

The Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP
House of Commons
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CC: The Rt Hon Rachel Reeves rachel.reeves.mp@parliament.uk

Sent by email

27/01/2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Local Wildlife Trusts Oppose the Expansion of Airports in South East England

We represent 6 local Wildlife Trusts in the south and east of England with a combined membership of over 191,500 people. We strongly oppose the proposed expansions of Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton airports for the following reasons:

Climate Change

The proposal for airport expansion would enable more flights and increase carbon emissions. This is in direct opposition to the UK's legally binding net zero targets and the expert recommendations of the Climate Change Committee, which continues to advise 'no net airport expansion across the UK.'

Habitat Loss

Airport expansion would have damaging impacts on the ground. Previous plans for such expansions involved the destruction of precious natural green space, devastating impacts on waterbodies with international importance for birds and the concreting over of rivers.

Air Quality

The Airports Commission has reported that airport expansion would result in increased traffic from passenger, freight and other activity in the surrounding areas leading to poorer air quality. Such increased pollution is in addition to the pollution caused during the construction process and aircraft engines once additional flights begin. Poorer air quality would damage the health and wellbeing of communities and lead to increased early deaths.

As a movement we work to restore habitats, protect nature and work with partners and businesses to embed sustainability in our society and economy at every opportunity. We believe in sustainable transport and infrastructure that improves urban air quality, delivers health benefits, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions, as embedded in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Additional air travel undermines each of these objectives.

We are therefore dismayed to see reports that the Government is considering supporting airport expansion. We know that prioritising short-term growth over our net zero obligations and economic security is short sighted. We must not allow short-term gain to cause long-term damage to the economy, health and security of future generations. Global warming is the biggest threat our planet and all life on it faces.

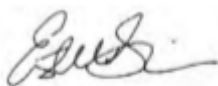
The previous Government faced legal challenges based on climate grounds over their support for airport expansion. We trust the Prime Minister's statement about "Nimbys and zealots gumming up the legal system" does not signal a direction of travel that would prevent legitimate challenges to Government decisions, such as the proceedings that lead to the Court of Appeal blocking Heathrow expansion in 2020, which although overruled by the Supreme Court in 2021, showed that it was a legitimate challenge and not driven by an "ideological blindspot". We also do not believe the use of such divisive language is conducive to constructive debate on such important issues.

At COP29, on the world stage, the UK called out other nations for inaction and set new ambitious goals to reduce emissions by 81% by 2035. That date is approaching rapidly and recent reports from the Climate Change Committee indicate that the country is veering from this target. The Government will have to act with haste to reach these goals, but hastening airport expansion runs counter to these climate ambitions and weakens our voice on the world stage.

The signatories to this letter urge the Government not to support the proposed expansion of Gatwick, Heathrow and Luton airports. Flooding, storms, wildfires, drought, crop failure, rising sea levels and biodiversity loss are just a handful of the negative consequences of climate collapse and with every 0.1 degree temperature increase these threats become increasingly extreme.

Growth must be sustainable, not destructive.

Yours sincerely,



Estelle Bailey
Chief Executive, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust



Brian Eversham
Chief Executive, Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs & Northants

Lesley Davies

Lesley Davies
Chief Executive, Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

SJChimbwandira

Sarah Jane Chimbwandira
Chief Executive, Surrey Wildlife Trust

DM

David Mooney
Chief Executive, London Wildlife Trust

Chris Corrigan

Chris Corrigan
Chief Executive, Sussex Wildlife Trust

J Edwards

Joan Edwards OBE
Director of Policy and Advocacy at Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts



Sussex
Wildlife Trust



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