

“As a former pilot, it seems clear to me we need to decelerate our lives and provide genuinely sustainable clean transport for the masses, rather than continue to expand super-polluting private jet airports which cater to a tiny minority of ultra-wealthy individuals.” - Todd Smith, member of Safe Landing

Q1:

Farnborough Airport has a role to play in the economic success of the local area.

Aviation workers have seen the greatest wage decrease of any sector since 2007, with fewer jobs in our sector now than then. The growth we’ve witnessed in aviation over that period has often been for the benefit of shareholders only; not for local people, the local area, or for aviation workers. Nowhere is this more true than Farnborough, where the super-rich are chauffeured in, then fly out of the UK to places like the South of France where they’ll then spend their money.

A [recent report by the New Economics Foundation \(NEF\)](#) found that increased air travel does not necessarily increase UK productivity or growth: *“Strong evidence, grounded in government data and academic research, suggests that the economic merit of expanding the UK’s air transport sector has diminished considerably”* [Page 31].

We are primarily concerned about the specific type of flights that Farnborough is looking to cater for though: private jets, or so called “business aviation” flights.

As we explain in our answers to the other questions below, we don’t believe that the future of sustainable air travel will include a great increase in private flights. This is because private jets are a very inefficient mode of transport and are therefore an inefficient use of limited resources.

There is evidence that both public opinion and political opinion is turning against private jets. Various high-profile protests [have taken place](#) around private aviation facilities and many politicians [are talking about](#) the need to curb private jet use. This is against the backdrop of the climate crisis and a cost-of-living crisis that has seen fuel prices rise substantially for motorists, whilst wealthy private jet owners can continue to fill their aircraft up tax free.

The UK Citizens’ Assemblies on Climate [recommended policies](#) including an increased rate of tax for frequent flyers and private jets, and even complete bans. Perhaps surprisingly, aviation workers and associated trade unions are also on board with this. For instance, the International Transport Workers’ Federation, in their [“A Zero Carbon Future for the Aviation Sector” report](#) recommended: *“The use of private jets must be severely curbed through new taxes now, followed by flight restrictions for any carbon-emitting private flights after 2030.”*

Given the degree of momentum behind these proposals, we view it as highly likely that policies will emerge over the coming decade, if not within the next few years, that are aimed to specifically tax and curtail private jet traffic. This makes any investments geared towards airport infrastructure catering to increased private jet flights a risky proposition.

However, we can see an alternative route through this. Farnborough could make sensible, forward-thinking investments which could transform the airport and make it future-fit for the genuinely sustainable future of air travel.

For example: rather than continuing to expand for business-as-usual private jet flights, Farnborough could pivot to infrastructure (e.g. terminals, gates, charging/refuelling equipment) catering to hydrogen-powered turboprop aircraft flown by regional airline operators. See for instance the aircraft being developed by [ZeroAvia](#), [Universal Hydrogen](#), [Cranfield Aerospace Solutions](#), [GKN](#), and others, and the [‘Ecojet’ airline model](#) being proposed by Ecotricity.

This could position the airport as the ‘low-carbon airport hub’ for London and allow e.g. families from Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Western Europe to visit London by air if more sustainable ground transport options are too difficult, or they need to travel more quickly.

We urge the airport to pause its current expansion plans, and reconsider the investments needed to reconfigure the airport in this regard. This will also ensure a sustainable future for the airport and associated secure and stable careers for aviation workers at Farnborough.

Q2. It is important that Farnborough Airport is able to plan for its long-term future and support the forecast market demand.

As aviation workers, we believe that it’s the workforce who should have the power to plan for our own long-term future.

Market forces cause a short-termist approach, with business leaders simply aiming to deliver quarterly/annual profits to their shareholders. This doesn’t necessarily equate to better rights and conditions for workers, or local communities.

Currently, these market forces are driving an overall predicted doubling of air traffic every fifteen years. Given our industry has no easy technological fix for decarbonisation, this is completely at odds with the 2015 Paris Agreement, and the UK Government’s legally binding carbon budget targets. It’s also incredibly dangerous to the future of our industry. If we continue down our current path of business-as-usual, there will soon be no air travel, or indeed tourism full stop, in many regions of the world.

Unchecked air traffic growth at Farnborough may well be in response to a forecast for demand, but communities, workers and government should retain the ability to decide what is best for the future of Farnborough, the aviation industry, and the UK's net-zero strategy.

The forecast market demand for more private jet air traffic stems not from whether or not such flights are environmentally sound, or economically justified. Instead it comes from a lack of credible industrial strategy to decarbonise aviation and a lack of effective policies delivered by the UK Government. Once such policies, which we view as inevitable, are delivered - and this includes higher taxation of private jets and curbing private jet air traffic - we expect forecasts of private/business aviation market demand to be significantly altered.

On the other hand, it's more likely that there will be a favourable policy regime supporting the development and use of so-called "zero emissions" regional electric or hydrogen powered aircraft by commercial airlines.

As such, if the owners of Farnborough Airport genuinely want to plan robustly for the 'long-term future' of the airport, we recommend forecasting for a radical overhaul of the air transport network, and towards the types of high-efficiency, low-carbon aircraft which may fly its routes.

Q3. We are proposing a number of changes to the way we operate, and would welcome your views on each of these.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Farnborough has a unique opportunity to become the first UK airport of the future.

Private / "business" jets are not the future of sustainable air travel – they are the least efficient mode of air transport.

- There's a huge business and employment risk to the region by preparing for an industry - private aviation - that is likely to be highly regulated compared to today.
- There is a huge potential for transitioning the airport to cater for medium range electric/hydrogen aircraft that can be a more of a mass-transit option, with high capacity factors. These will be 'regional' to e.g. Ireland, Scotland, Western Europe initially – e.g. within a 2000km radius.
- Other "London" airports e.g. Heathrow/Gatwick will struggle to cater for a higher quantity of smaller capacity electric / hydrogen aircraft.
- If you use Farnborough to cater to small electric/hydrogen aircraft – these will have very different routes and customers than private jets.
- These should produce far less noise, carbon emissions, and pollution – benefitting climate and health. They'll also produce more jobs!!

Any increase in private jet air traffic will decrease the quality of local resident's lives as noise and air pollution will increase, whatever measures you put in place. However, a transition to electric/hydrogen propulsion would unlock significantly lower air and noise pollution levels.

More widely, the increase of private jet flights - which will lead to increased CO2 and non-CO2 effects is dangerous during a climate crisis, and will make the UK's legally binding commitments to meet approaching carbon budgets (fourth [2023-2027], fifth [2028-2032] and sixth [2033-2037] carbon budgets) more difficult to achieve.

Q4. We understand that there needs to be a balance between the economic benefits we can provide and our environmental impact.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

As aviation workers we agree on a need for balance, but consider Farnborough's application for expansion of flights to represent an imbalance. Expansion of business-as-usual private jet flights will be a bad move from both an environmental and an economic perspective. No amount of token funding for 'local sustainability' projects will address this.

We must recognise that we have a limited carbon budget remaining before we fly past the 1.5°C of global warming threshold that may lead to uncontrolled and irreversible climate breakdown. In addition, we have a limited supply of alternative energy sources: be that renewable electricity or bioenergy. There are clearly many competing sectors and uses for these resources, and different activities have different levels of socio-economic benefit and environmental impact.

Private jets are 10 times more carbon intensive than conventional airliners, and 50 times more polluting than trains. A four-hour private flight [emits as much](#) as the average European person does in a year.

Put simply: for every hour spent in a private jet, 10 other people could have spent an hour travelling by commercial airline, while using up the same amount of resources. Alternatively, many more people could heat their homes or have food produced and delivered. Private jet use does not constitute a sensible or rational use of resources during a climate emergency.

Expanding private jet operations is therefore not a productive use of time.

Q5. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about our proposed changes to the way we operate?

COMMENTS:

We're writing to you to strongly oppose the plan to expand private jet air traffic at Farnborough Airport.

We are Safe Landing, a group of professionals within the aviation industry: pilots, cabin crew, airport staff, aerospace engineers and factory workers. We campaign for long-term employment by challenging industry leaders to conform with climate science and reject dangerous growth. Our website can be found here: www.safe-landing.org.

We're concerned about the trajectory of our sector. In particular, the growth of air travel, and what this means for greenhouse gas emissions, global warming and climate change. We see the current projected growth as unrealistic, given the necessity for future restrictions.

We're also worried about the economic risk to workers' livelihoods if our leaders plan for a massive growth in flights, which is then incredibly unlikely to materialise. First and foremost, we care about protecting the jobs and skills of the future. We want an industry that is sustainable in the long-term, not one being propped-up on false assumptions that could fail us again, and likely lead to a fresh round of redundancies, later this decade.

We're particularly concerned by the expansion plans of many airports around the UK. These assume business-as-usual air traffic growth across the 2020s & 2030s, in a similar manner to the growth that occurred across the 2010s.

However, we're in a position where the climate science and climate action required is incredibly clear: we need rapid year-by-year reductions in emissions across all sectors of the economy. This necessitates that we fundamentally transform how we travel, and how we fly.

Our group includes engineers who have worked on the cutting-edge technology and fuels that will emerge over the next few decades, and it's very clear to us that technology alone won't deliver a 1.5°C-consistent emissions reduction pathway. We fully anticipate future policies and regulations that will mean we fly less frequently, less far and less fast. This is likely to result in shorter-range flights made in smaller, unconventional aircraft e.g. electric or hydrogen aircraft, and less longer-range flights made in larger, conventional aircraft.

However, these aircraft concepts are still in very early stages of design and development, and there are many significant design challenges which are likely to place severe restrictions on the capabilities of future aircraft. They are likely to be different sizes, shapes and carry lower numbers of passengers per aircraft. The airport infrastructure being proposed at Farnborough, and elsewhere, appears inconsistent with a significant uptake of such aircraft.

We therefore warn Farnborough Airport about the risk of stranded-assets for public and private finance if the wrong infrastructure is built, and would encourage all stakeholders to consider the benefits of putting expansion plans on hold until the future of air travel is better understood. This is not only in the best interests of the planet, but also of workers who rely on sustainable business decisions being made, for a future of long-term, sustainable employment.

We are concerned that if Farnborough Airport goes ahead with this proposal, it will waste significant financial resources and time. It should instead hold off on expansion planning until there is more certainty regarding the future of aviation, and in the meantime direct efforts towards future-proofing the airport and associated jobs, for the necessary transformation of air travel.

Changing how we fly will require huge amounts of investment and create many long-term jobs to convert infrastructure, airports, airlines and aircraft. However, we need intelligent investment. Investment into business-as-usual airport expansion (particularly to support increased private jet use), rather than airport transformation, could be a waste of time and

money. That is why we're concerned by your promise of thousands of new jobs which could prove misleading in the long-run.

By expanding beyond our means, with infrastructure that isn't future-proof: we risk increasing our workforce in the short-term, but in the wrong areas, only to cause more job losses in the long-term.

This bubble-and-burst cycle is only too familiar to aviation workers. As we emerge from a major industry crash due to the Covid-19 health pandemic, we risk flying forward into an even larger industry crash due to the climate crisis. However, there is no vaccine for climate catastrophe - such a crash is likely to be far more permanent.

Aviation workers are trained to put safety first and to identify and mitigate potential threats. As even Heathrow Airport declared in their recent [Net Zero Plan](#) (2022):

*“Climate is an existential threat to aviation as well as to us all personally and must be addressed. The risk to the sector is not just opposition to airport expansion and flight shaming. It is the real impact of climate change. No one will fly to coastal cities or tropical islands that are under water. The wider impacts of dangerous global heating – extreme weather, food and water shortages – would have a huge impact on our global society and economy. [...] **This is the decade to make a difference.**”*

Farnborough's proposed expansion appears wholly inconsistent with the action required to limit greenhouse gas emissions under the 2015 Paris Agreement: namely a rapid reduction in emissions - particularly from the relatively high-income, high-emitting countries, individuals and organisations who are also the most responsible for historic emissions. For countries such as the UK, where we already have a far higher number of per capita flights than the global average, and as such, where our aviation emissions account for a far higher % of our overall greenhouse gas emissions, there will be an imperative to fly less. From our perspective, this feels inescapable.

Against a backdrop of projected rising emissions to 2030, we're likely to have blown our global carbon budget for 1.5°C of warming within the next decade. Therefore, it appears that our industry is hurtling towards a cliff-edge of severe regulations in order to dramatically limit emissions within a very short time frame. Expanding now will shrink that window further still. This is a dangerous flightpath, and there may be no safe landing for aviation workers.

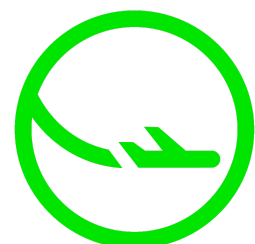
We note that we [presented our view](#) on the issues with Farnborough's proposals to the Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee in June 2023 and received no response.

We urge Farnborough to reconsider their proposals, and offer our support should you be open to alternatives which aim to secure a safer future for both the planet and for workers.

Best regards,

Safe Landing

Contact: info@safe-landing.org



**Safe
Landing**

AVIATION WORKERS
FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE