

What aviation is planning, its impact on us and what we can do about it

2025 will be an important year for this area with decisions on Farnborough and Gatwick Airport's proposed expansion and the government's plans to introduce new flightpaths over us. The impact of these decisions will be felt by future generations in terms of pollution and climate change but more immediately in house prices and noise disturbance.

- Farnborough Airport's plans to double the number of flights is due for decision by Rushmoor Borough Council early in the New Year.
- Gatwick Airport's plans to start operating a second runway are in consultation.
- The government's plans to double the number of UK commercial flights by 2030, introduce much more dense flightpaths over the south east by 2027, as well as more night flights and holding stacks at 3,000ft over places like Petersfield and Farnham is at the final stages of consultation.

Aircraft noise is already an issue for many people in the south east and a doubling of flightpaths – some over the same areas but many over new areas – will result in “noise sewers in the sky”. The impact on property prices resulting from new flightpaths will be on average £30,000 per property and nearly £1bn in Waverley alone. Noise, especially when disturbing sleep, causes various health issues. So does aircraft pollution but that is something most people aren't aware of and it isn't even being measured. But Surrey University is researching it and since airborne pollution is the biggest killer in the UK, it is something that can't be ignored.

It is also hard to understand how the government's legally binding commitment to deliver net zero by 2050 is achievable while it plans to double the number of flights by 2030 at the same time it has said it will reduce aviation's emissions by 15% vs 2019. Unrealistic and unsubstantiated goals set by governments do little to enhance their credibility and no wonder the public lose (or have lost) faith in elected authorities.

The new Labour government has already jumped on the bandwagon of “growth at all costs” without understanding that is a 20th century response to a 20th century problem. The world isn't that simple anymore and when the money from such growth ends up in the pockets of corporates and the very wealthy, few “normal” people buy it. The situation with our rivers is a case in point and the owners of Farnborough Airport are the ex-owners of Thames Water and now Southern Water. Do we really expect such businesses to make the right decisions that benefit the population at the expense of their profits?

The reality in 2025 will be that growth will have to be balanced by the social and environmental impact of such growth and we can expect the courts to decide what is appropriate rather than the government. This has already been demonstrated by the Supreme Court who ruled in 2024 that all emissions must be included in Environmental Impact Assessments and so new oil drilling in Surrey and then all of the UK was stopped. The same court ruling requires airports to now consider all emissions from all flights which the industry has so far managed to hide under the carpet.

Zero Carbon Guildford. 7.30pm. Thursday 16th January

Tickets available at: <https://www.zerocarbondguildford.org/event-details/farnborough-airport-expansion>