

## **REVIEW OF THE PROCESS FOLLOWED FOR DETERMINING THE STANSTED AIRPORT 25 MPPA PLANNING APPLICATION**

The debate over expansion of Stansted Airport involved the district council for 2-3 years. Initially there were informal discussions on scoping statements from the applicant. More latterly the formal planning application was considered. Several council workshops and meetings were held. The public was given the opportunity to participate. In the end the application was approved subject to conditions and a legal agreement that have been variously described as "historic", "a good deal" and "legitimising what the applicant wanted".

In due course the council is likely to be asked to consider expansion beyond 25 mppa. Regardless of the merits of such a proposal, are there lessons to be learned from this latest exercise that should influence how consideration of further expansion should be conducted?

This paper proposes that an evaluation takes place of how the 25 mppa expansion was dealt with before the recent experience fades from memory and to be completed before the May change of Council. It is suggested that the evaluation is carried out under the auspices of the relevant scrutiny committee but that the groundwork for the evaluation is carried out by an independent person(s) who were not part of the process. Evidence would be taken from officers and members of the council and members of the public.

Questions that the review should consider include but should not be limited to the following:

- Did the council have a clear enough set of objectives against which to measure its success in obtaining controls on the impact of expansion?
- Was the locally determined decision preferable to resorting to a public enquiry?
- Was sufficient information available to members in making their decisions?
- Should other sources of information and advice have been used?
- Were members adequately equipped to handle a decision of such magnitude?
- Were all stages of the process of equal value or should greater effort have been focused on some areas? If so, how could this been achieved?
- Did members sufficiently well lead and direct the debate?
- Were members decisive enough soon enough?
- Was officers' advice objective enough at all times?
- Did officers support members adequately?
- Could the mechanism for negotiating conditions and obligations be improved?
- Was a full memorandum taken of all negotiation meetings between officers and STAL?
- Was the public adequately advised about what matters the council could affect and which it could not affect?

