

## **Redhill Aerodrome Hard Runway - Public Inquiry – 9 January 2014**

### **Evidence by Cllr Jonathan Essex**

My name is Jonathan Essex. I am a Chartered Civil Engineer, Chartered Environmentalist and Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts. I work in Sustainable Construction and Sustainable Development. But I am here in my capacity as Ward Councillor for Redhill East on Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Surrey County Council.

I have a short presentation which covers three areas of concern:

- failure of the five tests on protection of the Green Belt, the strongest piece of legislation we have in the UK, one that I believe should be firmly upheld
- not sustainable economic growth
- not in keeping with the NPPF and Localism Bill's focus on greater community say in the nature of development that departs from the local plan.

### **Green Belt**

I have been reading carefully about the tests to protect the Green Belt, and whether this proposal is acceptable.

I tried to visualise what a future airport at this location would look like, if this appeal is given permission.

So I am trying hard to visualise what a future airport at this location would look like, if this appeal is allowed. But not just imagining the 33,000m<sup>2</sup> of hardstanding for the runway, and the associated taxiways, but also the associated 'permitted development' – further incremental development that might be expected with a doubling of flights, to justify and pay back the capital investment.

We have not been given details of the future mix of planes that the applicant bases their noise assessments on but other hard runway airports do have more physical infrastructure than grass runways have.

This is all about scale of development and comparing this scale to the current size of the Green Belt gap to prevent sprawl between the village of South Nutfield to the east, Whitebushes to the west and the Royal Earlswood development and Earlswood to the north-west. I will focus on the first two.

I understand, that this development, as drawn, would mean that future extension to Code 2C runway standard would only need increase in length, which is feasible within the space between the two roads at either end, making it big enough for larger private jets.

And, as it stands, the proposed length is long enough for smaller regional turboprop aircraft with 20-30 seats and many business aircraft types operating privately (rather than being chartered), as presented by Redhill Aerodrome Limited to a public meeting at Salfords

Village Hall. So that would make this London Green Belt Airport, or Redhill in the Green Belt Airport.

So, what if permitted development occurred up to the planning application boundaries of this application, to make it economically sustainable (although I dispute that is what is meant by the term sustainable growth in the NPPF)?

And what is the scale of this?

I perused the drawing Figure 2.2, the Planning Application Boundary Plan, in the Redhill Aerodrome Environmental Statement dated July 2012 to see how close a mixture of permitted and further incremental development within this boundary could be to South Nutfield and Whitebushes respectively.

My ruler suggests that the current approximately 2km Green Belt gap could be narrowed to perhaps as little as 200m to South Nutfield and 300m from Whitebushes. So the scale of the development, results in a significant loss of this Green Belt gap.

In terms of the Green Belt tests this would cause significant harm, particularly in 'stopping villages merging with each other' (test 3). In my view as a layman this would constitute a sprawl between the two existing settlements, and be a loss of 'safeguarding from encroachment' too. And that loss of separation would, undoubtedly, mean loss of character for the village. Instead of protecting tranquillity and contributing to flood protection, the proposed development would impact on both.

### **Sustainable Economic Growth**

I would like to comment on how this development relates to the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 19. This refers to "sustainable economic growth", which is shortened to "sustainable growth", not purely economic growth as noted by the appellant's counsel.

As a sustainability professional I understand that such growth is set in context at the start of the NPPF. The contents page starts by saying that the whole point of this framework is "achieving sustainable development". Building a strong and sustainable – that word creeps in again, even though some like to leave it out – economy is a subsection of this.

Achieving sustainable development is introduced in a text box between paragraphs 5 and 6. It refers to the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, *Securing the Future*, which, the NPPF says, "sets out five 'guiding principles' of sustainable development: living within the planet's environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using sound science responsibly". *Securing the Future* actually prioritises these. It places the first two as objectives, with 'achieving a sustainable economy' as a supporting aim. It is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It has less weight.

I am thankful to our MP Crispin Blunt for clarifying just this. He wrote to the Prime Minister on this matter before the Reigate and Banstead Core Strategy Inquiry and received a written reply which stressed the pre-eminence of Green Belt over development.

This means that it can't just be jobs that count, but whether they are sustainable, and local, jobs. I am not sure if this was covered in the analysis done by York Aviation to justify the appellant's very special circumstances.

What I do know is that scaffolding, vital to maintain our homes in Redhill and build more, currently comes from Redhill Aerodrome, because the aerodrome currently acts as a low cost warehousing base. And, rightly so, the need for such a cluster of reasonably priced warehousing is important. I am concerned what the wider impact of lack of this warehouse space – such as the additional scaffolding 'road miles' – would be if the Aerodrome puts all its jobs into the aviation basket.

And what is sustainable economic growth in aviation? The government's climate change strategy states that by 2050 the total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from aviation must be no higher than 2000 levels, 20% of the UK total by that time. The government's plan is for expansion in aviation to be matched by a reduction in fuel emissions per passenger km. But Redhill Aerodrome's additional flights, beyond its training flights, shown as small business jets in the presentations at Salford Village Hall, are worse, they have *higher* CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per passenger km.

And is it vital to the local economy? Surrey is not short of economic growth – it grew by around 7% over the past two years, not in line with the rest of the UK.

Either the increase in flights at Redhill will mean a net growth in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, if it is additional flights, or it will be no economic growth, if it's simply a relocation of flights and the jobs that come with them from one location, such as Biggin Hill, to Redhill. You can't have it both ways. Either this is economic growth that is not sustainable, or it's not growth.

### **Localism**

Finally, I admit to being in favour of localism, and was interested to read the draft NPPF which was introduced heavily linked to the Localism Bill. Aspects such as the Community Right to Build, in paragraph 90, suggest that one of the reasons you might now allow building in the Green Belt is if locals express that that is the way they would like to see sustainable economic growth in their community, whether through a Community Right to Build or Neighbourhood Development Plan. I am not sure of the details as we have not had either of these in Redhill.

So, in the context of the national framework giving more weight to local views, and a local say in development, I can't see how going against the expressed view of the vast majority of local people is compatible with very special circumstances.

I would urge the Inspector to consider dismissing this appeal.

**Final note:** Yesterday Surrey County Council considered that vehicle access to the new Earlswood Depot should not use Kings Mill Lane, but should be advised to use A roads instead.