

# Briefing

## Guide for local groups on Heathrow third runway campaign

This briefing accompanies new local group materials 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 across 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 climate-wrecking emissions in the UK, responsible for as much carbon dioxide as Croatia's entire economy.

Recent climate science underlines the need for greater emissions cuts to address the climate crisis. A third runway is clearly incompatible with the action we need to take.

Although MPs approved the government's plan to build a third runway in June 2018, the story is far from over. Friends of the Earth is challenging this decision on climate change grounds in the High Court, starting on 11 March 2019. The third runway faces other legal challenges too, including on air pollution.

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

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

At the moment, not enough people and politicians understand how seriously Heathrow expansion would undermine UK climate action.

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](#).

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That's why we're 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 isn't just a local air and noise pollution issue, but a national climate change issue too.

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 groups in West London and the surrounding area who've been campaigning against Heathrow expansion for many years.

It's not just about Heathrow though. The government's new draft Aviation Strategy proposes major airport expansion all across the UK, ignoring the severity of the climate crisis. Unless we tackle airport expansion head on, we won't be able to cut emissions in line with the Paris Climate Agreement and keep global temperature rise to 1.5°C.

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 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 solidary action](#) – so that we can display messages from all around the UK outside court on 11 March.
- b) Come along to our demonstration outside the High Court on 11 March – 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. You could use our [social media resources](#) to spread the word online, or our [template letter](#) to write to your local paper – make sure to use the court case as a media hook.

If you have other ideas we'd love to hear them. Please get in touch by emailing [localgroups@foe.co.uk](mailto: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. For example, it didn't fully consider 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. We wanted 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 from an environmental perspective.

In just one week, 1,500 people signed a petition stating that they wanted to follow the climate change aspects of the proceedings in particular. But despite the public interest in this highly significant case, the court decided against live-streaming the proceedings on technical grounds.

Instead, the judges agreed to open a second courtroom in London to allow more people to attend, to fast-track the publication of searchable transcripts, and to allow live-tweeting from the courtroom itself.

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

We're focusing 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 Heathrow expansion, or you can be serious about tackling climate change. You can't be both.**

A third runway at Heathrow Airport is incompatible with efforts to stop climate change.

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 emissions 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 reduction 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 do 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](#).

The significant climate and air pollution impacts of Heathrow expansion will cause disproportionate suffering to the most vulnerable groups in society across the globe. On the other hand, 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, you can read this [letter](#), short [briefing](#) and [webpage](#).

**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. Not only will expanding Heathrow mean more flights, but more traffic on the roads from people travelling to the airport. This is likely to cause even more air pollution.

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 MPs in favour of expansion, 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; in other words, 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 projections 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 than aviation. This includes long-distance travel by train and boat, with comfortable and high-speed Wi-Fi enabled work stations on trains.