

HEATHROW EXPANSION – THE COLNE VALLEY REGIONAL PARK’S POSITION

The proposed expansion of Heathrow Airport continues to pose a grave and direct threat to the Colne Valley Regional Park.

In February 2020, the Court of Appeal ruled that the Government’s Airports National Policy Statement – the key document that forms the foundation for further expansion – was unlawful.

Unfortunately, this is by no means likely to be the end of the matter. Heathrow is continuing to fight to keep its ill-conceived and destructive scheme alive, but there can be no doubt that in the context of international concern over climate change, the idea of expansion on such a gigantic scale is now politically toxic. We hope common sense will triumph over ruthless commercial imperatives

We remain publicly and determinedly opposed to the plans, which, in their latest incarnation, will take around 900 acres of the Park, changing it forever. Another 400 or so acres of Green Belt just beyond the Park’s boundaries will also be lost. In addition to the new runway itself, there would be associated taxiways, hotels, car parks, a ‘railhead’, warehousing and offices plus displaced existing businesses.

This colossal scheme is roughly equivalent to bolting an operation the size of Gatwick on to the northern side of Heathrow. It will cause noise, air, water and light pollution at unprecedented and completely unacceptable levels, as well as sweeping away entire communities, such as the village of Longford.

In our view, the human and environmental costs associated with Heathrow expansion would set a new and dangerous precedent for all future infrastructure schemes. And in light of recent events that gave us a welcome respite from noise and air pollution, the project increasingly seems to belong to a bygone era, completely out of step with modern thinking at a time of climate emergency.

The sheer scale of the expansion plans is deeply disturbing, and Heathrow’s ambitions for further development stretch well into the third quarter of this century. We are particularly concerned that five rivers are to be diverted. Stretches dating back to the last Ice Age will be lost beneath the new runway and taxiways, merged, culverted and netted. The very character of the water will be changed, spelling disaster for wildlife. The vital and ancient link between the network of already threatened chalk streams to the north, and the River Thames to the south, will be permanently compromised. The braided river systems in open channels lie at the heart of the character of the Colne Valley.

The Government’s long term view on aviation policy is now unclear. Until there is clarity in that regard, we will continue to engage with Heathrow, drawing its attention to the potentially devastating impact its plans would have on the Colne Valley Regional Park and the wider area around the airport. Our lines of communication remain open, and we regularly share our views and concerns with airport owner HAL Ltd, proposers of alternative expansion schemes, and the Government.

We want to see the expansion plans permanently scrapped. But we have plenty of mitigatory suggestions to help ameliorate its worst effects, should common sense fail to prevail and the project go ahead. You can read our response to Heathrow’s most recent consultation [here](#):

You can keep up with developments by visiting our website www.colnevalleypark.org.uk and by following us on Twitter (@Colne_Valley) and Facebook.

The Colne Valley Regional Park is a member of the [No Third Runway Coalition](#), the largest campaign group of its kind, consisting of MPs, local authorities, residents, local and national pressure groups.

Mitigation – a sample of what we’re pressing for should expansion go ahead

Issue: Permanent loss of parts of the Colne Valley Regional Park

Unfortunately, a huge area of the Park will be lost. In addition to the new runway, there would be associated taxiways, hotels, car parks, warehousing and offices. Large operations, like Lakeside Energy from Waste, and British Airways headquarters are to be relocated. The land in the Park is a natural resource for the long-term - once lost it is gone forever.

Suggested solution:

Heathrow reduces permanent land-take and replaces land lost with new areas – an expansion of the boundaries of the Park elsewhere in the Colne Catchment (e.g. River Ash corridor etc) that will mitigate for losses. More extensive mitigation is also needed to improve the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining areas of the Park.

Issue: Loss of the Park’s functionality

Heathrow’s expansion proposals severely hamper the Park’s ability to function, and prevent it from achieving its objectives. The Park’s landscape will be changed forever: large areas of agricultural land and waterscapes will be lost. Recreation and countryside enjoyment will be severely affected; there will be loss of angling sites, severed public rights of way, and loss of proposed route improvements (e.g. the Colne Valley Trail). Large parts of Harmondsworth Moor and other precious green spaces will also vanish. There will be far-ranging and significant impact on biodiversity; loss of habitat, species and habitat connectivity. The expansion will bring light pollution and the real risk of large scale urbanisation in this vulnerable area, putting even further pressure on the Park.

Suggested solution:

Use the [Colne & Crane Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) to inform a Landscape Masterplan devised specifically to ensure the objectives of the Colne Valley Regional Park are met. This will include particular and careful consideration of the wider landscape and how it can be used by people and wildlife; compensation for agricultural tenants and farm businesses remaining in and around the Park; multi-functional use of flood mitigation and flood storage areas. With more extensive mitigation to improve environmental quality and accessibility we would see a better legacy for remaining areas of the Park in terms of recreation, walking and cycling. This must be secured for the future through planning approval and legal agreements. There must be sufficient funding made available for long- term management and maintenance of the whole landscape.

Issue: Impact on rivers and loss of connectivity from the Thames to the Chilterns

Rivers and riparian habitat will be threatened – e.g. by use of covered river corridors and netting. Heathrow proposes to carry four rivers (Colne, Wraysbury, Longford and Duke of Northumberland) and many smaller streams under the runway. The Colne Brook would be put into an artificial, engineered channel by the M4 motorway and new development area to the NW of the runway. This would mean a complete loss of open, natural, river habitat connections between the Colne Catchment and the River Thames. Runoff from the airport could change flow levels in our rivers and affect water quality.

Suggested solution:

It will be crucial to ensure mitigation is implemented on a catchment scale and that habitat connectivity can be maintained between the upper Colne Catchment and the River Thames. As an absolute minimum, the Colne Brook must remain as an open channel in a more natural and attractive river corridor. For any covered river corridors, the best possible design needs to be developed (natural light, naturalised river beds and riparian habitat, air circulation, headroom for maintenance etc). Water drainage and treatment facilities must be designed to the highest possible standard to prevent water quality issues.”