



Runways UK speech 2015

Cllr David Hodge, Deputy Chairman SEEC & Leader Surrey CC

Speaking notes 06 July 2015: CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good Afternoon Everyone.

I am delighted to be back at Runways UK to speak to you about airport expansion.

I spoke at last year's event and I'm pleased that so many more people are here today as the debate on aviation capacity reaches its final approach!

Local authorities need to play a **critical role** in the debate on runway capacity.

However too often our voice is lost in the haze.

The debate has tended to focus on the national and even international case for an increase in capacity at Gatwick and Heathrow airports.

I would like to emphasise the local case for local people,

For expansion to be a success local authority involvement is **vital**, because it is local authorities that speak for **all** parts of local communities.

Local authorities have a duty to balance the local interests of residents, businesses and the environment, with the needs of the economy.

And it is local authorities that are on the front line of the airports debate.

During recent flight path trials at both airports, it wasn't just the airports that received the calls; local councillors too were inundated with questions and complaints.

It is councils like Surrey and my fellow Leaders in the South East that will be left to deal with the unintended consequences of expansion long after recommendations have been made, policy statements written and the runways have been built.

Local authorities are key providers of local infrastructure and services.

My council is responsible for roads, as the local highway authority. We also provide schools, social care and libraries to name just a few of our excellent services!

Colleagues in district councils are responsible for planning new housing, with counties and unitaries providing much of the community infrastructure needed to support new development.

We therefore have a major stake in this debate and in the infrastructure needed to support expansion.

Surrey is in a unique position, with both Heathrow and Gatwick Airport right on our borders. We are the only county in the country in this position.

Regardless of where expansion eventually takes place, Surrey will receive the benefits but also have to deal with the costs.

For a council where economic prosperity is a priority, it is important to reflect on the contribution that the airports make.

Surrey itself has an economy worth over 35 billion pounds, greater than Leeds and Birmingham combined.

Airports are a key part of that economic success. We know that:

- Over 13,000 Surrey residents are directly employed by the airports.
- Many major international companies, such as BP, Canon, and ExxonMobil, are based in Surrey because of our connectivity to Heathrow and Gatwick
- And we estimate that as much as 15% of employment in Surrey is generated by the airports.

Surrey's economic success reflects the outward looking nature of our economy; Surrey businesses are increasingly international, competing on a global stage.

For Surrey our competitors are not in the UK but across the world, in China, India and other fast growing economies.

We need to balance the needs of this international economy, which thrives on its global connections, with the desire of local residents to have a good quality of life, with good local services and the necessary infrastructure.

Our recognition of the economic benefits that the airports bring is tempered by the negative impacts they impose on the communities around them – the noise, pollution, blight and traffic congestion.

We've made clear that whilst recognising the crucial role of the airports, expansion at either airport would require the environmental and infrastructure issues to be satisfactorily addressed in advance.

We need to think beyond the runway and ensure that these issues are tackled effectively. They are not just nice to have.

I make no apologies for repeating today what I said at last year's Runways UK event: **we must get the infrastructure right!**

Residents and businesses in the South East already suffer from an infrastructure deficit.

That deficit has not gone away in the last 12 months!

Infrastructure improvements are needed now, before runway expansion!

Failure to adequately address infrastructure deficits around the airports will only serve to undermine the benefits of expansion.

Surface access is a significant issue in Surrey and many parts of the South East. Despite the fact that both airports border my county, public transport access to both airports is poor.

It can take as long to get the train from Guildford to Heathrow as it will to get from London to Leeds with HS2. Little wonder that over 80% of passengers in Surrey travel to the airports by road.

This means that congestion around the two airports is frequent and costly. In fact - it's been estimated that congestion in Surrey is costing the UK economy £550 million every year!

I refuse to accept that international businesses and visitors will land at world class, state of art airports but be transported across the South East in overcrowded, slow trains or stuck in traffic jams on our roads!

Expansion will also put pressure on local housing – something that local authorities are already struggling with.

This means that housing will get more expensive too. The South East is already the most expensive area to live outside London, with several areas in Surrey amongst the most expensive to live in the country.

We need affordable housing to help support the range of jobs that expansion will bring.

The **schools and healthcare** systems are already under pressure from an increasing population. For example, last year Surrey saw an additional 19,000 births, but only 11,000 deaths. Expansion will add to that pressure.

There is a real danger that expansion will see communities without the right balance of housing, schools, hospitals and worsening congestion. That's the challenge that local authorities will need to address.

On top of that we also need to consider the significant environmental concerns. Planes may be getting quieter, but they will still disturb those living and working underneath a flight path several miles from either airport. I've already mentioned

the complaints local councillors received during recent flight path trials!

I am also concerned about air pollution and flooding impacts should either airport expand.

The impacts I have noted are significant at the national level but we must be mindful that the impacts of expansion will be most felt in local communities.

It is part of our role as community leaders to reflect local concerns, to ensure that they are understood by Government and heard by the aviation industry.

We note the Commission's attempt to measure quality of life in local areas but I don't believe that they have gone far enough.

They haven't recognised that different communities will be affected in very different ways.

And some communities will suffer a number of impacts - a combination of noise, additional traffic, pollution and loss of local amenities.

As much work as possible needs to be done to understand the nature and scale of these local impacts.

On noise, I regret that the Commission has only considered a limited number of indicative flight paths.

We need to fully understand the flight paths that will be used so that impacts on local residents can be properly assessed.

I am particularly concerned about the impact on communities that have not previously been affected by noise.

A ban on night flights is a red line. It is critical for my residents and local communities across the South East.

To move beyond noise, more work is also needed on potential flooding impacts and on air quality.

And a thorough understanding is also needed on the indirect traffic impacts associated with the wider economic growth that airport expansion is likely to generate.

I am not prepared as the Leader of Surrey County Council for these issues to be negotiated away;

- **I want to make sure** that these issues are sorted before a decision is made
- **I want to make sure** that residents are properly compensated, and
- **And I want to make sure** that local authorities are not left to pick up the pieces.

So it is vital that local authorities are involved as much as possible in the current debate and that we have a voice in decision-making.

Let me be clear, I am not against airport expansion. Airport expansion could have significant benefits for the residents I represent – and the country as a whole!

But before we think about landing a single plane on any new tarmac;

- We have to put the infrastructure in place so that the airport can work properly

- We have to make sure that everything has been done to limit the impact on local communities.

If we are going to get this right local government has a crucial role.

Talk to us! Don't ignore us! Trust us to play our part.