3rd Feb

Datchet Parish Council

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[redacted]

2 February 2015

Sir Howard Davies
Airport Commission Consultation
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SENT BY E-MAIL AND BY REGISTERED POST

Dear Sir Howard

This response is from Datchet Parish Council, a local government organisation representing the residents of Datchet – Postcode SL3. The appropriate point of contact with the Parish Council is the Parish Clerk who can be reached at the address at letterhead or **clerk@datchetparishcouncil.gov.uk**

Datchet Parish Council strongly objects to the two Heathrow expansion proposals and supports the development of the Gatwick Second Runway (GSR). Our conclusions are based on the arguments and observations stated below. Our overriding objections are on the grounds that the selection of either of the Heathrow options would create much greater environmental and community disadvantages than the GSR.

Q1 : What conclusions, if any, do you draw in respect of the three short-listed options?

The selection of either of the Heathrow options would, overall, create much greater environmental and community damage than the GSR. Indeed the Heathrow options would bring about the destruction or forced relocation of a number of sizeable communities and would bring additional major environmental stress and social disadvantages to others.

The work necessary to deliver either of the Heathrow options would bring major disruption to an already massively stressed area. In terms of cost, both the Heathrow options would be significantly more expensive to deliver. The potential for unknown cost overruns and environmental impact would be much greater for the Heathrow region than Gatwick where the airport is largely surrounded by agricultural land.

According to the EU Commission's report (2006) there were 725,000 people living under Heathrow's flight paths and affected by over 55Ldens, which meant that 28% of all people impacted by aircraft noise across Europe lived under the Heathrow flight path - that is nearly as many as the combined total of several other major airports as shown below:

Frankfurt	238,700	Paris CDG	170,000	Paris Orly	110,000
Manchester	94,000	Brussels	49,700	Amsterdam	43,700
Madrid	43,300	Gatwick	11,900	Stansted	9,400
London Heathrow	**725,000**			**The Rest**	**770,700**

Datchet is a village community with a long history and some significant heritage sites and listed buildings. Situated four miles to the west of Heathrow, it is shoe horned in a triangle bordered by the M4 to the north, the M25 to the east, and the River Thames (with two bridge crossings) together with the main line railway from Windsor to London Waterloo to the south. The village centre is a conservation area within which planning regulations are strictly enforced such that even the placement of refuse bins is subject to rigid control.
Not only is Datchet already subject to a very significant amount of Heathrow noise and nuisance on a daily basis but the village is also routinely used as a rat run for traffic seeking to cut corners to avoid the motorway confluence (M4/M25), a feature that is massively exacerbated in the event of any motorway disruption. The village roads are mainly narrow with no scope for widening, and even today struggle to cope with the volume of traffic. Add to this two railway crossings which shut four times an hour, it is obvious that Datchet cannot cope with the inevitable additional road traffic volume that either of the Heathrow proposals would generate.

In addition to these routine but disruptive pressures on the community, Datchet is on the Thames flood plain and experienced significant flood events in 2003 and 2014 – with ground water flooding playing an increasing part. For Datchet residents the risk of flood is ever present; consequently Datchet as a community is already under extreme environmental stress.

The Heathrow Northwest Option (HNW) would deliver a runway approximately one mile nearer to Datchet and the number of aircraft movements affecting the village would increase by 54%. The impact on the village would be severe in terms of noise and emissions.

The Heathrow Extended Northern (HEN) would bring the runway to within two miles of the centre of the village with an increase in movements of some 46% (up from 480,000 to 700.000). Datchet is on the extended centre line of the current and proposed extended northern runway. It follows that aircraft overflying would be correspondingly lower. Indeed inbound aircraft would fly over Datchet descending through 600 feet rather than 1,200 feet as they do now. Most outbound aircraft would overfly the village itself as they would not have the time to begin turns to share noise pain. More movements flying lower would inevitably lead to greater noise levels in the village. With an increased number of flights and lower flight profiles air quality would be substantially degraded resulting in more health issues for the community.

The HEN would also involve inbound and outbound flights crossing the Queen Mother Reservoir, which is on the edge of the village, at a much reduced height with the attendant increased risk of bird strikes at critical stages of flight.

The essential works required to implement either of the Heathrow options, be they part of the airport or supporting infrastructure, would unquestionably add to the adverse collateral impact the Datchet community already suffers because of its geographical position.

As already mentioned, flooding is a big issue for Datchet. Every year our residents live with the anxiety that there will be a flooding event. Significant amounts of land would be subsumed by the Heathrow options which could only create greater flooding jeopardy. It appears that neither the companies nor the Airports Commission have addressed the requirements of Datchet let alone the promised Lower Thames Flood Relief Scheme.

Other factors affecting the village would include vastly increased pressures on local infrastructure (housing, education, medical services, waste disposal – to name but a few examples). These detrimental factors would start at the commencement of the build programme and would increase if and when either of the two Heathrow options became operational. In our local schools learning would be constrained to a lock-down situation to escape the noise disruption and the concerns about air quality.

The consultation document makes it clear that the GSR would not result in the same adverse social and environmental impact. Therefore, we unequivocally conclude that the Gatwick Second Runway is the only rational choice. Indeed, the GSR by a significant margin most closely meets the Commission's stated objectives for the shortlisted schemes (Table 2.1).

Q2: Do you have any suggestions for how the short-listed options could be improved?

The business cases for the Heathrow options seem to be presented with a careless disregard for the communities involved. We recognise the economic benefits that Heathrow currently provides but from our perspective it needs to be better not bigger.

Proper regard needs to be taken of the environmental and social impact of any proposed expansion. The proposals could be enhanced by constructive suggestions as to how the increased housing need would be satisfied, in an area where land for building is severely constrained. It would be well nigh impossible to accommodate greater numbers of incoming workers without setting aside prevailing rigid planning considerations, such as flooding and Green Belt. Even now it is not possible to meet current housing targets.

The Commission's commentary would be improved if it addressed future healthcare provision, the emergency services needs, education and other amenities that local authorities will have to provide once a selection is made.

Throughout the consultation document it is clear that the mitigation to problems created by the schemes is compensation. However, the scale or scope of such compensation has been historically inadequate and in the context of Heathrow falls well below the compensation levels provided by other airports in Europe. By way of example, Charles de Gaulle provides community noise mitigation to a larger contour area than Heathrow and at higher per capita rates of compensation. Charles de Gaulle's level of compensation to the groups affected amounts to Euro 68 per head per year compared to Heathrow's Euro 10 per head per year. The short listed options would be improved if the case for direct and collateral compensation was more clearly made.

Q3: Do you have any comments on how the Commission has carried out its appraisal?

The details of the three options are no more than commercial business cases showing scant regard for the impact on communities in the Heathrow region. Against that, the Commission Consultation document in presenting the three options does highlight some areas of concern which assists understanding of the issues.

The consultation is aimed at a very wide audience with vastly different resources at their disposal who wish to either promote their interests or to reach informed conclusions.

Bearing in mind it is predominantly individuals who are affected by the proposals and the Commission (it seems) wants individuals to respond, the questions posed are complex and the document offers little help to individuals to make their views and concerns known. Indeed, respondents are likely to be deterred by the consultation document and only the most determined and most articulate are likely to respond. A plain English version would have been helpful for individuals – your questions and the response form as presented are an obstacle to members of the public who wish to make their views and concerns known. It has become clear in our public meetings that the residents of Datchet feel very strongly that neither Heathrow option should proceed, but the absence of a simple way to gather the information they need to express those views makes the community feel disenfranchised. It is the silent majority that the consultation should be seeking to reach and in that respect we feel it has failed miserably.

It is also difficult to gain an understanding of the weight that might be placed on any one respondent's view – not a topic covered in the consultation document. Views are sought from organisations and individuals across the globe. How does the view of a business conglomerate in Tokyo stack up against the views of individuals living under the proposed flight paths?

As a consultation this aspect seems ill thought through – somebody should be looking after the individuals who are directly affected by the changes. The consultation should be fair and be seen to be fair.

Furthermore there are many areas where the consultation either offers insufficient data or fails to deal with uncertainty; these include issues such as noise profiles, air space management issues, flooding and ground water displacement, predicted pollution levels, housing issues, employment statistics. We are told that many of these issues will not be clarified until after the consultation itself is finished – that is simply not good enough. Everyone who will be directly affected deserves better. Thus, despite the way in which the consultation document itself is presented, it would seem that those being consulted are not being given the opportunity to consider the essential facts to allow them to form a balanced, informed view.

Q4: Are there any relevant factors that have not been fully addressed by the Commission to date?

For the following reasons we believe the consultation document is flawed, incomplete and does not take account of all the relevant factors that need to be addressed before an informed decision can be made.

In our view the way in which these proposals are presented fails to take into account any concept of fairness or an individual's human rights. The promoting companies have clearly committed substantial budgets to pursue their specific commercial aims, with their undeniable bias in favour of development and expansion. Responding organisations and individuals do not have the resources to counteract the promoting organisations' campaigns.

At Para 1.9 of the Commission's document the Commission concluded that there is a case for at least one net additional runway in London and the South East. As mooted in Para 1.10 there is clear inference that a second additional runway may well prove necessary but further consideration of that possibility is set aside for future review. Whilst the second runway consideration may be for the future it is a relevant factor now. It would be ludicrous to believe that a decision following this consultation could be made without any regard for what happens next. Nowhere in the consultation document is there so much as a hint of the way in which the need for a second additional runway might be influenced by the decision that is to be made now. What assurances can we have that in commercial terms the fourth runway is not already being factored in by the three companies?

To set the comments above in context, prior to the building of T5 the British Airports Authority (BAA), a commercial organisation, told the 1995 Public Enquiry they had no operational need for a third runway and agreed to cap ATMs at 480,000. The local community relied upon that assurance, which is now clearly proven to be worthless. In 2003 the BAA sought unsuccessfully a third runway at Heathrow. Before T5 was even operational it was reported that the BAA expressed satisfaction that their call for a third runway had been turned down because it would have been inadequate. It is not credible to look at options for one additional runway when your report has recognised that these may soon be superseded by the need for a second additional runway in the south east.

The consultation appears to take no regard of the fact that because of its monopoly status the BAA was required to sell a number of its airports. Both of the Heathrow options would recreate a massive monopoly, taking direct business away from regional airports and denying the opportunity for the development of more comprehensive point to point travel that is becoming ever more popular, which in turn will impact negatively on regional economies.

The feedback in our community is that the three promoting companies are acting solely in their own commercial best interest with scant regard to the impact on local communities. As we have already said, there is little convincing detail on noise levels, flooding, air pollution, flight paths, airspace management, other amenities and services that would be required to support the community should an expansion of Heathrow occur.

All three options provide estimates of the number of jobs that may be created, but avoid the question of how those workers and their families will be housed and supported. The HEN representative, presenting their case to our village meeting, declined to comment on this aspect saying it was not their problem. The commercial plans and the Commission's report do not address how this housing would be provided in an area where land for building is severely constrained not least by Green Belt and flood risk assessment. Moreover the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is already unable to meet existing housing targets.

Given the current economic climate and the constraints on local authority expenditure, how do these commercial organisations, or the Commission, forecast that central government and local authorities would be able to finance the necessary housing and infrastructure improvements?

Q5, 6 and 7:

The concerns of Datchet Parish Council are for the village and its residents. These questions are outside our technical competence. Had there been any plain English presentation of these questions perhaps we would have been empowered to contribute.

Q8: Do you have any other comments?

Datchet is only two miles off the end of the proposed Heathrow Extended Northern Runway yet it does not feature on any of the diagrams and charts presented, nor is it mentioned in the Consultation document's Scheme Description.

Heathrow Hub Ltd, Heathrow Airport Ltd and Gatwick Airport Ltd have all spent freely in promoting their particular schemes through major national advertising campaigns, some local presentations, and placing their own glossy spin on the merits of their commercial options. We have been bombarded with selective and self-serving information through full page advertisements in national newspapers and locally distributed promotional materials.

In stark contrast, the Airports Commission has kept a low profile and has had little contact with the local communities affected. Given the magnitude and importance of these proposals the Airports Commission's communication has been wholly inadequate. The Commission has produced complex documents that are beyond the scope of the average person to digest and assimilate. Two presentational events with admission by tickets only is hardly an inclusive approach. A short, plain English consultation document, like those distributed by the competing companies, directed at people who are immediately affected would have been more appropriate.

Under Para 4.9 the Commission commits to running an open, fair and transparent process that provides an opportunity for interested parties to present their views. We believe you have totally failed in that objective. There should have been a more concerted effort by the Commission to reach individuals in the communities affected.

A final thought on the consultation is that our response is about us fighting to secure a viable future for our community and way of life for future generations. Here in Datchet we recognise we are not alone and are horrified at the effects these proposals would have on many communities in the region, some of whom would effectively cease to exist should the Heathrow proposals go ahead.

Yours sincerely

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