

Buckland Parish Council presentation for Open Hearing re the DCO application by Gatwick Airport Limited

Introduction:

My name is Ianthe Cox and I am here to represent the views of Buckland Parish Council. I have lived in Buckland for 45 years

I have been a Parish Councillor since 2018 when I retired from full time work.

I also sit on the Committee of the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign.

Between the mid 1960's and the mid 1980's nearly twenty years of my working career was spent at Gatwick Airport, during which time I shared in its historic growth and development. Consequently, I like to think I speak with some experience of aviation. I have previously supported the economic growth of Gatwick.

However, the recent application by GAL to virtually double the size of the airport does not have my personal support and I seriously doubt the benefits of such a development.

Background

Buckland is a small village in Mole Valley of c.250 houses situated between Reigate and Dorking and bisected by the A25. We are in the Green Belt and an area of outstanding natural beauty, boasting indigenous wildlife, flora, and fauna. It is approximately 14 miles from Gatwick Airport.

While local people accept the benefits of having an airport in this area, and have grown used to aircraft noise and a busy road, any further increase to the current levels of traffic, both in the air and on the surface, are not acceptable to the majority of this village.

Surface transport

The A25 is already a busy road as an artery between east and west. The M25 is situated a short distance from Buckland above the village over the North Downs. Noise from the M25 is distinct when there are northerly winds. The M25 is subject to frequent closures or problems, and the A25 is an approved diversionary route which increases traffic through the village to a very high level. The A25 is frequently slow due to normal traffic volumes. Many motorists, frustrated by the frequent delays on the M25 will also take short cuts along country lanes through the rural areas via the villages of Leigh and Charlwood to the airport. The infrastructure in this area and current state of the roads cannot sustain further increases in traffic. Most recently there have been serious gas leaks on the A25 and on the B2032 involving days of delays and diversions. Buckland villagers also suffer from road traffic noise at night. There is a fair amount of public documentation on this subject as it is believed to have a detrimental effect on health and welfare.

Gatwick night flights have been steadily increasing since 2014, and while diminished during the pandemic, they are now back at 2019 levels. It is understood that a further increase of 70% is proposed by GAL. This also applies to freight flights and my understanding is that the present pattern of flights is set to continue for a further 3 years. All this extra activity drives additional traffic on our local roads during an otherwise quiet period.

The North Downs railway runs through the north side of the A25 through Buckland with connections to Gatwick. Currently there are frequent hold ups at the railway crossing on the B2032 Station Road, Betchworth leading from Pebble Hill. Recently, there have been significant road works in this area causing huge delays. An increase to rail traffic to support Gatwick would cause further railway crossing closures and would have a marked effect on local road traffic. Additionally, any increase in rail traffic would be detrimental in terms of noise and the effect on the environment.

Buckland Parish Council presentation to the DCO application by Gatwick Airport Limited continued.

Air traffic

Buckland already experiences and has accepted aircraft noise/pollution from flight departures and arrivals from both Gatwick and Heathrow and from helicopter and light aircraft traffic flying the east/west corridor over Buckland. Departing aircraft from Heathrow frequently overfly Buckland at below 7,000 feet. The proposed Airspace changes for arrivals and departures from Gatwick and the south east also further threaten the Buckland area.

While people may be able to insulate their houses from some of the noise effects, it is impossible to apply this notion to the enjoyment of their gardens and outside space during the daylight hours. This also can require windows to be shut whatever the overnight temperature.

Any night flights are particularly intrusive in this otherwise quiet area. The debilitating effect of disturbed sleep on health and welfare is well documented.

Flooding

Buckland frequently experiences flooding at the Betchworth Bridge, which is the principal north/south rural corridor. Serious flooding locally can also increase the level of road traffic diverting through the village on the A25.

Environment and Climate

Buckland Parish Council endeavours to encourage the village to adopt 'green' policies to avert the effects of climate change. We are also aware that the river Mole is subject to pollution Any further pollution would endanger these policies and the wildlife.

This area as stated is one of outstanding natural beauty, and a further expansion of the airport encouraging road and air traffic will potentially increase CO2 emissions and pollution to an unacceptable environmental level. This would also apply to the construction period of the airport facilities when increased traffic would be passing through the area.

Economics

Buckland Parish Council is aware of the GAL economic forecasts, and while questioning the veracity of these forecasts about the future of air travel, we are only commenting that while GAL have classed them as beneficial, it appears to be principally commercially driven, and no account has been taken of the social and environmental costs to this area and to those of the outlying villages around Gatwick. These Forecasts will be challenged by GACC.

Summary

Buckland Parish Council strongly opposes the plans of GAL to expand the airport through commercial use of the emergence northern runway.

The question has to be asked is this development being done purely for profit at the expense of the local environment and the people who live here? Thank you very much for letting us have our say.

Councillor Cox

28th February 2024