



Expanding London airports “not an environmental trade off” - Minister claims

Expanding Heathrow and Gatwick is “crucial” for this government after years of people sticking “their heads in the sand” over plans for new runways at south east airports, the Secretary of State for Transport said.

Heidi Alexander made the remarks as she outlined its vision to “modernise” the aviation sector at the annual AirportsUK dinner at a time when passenger levels at the country’s airports had grown by 7 per cent – and signs indicating 2025 would be a record breaking year.

She said: “It’s clear this is a trend, not an unusual year. In fact, everything points to a record-breaking 2025 – and it’s easy to see why.

“The world has never been more interconnected. The desire for travel never stronger. Global forecasts show a near doubling of passengers and cargo in the next 20 years. So the demand is there. It’s growing. And if we don’t seize it, we not only risk being outpaced by European competitors, but we will be on the wrong side of public aspirations.”

The Government has already announced its support for a third runway at Heathrow Airport – which has put in £2.3billion to overhaul its infrastructure – and more recently said it was ‘minded to approve’ a second at Gatwick.

She added: “We see airports as a crucial pillar of our plan for change. And it’s why we’ve acted, and acted quickly, across three areas – starting with expansion. It’s no secret that long ignored capacity issues in the south-east, has meant some of our major airports are now bursting at the seams.

“And yet – when it came to expansion – too many people stuck their heads in the sand. It left the industry in a perpetual holding pattern, with decisions circling around Whitehall for years, waiting for a clear signal.”

Expansion at Heathrow would be the first new full-length runway in the country for quarter of a century with the transport secretary saying her job was now to balance “economic benefits of expansion with social and environmental commitments.”

She said this was reflected in her caveated support for Gatwick – with a “clear path for expansion” set out if certain conditions are met.

A final decision on whether to approve Gatwick’s expansion is expected to be made on October 27.

The transport secretary finished: “I will never accept the false trade off that pits growing aviation against protecting our environment. I honestly believe we can, and must, do both. And how we do that is already being answered...

“Firstly, we cannot hope for quieter, cleaner and greener flights if our most critical piece of infrastructure is stuck in the past. We must ramp up work on reducing emissions. Green flight isn’t only essential for the industry, it’s existential.”

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[Report against airport expansion](#)

[Heathrow expansion reaction](#)

[Heathrow Airport. Credit Heathrow Airports Limited.](#)

Epsom Ranks Among Surrey’s Best for Train Punctuality

Epsom railway station has emerged as one of Surrey’s most reliable stations for punctuality and service, faring significantly better than many other locations across the county. Despite serving three major London terminals—Victoria, Waterloo, and London Bridge—Epsom’s train services remain relatively efficient, avoiding the severe delays and cancellations plaguing other areas.



Government Push for Greater Transparency

The government has announced plans to improve transparency in railway punctuality by introducing live data screens at major stations across the country, including in Surrey. These digital screens will display real-time statistics on train cancellations and punctuality, offering commuters a clearer picture of service reliability. Data will also be made available online.

The latest figures highlight significant differences in performance across Surrey's rail network. While some stations suffer from frequent delays and cancellations, Epsom continues to provide a more dependable service for its passengers.

Surrey's Worst-Offending Stations for Delays and Cancellations

Several stations in Surrey have been identified as the worst performers for punctuality and cancellations, frustrating thousands of daily commuters. At the bottom of the list is Woking, where only 72.2% of non-cancelled trains arrive 'on time'—defined as arriving within three minutes of schedule. Just above it, Guildford fares only slightly better at 74.2%.

Other stations in the lowest 10 for punctuality include:

- **Guildford** - 74.2%
- **Horley** - 74.8%
- **Gomshall** - 74.8%
- **Haslemere** - 75.2%
- **Reigate** - 75.6%
- **Dorking (Deepdene)** - 76.4%
- **Byfleet and New Haw** - 76.6%
- **Earlswood** - 76.7%
- **Redhill** - 77%

Some of these stations also struggle with cancellations, with Earlswood topping the list, where 11.7% of all scheduled trains simply do not arrive. This is followed by Salfords (11.7%) and Horley (8.4%). The full list of worst stations for cancellations is as follows:

- **Earlswood** - 11.7%
- **Salfords** - 11.7%
- **Horley** - 8.4%
- **Kempton Park Racecourse** - 7.4%
- **Sunbury** - 7.3%
- **Upper Halliford** - 7.3%
- **Chilworth** - 6.8%
- **Redhill** - 6.6%
- **Shepperton** - 6.6%
- **Gomshall** - 6.5%

Epsom's Strong Performance

If Epsom were included in these rankings, it would rank significantly higher in reliability. The latest figures show that **87.7%** of its non-cancelled trains arrive on time or within three minutes, a notably strong performance compared to its Surrey counterparts. Additionally, the station has a low cancellation rate of just **1.6%**, offering passengers greater confidence in their daily commutes.

Natasha Grice, Director at Transport Focus, welcomed the initiative to improve the transparency of service reliability, stating:



"Passengers tell us they want a reliable, on-time train service and will welcome improvements to information about the punctuality of their service and cancellations being shared more transparently. It's important that the industry uses this information to drive up performance."

Meanwhile, Woking MP Will Forster has launched a new cross-party group aimed at holding South Western Railway accountable for poor performance. "I'm disappointed but sadly not surprised Woking suffers from more delays than any other station in Surrey," he said. "My constituents in Woking, and passengers right across the South Western Railway network, deserve a fair deal as they travel by train. We should expect cheaper and more reliable services."

A Positive Outlook for Epsom Commuters

While many Surrey stations struggle with delays and cancellations, Epsom's strong performance provides a welcome relief for local commuters. The government's move to display live data at stations will allow passengers to make more informed travel choices and hold operators accountable. As the debate around rail service reliability continues, Epsom's efficiency stands out as a positive example in an otherwise challenging landscape for rail users across Surrey.

Surrey to get new recycling centre?

Newspapers, cardboard, plastic bottles and tins of tuna could have a new home to go to in Surrey. Plans for a new recycling centre are on the cards on farmland in Chertsey as the existing infrastructure is "under strain", a new report says.

Surrey County Council is proposing to build a dry material recycling centre on Trumps Farm, just off the M3. An outline planning application has been submitted and an outline business case has been developed, with a decision hopefully being made in May 2025.

Waste like metal, cardboard and plastic would be collected at the kerbside and then separated from mixed items like paper, card, plastic, metal and glass into single material streams. These streams are then sent on to reprocessors to turn into new products.

Trumps Farm, owned by the county council, was identified as the most suitable location for a recycling facility as it is North West Surrey, closest to where the highest levels of waste are produced, according to the council report. The size of the proposed facility will provide capacity for Surrey's dry recycling now and into the future, the document said.

The county's ability to recycle and get rid of waste is under "significant strain", according to a council report. A report in 2023 highlighted a strain on the current recycling infrastructure and a lack of dry mixed recycling centres in the county.

"If we're going to build and invest in a recycling centre, we need to up our recycling rates," said the Leader of the council, Tim Oliver at a cabinet meeting on February 25. He urged members to "renew their energy" for recycling around the districts and boroughs.

The Conservative leader said recycling rates around Surrey had stagnated at around 50 per cent and perhaps residents were not sure what can and cannot be recycled. He added: "I have persuaded my wife to look at a package before she puts it in the bin because it does tell you whether it's recyclable or not."

Responsible for around 90,000 tonnes of recycling in Surrey, the council is hoping to find an operator to process all this material without changing the current district and borough collection regimes. These authorities are Epsom & Ewell, Elmbridge, Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking.

Use of third-party sites to manage recyclable materials collected by the District and Boroughs on the county's behalf has been increasingly expensive and the service has no control over costs or the separation processes. "Surrey County Council will need greater control over its supply chain and associated infrastructure," according to a new report.

Imminent waste legislative changes could put the county council at risk of not meeting its duty as the Waste Disposal Authority. The new legal rules include: collection packaging reforms and extended producer responsibility (meaning the need to collect and recycle a broader range of materials) and a new levy on fossil fuel waste which could cost the council up to £10m a year.

The report said: "The delivery of a Surrey material recycling facility will work to mitigate these financial pressures by increasing recycling, particularly with regard to plastics and provide revenue savings which can offset these costs."

In the event that Surrey was split into a number of unitary authorities that were responsible for waste disposal, the county council said the continued use of strategic waste management facilities would be managed through agreements between local authorities.



Image: Surrey Recycling Centre. Credit Surrey County Council

Surrey County Council's Climate Change Progress: Successes, Setbacks, and the Road Ahead

Surrey County Council (SCC) has made notable strides in its efforts to combat climate change, cutting its own carbon emissions by 38% since 2019. However, despite significant progress, challenges remain, particularly in securing funding and maintaining the momentum needed to achieve net zero by 2030 as an organisation and 2050 for the wider county.

Achievements: Measurable Gains in Emissions Reductions

SCC's third annual Climate Change Delivery Plan assessment highlights a range of accomplishments across various sectors. Since 2019, the county has:

- Reduced its yearly emissions by 1 million tonnes.
- Retrofitted nine council buildings and increased renewable energy capacity by 0.5 megawatts.
- Converted nearly 100% of its streetlights to LEDs, achieving a 75% reduction in emissions from street lighting.
- Upgraded over 3,000 homes to improve energy efficiency.
- Installed 14MW of additional solar power—enough to power 9,000 households.
- Planted 500,000 trees as part of a broader sustainability drive.
- Offered 500 green skills courses to improve employment opportunities in eco-friendly industries.

These efforts have collectively helped residents, businesses, and the public sector save approximately £18 million per year in energy costs.

Challenges: Where Progress Falls Short

Despite these commendable efforts, SCC faces several hurdles that could derail its long-term sustainability plans. Funding constraints, supply chain issues, and the cost of implementing further green initiatives pose serious challenges. The county remains at risk of falling behind on its ambitious targets without additional investment and governmental support.

According to SCC's Net Zero Progress Report, while the county remains generally on track, six out of its twelve borough and district councils have seen an increase in emissions. Moreover, transport remains a significant contributor to carbon output, with Surrey's transport-related emissions making up 44% of the county's total emissions—well above the national average of 29%. The report suggests that while cycling and walking rates have increased, they have not been sufficient to significantly reduce private vehicle use.

SCC's building decarbonisation efforts also face hurdles, with only eight buildings retrofitted against an anticipated 36 by 2025. Similarly, while 39 low-carbon vehicles have been introduced into the council's fleet, this falls well short of the 196 needed by 2025. The delay in installing EV charging points across council sites has further slowed fleet decarbonisation.

How Does SCC Compare to the Best in the Country?

One of the standout local authorities in climate action in the UK is Nottingham City Council, which has set a 2028 net-zero target—two years ahead of SCC's goal. Nottingham has implemented a city-wide district heating system powered by waste incineration, extensive home insulation programmes, and one of the most ambitious municipal renewable energy strategies in the UK. Nottingham has also successfully expanded its cycle network and introduced a fleet of electric buses.

By comparison, Surrey's efforts in public transport and active travel have been less effective. While SCC has made progress with bus electrification (with 16 ultra-low-emission vehicles introduced so far), it still lags behind other councils in deploying public transport solutions at scale. The lack of effective incentives to transition away from car dependency further limits its impact.



The Road Ahead: Priorities for SCC

SCC has outlined several key priorities for the next phase of its climate strategy:

1. **Expanding Renewable Energy:** Increasing rooftop solar on council buildings and exploring carbon offsetting options where direct emissions reductions are challenging.
2. **Improving Home Energy Efficiency:** Expanding the Warm Welcome initiative and continuing the Solar Together programme to help residents transition to renewable energy.
3. **Decarbonising Public Transport:** Expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure and investing in cleaner public transport solutions.
4. **Boosting Green Skills and Jobs:** Strengthening partnerships with institutions like the University of Surrey to create more opportunities in the green economy.
5. **Protecting Nature and Climate Adaptation:** Implementing flood resilience measures, developing biodiversity recovery plans, and ensuring green spaces are protected.
6. **Securing National Government Support:** Lobbying for greater investment in local sustainability projects and improvements to infrastructure.

Surrey County Council has made strong initial progress in reducing emissions and implementing sustainability initiatives, but serious risks remain. Without significant additional funding and structural improvements—especially in transport, building efficiency, and energy production—there is a real possibility that SCC may fall short of its ambitious targets.

Ultimately, SCC's ability to meet its targets will depend on whether it can maintain momentum in its existing initiatives while addressing the gaps that still threaten its long-term vision of a net-zero Surrey.

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell adopts new Climate Action Plan

Climate motion sparks energetic debate in Council

Surrey leading the shout: “Keep the noise down will you!”

An interdisciplinary network of engineers, policymakers, industry stakeholders and social scientists, led by the University of Surrey, will take on one of the UK's most overlooked environmental challenges: noise pollution.

From the constant hum of road traffic to the thousands of flights in and out of UK airports, noise awareness in our modern world often fades into the background - but it carries significant consequences for both human health and wildlife. Noise Network Plus will focus on promoting conscious design processes to create quieter products, buildings and transportation systems - with the aim of reducing noise pollution and building a healthier environment over the next 10-15 years.

Professor Mark Plumbley, project lead and Professor of Signal Processing at the University of Surrey's Centre for Vision, Speech and Signal Processing (CVSSP), said:

“Noise is a frequently neglected pollutant, but it has a big impact on health, society and the environment. For example, road noise can lead to sleep disturbance and heart disease, costing £7-10 billion each year in England alone. Once noise is out there, it is really hard to remove. We need to re-think how we design noise from the start.”

Awarded more than £1.8 million in funding, Noise Network Plus is one of six research projects to receive a share of £10 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). Together they form part of its wider community engagement initiative to address ‘Tomorrow's Engineering Research Challenges’ (TERC), launched today (11th February), which focuses on tackling the most pressing issues facing the engineering sector.



Professor Abigail Bristow from the University of Surrey, said:

“We’re at a pivotal moment in time where our environment is under threat, but we have the technology and expertise to make meaningful changes. Our mission-oriented research and innovation network will look to adopt a systems-thinking approach, addressing the root causes of noise and understanding its far-reaching impacts.”

A collaboration between the University of Surrey, City St George’s University of London, the University of Bath, and the University of Salford, Noise Network Plus aims to build unprecedented research capabilities to tackle the complex challenge of reducing noise and its impacts on people, the environment and the economy. Bringing together diverse teams and stakeholders, the initiative will promote inclusive dialogue and co-design innovative solutions.

Alan Hunter, Professor in Autonomous Systems based in the University of Bath’s Department of Mechanical Engineering, will lead the network’s efforts on underwater noise and artificial intelligence. This will include research into the effects of noise created by human activities at sea and improving the resilience of uncrewed underwater vehicles to noise. Professor Hunter said:

“The ocean is a noisy place, and a lot of the tools and technologies we rely on to deliver services either increase noise levels or are affected by noise. Taking oceanographic measurements, measuring marine wildlife populations, or inspecting underwater infrastructure, are all examples of activities affected by noise and of which we need to build a better understanding.”

Professor Antonio Torija Martinez and Dr Simone Graetzer are co-leads on the project at the University of Salford’s Acoustic Research Centre. Professor Martinez said:

“As the UK moves toward Net Zero, the adoption of sustainable energy and emerging technologies – such as wind turbines and drones – will introduce new sources of noise, fundamentally reshaping our soundscapes. This offers us a unique opportunity for a fresh start and through our initiative, we aim to transform the way noise is managed, embedding innovative solutions into engineering design and policy.”

Professor Charlotte Clark, Professor of Environmental Epidemiology in the Population Health Research Institute at City St George’s, University of London, said:

“This is a rare and timely opportunity to form multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams to develop engineering solutions addressing the problem of noise effects on health. We know that noise affects health, but we know little about how to mitigate the problem. The missions developed in the Noise Network Plus have the potential to step up mitigation efforts that will translate into major, long-term public health gains.”

The launch of Noise Network Plus will take place on 18th March at Prince Philip House, the home of the Royal Academy of Engineering, in London. The event will bring together a cross-section of people from engineering and other disciplines including researchers, industry, professional institutions, policymakers, charities, and other stakeholders, to identify the challenges that need to be addressed, and plan how the Network can work to address these challenges.

Professor Adrian Hilton, Director of the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI and CVSSP, added:

“Noise Network Plus represents a significant step towards addressing an often-overlooked pollutant and its detrimental impact on people. This interdisciplinary people-centred approach aims to tackle the complex challenges of noise in our modern world and develop innovative solutions for quieter and healthier communities.”

Surrey’s flood defences and energy efficiency funding

Funding for Surrey’s climate change programme has been reinstated after the county council received £1.5m more in government grants than it was expecting.

Surrey’s Greener Future’s programme is a climate change strategy that aims to reduce carbon emissions and make the county net-zero by 2050. Budget details had initially proposed to slash £0.5m from the Greener Future’s spreadsheet, as part of Surrey County Council’s identified £66.4m cuts it needs to make in 2025/26.

But the cuts will now be reversed after an amendment put forward by the Residents’ Association/Independents and the Green Party. Members unanimously agreed to the proposed changes to the budget at a full council meeting on February 4.

Cllr Catherine Powell said in the meeting: “Younger residents want a long-term focus which I don’t believe this budget fully supports.” The Independent member for Farnham Residents said the funds will safeguard the “vital work on developing and embedding climate adaptation”.



Money reinvested back into the Greener Futures team can be used to develop and integrate climate adaptation policies such as flood defences, heat avoidance, and programmes to improve household energy efficiency. It also includes developing finance opportunities like natural capital and organising health initiatives.

Cllr Jonathan Essex (Green Party/ Redhill East), who initiated the amendment, said: "Now is the time to strengthen and extend, not water down, climate action across Surrey, so I am delighted that we have taken this step to continue tackling the climate emergency.

"Leadership by local councils, including here in Surrey, is vital to ensure that the health of the economy is defined by community well-being and sustainable living, not by growth at all costs."

Cllr Powell added: "I firmly believe that climate change is not only real, but impacting Surrey and our residents and our businesses today." She cited the multiple instances of flooding across Surrey last year which the Environmental Agency said would only happen once every 30 years in normal condition.

The agreed change was just one of five amendments the Green Party put forward to change the council's budget, the rest were rejected. The others included creating a voluntary contribution fund for early intervention children services, closing the Your Fund Surrey programme, putting a transport scheme on hold and committing to a cross-party working group for SEND needs.

View from Little Misley, one of the fields set to have solar panels. (Credit: Guildford Borough Council planning documents)

Surrey Uni leads research to replace plastic with paper for liquids

A multimillion-pound research project, called SustaPack, aims to overcome manufacturing challenges for the next generation of sustainable, paper-based packaging for liquids. Backed by a £1 million grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) as part of UKRI's co-investing programme, packaging technology company Pulpex Ltd has joined forces with the University of Surrey to refine its manufacturing processes to provide a viable solution to plastic pollution.

Contributing matching support towards the project, Pulpex has already made significant strides in the development of its patented technology, which produces degradable bottles made from natural wood fibres. The packaging offers a sustainable alternative to traditional plastic materials and can be recycled in existing paper waste streams.

However, designing the next generation of production technology and materials requires novel and fundamental research to address current limitations, including new analytical techniques to improve product quality, optimising performance and reducing in-process imperfections.

Scott Winston, CEO at Pulpex, said:

"We're excited to strengthen our existing collaboration with the University of Surrey to enhance our technologies and processes. Our SustaPack partnership will help us advance safe, sustainable packaging solutions, enabling brand owners to meet Net-Zero targets. It gives consumers sustainable choices, delivers answers for brand owners, and enables supply chains and retailers to deliver their carbon footprint reduction goals – a priority for all."

A key feature of the packaging is its multi-layered barrier coating, which prevents contained liquid from leaking, as well as inward oxygen permeation, maintaining high-quality products for consumers. To create a step-change in the energy usage in methods used to apply these coatings, the researchers plan to develop innovative processes that consume less energy and water while increasing the shelf life of packaged goods.

Professor Joseph Keddle, from the University of Surrey's School of Mathematics and Physics, and Fellow of the Institute for Sustainability, said:

"Over the past couple of years, I have forged a close relationship with Pulpex as a Royal Society Industry Fellow, and I am enthusiastic about strengthening our ties through our SustaPack Partnership.

"Our aim here is to combine novel coating processes, mechanistic modelling, computer vision and artificial intelligence (AI) to establish a 'dry' spray coating process that deposits food-safe, degradable coatings. This technology, which isn't yet commercially available, will not only drive the next generation of packaging technology but will also contribute to a significant reduction in plastic pollution and lower carbon emissions from manufacturing."



A multi-disciplinary team of researchers will explore the feasibility of using thermal imaging to detect defects in wet coatings as they occur, enabling immediate corrections using AI. Multi-scale mechanistic models of the coating process will be employed to identify the sources of imperfections and non-uniformities and then eliminate them to ensure optimal packaging performance.

By applying innovative computer vision techniques powered by AI, the project aims to identify production defects in real-time, optimise materials and processes, and achieve 100% reliability in the manufactured products.

The outcomes of the project could set new standards for environmentally friendly packaging, helping brand owners reduce their environmental impact amidst ever-increasing environmental regulations – while offering consumers eco-friendly options to help fight against plastic pollution.

From left to right: Dr Hui Luo and Professor Robert Dorey (University of Surrey's School of Engineering); Professor Joseph Keddie (University of Surrey's School of Mathematics and Physics); Scott Winston, CEO at Pulpex; Barrie Harvey, COO at Pulpex; Dr Simon Hadfield (University of Surrey's Centre for Vision, Speech and Signal Processing); Professor Charley Wu (University of Surrey's School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering).

Young Artists Brighten Up Tattenham Corner Station

Passengers at Tattenham Corner station will soon be welcomed by a brand-new display of artwork, thanks to a creative collaboration between local students and The Arts Society Epsom.

Led by Carol Skelton, Arts Coordinator, Year 6 students from Epsom Downs Community School have explored block printing and etching on polystyrene sheets to create Greek vase designs inspired by renowned printmaker Patrick Caulfield's *Pottery 1969*.

The project has been supported by The Arts Society Epsom, with Angie Child, Head of Young Arts Volunteering, overseeing the initiative. It follows the launch of a permanent art display at Epsom Station in October 2024, created by students from Nescot College of Technology.

Part of the national **Art@TheStation** initiative, the project is backed by The Arts Society's head office in London and funded by Southern Railway. The goal is to showcase local primary school artwork, bringing creativity into public spaces and enriching the experience of travelers passing through the station.

Next time you're at Tattenham Corner station, take a moment to admire the talent and creativity of these young artists!

"Blocks away" from airport expansions

So called "blockers" to major transport projects will be cleared in a move that looks set to curb challenges to Heathrow and Gatwick Airport expansions, the Government has announced.

The Prime Minister wants to curtail legal challenges to major decisions in what the Government describes as "unarguable cases" they say can cause "years of delay and hundreds of millions of cost to projects that have been approved by democratically elected ministers."

Instead, the legal system will be overhauled with campaigners given just one attempt at a legal challenge for "cynical cases lodged purely to cause delay rather than three". It comes after reports the chancellor Rachel Reeves said she was prepared to face down critics of plans to expand Heathrow Airport and Gatwick – arguing economic growth outweighed other concerns.

The Government has said this would balance the need for ongoing access to justice against what it describes as a "challenge culture" where small pressure groups obstruct decisions taken in the national interest. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said: "For too long, blockers have had the upper hand in legal challenges – using our court processes to frustrate growth. We're putting an end to this challenge culture by taking on the NIMBYs and a broken system that has slowed down our progress as a nation. This is the government's Plan for Change in action – taking the brakes off Britain by reforming the planning system so it is pro-growth and pro-infrastructure. The current first attempt, known as the paper permission stage, will be scrapped.

"Primary legislation will be changed so that where a judge in an oral hearing at the High Court deems the case Totally Without Merit, it will not be possible to ask the Court of Appeal to reconsider. To ensure ongoing access to justice, a request to appeal



second attempt will be allowed for other cases.”

What the airports say

Heathrow has said it would wait until formal plans before commenting but that it strongly believed in its “vital role for the UK economy” and its long-held belief that expanding capacity at the UK’s hub airport was critical for economic growth.

A Heathrow spokesperson said: “Heathrow is the best-connected airport in the world. That competitive advantage for UK plc already enables over £200bn of British trade annually. But growing the economy means adding capacity at the UK’s hub airport which is full. That’s why we’re planning to unlock capacity by improving and upgrading our existing infrastructure, while also looking at potential options to deliver a third runway at Heathrow in line with strict tests on carbon, noise and air quality.”

Stewart Wingate, CEO of London Gatwick said: “We can be a major part of the Government’s drive for growth. We are already contributing over £5.5 billion to the UK economy and supporting over 76,000 jobs, but unless we can access greater airport capacity the UK will miss out on opportunities to enhance global connectivity and unlock further opportunities for trade, tourism and job creation. Bringing our Northern Runway into routine use, through a £2.2 billion privately financed, shovel-ready investment will create 14,000 jobs and generate £1 billion a year in economic benefits.

“The project, which is due for government approval early next year, could be operational by the end of the decade. We have put forward a strong and compelling case focused around making best use of our existing infrastructure, minimising noise and environmental impacts and meeting the four ‘tests’ for airport expansion set by Labour.”

The average legal challenge takes about 18 months to resolve and more than half of all major infrastructure decisions were taken to court.

Campaigners will not rest

Paul Beckford, the chairperson of the HACAN clearskies campaign group challenges the notion that expanding the airport would bring the craved-for growth.

He says that at best it could bring in £3.3bn over 60 years and that 75 per cent of passengers using a third runway would likely be transfer passengers “who contribute nothing to the economy”. He also said that Heathrow expansion would not be in a vacuum and instead “suck growth” from the regions.

Government’s own figures show that a third runway at Heathrow would suck growth from the regions, citing Department for Transport Aviation Forecasts that suggested “expansion at Heathrow would see 170,000 fewer flights per year from regional airports than if expansion does not take place”.

Mr Beckford said: “Local communities around Heathrow represent nearly a third of all people across Europe exposed to levels of aircraft noise that harms their health. If Heathrow were to expand the Government would expose over two million people to increases in noise pollution in spite of a deepening evidence base of the negative health impacts, particularly at night. Such expansion would increase the emissions of the country’s single largest source of carbon by around 9 million tonnes per annum, which is incompatible with the UK’s climate targets.

“It would be a failure of duty for any Government to put the health of their citizens at risk in the forlorn hope of generating growth when we know that the business case is marginal at best and 75 per cent of passengers using any third runway would contribute nothing to the UK economy.”

Sally Pavey, who chairs the CAGNE group that opposes expansion of Gatwick airport call the government’s decision a disgrace that ignored public opinion in order to build a new runway by stealth. She said: “If this story is true it opens the door to us communities concerned about the decline in our wellbeing to benefit the shareholders of Gatwick Airport. Any airport expansion shows a lack of understanding and priority placed by this government towards global warming and yet we see the signs constantly on the news of flooding, fires and rising temperatures.

“Aviation is one of the biggest polluters this planet suffers and yet a new runway would add extra carbon a year plus greenhouse gases, and there are no true decarbonising factors that will reduce this as with more planes comes more CO2 and noise. CAGNE has been at the forefront of opposing this new runway due to the lack of infrastructure, lack of workers, decline in air quality and unbelievable increase in noise as Gatwick would be as big as Heathrow today.

“Gatwick already has serious issues with noise and yet we were not allowed to include the modernisation of airspace that Gatwick is reliant upon to reach its economic growth goals with two runway operation. This is just one of the reasons we will be legally challenging a decision to allow a new runway at Gatwick. We have already started to fundraise to legally challenge a decision to allow two runway operations as there were so many flaws in the evidence provided by Gatwick at the DCO hearings, this news story, if factual, is just another reason to challenge a new runway decision.”



Surrey village to suffer a lot more Heathrow flights

Residents could suffer “an unacceptable amount of noise” from an airport as flight directions change, meaning the number of landing planes could increase from 36 to over 300 a day in a Surrey village.

Heathrow Airport is proposing to change its flight patterns to share noise more equally to communities around the site. This involves alternating between the southern and northern runways when the airport operates flights eastwards.

Most of the time (70 per cent) the airport runs on westerly operation, meaning planes take off and land towards the west as the wind favours the west direction at Heathrow. From 7am-3pm, planes land on the northern runway and depart on the southern runway. Halfway through the airport’s day, at 3pm, Heathrow switches runways to give neighbouring residents a break.

This is because of the Cranford Agreement in 1952 which restricted departures over Cranford. But the government ripped up the Cranford agreement in 2009 to bring more equal noise distribution in the residential areas around Heathrow.

As planes are now allowed to take off over Cranford (to the north-east of the airport) Heathrow is proposing to make changes to the airfield to allow for easterly operations of planes taking off and landing from the east. These include: building a noise barrier, up to seven foot high, near Longford, as well as changing the taxiways where planes turn on the runway to reduce ground noise.

The applicant states the redistribution of noise around Heathrow Airport will result in lower noise effects in some locations and higher noise effects in others, but it will enable noise from aircraft operations to be more fairly distributed around the airport than it is currently.

Despite the overall aim meant to have a more even spread of noise, Spelthorne council’s noise officer has objected to the changes as it will adversely impact Spelthorne and especially Stanwell Moor.

Currently only 36 planes arrive over Stanwell Moor on an easterly operation but if plans go ahead it could skyrocket to 328 landing a day, according to council documents. Councillor Joanne Sexton (Independent Spelthorne Group/ Ashford East), leader of Spelthorne council, said it was “quite a shock” to see the dramatic increase.

Heathrow submitted a planning proposal to Hillingdon Borough in October 2024, which is now in the consultation stage. Councillors wholeheartedly voted to object to the scheme, citing unacceptable noise impacts on the borough, at an environment and sustainability council meeting on January 14. These comments will be passed on to Spelthorne’s planning committee.

Only Cllr Paul Woodward (Conservative/ Ashford Town) approved Heathrow’s proposal, arguing: “Landing is the quietest part of the operation until you put the airbrakes halfway down the runway.”

Stanwell Moor runs directly parallel to Heathrow’s southern runway which leaves residents with a “constant stream of aircraft noise” for half the day, according to council documents. But if the airport uses full easterly alternation, the noise officer said this would “significantly increase the noise and frequency of overflights and significantly affect [Stanwell Moor] residents”.

Although Cllr Sexton raised concerns of Ashford becoming increasingly louder with plane noises, the noise officer said the changes would not harmfully impact Ashford or Sunbury.

Applauding the council for objecting to the project, Cllr Sue Doran (Labour/ Stanwell North) said: “It doesn’t matter which way [the planes] fly, the noise is terrible all the time.” Cllr Doran said she had lived in Stanwell for 15 years and said there is noise “virtually 24 hours a day”.

Heathrow Airport is aiming to introduce easterly runway alternation by 2028. Currently there is no proposed increase in the number of flights taking off or landing from the airport, just changes in the direction.

A Heathrow spokesperson said: “We know that noise is an important issue for local communities which is why we have published clear reduction targets in our Noise Action Plan. Our noise footprint has reduced by 41 per cent since 2006 and we expect to see further reductions. Easterly alternation is aimed at delivering predictable noise respite to more communities and is coupled with our ongoing work to install noise insulation for our nearest neighbours.”

Heathrow Airport. Credit Heathrow Airports Limited.