

An Open Letter From Leeds Academics - Why We Are Against The Expansion Of Leeds Bradford Airport

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The following is the text of an open letter concerning the proposed expansion of Leeds Bradford airport.

An economic recovery based on sustainability is the only way we can address the post Covid-19 challenges ahead - and the wider challenge of climate change.

We call on Leeds City Council to lead the way, and reject the expansion of Leeds Bradford Airport

The Covid-19 epidemic has exposed just how vulnerable we are as individuals and as a society. It has caused immense suffering, pushed our health service to the brink and

shredded our economy. It is an unmitigated human disaster. But the next crisis, the climate crisis, will be far worse, unless we make the right decisions now.

Huge investment is needed to get the economy back on its feet, but we simply cannot afford to return to 'business as usual'. We cannot afford to prop up the carbon emitting industries that will hasten climate breakdown. We need a low-carbon recovery supported by central government. But we also call on Yorkshire councils, unions and businesses to take the lead. In Leeds, the City Council can start by rejecting the expansion of Leeds Bradford Airport (LBA), an expansion that would double carbon emissions from flights, and make it impossible for the city to meet its carbon reduction target. LBA does not represent value for money in terms of an employment centre. Larger employment gains, as well as other benefits, are more likely to be created from investing in the local economy.

While LBA's owners have consistently drawn attention to the low carbon credentials of the new terminal building, this is a 'grain of sand' compared to greenhouse gas emissions from the aircraft. And now researchers at Leeds University have found that the planning application submitted by LBA has grossly minimised the impact of aircraft emissions – **by at least a factor of 4.**

This has been achieved by:

1. Looking at departures only, and ignoring arrivals, for the proposed extra flights, so half of the passengers have been omitted.
2. Not accounting at all for the large global warming effect of non-CO2 emissions at altitude.
4. Ignoring the cumulative effect of emissions beyond 2030, despite CO2 staying in the atmosphere for many decades.
5. Omitting international flights (more than 90% of the flight emissions associated with LBA) when comparing them to national carbon targets and to the Leeds Zero Carbon Roadmap.
6. Exaggerating future efficiency improvements in aviation compared to what the UK Committee on Climate Change considers plausible.

There are no low-emission aviation technologies available now, and none will be available within the timescales available to combat climate breakdown, meaning that any expansion of aviation goes against the UK's net-zero goal. This is the reason the UK Court of Appeal refused Heathrow's third runway, and it holds just as strongly for LBA's expansion. The imperative of reducing carbon emissions and preventing dangerous climate change, strongly supported by the Leeds Citizens Jury on Climate Change, should be recognized by Leeds City Council. As Leeds MP Alex Sobel has stated: "A net increase of pollution from the airport due to an increase of flights will undermine the city in its policy to meet net zero carbon by 2030 and will impact the air quality."

Instead, we need to invest in a fairer, local and sustainable economy - one that can

safeguard our long-term future. Many projects, such as home insulation and electric charging points, are ready to go and they have been shown to create more jobs, deliver higher returns and lead to increased long-term cost savings.

Leeds City Council could provide support and funding for co-operatives and community businesses in activities such as renewables and home retrofit. These offer the potential for large employment gains and will address inequalities by locking wealth into inner city communities. If employment is localised, then travel to work will be minimised and this would also address other pressing issues around air quality and public health issues around inactivity. By contrast, LBA does not offer these benefits nor represent value for money. There is also very limited evidence that the airport site offers any kind of trickle down or local economic benefit. The associated transport infrastructure is incomplete, poorly sited and likely to produce greater reliance on car based journeys.

It is no exaggeration to say that the decisions we make in the next few months will have a profound impact on our lives, and those of our children, for thousands of years. A low-carbon economic recovery can repair the economic damage done by Covid-19 and put the world on track to tackle climate breakdown. This is a pivotal moment and we urge central and local government to put sustainability at the heart of the post Covid recovery.

The letter has been welcomed by GALBA (Group for Action on Leeds Bradford Airport) with the following announcement to the press:

In a dramatic development of the argument about the proposed expansion of Leeds Bradford Airport 90 academics have signed a letter calling on Leeds City Council to block the plans. They say expansion would make the climate crisis worse and that LBA have vastly underestimated the amount of climate damaging emissions that would be caused by expansion.

They also call on Yorkshire Councils, businesses and Trade Unions to support a sustainable recovery from the Covid crisis. They call for investment in a fairer, more sustainable local economy: "one that can safeguard our long-term future". They say that projects such as home insulation and electric charging points are ready to go, would create more jobs, deliver higher returns and lead to increased long-term cost savings than an expanded airport.

19 of the signatories are professors, with expertise in Earth & Environment, Geography, Civil Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Food & Nutrition, Transport and Chemistry. Professor Julia Steinberger sits on the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which advises governments around the world how to tackle the climate emergency. The letter comes hot on the heels of objections to airport expansion made by Leeds MPs Alex Sobel, Richard Burgon and Hilary Benn.

Chris Foren, chair of the Group for Action on Leeds Bradford Airport (GALBA) said: "We're very pleased that so many people in the academic community have made this bold and clear statement. I couldn't put it better than the last line of their letter: 'It is no exaggeration to say that the decisions we make in the next few months will have a

profound impact on our lives, and those of our children, for thousands of years. A low-carbon economic recovery can repair the economic damage done by Covid-19 and put the world on track to tackle climate breakdown.”

Signatories to the letter

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