flights they take to save our planet. Increasing the numbers of flights and associated traffic will only worsen the position. We are against the proposal for more 'hours of flight' operations through the night, for a wider distribution of flight patterns, and finally, for the proposed third runway. The area around Wimbledon and in South West London is very densely populated and it is wrong and detrimental to people's health to further increase density, air and noise pollution in the area. Homes in the London Borough of Merton will also be degraded and devalued because of your proposal, due to the proposed increases in number and frequency of incoming and departing flights immediately overhead.

1. Carbon emissions

The UK will fail to meet its next carbon budget (a legal obligation), unless the government brings in more ambitious policies to cut carbon. Aviation expansion would mean that more draconian cuts are required from other sectors.

The plan to increase the number of car parking spaces by 13,000 obviously envisages increased car traffic with all its associated greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. We note that additional traffic to Sipson, where one of the new car parks is located, will not be counted in 'airport-related traffic' as traffic does not cross the airport campus. This is an artificial way of measuring the impact of increased traffic to and around the airport.

With the introduction of the third runway the amount of airfreight is planned to double. Traffic to the associated underground warehouse will mean a big increase in lorries going to and from the site, but the Airport Commission has ignored emissions from cargo in its report.

2. No business case for expansion of Heathrow

At a time of climate crisis, we believe we should be developing more sustainable forms of transport or reducing the need to travel at all.

22% of total travellers are just transferring from one foreign flight to another foreign flight at Heathrow and so don't actually enter the UK, spend money here or contribute to the UK economy. Airport hubs are vulnerable to weather, terrorism and accident and therefore are high risk.

3. Local impact of new flight paths

Expansion will increase flight numbers to 756,000 flights, an increase of over 280,000 flights each year. 2.2 million people will be impacted by the increases in aircraft noise. 324,000 people will be impacted by aircraft noise for the first time.

Until recently, Wimbledon and the wider borough of Merton experienced aircraft noise from departing planes about 25-30% of the time i.e. when there is an easterly wind. The vote in parliament to approve Heathrow expansion was taken before anyone knew about the new flight paths over Merton. The decision about new flight paths will not be announced until 2022 - which is after Heathrow expects planning approval for a 3rd runway. The proposed new flight paths are landing paths (which are noisier than departures) and when the wind is from the west, which is approximately 70 -75% of the time. The new flight paths mean 25,000 more flights a year, even before any new runway opens. According to our local MP in the last few months, there has already been a marked increase in the number of flights over the Wimbledon area.

4. Health & well-being

According to the Civil Aviation Authority Heathrow already accounts for more than one quarter of people affected by aviation noise (noise above 55 decibels) in Europe. The European Commission states that noise above 55 decibels has a negative impact on well-being, happiness and anxiety levels, whilst the WHO guidance is that daytime noise from aircraft should be no more than 45 decibels during the day and 40 decibels at night. Any increase in flights will have a negative impact on health and well-being. In particular noise levels up to 80 decibels over Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common will mean a loss of peace and tranquillity. These areas are used by many people for relaxation and help restore mental health

5. Loss of homes

At a time when the south east desperately needs more homes these plans entail the destruction of 756 homes and render 3,000 homes unliveable.

6. Damage to the natural environment

Significant negative effects are predicted on the Wraysbury River, River Colne, Longford River and Duke of Northumberland's River, which will all be diverted. Specifically the expansion plans will result in the loss of multiple habitats in Colne Valley Regional Park, Staines Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest and a number of Local Wildlife Sites. These detrimental impacts on wildlife and habitats will lead to loss of biodiversity at a time when global heating is already putting stress on the natural environment.

7. Alternatives to expansion

High speed rail linking Heathrow and Gatwick could create a 15 minute link between the two, turning them into a single hub. This could be linked to HS2 and so to the north of England and to Wales.