

Report to Annual Parish Meeting – April 2024 – Cllr Malcolm Fillmore Re Gatwick Airport

One of my roles as a Rusper Parish Councillor is as your representative responsible for looking after all and any issues arising out of Gatwick Airport.

I am thus the Parish representative on what is called GATCOM and which is the Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee. This is an independent advisory body set up by Government many years ago to provide a means whereby local authorities, airport users and other interested parties can regularly discuss issues with the airport management. We meet formally four times a year but there is further fairly frequent liaison on issues as they arise.

And there are a lot of issues currently. Not least is the proposed expansion of Gatwick from its present single runway operation by upgrading their existing emergency runway to become its Northern Runway. Gatwick is looking to substantially expand. You may recall that when the Government looked at the potential growth of air travel in the South East some years ago, they opted to go with a third runway at Heathrow as opposed to allowing Gatwick its proposed second southerly runway. The likelihood of Heathrow ever getting its third runway seems increasingly remote and hence Gatwick is promoting a significant increase in its operations.

The Northern Runway project is not the same as the previous second southerly runway in that it can only be used by departing short-haul aircraft but it will enable Gatwick to have significantly more movements because it will relieve existing blockages, enabling simultaneous landings and take-offs and thus avoiding the often lengthy queues of departing aircraft.

This proposal is currently subject to a formal consultation and review by the Planning Inspectorate under what is known as a Development Consent Order or DCO. Five independent inspectors are currently carrying out this study and which involves a series of public hearings where they are critically cross-examining Gatwick's plans and also allowing representatives such as myself to fully join in with our views and representations – both written and oral.

I have attended all the hearings so far and there is a further series next week. I am of the opinion that the Inspectors are taking their role very seriously and while the outcome remains uncertain – they report to the Secretary of State towards the end of the year – it is clear they are having proper regard to the negative aspects of Gatwick's proposed growth. But I have to say I am not optimistic that Gatwick's proposals will be turned down.

My principle focus on behalf of the Parish is on noise and particularly night noise and where the number of night flights has been steadily increasing over the years. They are now more frequent than they were pre-Covid, despite the fact that Gatwick has so far recovered overall to only about 85% of its previous numbers. While it is true that aircraft are less noisy than they used to be, there are studies which show that sleep disturbance remains a real problem for many.

I am therefore also on the NATMAG Committee – NATMAG being the Noise and Track Monitoring Advisory Group. Again this is a separate representative body and it receives a detailed quarterly report from the airport on its flight operations and then meets formally to critically analyse and discuss the Report with the Airport's representatives and to agree and monitor a resultant Noise Action Plan.

Gatwick is subject to a legal agreement with the Department of Transport which limits the number of night flights in the core period of 2330 to 0600. The limits agreed with Gatwick are far higher than at Heathrow and Stansted – the other two airports subject to such controls. These are amongst the

matters critically monitored by NATMAG and we continue to be concerned at what I would call fudges which permit additional night flights, particularly during the summer period.

There is a DfT Night Flight consultation ongoing at present aimed at looking at in particular the numbers permitted. Such review generally happens every five or so years but it seems clear that, blaming the fact that because recent statistics have been impacted by Covid, the DfT simply wish the present regime and numbers be allowed to run forward a further three years. We and other local representatives are objecting to this and are looking to persuade the DfT to set substantially reduced figures.

A related issue which is getting increased attention is that of the impact of particulates in the air as a result of overflying jet engines and the impact this is potentially having on people's health. You will be seeing more on this over the coming years.

Other issues you may have heard of is something called FASI South. FASI is short for Future Airspace Strategy Implementation and is a redesign of upper airspace – that is the routes aircraft take over the country after take-off and before landing. Existing airspace corridors and routes are of course designed primarily for safety and as air traffic has grown, the routes have had to be patched up so they have now become somewhat unwieldy. As a result, aircraft commonly have to take circuitous routes rather than direct ones or go round and round in circles awaiting a way in to the airport.

The perceived downsides to this project is that new straighter and shorter routes will be found with the result that some residents not currently overflown may find that they will be in future. However, this will have minimal impact on Rusper Parish since we are overflown by 100% of all aircraft arriving or departing!

Another related issue that concerns me is what Gatwick are prepared to do to fund home insulation and other noise-reducing opportunities. There is an existing scheme which has been around for some years and I had hoped to get a Gatwick representative here tonight to talk about it and hear representations. However, because a revised scheme is being proposed under the DCO, they have unfortunately declined to attend. This is a matter I am continuing to pursue and do intend at some stage to persuade them to attend a Parish Council meeting so the revised scheme can be fully understood – and hopefully improved still further.

Rusper Parish Council is a fully signed-up member of the two principle environmental groups focusing on Gatwick. These are CAGNE – Community Against Gatwick Noise and Emissions – and GACC – Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign. We support and work with both of these bodies and strongly welcome the efforts they make to limit the adverse impacts that Gatwick has on our neighbourhood. Indeed, I have very recently been asked by GACC to become a member of their Committee.

Additionally, since detailed facts are important in support of representations to Gatwick and the Government, I personally prepare a monthly report which sets out in detail the daily movements at Gatwick by airline and also provides a detailed analysis of every night movement from 2300 to 0700 and these are widely circulated. These and other reports I prepare or comment upon are posted on the Parish Council website.

But, I am anxious to have feedback from local residents so that I can take up your concerns and issues. So please feel free to contact me (either direct or preferably via our esteemed clerk, Lisa) on anything relating to Gatwick Airport and its impact on you, your family or neighbours.

Cllr Malcolm Fillmore

