

I am Brian Ross, Deputy Chairman of SSE

I was told this morning, by a relative stranger, that it's a complete waste of my time to be speaking to this Committee this evening – because everything to do with the most recent Stansted Airport Planning Application has become totally politicised. I am told that the Council will block any meaningful investigation until after the May elections, and will try to restrict its scope rather than allowing it to examine the entire process from start to finish.

I very much hope that I'm not wasting my time. SSE has always been politically neutral and has tried its best to defend this local community (regardless of their political persuasion) against unfettered expansion of Stansted Airport.

We were, of course, disappointed when UDC approved expansion to 43 mppa last November. But we were not surprised because, as far back as the summer of 2017, it was made clear to us at the highest level, that this Council wanted the planning application approved.

In order to ensure public trust, the review must be carried out independently and the terms of reference must enable the entire process to be thoroughly looked at, from start to finish. It's not just a question of trying to develop best practice; it's also important to consider whether there was any malpractice.

There are some who say that it would 'not be prudent' for the Council to wash its dirty linen in public while there is still the risk of a legal challenge. First, this seems to indicate some concern that the review would uncover dirty linen. Second, the risk of legal challenge may well be far higher if other avenues for seeking redress are blocked.

I therefore urge you to agree to a thorough independent review – perhaps by a planning QC – examining all aspects of the process followed in the handling of the recent airport planning application. A truly independent review of this type need not be a drain on officers' time. It could therefore start very soon and it should publish its findings as soon as possible.

Thank you.