

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 26 JANUARY 2004

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs – Chairman.
Councillors E C Abrahams, K R Artus, H D Baker, C A Bayley, P Boland, W F Bowker, C A Cant, K J Clarke, D Corke, A Dean, C M Dean, C D Down, S Flack, M A Gayler, E J Godwin, D W Gregory, R T Harris, E W Hicks, B M Hughes, S C Jones, A J Ketteridge, V J T Lelliott, R M Lemon, J I Loughlin, A Marchant, J E Menell, D J Morson, J P Murphy, V Pedder, M J Savage, S V Schneider, G Sell, E Tealby-Watson, A R Thawley and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, W Cockerell, J B Dickson, B D Perkins, M J Perry and M T Purkiss.

C70 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R P Chambers, J F Cheetham, R J Copping, M L Foley, R F Freeman, A R Row, F E Silver and A M Wattebot.

C71 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors K R Artus, C A Bayley, P Boland, W F Bowker, C A Cant, D Corke, A Dean, C M Dean, C D Down, S Flack, E J Godwin, R T Harris, B M Hughes, A J Ketteridge, J I Loughlin, A Marchant, J E Menell, D J Morson, J P Murphy, V Pedder, M J Savage, A R Thawley and P A Wilcock made the following declaration.

“I wish to declare a personal and prejudicial interest as a member of SSE but I hold a dispensation from the Standards Committee permitting me to speak and vote.”

Councillor D W Gregory declared a personal interest as a driver for Airport Carz.

C72 CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Alasdair Bovaird, the new Chief Executive.

C73 WHITE PAPER: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT AND STANSTED AIRPORT

Members considered a report on the Government's White Paper on the Future Development of Air Transport and the implications for Stansted Airport.

Councillor A Dean, the Leader of the Council, said that despite an invitation to attend this meeting, no response had been received from Alistair Darling, the Secretary of State. He said that the Council had been neglected and ignored throughout the consultation process. He said that he had written to the Prime Minister last year but had been ignored again. He expressed disappointment that ministers had chosen to ignore this Council and the residents of Uttlesford. He added that it was ironic that the Prime Minister had chosen to get involved in the work of the East of England Regional Assembly in relation to the proposals for housing along the M11 Corridor.

He emphasised that the White Paper was not a done deal but a statement of Government policy. There were many hurdles and barriers which would need to be overcome. He said that it was important that Uttlesford worked with neighbouring authorities and said that there was a need for further studies to be undertaken. He said that a meeting had been held with Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils and East Hertfordshire District Council and it had been agreed to continue to work together to ensure that this Government policy does not come to fruition. He also emphasised the importance of continuing to work with SSE.

Councillor Godwin endorsed everything which the Leader had said and stressed the importance of working together with other partners. She emphasised that it was not a done deal as the airlines and passengers did not want to come to Stansted and BAA and the Government would not pay for it. She said that it was disrespectful that despite numerous invitations the Secretary of State had chosen not to visit the district or talk to its residents or the Council. She said that the Government had looked for an easy option and had failed to consider the infrastructure and environmental implications. She added that BAA had grossly underestimated the cost of providing the necessary infrastructure and there was no indication of how it would be funded when there would be no cross subsidy. She said that a second runway could not be provided without the proper infrastructure being put in place. She concluded that the White Paper also failed to take into account health issues and said that it was a flawed paper open to challenge on many counts.

Councillor Ketteridge read a statement from Councillor Cheetham in which she confirmed her total opposition to the White Paper. She said that there was much to fight for and the Council must prove that a second runway would be an environmental and financial disaster in the wrong location. She urged all Members to unite and work with partners and local residents to oppose the White Paper. Councillor Ketteridge said that he had written last year inviting the Prime Minister to the district but after a long delay only received a pre-printed card saying that he was unable to attend. He said that the Government had had a dialogue with BAA and it was disrespectful not to speak to the Council. He urged all councillors to work hard to illustrate to residents the consequences and impact of a second runway.

Councillor Sell said that the airport was continuing to grow and its appetite was never sated. Changes were already taking place in the district which could lead to an imbalanced economy. He said that the Council must work together with other local authorities and asked whether the public relations consultants would be retained. The Leader agreed that it was vital to work

together with the other local authorities. He said that the direction of the campaign had now moved away from influencing ministers and it was not intended that the consultants would be retained in the same way.

Councillor Morson said that the Council needed to look at strategies that were practical. He said that the Council needed to promote the fact that the White Paper was only a statement of intent that could be challenged. He said that it was unlikely that airline operators would want to pay the increased charges at Stansted Airport and said that it was unrealistic that the White Paper concentrated two thirds of future airport growth in the southeast. The White Paper had also dismissed all environmental arguments and the suggestion of VAT being payable on aviation fuel. He then said that the Government needed to be reminded that at the Public Inquiry in 1985 the Inspector had said that environmental issues should be paramount and in 1999 the World Health Organisation had made it clear that future airport expansion must consider the impact on health. He said that BAA were not qualified to monitor health issues. He said that SSE must be given every opportunity to challenge expansion through the planning process and the Council needed to co-operate with all partners.

Councillor Wilcock emphasised that the White Paper had not been approved by Parliament and could be changed. He considered that there could be a further challenge on economic grounds and he hoped that the White Paper could be challenged through the legal and regulatory processes. He concluded that the Council must send a clear message that the fight is not over and he hoped that the vote later in the meeting would be unanimous. Councillor C Dean said that following the announcement of the White Paper BAA had sent a document to Uttlesford residents and she urged that the Council should publicly refute and challenge some of the claims made in this document. Councillor Corke said that he owned a few shares in BAA and said that these were low in value, partly because of the loss being made at Stansted Airport. He considered that major shareholders in BAA should be encouraged to "revolt" over plans for the second runway.

Councillor Tealby-Watson said that she was dismayed at a recent press report which claimed that Saffron Walden residents were not opposed to a second runway. She said that in the Council's independent referendum 89% of those taking part had said "No" to further runways and the Council had a duty to make their voice heard. Councillor Cant said that the White Paper contained many statements about minimising or reducing the impact of a second runway but much of this was qualitative and could be meaningless. She urged the Council to continue its work in establishing the real impact of a second runway and ensuring that all residents were aware of this. Councillor Clarke said that once the planning application was submitted an environmental impact assessment would be required and he said that if this was not satisfactory permission should not be granted. He said that the Council needed to obtain the advice of environmental experts and make its views known forcefully. Councillor Thawley said that he would be attending a meeting of the East of England Regional Assembly next month and would try to get the message across to representatives at that meeting. He concluded that the Council needed to carry on the fight on behalf of all of the residents of Uttlesford.

The Chairman then concluded the debate and said that there had been good reasoned arguments against an irrational decision which had led to frustration and annoyance. He hoped that all Members would support the motion.

The Chairman then asked members of the public if they wished to make a statement before a vote was taken. Three members of the public then made statements opposing a second runway at Stansted Airport.

The motion proposed by Councillor A Dean and seconded by Councillor E J Godwin was then put to the vote and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that

- 1 The Council does not accept, nor agree with, the Government's support for a second runway in its Air Transport White Paper and therefore re-affirms its opposition to such development at Stansted Airport.
- 2 The Council agrees to continue its campaign against a second runway to protect the rural quality of life in its area and, in particular, it will
 - consider any legal action which seeks to prevent a second runway
 - consider any studies which seek to prevent a second runway
 - work with other local authorities and organisations to further its policy
 - work with SSE to prevent a second runway
 - continue to inform and consult the public on the issue of a potential second runway
- 3 The Council re-affirms its existing arrangements, namely the Chief Executive in consultation with Group Leaders, to continue the Council's campaign for opposing a second runway.
- 4 The Council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport to express its disappointment that he has not accepted the Council's invitation to visit the area to see the adverse impact of a second runway at Stansted.

C74

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraph 12 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

C75

LEGAL OPINION

Prior to the meeting all Members had received a copy of Counsel's advice as to whether there were any grounds for bringing a legal challenge against the validity of the recent White Paper on the Future of Air Transport. Members then considered this advice together with the advice of the Head of Legal Services. It was noted that on 30 January a meeting would be held with three members of the Bar and representatives of Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils and East Herts District Council to give further consideration to a possible legal challenge. The Head of Legal Services advised Members of the likely costs of bringing legal action and answered Members' questions.

In response to a question from Councillor Flack, the Leader said that the Council had not provided funding direct to SSE but had paid for some pieces of work to be undertaken. He said that the Council would continue to work with SSE and would not be limited by what was in the budget.

The Chief Executive said that following the meeting on Friday the Council would know the strength of the legal position and the views of partner local authorities and could then proceed to a costed strategy.

RESOLVED that a progress report be submitted to the Council Meeting on 10 February 2004.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm.