

Mr P Crysell
c/o Kath Thorne, Programme Officer
By email

Date: 7 March 2012
Our Ref: D6
Enquiries to: Planning Policy Team
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Dear Mr Crysell

RE: Extract from Council minutes regarding Filton Airfield

At the last Full Council meeting on 22 February 2012 a statement was made by the lead petitioner for the Filton Airfield debate. It was agreed at the meeting that the relevant extract of the meeting's minutes and the lead petitioner's statement would be sent to you for your consideration during the Core Strategy's Examination. Please find that extract and statement attached to this letter.

The extract and statement should be read alongside the petition representations from Save Filton Airfield (respondent ID 5722337). We have also appended the statement and extract to those representations and included this letter and the attachments in the Examination Library.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Conroy
Strategic Planning Policy & Specialist Advice Manager

EXTRACT FROM THE 22 FEBRUARY 2012 COUNCIL MEETING

64 DEBATE ON A PETITION RECEIVED – SAVE FILTON AIRFIELD (Agenda Item 9)

The lead petitioner was invited to introduce the petition debate to Council. A copy of the statement made by the lead petitioner is attached as appendix 1 to these minutes.

It was **agreed** that the relevant extract of the draft minutes of the meeting and the statement from the lead petitioner would be sent to the planning inspector conducting the examination in public.

Councillor Brian Allinson **proposed** a motion that was **seconded** by Councillor Pat Hockey that:

This Council:

- Thanked the petition signatories for triggering this debate
- reaffirms its support for the core strategy proposal to safeguard around 50ha of employment land through the redevelopment of Filton airfield to support, complement and enhance the existing advanced engineering and aerospace centre of excellence
- welcomes initial spatial planning officer analysis that this could create up to 5000 skilled jobs in the wider area
- gives in principle support to Gloucestershire County Cricket club's option for re-locating to the Cribbs/ Patchway new neighbourhood on the basis that it can be accommodated in addition to the planning requirements, aims and aspirations already set out in the revised Core Strategy.

The item was then debated by councillors and the following points were made during the debate:

- BAE must have chosen the timing of their announcement to close the Airfield very carefully and the Council could have been better prepared to take action following the announcement of the closure of the airfield
- the belief that the Core Strategy would protect the area from development was flawed because the developer needed only to evidence sustainable development in order to gain planning permission
- few issues had generated as much comment or emotional response
- any decision to allow Filton airfield to be sold for housing would be regretted in the future
- localism is about giving local people more say in local issues and the inspector had a duty to be mindful of local opposition
- BAE had received more support from South Gloucestershire Council officers than the Save Filton Airfield group

- between March 2012 and 2013 the government is holding an aviation consultation. Filton airfield is a key site and until the consultation is completed it would be foolish to allow Filton Airfield to be closed
- the number of houses that would be located on the site are unknown and will only be known if the inspector opens the area for development
- it is essential to keep control of development if development is allowed to go ahead
- suggestions made that the council should purchase the land would lead to very steep council tax increases for all residents if they were acted upon
- if BAE wished to sell the Airfield then the council could not prevent them from doing so
- if the Labour proposal for the Core Strategy had been adopted by the Council then the airfield would be designated as a Brownfield site
- the decision on the future of the Airfield rests with the Inspector and South Gloucestershire Council was not given an option but was asked to say how it felt the land should be developed if development was to come
- there is a need for land be set aside for housing
- locating a cricket club on the site would not prejudice the Core Strategy proposals

Following the debate the motion was then put to the **vote** and with 13 voting against it was **RESOLVED** that:

This Council:

- Thanks the petition signatories for triggering this debate
- reaffirms its support for the core strategy proposal to safeguard around 50ha of employment land through the redevelopment of Filton airfield to support, complement and enhance the existing advanced engineering and aerospace centre of excellence
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SFA – Filton Airfield Debate

Councillors,

Save Filton Airfield (SFA) welcomes the opportunity to debate the issue of Filton Airfield in relation to your core strategy.

At the last council meeting, SFA submitted a petition showing that over 3,300 people living locally to Filton Airfield, support our claim that the airfield should remain as an operational airfield.

Many of these people voted you into office as councillors, while others live within the Bristol area, but nonetheless live in close proximity to the airfield and so will be heavily affected by any decisions you make regarding the North Bristol area.

At the weekend, hundreds of people turned out for the SFA and Unite march, despite the awful weather. The speeches included messages from people such as, Sir George White, Sir Graham Watson MEP and even Peter Hargreaves, who sent **this** message to be read out:

“Modern cities live and die on the quality of their communications.

Although Bristol seems to have been insulated for much of the recession, the ever poorer communications within the city, will one day extract a terrible toll on the city.

Air transport is not only here to stay, but will continue to grow.

In my vision of the future, the most successful cities will have not one airport, but two.

Any city that allows the demise of **any** type of airfield is short-sighted; very short-sighted.”

Peter Hargreaves is arguably one of the most successful business people in Bristol today.

So, if **he’s** saying it’s a huge mistake to allow Filton Airfield to close, then surely, this is a matter that should be given far more consideration than just a couple of reports, that have been commissioned and paid for by those who have a vested interest, in seeing houses built on the land.

We believe that Councillors should **not** continue to ignore this very strong support from both the residential and business communities.

SFA has obtained an internal DFT document via an FOI request, showing communication between the DFT and SGC. This shows that even **they** are concerned that the closure of Filton Airfield will have a negative impact on the prosperity of Bristol and the wider region.

To quote three passages from the document.

The first:

“If Filton is lost to business aviation, the only comparable, hard runway airfield serving the city would be Bristol Airport itself, which is to the south of the city. ... The fear (from a GA perspective) would be that the Government's strategy to encourage growth at Regional airports would result in more low cost carriers being attracted to the one remaining airport serving Bristol.

There is a current GA centre at the airport, but whether this would come under pressure over time, if Bristol expanded its low cost operations, is a genuine GA sector concern.

GA could gradually be squeezed out through a combination of fewer landing and parking slots being available and higher landing fees.

With no competition (from Filton) to keep fees down, GA activity may, conceivably, be priced out of Bristol. This in turn ... might discourage regional investment in the area from those multinational corporations that are attracted to business centres with rapid (aviation) transport links, to Europe and beyond.”

the second:

“The Government wants to see a successful aviation sector and will develop a sustainable framework for UK aviation, which supports economic growth and addresses aviation's local and global environmental impacts.”

and the third:

“The Government will issue a draft aviation policy framework for public consultation in March 2012, and adopt the framework by March 2013. Local authorities will need to have regard to the finalised policy framework in making planning decisions.”

So surely, the wise thing to do would be to wait for the government to issue its Aviation Framework Strategy and use **it** to guide the treatment of Filton Airfield, in accordance with National Aviation Policy.

Even York Aviation in their report: “The Economic and Social Impact of the MAG Airports” say:

“Airports put regions ‘on the map’, in a way that few other facilities can.”

An article in yesterday’s Times Newspaper, quite concisely summarises what is also the view of a great deal of SGC and BCC constituents:

“Filton is a global centre of excellence in aerospace engineering and plays host to many top businesses in the sector. It seems short-sighted in the extreme to sell and redevelop an asset that sits at its heart and could play a key role in its future growth.”

In a democracy, surely the will of the majority of constituents should take precedence over the financial desires of one company and a few council officers?

In our EIP submission, we present a vision of how Filton Airfield can be run as a profitable airfield for the benefit of the whole region and would like to take this opportunity to debate this vision.

We would like to draw your attention to an example of how, with the right mindset and a coordinated and supportive approach from local councils, the whole region **and** the councils can benefit greatly, both socially and financially.

We're referring to the Manchester Airports Group. This group started as a collaboration between the local councils, who had the vision to jointly buy their airport and run it for **their** benefit **and** that of their community. It's well known that this company has gone from strength to strength and is now a very profitable and successful venture.

They have now expanded to include several other regional airports around the country and reports indicate they are now considering buying one of the country's main airports that BAA have put up for sale.

It hardly needs to be said that the local councils are benefitting handsomely from the profits their joint venture is producing. Their communities are also benefitting from the extra revenue that the councils are able to invest in the local infrastructure and facilities that they can now offer to them.

This is an excellent example of how forward thinking councils, taking a coordinated and cooperative approach, can produce significant benefits to their communities and beyond.

Carlisle, Redhill, Shoreham, Southend and Cambridge are also examples of how, with the right support, regional airfields **can** become successful

You and Bristol City Council have the opportunity to do something similar with Filton Airfield too. You have a **prime** opportunity right on your doorstep. You just have to choose to take it and run with it.

In our vision, rather than focussing on just one type of operation, the airfield should operate by attracting all the different businesses that normally use an airfield's facilities.

We're not advocating including commercial passenger services at Filton, but instead focusing on aerospace industries, aircraft maintenance, business jets and general aviation. Luton does **not** have capacity to cater for this traffic, but we believe these sources of income are sufficient to enable Filton Airfield to be a profitable and successful airfield.

Once the basic model has been established and is being marketed effectively, the facilities offered by Filton would attract more medium and larger sized businesses to the area, providing more well-paid jobs to the local community.

To achieve our vision for Filton Airfield, we would like to see a partnership between SGC, BCC, local businesses and even the local community. With LEP support, the consortium should seek to manage and operate the airfield.

In addition to the above information, we would also like the councillors to discuss the following questions during the debate.

These include the original petition question and four of the main questions we suggest should have been considered, while the core strategy was being compiled.

We're not asking whether these are relevant questions, just that they're debated with an open mind as to the possibilities:

- Q1. With reference to our petition question: "Why has SGC not protected Filton Airfield as a unique asset supporting the local Aerospace economy, and what steps will they take to protect and promote Filton and Patchway as an Aerospace world centre of excellence, providing high value, skilled jobs?"
- Q2. As whatever happens in the North Bristol area affects Bristol residents, just as much as South Gloucestershire residents, how can SGC work with BCC to create a coordinated approach to the planning of the infrastructure of the North Bristol area with Filton Airfield playing a significant role?
- Q3. Why have you supported and even encouraged the redevelopment of Filton Airfield, when it's clear that there's **huge** opposition from your constituents and when it's also clear that, in the right hands, Filton Airfield can be a major asset, at the heart of the prosperity of the whole region?
- Q4. As Filton Airfield is the only airfield in South Gloucestershire and, as it's a well known fact that airfields bring prosperity to an area, why is SGC deliberately allowing one of their prime assets to be destroyed, when they have the power to save it, simply by continuing to include it in their core strategy as a protected airfield and encouraging and facilitating other airfield operators to buy it from BAE?
- Q5. Would it not be more advisable, as shown in the DFT FOI documents, to deal with Filton Airfield after the Aviation Framework Strategy is released, to ensure that it is dealt with according to National Aviation Policy?

We await, with interest, your discussion of, and answers to, these questions and the information presented in this introductory speech.

We would also like to request that this speech is appended to this meeting's minutes.

Thank you very much.