

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

10 August 2016

Dear Mr Grayling MP

Runway Capacity in the South East

In February 2015 Mole Valley District Council responded to the Airports Commission's consultation on additional runway capacity in the south east. After a detailed review of the evidence, we concluded that the environmental harm of expanding Gatwick Airport would far exceed its economic benefit and objected strongly to it as an option. We raised no objection to the expansion of Heathrow Airport recognising that it had a much stronger economic case and met national aviation needs better than expansion at Gatwick. We were pleased that the Airports Commission reached the same conclusion in their final report in July 2015.

Since then, there has been repeated delay in the Government announcing its preference for airport expansion in the south east. We appreciate that the decision is a difficult one and that the evidence on which a decision is based must be robust and stand up to scrutiny. However, the delay is creating great uncertainty in the area around Gatwick Airport and this has indirect effects on the housing market and perpetuates communities' fears as to what may happen in the future.

In the light of the continuing uncertainty, I should like to reiterate our concerns about a second runway at Gatwick Airport. The adverse effects impact particularly hard on communities in Mole Valley, with noise, road congestion, and housing pressure all significantly increased. These impacts would be proportionately more disturbing than around Heathrow because of the relatively quiet rural nature of the area surrounding Gatwick.

Gatwick would be less resilient to interruptions in strategic surface access than Heathrow. There is only one motorway (M23) and one mainline railway (Brighton Mainline) serving the airport. The almost daily experience of those who currently use these services is one of overcrowding during peak periods on both mainline railway and motorway, and high flows during other times. The lack of capacity leads to poor resilience, with even small interruptions in movement causing persistent backlogs. Experience has shown that when these services are halted, the local road network is incapable of handling the consequent disruption.

Pressure for additional housing would also be much harder to accommodate. A large proportion of employees at Gatwick live close to the airport. If additional housing demand followed the current distribution of employees, then it would exceed the capacity of the existing built up area around Gatwick to accommodate the additional housing. The demand would require large scale release of Green Belt land contrary to the Government's stated aim, and which would be bitterly opposed by local communities. The alternative scenario, if land for new housing around Gatwick were constrained, is that a large part of the workforce would have to commute greater distances. This would place even greater demand on the transport network, and in any event would be an unrealistic assumption for those in lower paid occupations.

We are also concerned that there has been insufficient assessment to identify how additional infrastructure would be provided. In that we include not just surface access requirements for the airport, which is significant in itself, but also local infrastructure requirements such as highway improvements, new education, health and sporting facilities and flood resilience measures (which are a particular issue around Gatwick) that would be essential to support new housing and businesses in the surrounding area.

I should be grateful if you would bear these points in mind when deliberating on new runway capacity in the south east. Please listen to the very real concerns that local people have about the impact of airport expansion at Gatwick.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Vivienne Michael".

Councillor Vivienne Michael
Leader of the Council