Briefing

Guide for local groups on Heathrow third runway campaign

This briefing accompanies new materials for local groups on climate change and the third runway at Heathrow. It sets out: why Heathrow is a major part of Friends of the Earth’s climate change campaign; why we’re asking local groups all around the UK to get involved; how you can take action; an update on our upcoming court case; and our main reasons for opposing the third runway at Heathrow – covering economics, fairness, noise and air pollution, and green transport alternatives, as well as climate change.

1. Why are we campaigning to stop the third runway at Heathrow?

We need to stop the third runway at Heathrow if we’re serious about meeting the UK’s climate change goals. Heathrow airport is already the biggest single source of emissions in the UK. An expanded Heathrow would produce as much greenhouse gas emissions as Croatia does today – that’s totally incompatible with the urgent action needed to address the climate crisis.

Although MPs approved the government’s plans to build a third runway in June 2018, the story is far from over. Friends of the Earth is challenging the decision to proceed in the High Court, on climate change grounds, starting on 11 March 2019. The third runway faces other legal challenges too, including on air pollution. Recent climate science underlines the need for greater emissions cuts. Airport bosses face additional planning hurdles too, before they can bring in the bulldozers.

For the sake of the climate, people and nature, we can and must stop the third runway at Heathrow. Alongside our legal challenge, local groups and supporters have a hugely important role to play.

2. Why asking all local groups to take part in the campaign?

At the moment, too few people and politicians understand how seriously Heathrow expansion would undermine UK climate action.

In the parliamentary vote in June 2018, the majority of MPs voted in favour of Heathrow expansion. Even some politicians who normally take a positive position on climate and environmental issues voted for expansion or abstained. You can see how your MP voted [here](#).
That’s why we are asking as many local groups as possible to get involved in the campaign to stop the third runway – especially those outside of London. With your help, we can show that this is a national climate change issue, as well as a local air and noise pollution issue for local people living nearby.

As a first step, we want to pressure MPs to consider the latest climate science and policy developments, and call on the Department for Transport to review the decision to proceed with the third runway. This will complement the court case and the legal work being done by Friends of the Earth lawyers, and show solidarity with Friends of the Earth in West London and nearby who’ve been campaigning against Heathrow expansion for many years.

Unless we tackle airport expansion head on, we won’t be able to cut emissions cuts in line with the Paris Climate Agreement and keep global temperature rise to 1.5C. This is shown by the government’s new draft Aviation Strategy, which proposes major expansion all across the UK, ignoring the severity of the climate crisis.

Stopping the third runway at Heathrow on climate grounds would also set an important precedent to help many other local communities and Friends of the Earth groups opposing airport expansion elsewhere, all across the UK.

3. What can local groups do to get involved?

We are asking local groups to take a number of actions before and during the court case in March. Here are some ways you can help:

   a) Take part in the ‘paper planes’ solidarity action – so that we can display messages from all around the UK outside court on 11 March
   b) Put the demonstration outside the High Court on 11 March in your diary if you might like to come along in person – and look out for more details soon
   c) Email or write to your MP about climate change and Heathrow expansion - using our template letter
   d) Order some of our new ‘Stop the climate-trashing third runway’ leaflets for stalls and events
   e) Spread the word locally about why Heathrow expansion would be a disaster for the climate, for example, by using our social media resources, or writing to your local paper – using the court case against third runway at Heathrow as a hook
   f) Join our webinar on 11 February 2019 to find out more about the campaign and share your ideas.

If you have other ideas we’d love to hear them. Please get in touch by emailing localgroups@foe.co.uk.

4. What’s happening with the legal challenge?

Friends of the Earth is arguing that the government did not fully consider its climate change and sustainable development duties when it designated the National Policy Statement (NPS) which gave the go ahead to the third runway, including, for example, the implications of the Paris Climate Agreement.
On 4 October 2018, we won the right to a full trial. On 15 January 2019, we were in the High Court for the pre-trial hearing, where procedural issues for the timetabling of the trial were dealt with, and we secured an important concession from the government relating to the Paris Agreement and climate change.

At the pre-trial hearing, the government conceded that, prior to designating the NPS, it had in its possession emerging policy material relating to its obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement, but it did not take this into account. Friends of the Earth will argue in the trial listed for 11 March 2019 that this failure made the designation of the NPS unlawful, and that it should therefore be quashed.

The entire court case (not just our part) starts on 11 March 2019 and will last two weeks, with a judgement within a month after the hearing, by mid-April.

Livestreaming
At the pre-trial hearing, Friends of the Earth and Plan B also made a joint request for the trial to be live-streamed over the internet. This would be the first case of live-streaming from the High Court. The level of public interest in this highly significant case is huge. In just one week, 1,500 people signed a petition stating that they want to follow the climate change aspects of the proceedings in particular – thanks to all local groups and individuals who did this.

We want to ensure that capacity and accessibility constraints at court do not prevent people from watching the proceedings, even if they cannot attend in person or would have reservations about travelling significant distances to do so from an environmental perspective. The court will hand down its decision on this application in advance of the trial and is holding a hearing to consider livestreaming on 5 February 2019.

5. What are our main reasons for opposing Heathrow expansion?

We’re focussing on climate change as a key reason for stopping the third runway at Heathrow – that’s what our legal challenge is all about – but there are many other reasons too. Our top 5 are:

a) You can be in favour of a third runway, or in favour of tackling climate change. You can’t be both.
A third runway at Heathrow Airport is incompatible with efforts to stop climate change. Climate disasters such as hurricanes, floods and drought are getting more extreme.

Heathrow is already the single biggest source of emissions in the UK. Building a third runway at Heathrow will increase emissions at a time when all sectors of the economy must make deep cuts. It’ll make our current climate change targets virtually impossible to meet, let alone the tougher cuts needed to reach net-zero emissions before 2050.

The UK – along with almost every other country in the world – has agreed to a global deal to limit global warming to “well below” 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with an aspiration to limit rises to 1.5°C. However, emissions reductions commitments currently fall well short of what is needed to achieve this aim. Even if all existing commitments were met, the world would see warming of 3 to 4.5°C – which would be catastrophic for millions of people. In this context the UK must be doing far more to reduce emissions.
Since the third runway was approved in June 2018, there have been several developments in climate science and policy that make an even stronger case for withdrawing and reviewing the decision to proceed. These are set out in the draft letter to MPs, provided as part of this campaign pack.

b) More flights would only benefit a small, wealthy proportion of the UK population
The majority of flights are leisure flights, and the majority of these leisure flights are taken by a small number of wealthy fliers who take multiple flights each year. According to the Campaign for Better Transport, just 15% of the UK population take about 70% of all flights [PDF].

The significant climate and air pollution impacts of Heathrow expansion will be suffered disproportionately by the most vulnerable groups in society and across the globe, while the benefits of a third runway will be restricted overwhelmingly to a privileged few.

Friends of the Earth supports a ‘frequent flier levy’ as one policy that the government should adopt to ensure that aviation is kept within environmental limits, without making flying the preserve of the rich. For more information on this, see this letter, 2-side briefing and website.

c) Heathrow expansion means more noise and air pollution
Heathrow is already one of the world’s busiest international airports, with 1,300 planes landing and taking off each day. It is also one of the world’s most poorly-sited airports, built in a heavily populated area and surrounded by houses on three sides.

Heathrow, and the surrounding area, already suffers from illegal levels of air pollution. Dirty air already causes over 9,000 early deaths in London each year. Expanding Heathrow will mean more flights, but also more traffic on the roads as more people head to the airport, which is likely to result in air pollution increasing yet further.

Over half a million people in the surrounding area already suffer noise levels above World Health Organisation standards. A third runway at Heathrow would mean over 700 additional flights every day, increasing noise pollution even more for local residents, schools and communities.

d) The economic arguments are flawed
A key argument put forward by the government, and by supportive MPs from opposition parties, is that Heathrow expansion will be beneficial for the UK economy. However, the New Economics Foundation (NEF) examined the economic case for the third runway in March 2018 and found that it has eroded to the point where it is no longer viable.

Using the Government’s own formula for assessing the value for money of transport schemes, Heathrow expansion would be rated as either ‘poor’ or ‘low’ value. At worst, the third runway would mean a significant financial cost of up to £2.2 billion, to be borne either by the airport, its investors, airlines, passengers or perhaps even public finances.

The NEF analysis also highlights that three quarters of passengers using an expanded Heathrow by 2040 would be international transfers i.e. journeys starting and finishing outside of the UK. This would bring little if any economic benefit to nations and regions in this country. New domestic connections might only be available with government
support, with the latest productions showing that a third runway would lead to lower passenger numbers at regional airports.

Most economic arguments also fail to take in to account the true cost of climate change. The costs involved in the UK adapting to an ever-changing climate have not been factored in to the government’s economic argument, let alone the cost to the lives of millions across the globe.

e) We need better railways and public transport, not airport expansion
Our transport system is stuck in the past. An aged rail network and underfunded public transport system aren’t just an inconvenience, but something that impacts people’s quality of life across the country. Transport is now the UK’s biggest source of greenhouse gases.

We urgently need to invest in our ageing rail and public transport networks, not climate-wrecking airports. Government policy must focus on ensuring alternative modes of travel become more affordable and more attractive that aviation, including long-distance travel by train and boat, with comfortable and high-speed Wi-Fi enabled work stations on trains.