

Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign **GACC**

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Gatwick for sale

The decision by BAA to put Gatwick up for sale will inevitably raise speculation about the possibility of an additional runway.¹ But the GACC Committee, meeting today, have reached the conclusion that the sale will not change the present situation.

Brendon Sewill, Chairman of GACC, said: “The cast iron legal agreement which prevents the construction of any new runway before 2019 remains in force and will apply equally to any new owner. The fact that Gatwick is a very small site, and that there is physically no space for an efficient new runway, will not change whoever owns Gatwick. And the strength of public opposition from the whole of Surrey and Sussex will ensure it never happens.”

GACC is more concerned to check out the environmental credentials of any new owner of the airport. “Our experience with Ferrovial has been that environmental issues have been given low priority. We would welcome a new company that takes more seriously its responsibilities for noise and for climate change.”²

This point in time, with the price of oil still high, with the demand for air travel falling, and with the Gatwick-based XL airline and tour operator having gone bust, does not sound a good time for selling the airport. Any new owner may find themselves having to cope with the problems of contraction, not expansion.

A note is attached on the reasons why a new runway is not a practical proposition.

¹ Gatwick already has two runways but they cannot both be used at the same time.

² UK residents on return flights from Gatwick cause more climate change damage than all the vehicles, houses, offices and factories in Surrey and Sussex combined.

Why the sale of Gatwick will not mean an extra runway

Before 2019 -

- There is a cast iron legal agreement that prevents any new runway before August 2019;
- The agreement could only be overturned by an Act of Parliament;
- The Government has decided that the legal agreement should not be overturned;
- The situation would not change with a change of government: the Conservative and Lib Dem Parties have stated that they are opposed to a new runway at Gatwick;
- Even if legislation were introduced, it would probably not be passed by the House of Lords.

After 2019 -

- There is no physical space for a new runway between the towns of Horley and Crawley. As BA has commented, the current plans show the runways so close together that the airport could not operate efficiently;³
- A change in the ownership of Gatwick is not going to alter the topography of the area;
- Although the 2003 Air Transport White Paper mentioned the possibility of a new Gatwick runway if a Heathrow runway failed to meet environmental conditions, the Government appears determined to press ahead with Heathrow ;
- If by 2019 new runways have been built at Stansted and/or Heathrow, which we hope will never happen, there will be no commercial case for a Gatwick runway;
- If the pressure of public opposition has defeated the Stansted and Heathrow proposals, there is no reason to suppose that the opposition will be any less fierce from around Gatwick;
- Over 80 councils and environmental groups, and every local MP, are opposed to a new runway;
- The SERAS study by the Government before the Aviation White Paper found that a new Gatwick runway scored low on economic benefit but high on environmental cost;
- If concern about climate change goes on increasing, that is likely to rule out any new runway;
- If the cost of oil remains high, or if a future Government decides to tax aviation fuel, the growth in air travel will slow down or stop;
- Gatwick is not popular with airlines: it has a reputation as the graveyard for Laker, British Caledonian, and Dan Air. British Airways told the Competition Commission that three runways (!) would be needed to turn Gatwick into a viable hub.⁴

³ Response to Air Transport consultation 2003

⁴ Competition Commission Emerging Thinking report. April 2008 Paragraph 110 b