

PRESS RELEASE

9 June 2018

For immediate use

POLITICAL FIGHT OVER HEATHROW BREWING IN SCOTLAND

With the final vote on Heathrow expansion coming up in the UK Parliament later this month, the political fight over whether to expand the London airport is intensifying, as the SNP gather for their conference in Aberdeen this weekend (1).

Despite the conference being 400 miles from Westminster, the potentially critical role of the SNP in determining the final decision is being felt both inside and outside Aberdeen's Exhibition and Conference Centre.

Heathrow Airport Limited continue to throw money and the weight of its corporate lobbying schmoozing at Scotland's governing party, with its presence at the conference not too dissimilar to the exclusivity surrounding its presence at all previous conference over the past few years (2).

The campaign to secure support for the parliamentary vote is going down to the wire, with Heathrow holding a reception on Friday evening targeted specifically at lobbying SNP politicians (3).

By contrast three residents who would lose their homes if the expansion goes ahead, drove for thirteen hours overnight from Harmondsworth – the village near Heathrow that would be demolished if expansion goes ahead – to Aberdeen to focus on engaging with SNP party members and politicians going into the conference, putting the case that the SNP should not be led astray by the promises of Heathrow Airport and the Tory Government in Westminster. One resident wore a huge paper-mache plane on his back bearing the message "No 3rd Runway" (4).

Speaking to hundreds of party members, the majority of whom expressed concern at the party's position to support the third runway proposal, primarily citing environmental concerns and a preference to see the development of further direct air links from Scottish airports, and a dedicated air freight hub in Scotland.

Lots of questions were being asked by SNP members and pro-independence supporters as to why the party were supporting the creation of a monopoly of UK aviation at a London airport. A recent report by the New Economics Foundation found that expansion at Heathrow could constrain growth at airports around the UK in the future (5). Further, in order to meet climate change targets, no new runway capacity could be built in the UK until after 2050 and there would have to be an emissions cut, possibly from other sectors of the economy, such as the impact of Heathrow expansion, in order not to breach these targets (6).

Rob Barnstone, Coordinator of the No 3rd Runway Coalition, said:

"Heathrow expansion is far from a foregone conclusion even at this late stage. There is evidence that a decision will go right down to the wire."

"As the report by the New Economics Foundation demonstrates, the supposed economic benefits for Scotland as a result of Heathrow expansion are not fixed and in fact are constantly being revised down. The economic argument in favour of expansion is still being challenged, particularly since there has been no assessment of the economic impact this project might have since Brexit."

Neil Keveren, Harmondsworth resident who attended the Conference and who faces losing his home if expansion goes ahead, said:

"Coming up to Aberdeen and speaking to delegates has really helped to reinforce that this really isn't just a London issue and even this far away people feel just as strongly about the impacts on individuals, communities and the environment."

"Heathrow's exclusive invitation-only, reception shows that is where the money is but it certainly seemed that a clear majority of SNP members do not like the David versus Goliath approach that Heathrow are taking, their apparent lack of willingness to engage with ordinary members, and the disparity between the influence between communities and corporate power."

ENDS.

Notes

1. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-airports-heathrow-may/pm-may-promises-mps-a-timely-vote-on-heathrow-airport-expansion-idUKKCN1J21CZ>
2. <https://www.commonspace.scot/articles/9723/snp-comes-under-pressure-questions-surface-over-heathrow-lobbying>
3. Photo of 'Invitation only' event from Conference brochure attached.
4. Photo of Campaigners from London who drove up SNP Conference attached.
5. <http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NEF-Flying-Low.pdf>
p.17
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38098451>

For more information, or for copies of any images attached, contact: Rob Barnstone, 07806 947050 or Robert.barnstone@outlook.com