

Farnborough Airport (and wider Aviation) Update

FNG is now the leading group in the UK looking at private jets and a member of UK and international campaign groups such as Stay Grounded and No Airport Expansion. Attached is a document sent to MPs, the Lords and chairs of government bodies last week by the aviation campaign groups. FNG has always tried to engage with the airport and with the FACC but has been blocked at every step. The airport often refuses to answer reasonable questions and seeks to mislead in its quest for increasing private jet flights – the most carbon intensive form of transportation. The airport is content for there to be an information vacuum.

Below are examples of emails between FAL and the FACC (from a Subject Access Request). They demonstrate their refusal to recognise the group and to engage in meaningful discussion. As a result, they do not understand the issues that the public are raising.

- FNG has “... *flooded local parish councils, town councils, borough council and county councils with facts which on the face it make an argument but the facts themselves are misleading at best*”.
- “*Colin Shearn, the ex-FNG chair....asked if FAL and NATS would meet to discuss the valid points being raised by the public – they refused*”.
- “*Dear Mr Shearn, Due to unprecedented levels of questions from the public over the past 18 months, both in the preparation for Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee meetings and between meeting, Farnborough Airport Limited (FAL) has advised the Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee, going forward, it does not intend to respond to questions channelled through the Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee website and/or Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee email address from members of the public*”.
- “*I agree that we need to head off these questions without spending any time on them at the next meeting especially as Mr Shearn well knows that he will not get an answer to most if not all of them*”.

The information vacuum expanded last week with Rachel Reeves’ announcement regarding Heathrow airport, so another newsletter seems appropriate. This newsletter’s audience is varied with many different concerns so pick the bits of the newsletter that are of interest to you.

1. Labour’s proposed expansion of airports and what the public weren’t told.
2. Why has Farnborough Airport delayed its expansion planning application?
3. More nails in the coffin of “green” flying.
4. Rushmoor Borough Council’s moving goalposts.

1) Labour’s proposed expansion of airports and what the public weren’t told.

Labour is driving for growth. It is an argument that gains the support of businesses and many people in the UK – why wouldn’t it if people think they will be better off? The problem is that we need the “right” growth to avoid a catastrophic impact on our environment, economy and security¹. Many people who voted Labour in the expectation that it would progress the environmental and emissions reduction agenda are “disappointed” with the government and that is being very polite. It is IMPOSSIBLE for the UK to meet its legally binding commitment to Net Zero by 2050 while expanding

¹ <https://actuaries.org.uk/media-release/current-climate-policies-risk-catastrophic-societal-and-economic-impacts/>

aviation. The reasons for that are well known and repeated by the government's own advisors and we highlight some of them later. It seems that all the positive steps in greening our energy supply, such as onshore wind and solar (PV) will be consumed by data centres, AI and Bitcoin. And the announcements by Shell, BP and Equinor in the past few days show the oil & gas industry has no intention of using its profits to develop the green energy industries we urgently need². One step forward and two steps back when we need all the green energy we can produce to power cars and electrify heating in homes. Even worse, the government is using public money to fund and subsidise the growth of aviation when half the UK population doesn't fly. Why aren't the people flying paying for the factories that are supposed to be making Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) rather than using £22bn of public money? Why is aviation fuel not taxed?

Nor did Rachel Reeves, in the announcement regarding Heathrow (and other airports) provide a full impact assessment. Expansion of airports requires more flightpaths that are being developed in the DfT's Airspace Modernisation Strategy and that will result in millions of people being under new flightpaths and the existing flightpaths being considerably busier. It will wipe £billions off the value of properties, cause misery and poor health to people and destroy our quiet areas (e.g. National Landscapes) because the plan is to put as many flightpaths as possible over rural areas. Nor does it recognise that increasing flights results in a £30Bn tourism deficit in the UK.

The other elephant in the room is the Supreme Court's decision regarding Environmental Impact Assessments³. The case requires oil & gas drilling, as well as airport expansions, to consider the downstream emissions associated with a planning application. Unless the government is going to play some trickery to side-step the court's decision, the emissions from any airport's expansion must be considered – including Farnborough.

Few organisations (other than CPRE and Surrey Hills National Landscape in this area) and most politicians are also not aware of the plans that are about to be dropped on their constituents regarding new flightpaths and holding stacks, primarily over rural land. These have been in development for the past three years with no public engagement.

2) Why has Farnborough Airport delayed its expansion planning application?

Farnborough Airport says the delay in the planning application is because *"It is right that we take the time to ensure that the planning application is responsive and considerate to the feedback that we receive"*. Most of the feedback it received has been available for eighteen months. It previously said it needed to consider the report provided by Natural England (harm to protected wildlife caused by Farnborough expansion). But that isn't the real reason because the report was released in November 2024, well before the decision to delay in January 2025. We know what the reason for the delay is. It is one of, or several of, the following:

Political – Labour doesn't want to announce the expansion of a private jet airport just as it announces the expansion of commercial airports. It would be political suicide.

Farnborough in decline – Flight volumes have declined in the past year⁴. There are noticeably fewer flights to the Alps this winter. Requesting expansion when flight volumes are declining is unlikely to gain support.

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c30d4ernzqjo>

³ <https://supremecourt.uk/cases/press-summary/uksc-2022-0064>

⁴ <https://www.facc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Nov-Farnborough-Airport-Ltd-Report.pdf>

Macquarie – is the business that owned Thames Water and now Southern Water. If there was ever a pariah business, it is Macquarie. The cat is out of the bag regarding its business model to load up debt while paying out huge dividends. Farnborough Airport, under Macquarie’s ownership, has increased its debt to £550m and has paid out £55m in dividends and interest (to overseas banks which minimises UK taxes) in its last reported year⁵. If it carries on like this, it is going to run out of money. That is why it needs the expansion to increase flight numbers despite currently only utilising less than 70% of permitted flights – to increase the book value of the business so it can continue to pay dividends. It has nothing to do with “supporting the local economy” long term. Is Macquarie looking to bail out of Farnborough Airport once it has maximised its potential value, the way it sold its other airports last year?

Local MPs – MPs, who were previously all Conservative in the surrounding constituencies, voiced strong opposition to the proposed expansion. It provided no benefit to their areas, just more noise, emissions & pollution. We’ve had a general election since and there is no doubt there have been discussions between the new MPs. These are multi-party MPs so the issue has become party-political and the stakes have increased. FNG is noticing much more engagement and requests for information from each party at a local and national level.

3) More nails in the coffin of “green” flying.

The aviation sector, with its massive PR budgets, has been pumping out fanciful ideologies about its efficiency improvements and its green flying. The bottom line is that the number of flights is growing far faster than improvements in aircraft efficiency or any viable solutions to replace fossil fuels.

The Advertising Standards Authority upheld complaints made by FNG against Farnborough Airport and several operators last year. For example, suggesting it was “carbon neutral” when that was only the ground operations responsible for 4% of emissions. The aviation sector is now depending entirely on Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and carbon capture to reduce its emissions. At some point in the near future the public will see that they are being sold a lemon⁶. SAF produces as much pollution and CO2 as Jet A1 fuel and the carbon capture cycle in SAF is vastly exaggerated and its use will not reduce emissions or pollution in the area.

The government has just announced (in line with Europe) that SAF made from crops is not acceptable as it competes with land for food crops⁷. Only three types of SAF are acceptable. SAF made from:

- 1) Waste vegetable oil: The problem here is that the volumes available are tiny because you’d need to eat 1,800 portions of chips to fly one way economy from Heathrow to New York⁸. Most used vegetable oil is currently supplied from China and already includes virgin palm oil from Malaysia.
- 2) Black bin waste: Which sounds good and there is a lot of out there it but it is inefficient to make oil from it and most waste is already committed to incinerators that are still being

⁵ https://www.farnboroughnoise.org/_files/ugd/17001e_24fd79ca821e46af8bb54456060331bd.pdf

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNgmKyw4qfo>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-the-saf-mandate/the-saf-mandate-an-essential-guide#how-much-jet-fuel-from-saf-is-being-used-currently>

⁸ <https://www.aerosociety.com/news/frequent-fryer/>

built. Local authorities have to pay millions to get out of contracts to supply waste to the incinerators.

- 3) Green SAF: Made from capturing CO₂ and using green/renewable electricity. While this is zero emissions, there isn't sufficient green electricity to make green SAF. Green electricity is needed by other industries.

The pictures of electric aircraft are just that. The weight of batteries means that until we have a new battery technology that holds 100 times the energy, they aren't viable. And how many people have noticed that electric aircraft have propellers (i.e. slow) rather than jets? Tell Taylor Swift her 1,500 mile flight will be flying at 250mph rather than 450mph and will have to stop for a recharge every 300 miles!

Hydrogen? Wait 20 years before new airframes and engines have been approved and every airport they operate from has a hydrogen manufacturing plant next to it. All a bit late to arrest the worst of climate change.....

Then there is the cost, even if the laws of gravity and the laws of supply and demand can be overcome. The cost of SAF will at least triple the cost of a flight and if you add in carbon capture, it will increase the cost by eight times. And we are talking full commercial flights here, not private jets. So, your £35 one-way trip to Prague will cost £250 and I suspect a lot of people will stop flying on short trips. So no need for airport expansion.....

4) Rushmoor Borough Council's moving goalposts

This title is perhaps a little unfair as the now Labour-run council inherited decisions made under a different regime. But the issues remain.

The airport should only operate charter flights for business purposes (i.e. not leisure flights and not scheduled flights). It is possible to buy a seat on a scheduled flight and to book a flight for your dog. It is hard to see how these comply with the airport's licence.

There is confusion and inconsistency between the airport, the CAA and RBC regarding what business flights are. The definition has been changed since the airport was licenced but without any discussion, planning permission or change in legislation. The public are clear regarding the meaning of "Business Flights" and the discrepancy must be resolved because it is critical to the evaluation of the business case for the airport's proposed expansion. It currently claims "economic benefit" from all flights when 40% are empty and only 15% – 30% seem to be for business purposes.

FAL submitted a business case with its expansion planning application. It is unclear how this has been scrutinised. It should have been rejected outright because it is not a business case. A business case needs to consider the disadvantages as well as the advantages and the scrutiny process needs to challenge the claims being made. The business case does not include the costs related to the proposed expansion such as the negative impact on house prices, the harm to human health from additional noise and pollution (especially to children under the flightpaths). Nor does it challenge the claims that flights generate inward investment and growth in the UK. The business case includes all the leisure flights that clearly have no business benefit to UK PLC. In fact they export revenue⁹.

⁹<https://neweconomics.org/2023/07/boom-in-air-travel-fails-to-increase-uk-productivity-or-gdp-growth>

The realities are that very few of the businesses that operate at the airport have anything to do with private jet flights and those that do, many operate at a loss, are foreign registered and contribute very little to the national or local economy. Certainly, from FAL's own data submitted with the planning application, most of the airport's 200 employees are relatively low paid (cleaning, catering & security) and few live in the borough. The idea that the airport generates significant inward investment, employs a large number of highly skilled people and contributes significantly to the local economy is at best misleading. The reality is that the airport is nothing more than a filling station for aircraft.

More information is available on the Farnborough Noise Group website¹⁰ and the Facebook page¹¹.

If you have any questions, please email farnboroughnoise@gmail.com

Farnborough Noise Group
11th February 2025

¹⁰ <https://www.farnboroughnoise.org/>

¹¹ https://www.facebook.com/groups/farnboroughnoise?locale=en_GB

Additional information

If you want a quick explanation of SAF, it's here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNgmKyw4qfo>

The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) found that at most 5.5% of aviation fuel in the EU could come from sustainable sources by 2030, largely from advanced waste biofuel. But if history is reflected in the future, things don't look promising. In 2019, [13 million gallons \(50 million litres\) of SAFs were used in flights](#). That is just [0.01% of global aviation fuel](#), meaning [the industry missed a goal](#) set in 2010 to reach 6% use by 2020. The ICCT paper sees only a small amount of synthetic fuels being used in aeroplanes by 2030 - just 0.2% of the total 5.5% of SAFs it says could be used in the EU by 2030.

The hype vs the reality of electric aircraft ([Why electric aircraft may never be the next big thing - POLITICO](#)). And why hydrogen aircraft are only part of the solution needed to make hydrogen aircraft viable (<https://www.airbus.com/en/newsroom/stories/2024-09-developing-a-global-ecosystem-to-support-hydrogen-powered-flight>).

The number of business flights has dropped dramatically in recent years but not all businesses are making progress. <https://travelsmartcampaign.org/top-25-flyers/>. But as ever, it seems many business and political leaders would rather tell others to change than change themselves. https://travelsmartcampaign.org/davos-economic-forum-2025/?mc_cid=76565a1e54&mc_eid=8c675ace92