

AIRPORTWATCH SOUTH WEST

5 February 2008

South West campaigners join forces to fight expansion at region's airports

Campaigners fighting expansion at Staverton airport have joined forces with other campaigners from across the South West to fight expansion of all of the region's airports. The new campaign, AirportWatch South West, will be launched at the house of Commons today as representatives from all the groups meet South West MPs and MEPs to discuss the issues.

The new AirportWatch South West group, a regional branch of the national organisation AirportWatch, is made up of campaigners opposing expansion at Staverton, Bristol, Exeter, Bournemouth, Newquay and Plymouth airports, all of which are facing massive expansion.

The new coalition represents a powerful unified voice to oppose airport expansion in the South West. The group will be fighting issues such as increased traffic congestion, increased noise disturbance and huge rises in climate changing emissions from aircraft, balanced against unproven economic benefits from regional airport growth.

AirportWatch SW members will give presentations at today's meeting on the economic, local and environmental impacts of airport expansion in the South West.

Cllr Philip Booth, a Stroud District councillor (Green), who has been campaigning in Gloucestershire against the expansion of Staverton Airport said: "Massive expansion plans for all the airports in the South West mean a severe downturn in quality of life for local communities as noise disturbance and local traffic congestion increase. Aviation is the fastest growing source of CO2 emissions, which cause at least twice the environmental damage than if they were released on the ground.

"The economic and environmental arguments against airport expansions are overwhelming. Why should we exempt aviation from cutting CO2 emissions? It would be unjust and economically absurd to allow aviation to expand and then need to demand even further cuts in emissions from other sectors. But even if we set aside climate change - which we cannot afford to do - it is hard to make a case for aviation in a world where oil is running out, unfair subsidies are rife and these airports lead to so many pounds being spent abroad."

Expansion of airports across the region make no sense at a time when the UK has not yet been able to achieve Government targets for cutting emissions.

"The driver for airport growth is the increase in budget flights, yet it is cheap flights that are squeezing tourism in the South West's, the region's biggest industry. Only last week, national hotel chain Travelodge gave evidence at the House of Commons showing that unfair tax breaks to short haul airlines 'are slowly bringing the curtain down on regional tourism,' losing the UK £19 billion a year.

Campaigners in the South West will now lobby national and regional government as a group, will pool resources such as research and will work to raise the profile of the issues across the region.

AirportWatch is an umbrella organisation for groups fighting airport expansion all over the UK. It includes Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the National Trust, the Women's Institute, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, RSPB and the Woodland Trust under its banner.

ENDS

For media enquiries and further information, contact: YOUR NAME & CONTACT DETAILS or Susan Pearson on 07891 460942; email: susan@wordways.co.uk

Notes for editors

1. DETAILS OF EACH AIRPORT – Passenger figs in 2004 or earlier, passenger figs for 2006/7, planned growth figs. Any other significant info.
2. The evidence presented by Travelodge on 29 January 2008 was to the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Select Committee, chaired by John Whittingdale, Member of Parliament for Maldon and Chelmsford East (Conservative) whose committee is conducting an Inquiry into the UK tourism industry.
3. A full transcript of Travelodge's evidence will be available on the CMS Select Committee website (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcmds.htm#uncorr>) within the next few days.
4. Travelodge has issued a press release summarising their evidence to the Select Committee (http://www.travelodge.co.uk/press/press_releases.php).