

AIRPORTWATCH SOUTH WEST

5 February 2008

Positive response from South West MPs lobbied by campaigners against airport expansion

Campaigners fighting growth at Bristol airport joined forces with other campaigners from across the South West yesterday to discuss major concerns about airport expansion with the region's MPs at Westminster.

The campaigners used the occasion to launch their new umbrella organisation, AirportWatch South West, which will represent a powerful unified voice to fight issues such as increased noise disturbance for local communities, increased traffic congestion, and huge rises in climate changing emissions from aircraft, balanced against unproven economic benefits from regional airport growth.

Airports at Staverton, Bristol, Exeter, Bournemouth, Newquay and Plymouth are all facing plans for major expansion over the next seven to 20 years.

MPs, including Don Foster (Bath), Doug Naysmith (North West Bristol), Stephen Williams (Bristol West), Liam Fox (Woodspring), John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) and Giles Chichester (MEP for the South West of England), plus Steven Race representing Ben Bradshaw, Minister for the South West, heard presentations on issues of climate change, noise, green belt and why the supposed economic benefits claimed as justification for expanding regional airports remain unproven.

An AirportWatch SW and Stop Bristol Airport Expansion spokesperson Susan Pearson said: "We were very encouraged by our reception from MPs who asked thoughtful questions when discussing the issues with us. They stated that they would help us ask questions in the Commons, which could gain us information which we might not normally have access to."

"The MPs were particularly interested in discussing the economic arguments for expanding airports, which are completely unsupported by any rigorous data.

"At the end of the meeting we made a direct request asking them to push for a review of the 2003 Air Transport White Paper of 2003, on which all UK airport expansion plans are based. It is now five years out of date and failed to take account of tourism deficit, which has grown from zero in 1997 to £18 billion, as more and more money is taken out of the UK than is brought in by overseas visitors. Government data shows a clear link between the rise of cheap flights and this massive tourist deficit, which translates as a loss of many millions to the South West.

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

Nationally, 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.

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Notes for editors

1. Travel Trends - A report on the 2005 International Passenger Survey, Office of National Statistics