

Classic growth versus environment dilemma

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Just 20 miles from **Epsom** weekend flights at **Farnborough Airport** could more than double if expansion plans go ahead.

The airport's owners are seeking to increase the annual number of flights from 50,000 to 70,000 a year - including a jump in weekend traffic from 8,900 to 18,900. They also hope to have aeroplanes taking off and landing from 7am to 9pm on weekends and public holidays, an hour earlier - and later - than currently permitted.

They say the increase in flights is needed to meet shifting needs of business travellers, opponents say the airport is trying to cash in on leisure and holiday travel. Airport bosses say the move will create thousands of new jobs in the area and are urging people to have their say on the proposals at a series of consultation events.

John Eriksson, chairperson of the Farnborough Noise action group said the people in the area already have no respite from the jet engines. He said his main concerns over the expansion were that it was yet another consultation before a review into the impact of airspace changes had concluded.

The claimed economic benefits, he said, were still being assessed by **Rushmoor Borough Council's** oversight and scrutiny committee, and that the Government's own climate change committee stated there should be no increase in aviation until the industry was able to reduce emissions.

He said that on average, planes from Farnborough carried 2.5 passengers per flight, with many not carrying any. Mr Eriksson said: "We're going to have a continuous drone of aircraft noise. They already fly at a lower altitude to get under Heathrow and Gatwick airspace."

Richard Nobbs, another Farnborough Noise member, said the growth of the airport had been "highly detrimental for the area". He added: "We are going to end up with an increase in pollution, an increase in noise. Farnborough Airport will say this is needed because it will make a big contribution to the local area, but I don't see that. Most of the flights are to holiday destinations."

The airport, one of the largest employment sites in the area, has said it would publish detailed information about its proposals from September 20. They claim the changes would enable it to be a "catalyst for long-term economic prosperity in the region" and support 4,100 jobs by 2040.

Opponents say it serves mostly private clients with jets averaging 2.5 passengers per trip. Campaigners said this makes it difficult to justify the airport expansion's economic argument.

The airport argues it contributes £200m to the local economy each year, which in turn supports thousands of direct and indirect jobs in the process.

Simon Geere, Farnborough Airport chief executive, said: "By satisfying the growing demand for connectivity from Farnborough Airport, our proposals will create hundreds of new jobs within the local community and give a boost to the unique aerospace cluster that we are part of. This will be vitally important for the future economic prosperity of the region. At the same time, Farnborough Airport is leading the way on airport sustainability.

"We recently achieved Level 4+ Carbon Neutrality which is the highest possible accolade, and last year we set ourselves one of the most ambitious targets in the industry, by committing to be Net Zero across our controllable emissions by 2030 or sooner. We are looking forward to sharing our proposals for the future of the Airport with the local community and receiving feedback on how we can continue to contribute to the ongoing economic prosperity of the communities we serve.

Further details are available at FarnboroughAirport2040.com.

The consultation will close on October 18 2023.

Following the consultation, the airport intends to submit its planning application in November 2023 after which a 16-week statutory consultation will follow.

It expects the first planning decision to be made in March 2024.

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