

## **Response to the Airport Commission Discussion Paper from Withyham Parish Council, Withyham, East Sussex**

Withyham Parish Council is situated in North part of East Sussex on the arrivals flight path to Gatwick. Withyham Parish Council represents a rural population of 2817 living in Groombridge, Blackham, Balls Green, Withyham and St John's Crowborough. The whole Parish is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty the highest designation after national park with many SSSI's protected by European Habitats regulations. It includes part of the Ashdown Forest.

Withyham Parish Council is disappointed at the lack of publicity given to this consultation, which resulted in our only knowing about it this week.

### **Legal and Planning Issues**

**Q: What do you think of the options for securing planning consent on new airport capacity? What are their particular strengths or weaknesses?**

**Q: Are there any others options that the Commission should consider?**

The existing planning rules relating to infrastructure projects seem in principle to be fit for purpose, save:

It is the experience of this Parish Council that the views and knowledge of this lowest tier of government at times differ and are in conflict with interests at district and county level and in planning matters the District at times overrides the genuine issues relating to this community to its detriment. That the Parish Council represents a small sector of the wider community should not make its local views and knowledge carry little or no weight particularly if the project directly affects its population which an expansion of Gatwick would do. This is potentially in direct conflict with the stated interests of the County which lie in increased commercial opportunities. The majority of the county are not so deeply affected by the airport therefore the Parish Council suggests that the Commission should consult directly with a consortium of any local Parish and Town Councils directly affected by any proposals and that such a consultation could be made up of a consortium of Parish and Town communities directly affected across county boundaries (e.g. all areas overflowed at less than 4,000 feet)

As a Parish Council we have experience of directly engaging with our community giving the silent majority a local outlet through which to express their views.

The Commission should consider whether to widen the area over which any developer must be required to consult.

### **Local Communities**

**Q: What are the factors the Commission should consider in relation to local communities and the delivery of new airport capacity?**

Noise is the single biggest issues for this Parish if Gatwick is expanded. Noise affects the health and well-being of its population. It is this Councils view that no proposal should be considered without an exact and rigorous independent research project into the actual cost in human and financial terms of any noise created by expansion on communities affected. WPC urge the Commission to adopt the stricter and more stringent measure suggested by the World Health Organisation and pay attention to its research into the effect of noise on health.

In addition noise has a different effect in rural and urban situations and this is a factor that is mostly ignored in relation to local communities leaving the less populace community at risk of being subjected to unacceptable and damaging levels of noise.

WPC believes that if a proposal for Gatwick is chosen then it will be imperative to introduce planning caps, restriction on night flights, respite periods and substantial fines for transgression which should be administered by an independent regulator.

WPC is concerned that the commercial interests of the owners of Gatwick and their greater lobbying, resources and potential influence on the process could, if insufficient checks and balances are introduced into the process, affect the outcome unduly. WPC therefore feels that any contact with local communities should be directly from the Commission at all stages of the decision making processes. As stated above WPC urges the Commission to contact as stakeholders Parish and Town Councils directly affected or a consortium of them, their views being of equal merit and weight as the larger administrative bodies.

Increased airport capacity at Gatwick would need a vast increase in infrastructure. WPC also ask that the Commission properly consider the effect of increased infrastructure capacity on all communities.

WPC is also affected by the 7 km non development zone applied around the Ashdown Forest in line with the EU Habitats Directive. The Commission should consider this directive as another factor.

WPC suggests that the Commission should factor in the future size and passenger capacity of aircraft before increasing airport runway capacity unnecessarily.

## **Role of the State**

### **Q: What are your views on the potential roles of the state in enabling the delivery of new airport capacity?**

The State must take responsibility for managing the environmental damage caused by delivering new airport capacity. It should take a direct role in ensuring that any additional capacity is fit for purpose and does not result in further piecemeal increase in capacity.

### **Q: How can public and private sector interest be best coordinated to deliver new airport capacity as expeditiously as practicable?**

The Olympic Delivery Authority and Crossrail provide a model that shows that coordination is possible and reduces the influence of vested commercial interests. We believe that Government should have a controlling interest in any future development of any airport particularly as the bottom line will be a demand on tax payers.

## **General**

**Q: Are these the right issues for the Commission to consider in relation to the expeditious delivery of any new airport capacity?**

**Q: Are there any others options that the Commission should consider?**

The Commission should consider how best to ameliorate the noise created by aircraft whether by widening the number of airports providing increased capacity or opting for a solution that allows the whole population to benefit from the fact that we are an island. Look at other islands and how their airports are on the extremities.

The question we ask is whether there is any need to increase the capacity at Gatwick with hub airports that already are in operation? Should the Commission look at the efficiency of existing airports and ask itself whether with increased efficiency and cooperation between the airports throughout the existing system there is sufficient capacity? It seems commercial interests may override the interests of the population.