

Matter 9
Filton Airfield
Personal ID No. 6191745
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Save Filton Airfield



**Statement to the Examination in Public of South
Gloucestershire Council's Proposed Core Strategy**

Matter 9

Filton Airfield

Paul D. Lee, 23 May 2012, v1.1

Question 1

Is there any evidence to show a case can be made for retaining an operational airfield at Filton?

SFA believes there is considerable evidence to show a case can be made for retaining an operational airfield at Filton.

Current Planning Policy

Current planning policy alone makes a strong case for retaining the airfield.

Local planning authorities will need to consider:

...

2. the role of small airports and airfields in serving business, recreational, training and emergency services needs. As demand for commercial air transport grows, this General Aviation may find access to larger airports increasingly restricted. General Aviation operators will therefore have to look to smaller airfields to provide facilities. In formulating their plan policies and proposals, and in determining planning applications, local authorities should take account of the economic, environmental, and social impacts of general aviation on local and regional economies

(PPG13, Annex B, paragraph 5)

Air travel is essential to the United Kingdom's economy and to our continued prosperity. In the last 30 years there has been a five-fold increase in air travel. ...

Our starting point is that we must make best use of existing airport capacity. We have concluded against proposals to build new airports at a number of locations. In every case we considered the consequences would be severe and better options are available.

We want to encourage growth at regional airports, and we have concluded that increased capacity is needed at a number of airports across the country, including some new runway capacity, more terminal capacity and support facilities.

(The Future of Air Transport (2003), Page 7, Foreword)

Air travel has increased five-fold over the past 30 years, and demand is projected to be between two and three times current levels by 2030. Some of our major airports are already close to capacity, so failure to allow for increased capacity could have serious economic consequences, both at national and at regional level. That must be balanced by the need to have regard to the environmental consequences of air travel. The Government believes that simply building more and more capacity to meet demand is not a sustainable way forward. Instead, a balanced approach is required which:

...

* minimises the need for airport development in new locations by making best use of existing capacity where possible;

(The Future of Air Transport (2003), Page 9, Executive Summary)

The South West is the largest of the English regions. Its size and population distribution mean it is difficult for any one airport to serve the whole region. As a result, the region contains several airports, many of them serving a distinct geographical area or commercial role, supporting air services which are of considerable importance to the regional economy. ...

(The Future of Air Transport (2003), Page 101, Paragraph 10.1)

As the region's airports grow, however, there are likely to be considerable opportunities to attract inward investment and inbound business travellers, and also predominantly leisure-orientated traffic (foreign and domestic tourists), for whom the travel times by alternative surface modes are a significant constraint. ...

(The Future of Air Transport (2003), Page 101, Paragraph 10.2)

We believe there is significant potential for growth at existing airports in the South West of England and that this will generate substantial economic benefits to the region. ...

(The Future of Air Transport (2003), Page 102, Paragraph 10.6)

The main potential for growth in the South West will be at Bristol Airport. Having due regard to the environmental impacts that would accompany its expansion, we support its development to around 12 mppa, to include a runway extension and new terminal south of the existing runway when these are required. ...

(The Future of Air Transport (2003), Page 102, Paragraph 10.7)

Filton and Gloucester Airports play an important local role in respect of business aviation, We fully support the continuation of these roles. ...

(The Future of Air Transport (2003), Page 105, Paragraph 10.30)

In the South West, Bristol has seen the largest increase in ATMs (up 65% over the decade) as a result of growth in the number and frequency of services operated.

(The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: The South West (2002), Section 2.5.2).

Consultation on general polices for GA was set out in the recent consultation paper, "The Future of Aviation". Whilst this document and the analysis that supports it does not focus on GA, it is worth noting that a number of smaller airfields in the region do have an important role to play. Principally, these are Filton, which is an important base for business aviation and the manufacture and freighting of Airbus parts and Gloucester, which has recreational and business aviation and a GA maintenance base.

(The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: The South West (2002), Section 7.4.34).

The South West airports also provide for general aviation which supports the regional economy. The needs of general aviation should be taken into account in future decisions regarding airport capacity in the region.

(South West Regional Spatial Strategy, Section 5.4.14)

Airports within the region should meet an increasing proportion of regional demand for air travel to reduce 'leakage' to other regions and the London airports, with the expected growth met by developing the major existing airports in the region – Bristol, Exeter and Bournemouth. Other airports will satisfy important local markets, for example Newquay, Plymouth and Staverton (Gloucester). Plymouth/Newquay should continue to provide business links to international hubs and London while facilitating tourist visits into the region. Local authorities, airport operators and other agencies will provide improvements to aviation facilities and access to airports (including public transport) in the region to meet future development requirements.

(South West Regional Spatial Strategy, Policy TR9)

Aviation Opportunities

SFA believes it is obvious there are considerable opportunities that can be attracted by an operational airfield.

For a start, the evidence suggests that at least two companies (Air Livery and Aeros) were forced out of Filton, as part of BAE's desire to run down the airfield in order to sell it for housing. In addition, it appears that Airbus would prefer the airfield to remain operational. Airbus continue to use the airfield, and Airbus Chief Operating Officer, Fabrice Bregier, has expressed regret to SFA that BAE is giving up the site.

It is also apparent that considerable aviation investment is taking place throughout the UK, in line with the predicted growth in the sector. For example, Cardiff Aviation are investing into St. Athan, as are Hunter Flying Limited. Marshall Aerospace are investing £20 million into Cambridge Airport and pledging not to build houses on the site.

SFA also has anecdotal evidence that there has been plenty of interest in Filton. However, with BAE wanting to sell the site for housing, and the Council ignoring alternative visions for the site, SFA is powerless to prove these.

SFA believes it ought to be obvious that there is scope for an Aerospace centre, focussed around an active runway. We have produced a vision of what Filton could be, and this includes our best efforts at running costs.

Visitor Centre

SFA has seen no evidence of BAE, York Aviation, TOR, Mott MacDonald or SGC looking at the integration of a visitor centre as part of a vision for a working airfield at Filton.

Filton is one of the most historic aviation sites in the world – from the formation of the Bristol Aircraft Company in 1911 right through to the birthplace of Concorde, the destination of the last ever Concorde to fly, and the home of the last one to be built and fly.

The Brabazon Hangar, where all the British Concorde aircraft were built, is a magnificent building, and is empty. It would make an ideal home for a visitor centre with Concorde 216 as a centrepiece.

SFA has been told Airbus will clear the west end of the BAE site by the end of 2013, with employees moving into the new Airbus Aerospace Park. We have been told the buildings will then be demolished. This may provide an opportunity to develop a world class visitor centre, telling the complete Filton story – rather than the current plans for a simple shed to house Concorde 216.

In 2011, the SS Great Britain received 178,000 visitors, bringing in £1.6 million. A further £3 million was collected through fundraising, legacies and grants.

Lack of Evidence

SFA believes there is a lack of evidence to show the airfield is unviable.

BAE has consistently refused to produce detailed figures showing the income the airfield attracts, or the costs of running it. There is also no explanation of how, despite being unviable, despite being rundown, and despite being closed on weekends, Filton Airfield apparently made a £1.2 million profit in the last year where figures are available.

SFA believes the Council has failed to challenge BAE with respect to the airfield's viability, as a result of being predisposed to BAE's plans. Evidence suggests the Council provided a steer to the BAE Aviation Options report, and also reworded York Aviation's report.

The current or prospective viability of the airfield is difficult to establish with any certainty without further information and analysis. However, in the absence of a clear overriding need for the runway to remain open, which we have not been able to identify, the question of the airfield's viability is a commercial judgement for BAE.

(Original York Aviation conclusion as to viability of Filton, 23 November 2011).

The current or prospective viability of the airfield is more difficult to establish without further information and analysis which we accept is in part due to the need of BAE to protect client confidentiality. Whilst we consider that further layers of details could be provided and analysed, we believe that, from our analysis within the tables, this wouldn't fundamentally alter the overall conclusions.

(SGC's rewording of York's conclusion 24 November 2011 - which appears in the final, "independent" York Aviation report).

It is outside the brief for this report to undertake an economic impact assessment of the aviation activity at Filton, ...

(York Aviation report, Page 21).

SFA believes that no economic assessment of Filton Airfield has ever taken place. BAE claim the airfield is unviable, but BAE wish to sell the airfield for houses.

SFA believes the issue can be simplified. It is clear there are airfields in the UK that are thriving. It is also clear that aviation is a growing sector. Filton has facilities and attributes that many airfields can only dream of. Length of runway, facilities, major aerospace cluster, proximity to population and business centres, excellent road and rail links, plus enormous history and Concorde.

Given all of this, SFA believes it is hardly surprising there is little real evidence to show the airfield is unviable. We believe it should have been the Council's role to seek out and challenge evidence, in line with planning law, policies and guidance.

Question 2

Is the balance of uses proposed for the area appropriate to the needs of the North Fringe and Bristol area?

SFA believes the CS vision for Filton Airfield is inappropriate and against both the wishes and needs of the North Fringe and Bristol area.

Question 3

To what extent has the Council had regard to the impact of development at the Airfield on the surrounding communities including those in the City Council's area?

SFA believes the Council has had little regard to the surrounding communities. There is evidence which suggests the Council committed to supporting the redevelopment plans long before the consultations were complete. SFA believes the consultations were nothing more than a tick box exercise. As a result no alternative visions for the airfield have been seriously considered, despite nearly 75% of consultation responses being against the redevelopment plans. SFA believes that in neglecting to follow the proper planning framework, the Council is in breach of the law and that there are grounds for a judicial review.

Question 4

Some businesses and organisations have concerns that development of the Airfield could undermine their existing operations. Are their fears valid?

SFA believes their fears are well founded. Two companies (Air Livery and Aeros) appear to have been forced out of Filton already. The evidence appears to show a long running plan from BAE to run the site down, in order to sell it for maximum profit, at the expense of the region's economy.

Question 5

Is the amount of land to be retained for employment purposes adequate?

SFA believes in a completely different vision for Filton Airfield. Full details can be found in the "Vision" section of SFA's EiP representation.

Further Details

Further details can be found in our representation documents “Legality”, “FOI Evidence” and “Vision”. The very latest copies can be found at the following locations:

http://www.savefiltonairfield.org/eipdocs/SFA_EIP_VISION.pdf

http://www.savefiltonairfield.org/eipdocs/SFA_EIP_LEGALITY.pdf

http://www.savefiltonairfield.org/eipdocs/SFA_EIP_FOI.pdf

http://www.savefiltonairfield.org/eipdocs/SFA_EIP_SOUND_1.pdf

http://www.savefiltonairfield.org/eipdocs/SFA_EIP_SOUND_2.pdf