

Observer COMMENT

Stansted delays are bad news for both sides of the argument

ANOTHER week and another wrangle – or two – between BAA and SSE.

With every day that passes, the issue of expansion at Stansted seems to move backwards – which is bad news not just for those stalwart campaigners who oppose any further growth at the Essex hub, but also for those whose livelihoods depend on the airport.

With so much at stake, clearly this issue needs to be resolved for the sake of both objectors and supporters so that both sides can finally go forward with certainty.

The endless war of words certainly seems to be serving no useful purpose at present, but the constant shifting sands surrounding BAA's proposals for a second runway mean there is little for the sides to do but exchange insults.

The operator's latest indication to the Government that it will take between 12 and 18 months for it to review and refresh its evidence supporting the G2 project, which in turn means a public inquiry to settle the matter is at least two years away. is welcome in that it gives some sort of timetable.

However, until the issue of ownership is settled once and for all it's hard to see how the hearing can proceed. With the Competition Commission considering going to the Court of Appeal to force through its order that Stansted must be sold, it seems we are as far away from a definitive answer as ever.

BAA has at least made it clear that it remains wedded to promoting a second runway in accordance with current Government policy – even in the face of Conservative declarations that a General Election win will be followed by a Tory death knell for the scheme. That remains to be seen, but only the long-term owner can really decide how far and for how long it will press the second runway case.

Meanwhile the waiting game will continue.

BISHOP'S STORTFORD and DISTRICT TALKING NEWSPAPER

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Publishing Director: Ricky Allan **PRICE: 60p**

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LETTERS

Why council's housing consultation is flawed

LAST month Uttlesford District Council published a consultation about housing growth which includes an assessment of the pros and cons of various options.

The basis of the council's analysis is flawed because there has been no decision made by councillors as to what factors matter most or least in deciding what makes a good place to live.

For example, its consultation document gives equal value to the availability of water supplies, drainage and cultural facilities. Cultural facilities can be built with relative ease, but, as King Canute showed, water is very hard to control. The Elsenham/Henham option has serious problems with water supplies and drainage.

The consultation document does not consider the inadequate roads to a new settlement at Elsenham and Henham to be important enough to rule out development, even though other sites do not have this problem. There is clear reason to believe that the Elsenham/Henham option would cause gridlock on local roads and in neighbouring towns and villages.

A request by Liberal Democrat councillors for these important issues to be discussed at a committee meeting before the start of the consultation was refused by the Conservative committee chairman.

The Conservatives are pressing ahead with Elsenham/Henham as the preferred option, even though there has been no discussion in the council whether this is still the right option, and they are consulting the public before they have looked at the sustainability assessment which compares the different options and locations. This makes the whole consultation both misleading and flawed.

In responding to the consultation we must now tell the council that a settlement at Elsenham/Henham, which has the potential to cause gridlock on local roads and in neighbouring towns and villages, would not be a good place in which to live.

Cllr Catherine Dean,
(Lib Dem, Elsenham & Henham),
Uttlesford District Council.

YOU reported that at last Tuesday night's area panel meeting Cllrs Jim Ketteridge and Sue Barker were full of apologies for having to implement the imposed 4,000 houses in Uttlesford ("Housing hell", Dunmow & Stansted **Observer**, Mar 4).



FLASHBACK: February 18 **Observer**

Sad chapter in retail history of Stortford

It was with a certain degree of sadness but no surprise to read that Boardmans is to close (**Observer**, Feb 11).

Books are so readily available via the internet and chain stores that can offer them at cheaper prices than small businesses can. Cheaper they may be, however they do not offer the same high quality of personal service that Boardmans has always given.

I speak from personal experience having worked there for nearly 18 years, first under the

management of the late Charles Brown and then the owners, Mr C & Mrs K Hampton. Those were happy days when we knew the needs of our many customers.

All I can do now is to wish Charles Hampton a happy retirement – one thing for sure, he won't be short of a book to read!

Carol E Grant,
Preston, Lancashire
(Bishop's Stortford born and bred).

However, this was a diversion from the purpose of the meeting, which was designed to explain to the public how they were going to manage the consultation process on this matter.

This proved to be sadly inadequate in transparency and clarity. It was obvious that there was no objective system in place for weighting response criteria. Rather, this would be left to "members' discretion" once the process was completed. It was also clear that what weighting had been created and published was designed to reinforce north-east Elsenham as the administration's preferred option.

Incredibly, this was despite the fact that the SHLAA document found no necessity for a single-settlement option to deal with the proposed housing development. This conclusion both mirrored the officer's original Local Development Framework recommendations in 2007 and reflected residents' preferences against a single-settlement option in the first round of consultation. Despite

this, the administration has chosen to press on with a single settlement with its preferred Option 4 and ignore these findings.

However, the same SHLAA document concluded that should a single-settlement option be chosen, then a site in the north of the district would provide more location advantages than north-east Elsenham. This same site was also identified as being more favourable for water supply and drainage.

The transport feasibility study relies heavily on the presumption that a considerable percentage of the new community will not need to travel because work will be available within the north-east Elsenham development itself. Yet, developer Fairfield cannot give the name of a single business that wishes to locate there nor what skills such a potential workforce might be required to have.

None of the above factors will give residents any confidence that their responses will be a significant factor in determining a process

democratically deficient from the outset.

Cllr David Morson,
(Lib Dem, Elsenham & Henham),
Uttlesford District Council.

Chesterford is my option

SO far everybody has concentrated on Elsenham and Henham, but has anybody thought of a different location? Great Chesterford could be expanded over the next 10-20 years for the following reasons:

a) Railway connections already exist.
b) Access to the M11 and A11 through the Stumps Cross intersection will require only an exit link south from the M11.
c) The science park is already in use and can expand.
d) Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge is already being enlarged to take over from Papworth and enlarged in other areas.

e) New companies would be sited within the housing infrastructure which will support (d) above as well as companies in Cambridge, Stansted Airport and other areas.

f) Access to all major roads throughout the country via (b).
g) No major infrastructure required to meet the above and would relieve pressure on the A120 and B1383.

Whatever is decided will upset people whose back yard it lands in, but we need this for the future of our country or we slip down the ladder as a prosperous nation for our children to live in.

I B Richie,
Stansted.

My horror at antique sale

IFOUND your article "Rhino horn sold for £30k to be turned into medicine" (**Observer**, Feb 25) regarding the sale of black rhino horn despicable.

I read with horror the light-hearted tone in which you promoted auctioneer Sworders' sale of the rhino horn to the very people who have caused the dangerous decline of the black rhino: the Chinese.

I am very disheartened that these sales are legally allowed to happen. The fact that Sworders has no conscience as to how it makes its money is irrelevant, it should be illegal.

Deborah Jardine.