

Birchanger Parish Council
Stansted Airport 35+ Planning Application
Comments

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Introduction

These are the objections of Birchanger Parish Council to the Manchester Airports Group (MAG) application to expand Stansted Airport to 43 million passengers per annum (mppa).

About Birchanger

Birchanger is a small village in north-west Essex, in the district of Uttlesford, with a population of about 1500. We are very close to Stansted Airport, with parts of the village only 1.5km from the threshold of runway 05. Residents, especially those living in the south and east of the village, suffer from disturbance caused by aircraft noise at all hours of the day and night. Residents in all parts of the village are affected by helicopter traffic, most of which is associated with Stansted Airport, by road congestion and by air pollution.

Democratic Mandate

Each year at our annual village meeting we hold a vote that confirms that residents of Birchanger are overwhelmingly opposed to expansion of Stansted Airport. The last such vote, which was passed with no objections, was on 21st March 2018.

Our Grounds for Objection

Birchanger Parish Council objects for the following reasons.

1. We resent the cynical use made of the planning regulations by MAG
2. We consider it unacceptable that permission for further expansion has been sought before MAG has compensated those affected by previous expansion
3. We object to any increase in noise, pollution and surface traffic

The Cynicism of the Application

MAG originally announced that it was going to apply for an expansion from 35 mppa (million passengers per annum) to 44.5 mppa, an increase of 9.5 mppa. They did this knowing that an application to expand the airport by 10 mppa would lead to the application being considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. As such it would be considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

MAG must have known that this ruse would be immediately seen through, and, of course, it was. When the application was made the number of passengers to be handled had been reduced to 43 mppa. However, nothing else had changed: they still wish to build additional infrastructure identical to that proposed for 44.5 mppa.

Clearly they wish this application to be treated as a local matter, and we wondered why. But then we heard about the deal between Uttlesford District Council (UDC) and MAG in which the latter accepted money from the former in exchange for expediting the application. We understand this to be legal (but we don't understand why Uttlesford were so reluctant to disclose the details) but it's undemocratic. It simply makes it impossible for other parties to read, analyse and respond to the application. MAG has had a team of employees and consultants working for several months on this application, but inexperienced individuals and councils at all levels are expected to be able to respond in a few weeks. This is undemocratic.

In view of the payments made we have no confidence in UDC's ability to treat this application fairly. This view was compounded when one of our ward's district councillors, Terry Farthing, wrote a long letter to the local newspaper in support of the application, failing to mention that he was an Uttlesford councillor or that he owned a large lettings agency based at the airport.

Our anger at the original short timescales was made worse when we heard from Stop Stansted Expansion that the application sought to remove an existing prohibition on MAG lobbying to amend night noise regulations. It took the relatively well resourced and highly professional SSE some weeks to note the clause about this buried in the application documents, and it would have been missed had the deadline not been extended.

This application must be called in by Government. It is, and always was, nationally significant infrastructure, and we have no confidence that UDC will give due weight to arguments against the application.

Compensation

There are residents in this area, some of them in Birchanger, who are still waiting for compensation due to them after the expansion to 25 mppa. MAG has again shown quite remarkable cynicism and a lack of good faith in the way it has treated these people.

For years it refused to allow claims on the grounds that all work associated with the expansion was incomplete. Once that excuse could no longer be used it then tried to throw out claims because too much time had elapsed since the expansion started. It would be funny if it wasn't real peoples' lives being affected.

This, again, shows the kind of organisation we're dealing with and reinforces our call for the application to be considered by someone equal to MAG; that is by HMG.

In any case **MAG should not have any increase in permitted flights or associated infrastructure permitted until it has fully compensated those adversely affected by the 25 mppa expansion.**

Adverse Effects on Birchanger

We have tried to understand the Environmental Statement but, of course, do not have the resources or the time. We do have some comments.

We reject as misleading the methodology used in the ES, which compares the environmental impact of 43 mppa against a baseline of 35 mppa, the current limit. This represents the passenger growth as being only 22.8% and therefore the ES concludes that the impact will be slight.

But that's just an academic exercise. The airport is not operating at anything like 35 mppa so the figures are all theoretical. Impacts can always be made to appear small if treated as a series of lesser increases, losing any compounding effects.

Birchanger is concerned about the real world, the one that we live in. Currently there are about 26 mppa using the airport and the application is for 43. That's a real-life increase of 66%.

We reject the complacency of the Environmental Statements as they don't reflect the real-world increase in passenger numbers being sought.

Noise

We are aware that aircraft are getting quieter and quieter, and the effects are noticeable in Birchanger. However the disruption caused by aircraft movements at Stansted is still significant, especially at the southeast end of the village.

The environment statement talks of dBA_{leq} levels, but this is meaningless to the residents of Birchanger.

- In a rural location it's noise events, not an average over time, that affects people
- As previously stated the only meaningful comparison for us is between the current situation, with 26 mppa, and the proposal. Comparisons with an estimate for 35 mppa mean nothing

We reject ANY increase in movements caused by an increase in passengers, and any trend towards heavier, larger aircraft (e.g. for longhaul or freight)

We consider that ANY night flights are too many.

MAG must be made to agree not to lobby for any relaxation of night noise regulations.

Air Quality

If you are handling 66% more passengers than today (and more freight) then you will be using far more energy. With that number of people it's safe to assume that the entire airport and its system (aircraft, terminals, office space, maintenance, staff and passenger transport to/from airport and so on) will also increase by about 66%. It's true that energy efficiency is improving in all areas, but an increase in airport capability on that scale will lead to significantly higher energy consumption.

Much of that energy will be obtained by burning fossil fuels. Combustion by-products from aircraft and airport-related road transport will inevitably increase. This gives us concerns about air quality. Every day seems to bring new reports on the adverse health impacts of particulates and NOx. We fail to see why our health should be threatened so that people can go to Ibiza.

And, of course, the implications for CO₂ emissions leading to climate change are considerable.

It is wrong to put plans in place to further reduce the air quality of local residents.

Surface Access

We have difficulty in understanding how anyone could contemplate increasing traffic on the M11 and specifically Junction 8 of that road. We understand that it is already 20% over its design capacity, with several thousand houses due to be built over the next few years close to the junction.

We note that MAG claims that its use of the local road network (and therefore vehicular pollution) is small in comparison with the traffic already using the network, but reject it as another attempt to portray the airport's impact as a small slice of a large cake.

43 000 000 passengers, an additional 500 employees, increased air freight and everything required to support the enlarged airport will generate a very large number of additional vehicle journeys. The roads will not be able to take it. We know this to be true because they're at capacity now for periods every weekday morning, afternoon and summer public holidays. Once the passenger numbers grow at the airport during the day, when it's currently relatively quiet, the M11 north and south and the A120 at Braintree will become blocked.

We, too, have journeys to make, and the traffic added by this application will make life difficult for many of our residents.

We note the aspirations of MAG to maintain current levels of rail use. We also note that increased capacity on the Stansted route is in the pipeline. But we also note that MAG derives a large part of its income from car parking, so are sceptical about these claims.

Conclusion

This application is bad for residents in many ways, and the way in which the application has been handled by MAG and by Uttlesford gives us no confidence that the application will receive rigorous scrutiny.

We insist that the application be referred to central Government, and that the Planning Inspectorate pay due regard to the adverse effects that will result if the application is approved.