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**Your Ref:**  
**Our Ref:** GW/LF

**Date:**  
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Sir Howard Davies  
Airports Commission Consultation  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

*Dear Sir Howard,*

I am writing personally to you in order to draw to your attention the key issues of concern to this Council within the Commission's current consultation concerning the option of a second runway at Gatwick.

The consultation is technical and consequently the responses you receive will be detailed in nature; however I believe it to be of the utmost importance that the bigger picture is not overlooked at this crucial stage in the Commission's work.

It is important to state at the outset that this Council is positive about sustainable economic growth and its plans reflect this by supporting knowledge-based business growth and reducing out commuting. The Council also welcomes opportunities for local businesses to grow and flourish. The Council places great importance on the need to achieve a balance between sustainable growth and protecting the environment.

Councillors have carefully considered this balance and are disappointed that the economic benefits of an expanded airport at Gatwick are not more pronounced. Therefore based on the available evidence they have concluded that the disadvantages of a much bigger airport at Gatwick outweigh the advantages and therefore strongly oppose expansion at Gatwick. The Council's arguments are outlined below.

The area surrounding Gatwick Airport is predominantly rural in nature and many areas comprise landscapes of the highest quality. Mid Sussex certainly has this characteristic. Our District, which at its most northerly point is just 1.25 miles from the current airport (see attached map), has 60% of its area either within the South Downs National Park or the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. 24% of the District is woodland and 16% ancient woodland (32% of which is not in the National Park or AONB).

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In addition, the European designated Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation in neighbouring Wealden District, means that 29% of Mid Sussex is within the buffer zone for the Forest. Our District has 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and over a thousand listed buildings and 25 scheduled monuments.

Mid Sussex has a rich network of ecological and historic assets. The area is rural in nature, tranquil and those living within it enjoy a high quality of life. Therefore I think it is extremely important that the Commission takes into careful account the impact of developing a huge airport, some 19% bigger than the existing Heathrow, in the middle of the Sussex and Surrey countryside.

This Council believes the impact would be to change the nature of this historic and beautiful area irreparably. Indeed it could be argued it will change the environment from rural to urban.

This Council considers that the Commission has grossly underestimated the difficulty of this District and its neighbours accommodating the additional housing required by a second runway at Gatwick. As things currently stand, the area is not able to provide the new housing needed to meet existing, natural growth let alone additional housing as a result of an expanded airport. Currently the wider area's draft and adopted spatial plans show a 2,000dpa deficit in the amount of housing the area can develop (compared to objectively assessed need), therefore the prospect of accommodating up to 18,400 additional homes cannot be anything other than very challenging.

In addition, this Council challenges the Commission's assumption that the additional housing required by a huge airport at Gatwick would be evenly accommodated across the 14 neighbouring local authorities. As the Commission is aware, currently nearly half of the airport's existing workforce lives within Mid Sussex, Crawley and Horsham. Given the housing constraints of Crawley, it is quite possible the burden of this additional housing would fall primarily to Mid Sussex and Horsham. For Mid Sussex this could equate to an increase of 51% in the amount of housing the area would need to accommodate. This would be untenable.

The infrastructure in Mid Sussex and the surrounding areas is already inadequate and is currently failing. This Council does not consider that the Commission has adequately understood this point. Even with the improvements planned, it is our view that they will not be enough to cope with the additional pressures created by a huge airport at Gatwick. Further, we believe the wider infrastructure requirements of expanding Gatwick have not been adequately assessed. Access to the whole range of essential facilities must be evaluated and their cost properly assessed. The current assessment looks only at the need for additional primary schools and doctor surgeries which is inadequate.

Finally, given the rural and tranquil nature of our District, we believe the effect of increased noise on Mid Sussex to be unacceptable. Currently, Mid Sussex residents can look forward to noise nuisance reducing as aircraft become quieter. However, if Gatwick is expanded and the number of flights more than doubled, this will reverse and noise will

detrimentally affect three times as many people in Mid Sussex than currently. Given the rural nature of the area, this Council has grave concerns about this potential impact.


The Council's response to the consultation is attached, but I believe it is very important that responses do not focus on the detail to the detriment of the bigger picture.

The Commission should be under no illusions about the devastating impact a huge airport at Gatwick could have on this beautiful, ecologically and historically rich area of the Country. The Commission has underestimated the nature of this impact and its consequent implications on the capacity of the area to absorb the urbanising implications of an expanded airport.

Despite its rural nature, Mid Sussex enjoys a buoyant local economy with high employment and has sensible plans for sustainable growth, both of housing and jobs. However, it is concerned that the impact of an extended airport at Gatwick would jeopardise the sustainability of these plans; putting an unacceptable strain on local infrastructure and services and driving up commuting patterns. Mid Sussex has a highly qualified workforce and consequently wishes to promote new jobs that match the skills of the workforce. This means knowledge driven, creative and technology-based jobs and businesses, not the large number of lower skilled jobs the Commission envisages being created by a larger airport.

This Council has carefully considered the economic advantages of a significantly larger airport at Gatwick and, based on the evidence available, has concluded that the opportunities do not outweigh the very significant environmental and infrastructure impacts and that it will therefore strongly oppose the option of a second runway at Gatwick.

I do hope you and your Commission are able to take careful account of the points made above.

Regards  
  
Councillor Garry Wall  
Leader of the Council

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