

HEATHROW

FROM PARIAH TO PIONEER



An account of how a major international company changed significantly

Candid and exclusive interviews with senior people from Heathrow provide a unique insight about the change that has taken place

'The book is not intended to put a halo on Heathrow but to try to unearth how and why such an important change took place'

by John Stewart

For 20 years from 2000 until 2020 I chaired HACAN, the organisation which gives a voice to residents under the Heathrow flight paths. I continue to chair HACAN East (focused on London City Airport) which has been independent of HACAN for some years now. I have worked or campaigned in the transport field for over 40 years and on noise issues for the last 25 years. I am the current chair of the UK Noise Association and of the Campaign for Better Transport. At a European level, I am vice chair of UECNA (which gives communities a voice on aviation) and am a member of the EU's Noise Expert Group. I am the lead author of *Why Noise Matters* (published by Earthscan in 2011).

All views expressed in this publication are my own and do not necessarily represent any of the organizations I am, or have been, associated with.

Heathrow is a different company, with markedly different attitudes and practices, to the one I first encountered in the mid-1990s.

Many residents may be surprised at these words. It doesn't tally with their experience on the ground.

That is true.

But, it is equally true, as I hope to show, attitudes, policies and practices within Heathrow have changed.

Its challenge now is to translate that change into many more positive improvements for people impacted by its aircraft.

Content and Summary

This page-by-page guide is intended to provide an 'at-a-glance' summary.

Page 6: Introduction

Heathrow is a markedly different company to the one I first encountered in the mid-1990s

Page 8: The start of the story

If I had been told in 1996 I would write something like this, I would have been astonished

Page 9: The first signs of change

CEO Janis Kong brought a change of tone but change didn't become embedded within BAA

Page 10: Why the third runway was so controversial

A leading politician said to me both sides were right – the reason it led to such a titanic battle

Page 11: Defeat brings reassessment

The loss of a third runway in 2010 was an 'existential moment' for BAA

Page 12: Talks about talks

We had talks about talks to find ways of improving things for residents at a 2-runway airport

Page 13: Change at Heathrow was not accidental

Interviews with senior Heathrow figures reveal a very definite plan to change tack

Page 16: Enter John Holland-Kaye

The modernisation agenda really took off when John Holland-Kaye became Chief Executive

Page 17: A period of reassessment

The shock of losing the third runway led the aviation industry into a period of reassessment

Page 18: The Airports Commission is set up

The industry began to exert pressure on Government to reassess its 'no new runways' policy

Page 19: Heathrow accepts all 11 of the Commission's conditions for a 3rd runway

The Commission thought it would accept just 3 or 4 of the toughest conditions ever imposed

Page 20: Ground-breaking noise recommendations

Following the Airports Commission's recommendations real progress was made on noise

Page 23: The second campaign against a third runway

By adopting a different approach from the earlier campaign Heathrow 'out-campaigned' its opponents

Page 24: Objectors lose the battle on the ground

Back Heathrow, set up by Heathrow, fought a brilliant campaign highlighting the local support for the runway and pinpointing its opponents' weak areas

Page 26: Why objectors could not mobilise their supporters

Outlining the reasons why objectors could not activate the local opposition to a 3rd runway

Page 27: Flight paths not runways was the issue for many
How the guarantee of respite for the first time won over support for the 3rd runway

Page 28: Trouble and strife in the campaigning ranks
Some campaigners felt HACAN was too close too Heathrow

Page 29: Parliament backs Heathrow
By a huge majority, 415 to 119 votes, Heathrow was given permission to draw up detailed plans for a 3rd runway

Page 29: Airspace trials
The 2014 airspace trials had a profound impact on Heathrow, and on HACAN

Page 30: Teddington Action Group (TAG) stirs things up
TAG campaigned to undermine HACAN, culminating in an aborted coup to take it over

Page 32: The impact of the trials on Heathrow
Heathrow developed community engagement which was unmatched at any other UK airport

Page 35: Heathrow gets to work preparing for a new runway and new flight paths
It was these consultations which showed how much Heathrow had changed as a company

Page 36: Preparation for a third runway
Residents were given the chance to help shape and design the flight paths

Page 41: Climate Change
'As far as Heathrow is concerned, not just any new runway but the airport, including all flights, would need to be net-zero - and that is non-negotiable'

Page 43: Air Pollution
Heathrow committed to limiting its use of the third runway until air quality in the surrounding areas met the legal limits

Page 44: Community Compensation
Heathrow made one of the biggest cash offers in UK history to those who would lose their homes

Page 46: Heathrow involved credible experts
They included people who would not have been natural supporters of a third runway

Page 47: Putting it all in Perspective
An interview with Stephen Turner

Page 49: The reasons Heathrow changed
The 10 key factors behind the change

Page 50: Will the change last?
We can never be certain but the 10 reasons I believe it will

Page 51: Endpiece

Introduction

In 2010 I published an account of the first campaign against a third runway at Heathrow ⁽¹⁾. I'm pleased to say it was translated into a number of different languages and widely used by a diverse range of campaigners. The obvious thing, ten years later, would be to write a similar account of the second campaign against the runway.

However, in thinking about it, I realised something had changed. Specifically, the company wanting the runway, Heathrow Airport Limited, had changed. I still include material about the second campaign. I also outline developments around noise, air pollution and climate change. It is important that I do because it paints the essential backdrop to the story but the focus is on how and why a major company changed.

Heathrow is a different company, with markedly different attitudes and practices, to the one I first encountered in the mid-1990s

I have lived with Heathrow, though not near Heathrow, for twenty-five years. I chaired the main residents' organisation – HACAN (the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise) - from 2000 to 2020. At close quarters, I watched the company formerly known as BAA and now called Heathrow (Heathrow Airport Holdings Limited), evolve. In a small way I was part of that evolution.

Heathrow is a different company, with markedly different attitudes and practices, to the one I first encountered in the mid-1990s. I am not alone in thinking this. When I spoke at events across Europe, it became clear to me Heathrow's policies on noise, climate and community engagement are now seen as some of most progressive in the industry.

I explore the reasons for the change. I interviewed senior people from Heathrow who were part of the change. And who drove it. Their exclusive interviews gave me valuable insights as to what happened and why it happened. I also interviewed people who worked with Heathrow during this period.

Many residents will be surprised at what I have to say. They will argue it doesn't tally with their own experience of living under a Heathrow flight path. And they may be right. One of my themes is that the change which has taken place in the attitudes, policies and practices within the company has been slow to filter down to actual change on the ground.

Exclusive interviews with senior people from Heathrow provided a unique insight about the change that has occurred

I hope that green activists read the publication with an open mind. Driven by climate concerns, many environmentalists have invested a lot of time and effort in opposing expansion at the airport and may find it difficult to accept anything good can come out of Heathrow. They may be surprised to hear there are people working within the company who are as passionate as they are about tackling climate emissions.

I am writing this as a campaigner. All my working life I have been trying to change things. So, I am interested in what makes change happen. In the case of Heathrow, I saw significant change take place within a large, international, high-profile company. I am fascinated by what drove this but also excited to discover if, and how, it can be replicated elsewhere.

I have tried to write a straightforward and balanced account of the change which has taken place. It is not intended to put a halo on Heathrow but attempts to unearth how and why such a significant change took place. I've used many quotes from people at Heathrow because they provide a fascinating and unique insight from the heart of the company. I didn't do formal interviews with residents but spoke with a number on the phone. Some remain so distrustful of the airport that they find it hard to accept the change is for real. Others are convinced it is not for real. But there are a number of people who, like me, have dealt with the airport for years who recognised many of the changes which have taken place.

I write as a campaigner, interested in what makes change happen, and excited to discover if the change at Heathrow can be replicated elsewhere

I have also been candid about the disputes amongst the community campaigners. In particular I've highlighted the role of Teddington Action Group. I thought long and hard before including this but felt the picture of the last ten years would be incomplete without it. The emergence of Teddington Action Group and its allies presented the airport with an unexpected challenge. What's interesting for me is the way that challenge was handled by the Heathrow of 2014/15; quite differently from the way the BAA of twenty years earlier would have dealt with it.

It is worth stressing that any views expressed are mine and mine alone and don't necessarily reflect the position of HACAN or any other organisation. Any errors, unfortunately, are also mine and mine alone!

Covid has had a devastating impact on the aviation industry, including Heathrow. If it hadn't been for Covid, it is likely Heathrow would have been presenting its case for a third runway to a Public Inquiry this year. As it is, it has been forced to disband its team working on expansion. Nobody can predict what the future holds for a third runway. One of the longest-running sagas in UK aviation history is not over yet. But the thrust of what I've written is that, whether or not a third runway is built, the Heathrow of today is a very different company to the one which began lobbying for the runway almost twenty years ago.

I hope you find it a stimulating read.

John Stewart

(1). <http://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/How-the-Heathrow-Campaign-was-won-revised.pdf>

The start of the story

If anybody had told me in 1996 that I would have been writing a publication like this, I would have been astonished. I would have quoted back at them the words of the American tennis player John McEnroe “You can’t be serious, man.”

In 1996 a change to the way aircraft approached the airport meant we had become the new neighbours of Heathrow. We were in South London, eighteen miles from the airport. As one resident wrote at the time, “It was as if, overnight, a motorway in the sky had opened up above our heads.” Up to 40 planes an hour flew over.

We were confused, angry, not knowing what had happened or who to turn to. Our MP, Kate Hoey, was supportive but the authorities were in denial. Heathrow and the Department for Transport claimed nothing had changed. (Years afterwards Heathrow admitted that was not true). I also learnt in later years Heathrow had sent a spy, posing as a resident, to one of the first meetings of our newly-formed campaign group, ClearSkies.

The local authority, Lambeth Council, was supportive and arranged for BAA (as Heathrow was then called) to give a presentation to a special council meeting. It answered none of our questions. Indeed, councillors told me BAA had put pressure on them to try and silence me.

The airport’s CEO John Egan gave assurances verbally and in writing that Terminal 5 would not lead to a third runway

This was around the period when HACAN, at the time largely representing people in West London and the Windsor area, was appearing at the Heathrow Terminal Five Inquiry. The airport’s CEO John Egan had given assurances verbally and in writing that a fifth terminal would not lead to a third runway. Matt Gorman, Heathrow’s Director of Carbon Strategy, told me that, while he has no reason to doubt the assurances were made in good faith, commitments like this

‘The history around T5 was one of the reasons that, in arguing for a third runway in the 2010s, Heathrow recommended that the Government pass legislation to rule out a fourth runway.’

Matt Gorman, Director of Carbon Strategy Heathrow

need to have legal weight if they are to bind subsequent generations of leaders in a company. That is particularly true for a company like Heathrow which is privately owned but runs a critical piece of national infrastructure on which the Government may form its own views on the need for future development. He told me that the history around T5 was one of the reasons that, in arguing for a third runway in the 2010s, Heathrow recommended that the Government pass legislation to rule out a fourth runway.

Within two years of BAA of getting permission for Terminal 5 in 2001, there were plans on the table for a third runway. Older residents knew this was par for the course. A decade earlier they had been assured that Terminal Four would be the last big piece of infrastructure to be built at the airport.

When ClearSkies merged with HACAN in 2000, and I took over as chair of the new combined organisation, Heathrow’s reputation amongst residents was close to an all-time low.

The first signs of change

In the early 2000s HACAN and Heathrow were on speaking terms. We were represented on its Consultative Committee and had meetings with its CEO Janis Kong, as well as with her environmental team. The stylish and accessible Kong set a very different tone to Egan. Jane Dawes, who became Head of Airspace Strategy at Heathrow in later years and who knew Kong when she was CEO at Gatwick Airport, believes she brought to Heathrow a belief in the importance of a strong relationship with the local community; a practice she had developed at Gatwick. This change of tone began to filter through the company but more fundamental change was a decade away.



The stylish and accessible Kong brought a change of tone from the Egan era

Change, though, didn't become embedded within the organisation in a way that it did a decade later

Rick Norman, who joined the company in the 1990s and now is Head of Noise, also sensed a change under Kong. There was a recognition, previously largely absent, that the community experience – and, indeed, the passenger experience – mattered. He contrasted that with the organisation he joined. In the 1990s BAA, which had been privatised in the late 1980s, was still bureaucratic and hierarchical, with directors and managers 'tucked away in their own offices', separate from the rest of the organisation.

Rick recalled a meeting he attended in the late 1990s about night flights where there was a fear amongst senior management about considering environmental objectives. When BAA had been privatised it had become more commercially-minded but in those early years it was all about being hard-nosed, with the emphasis on the money passengers brought in. Impacts on the community or the environment hardly featured.

It was this which began to change during the Kong era but Rick Norman believes it ebbed and flowed, according to the attitudes of different managers. Even John Egan and Des Wilson (his Director of Corporate and Public Affairs) in their book *Private Business Public Battleground* had talked about the idea of a 'stakeholder corporation' that needed to meet the needs of multiple stakeholders, not just shareholders. These ideas were developed by Kong but it was still within the context of a third runway which Egan had promised would not happen. Presumably the company thought the reputational damage was a price worth paying to get the runway in place.

It is to the third runway I now turn, the issue which came to dominate the headlines for the best part of twenty years.

Why the third runway was so controversial

'The coalition assembled outside Parliament is extraordinarily wide. It runs from radical eco-warriors to middle-class mothers in west London, hedge fund managers in Richmond, to pensioners and parents in Brentford.' Iain Martin, Daily Telegraph (14/1/09)

The first campaign against the plans for a third runway became one of the biggest in UK history. It lasted from 2003 – 2010. HACAN played a central role. I chaired the unofficial coalition of MPs, local authorities, businesses, trade unions, community groups, environmental organisations and direct action networks which defeated the plans of the Labour Government. As already mentioned, you can read a detailed account here: <http://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/How-the-Heathrow-Campaign-was-won-revised.pdf>

Its opponents argued:

- London was already the most overflown city in Europe, with over 700,000 residents impacted by aircraft noise from Heathrow.
- 28% of all the people in Europe affected by noise from aircraft lived under the Heathrow flight paths.
- A third runway would have increased flight numbers by over 700 a day.
- The strong London economy would survive without a third runway.
- Annual climate emissions from the new runway alone would be the same as the entire annual emissions from a country like Kenya. Plans to deal with them were inadequate.
- Thousands of people would lose their homes to make way for the runway.
- And, in contrast to the proposals ten years later, residents were offered little to counter the impact of the runway.

Its supporters argued:

- Heathrow was 98% full.
- It was the UK's only truly international 'hub' airport.
- An expanded 'hub' would mean direct routes to important new business and leisure destinations and so make the UK a more attractive place for business and tourists.
- Without expansion, the UK economy would lose out.
- Expansion would allow access to many more key business and tourist destinations, particularly in the emerging economies.

Many years later, a leading politician said to me both sides were right – the reason it led to such a titanic battle.

Defeat brings reassessment

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government which came to power at the 2010 General Election ruled out a third runway. It was the biggest setback Heathrow had experienced. More widely, it was a blow for the UK aviation industry. What it had wanted above all was a third runway at Heathrow. And it was a defeat for the civil servants in the Department for Transport who strongly backed the runway. After 2010 many of them were moved or left Government.

According to Matt Gorman, the loss of a third runway in 2010 was an ‘existential moment for the company’.

He identified four key areas in which Heathrow had failed:

- The corporate culture of the company meant it was less than willing to engage with others
- There was a belief the economic arguments for a third runway would carry the day
- The communication of the project was poor
- They had been out-campaigned.

But he also pointed to the fact that in the mid to late 2000s the company experienced a lot of changes and was fighting on numerous fronts, which left it less able to focus on the third runway. In 2006 it had been taken over by the giant Spanish company Ferrovial. Many experienced leaders, including the CEO, left in the aftermath of that. And then, almost immediately, it faced the challenge of the overnight introduction of the new restrictions on carrying liquids into cabins. It also had to deal with the inquiry by the Competition Commission that led to the break-up of BAA. That took a lot of management focus.

Nigel Milton, who joined BAA in 2010 and is now Director of External Affairs at Heathrow, agreed that the airport had little choice but to look at why it had lost. It had assumed a level of support for the third runway that in reality was not there. It now realised

it had to go out and actively win support for any new runway. Nigel Milton was shocked at how the company treated local residents when he joined in 2010. He told me there was total apathy and disinterest in residents. For example, he said, when residents had to be seen, they were expected to come to Heathrow. The airport didn't go to them. When I spoke with Jane Dawes she told me how strongly Nigel Milton insisted engagement had to be done in a different way.

Nigel Milton, now Director of External Affairs, told me there was ‘total apathy and disinterest in residents’ when he joined in 2010

For HACAN, 2010 meant an immediate return to work. The story is told about the coach of a lower division football team who forced his players back to their chilly, spartan training ground the morning after they had scored a great victory over a premier league side. They had work to do to prepare for their next fixture against an unheralded team from their own lowly division. At HACAN it felt much like that after the third runway was dropped.

We had played an important role in a momentous victory. But many of our members told me they felt the victory had been a hollow one. Nothing had changed for them. Indeed, more planes than ever were pounding over their homes. I resolved, if we had to fight another runway, their interests had to be integral to that fight...and that meant noise; and flight paths.

Talks about talks

Heathrow put out feelers to HACAN, the organisation perhaps most associated with opposition to its third runway plan, with a view to opening up discussions. Part of this was prompted by the MP, Theresa Villiers. She had been Shadow Secretary of State for Transport when the Conservatives were in opposition in the late 2000s and was a key figure in persuading the party to come out against a third runway. She went on to be a Cabinet Minister. Following the 2010 General Election she had suggested to Heathrow and to HACAN that they start talking with each other.



Over coffee in neutral venues we started to have talks about talks with Heathrow to see if we could cooperate to try to improve matters for people under the existing runways

She was right that it was in our mutual interest to talk. Heathrow had just lost a mighty battle to get a third runway. HACAN was keen to get in place measures to improve the noise climate for residents. We started to have tentative talks about talks over coffee in neutral venues. We parked our differences on the third runway. Neither of us knew at that stage whether it would come back, but we agreed that in the meantime there was plenty of scope to explore areas where we could cooperate. Heathrow, which had lost the trust of local communities, was eager to find out what residents wanted. We were eager to tell them!

HACAN, having just seen off a third runway, was speaking from a position of strength. If there was any time in our long history to sit down and speak with Heathrow, it was in 2010.

HACAN's developing relationship with Heathrow was to become a distinctive and controversial feature of the next 10 years. I can understand the criticisms. Old-stagers who had been messed around by the airport for years firmly believed it could never be trusted. People whose homes would be under threat if the third runway reappeared were not going to be fans of the airport. Many climate change campaigners saw Heathrow in stark terms: it was the devil which every environmentalist hated; the company that wanted to build a CO₂-generating third runway.

The assumption and the accusation from I think a small minority was that HACAN, and myself in particular, had been ensnared by Heathrow, slowly drawn into its clutches to dilute any threat we may pose. But both Heathrow and HACAN had gone in to our talks knowing the score. We didn't need to spell it out to each other. Heathrow was after better community relations. It still wanted a third runway but, as I hope to show, it now also was keen to 'do the right thing' for the community and the environment within the confines of running a successful business. But it knew that, in order to achieve this, it had to make concessions. It equally knew that in HACAN it wasn't dealing with a meek organisation that would roll over as soon as it was offered a large latte and a tasty brownie. This was the body which had played a significant role in seeing off a third runway. HACAN was speaking from a position of strength. If there was any time in its long history for HACAN to sit down and speak with Heathrow, it was in 2010.

Change at Heathrow was not accidental

The change taking place within Heathrow did not come about by accident. In his interview with me Nigel Milton was clear that the plan to change tack was a very definite decision, driven by people like Matt Gorman and himself.

Both have interesting backgrounds. And share a similar attitude towards aviation.

Nigel Milton joined the Department for Transport's graduate programme in 1995. He became the private secretary to Labour's John Prescott, the party's deputy leader and responsible for transport. Nigel then, in the years leading up to the 2003 Aviation White Paper, spent some



Nigel Milton, Director of External Affairs, was a key figure pressing for a new approach

time in the aviation team in the Department for Transport. He joined Virgin Atlantic International in 2004 and BAA, as it was then called, in 2010. He had enjoyed his time at Virgin but chose to leave because the job had involved had a lot of international travel and he was keen to move to a job which meant he could spend more time with a young family at home. Nigel told me he 'loved aviation'. The main reason was the chance it gave people to experience international travel. He had taken three years off to travel. What really opened and broadened his mind during that time was visiting East and Southern Africa. It was the mid-2000s that set Nigel thinking about aviation in a different light. Climate change started to

come onto the agenda. He became motivated about how the positives of aviation could be squared with its downsides. It was this thinking he brought to BAA when he joined in 2010.

Matt Gorman's attitude towards aviation is strikingly similar. Matt told me that what underlies his conviction that aviation is a good thing is the ability it provides to travel and to understand 'the richness of the world'. He said he had been lucky enough to have been able to travel as a young man – to France, to Quito in Ecuador and to Hong Kong (as a boy when his father worked there for a time). He is passionate about ensuring other people are not denied the same opportunities. It is one of the driving forces behind what he does. But he recognises the downsides of aviation and, like Nigel, believes the challenge is to retain the benefits of flying while dealing with its disbenefits.



Heathrow's Director of Carbon Strategy Matt Gorman was awarded an MBE in the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to the Decarbonisation of Aviation

I first met Matt in the late 1990s when we were both members of an environmental pressure group. He has been interested in green issues, he told me, since he was in his teens. He described himself as 'right-on' teenager who grew up in the 1980s, around the time of the second big wave of interest in environmental issues in the UK. He joined green organisations. In the 1990s he was at the protests against road building at Twyford Down outside Winchester, and the M11 Link Road in East London. Although he did languages as his main degree at university, further studies were on environmental matters, including time at Forum for the Future run by the famous environmentalist, Jonathon Porritt.

He spent time in the not-for-profit sector but really wanted to work in business because he felt that companies, as a key part of society, could affect change....including the environmental changes he was particularly interested in. The appeal to business to change would be enlightened self-interest. He joined BAA in the late 2000s, attracted by the fact that Mike Clasper, the then CEO, was providing leadership on climate change through, for example, BAA's support for the Emissions Trading Scheme, a stance not universally popular within the industry at that time.

When Nigel Milton applied for the job he saw this in Times diary piece:



Nigel told me that he saw the job as a challenge but also felt he couldn't be any worse than the people who he was replacing. 'I could only be an improvement. The only way was up'.

I asked Nigel if it had made a difference that he had come in from outside BAA. He said this was a key point. Around 2009/10 a number of senior staff were recruited from outside BAA and British Airways. This had not happened to any great extent previously. They brought fresh eyes. In came people like Emma Gilthorpe, Kathryn Leahy, Andrew Macmillan, Carol Hui and John Holland-Kaye.

Nigel Milton argued that the senior management was no longer dominated by 'aviation lifers'. He pinpointed other ways in which the newcomers were different from most of the old guard. There were more women, more dads with kids, people who lived in local communities under the flight paths. They and their children were hearing from local people about Heathrow. He made the interesting point that what your children are saying to you about the place where you work, about the job you do can have a huge effect on your outlook and how you approach that job.

The senior staff recruited were different from most of the old guard. There were more women, more dads with kids, people who lived in local communities under the flight paths

I think also critical to the new approach was the fact that key individuals who had been with the company for many years were now in positions of influence – people like Rick Norman and Jane Dawes. When I interviewed him, Rick was very much aware of the opportunities that the new management offered to do things differently; things he had been pushing for some years.

The new approach began to take place during the period Colin Matthews was Chief Executive. That was also when the name was changed from BAA to Heathrow. He had appointed the new guard. However, I got a sense that Matthews, a man of integrity and well-liked, was allowing modernisation to take place rather than driving it. He was a practical man, an engineer. And maybe the right man at the right time. Matt Gorman made the interesting point that, if Heathrow was ever to get permission for a third runway, it first had to show it could run the existing airport efficiently and effectively. That was Matthew's priority. The company had been shaken by the debacle on the day Terminal 5 opened in 2007. Matthew's achievements are impressive. Under his leadership Terminal 5 recovered and was voted by passengers as the world's best airport terminal for three years in a row; a brand new Terminal 2 was constructed; and in 2013 Heathrow was named 'Best European Airport'.

Heathrow assesses critics' arguments

In addition to reaching out to groups like HACAN, Heathrow also began to systematically assess the arguments critics were making about the airport. Previously, it felt it needed to do little of this because it was confident it would get the growth that it wanted. Rick Norman told me the airport looked at a range of things which were being said including the view that aircraft noise affected property values. Heathrow's research found that generally this was not true. He cited the example of Richmond, an upmarket London borough heavily overflown, where property values recovered much more quickly than in other areas after the 2009 recession.

Another topic Heathrow was keen to gather information about was the length of time people lived in a property. I know that HACAN cited examples of people living in properties (often under a flight path) for 30 years or more. Heathrow's research found most people moved much more often. It didn't claim – and certainly couldn't claim - that some residents had lived in their homes for many years or that there were people with little choice but to live under a flight path but what its research suggested was that a lot more people than might have been assumed had the option moving away from a flight path.

Heathrow was doing work to counter its critics which it didn't feel was necessary to carry out in earlier eras when it was so confident its plans would get approval.

Enter John Holland-Kaye

The modernisation agenda really took off when John Holland-Kaye became Chief Executive. No message came across more loudly and more clearly from the people I interviewed. This was the man who drove the modernisation agenda forward, who provided the leadership that was critical to make change happen.

Nigel Milton called the appointment ‘the real catalyst for change’. The tone was set by Holland-Kaye on the day he started. His first meetings were not with Government or the aviation industry but with a local school and with Steve Curran, the leader of Hounslow Council (which opposed a third runway). This was quickly followed by an apology about the way the company had previously misled communities. Nigel said the new CEO placed a lot of importance on ‘doing the right thing’.

This was echoed by **Matt Gorman**. He emphasised Holland-Kaye’s very strong ‘values-based approach’. He was motivated by expansion, but equally motivated that it was done in the right way.

Jane Dawes believes that under Holland-Kaye’s leadership the staff team were empowered; they were given their head. She and Rick Norman were given the chance to be hugely influential on noise issues. Holland-Kaye was always urging his senior staff to, where possible, go beyond what was strictly required in ‘doing the right thing’ for passengers, the local community and the environment. Gone were the days when doing the minimum required was the norm.

Rick Norman told me that, under Holland-Kaye’s leadership, talking to the Executive was like being in ‘a different place’ from what he had previously known. That Holland-Kaye gave leadership is beyond any doubt. I suspect, though, the very fact that he empowered his staff and gave them their head meant that they could also influence him. I know for a fact that Matt Gorman helped open his boss’s eyes on climate change. I’m pretty certain that Nigel Milton would have considered himself to have failed if he didn’t improve the CEO’s public performances and both Rick Norman and Jane Dawes told me how receptive he was to their ideas on noise.



As CEO, John Holland-Kaye provided the leadership that made change happen. No message came across more clearly from the people I interviewed.

In addition to my interviewees, there were so many people in key positions who had bought into the change that was taking place and were part of it: Cheryl Monk, Head of Community Relations; Emma Gilthorpe, heading up the Expansion Team; Kathryn Leahy, who played an important role in improving the way the airport was run; Pete Rafano and the rest of the team working on noise; Brendan Creavin, Rachel Thomas and Gordon Fergusson on flight paths; Xavier Ho’s on the Noise Action Plan; Becky Coffin, the current Director of Sustainability and Communities and with a strong record in sustainability; Laura Jones, Richard West, and their colleagues from the community engagement team. And giving support at a senior level, Andrew Macmillan and Carol Hui. Many others also. Indeed, what I hope to show is how deeply embedded change became within the company.

A period of reassessment

The shock of losing the third runway in 2010 led not just Heathrow but the aviation industry more generally into a period of reassessment. I suspect it realised it had to play a long game. The Coalition Government had made it clear there would be no new runway permitted at any airport during its five year term of office. Philip Hammond, whose constituency was close to Heathrow and heavily overflown, was appointed Transport Secretary; with



In 2011 Justine Greening who had spoken at countless no 3rd runway rallies was made Secretary of State for Transport.

Theresa Villiers, who in opposition had done so much to persuade David Cameron's Conservatives to come out against a third runway, made Aviation Minister. In the autumn of 2011 Philip Hammond was moved from transport and replaced by



Theresa Villiers, a key opponent of a 3rd runway was made Aviation Minister

Justine Greening, the staunchest of staunch opponents of a third runway, the MP who had exposed the way the Department had colluded with BAA during the first third runway campaign. If ever there was a moment

people opposed to a third runway would want to freeze in time, this was it!

HACAN's continued opposition to a third runway didn't prevent us working with Heathrow on other issues. In 2011 the Department for Transport launched a Scoping Study into the future of aviation. It wasn't specifically about new runways; it was more about future demand, how it should be catered for and, indeed, whether it should all be catered for; as well as sections on

For the first time in our response to a Government consultation we identified points of agreement with Heathrow

the environmental impacts of aviation. In our response we made our usual arguments against the 3rd runway but it was also the first time we identified points of agreement with Heathrow. Governments tend to want to avoid controversy

and difficult choices, so will home in on areas where there is agreement from organizations that come from different perspectives. Heathrow accepted and was happy to promote some of our key objectives such as the importance of respite and the value of an Independent Noise Authority.

Nigel Milton told me when I interviewed him that by 2012 Heathrow realised it had to adopt a new approach if it was to get a third runway.

- local concerns had to be addressed
- its national benefits spelt out
- areas outside London and the South East which might benefit from a third runway, for example Newcastle, had to be persuaded that Heathrow was playing fair by its residents
- a Parliamentary majority had to be worked for; it couldn't be assumed.

This was a very different approach from the one adopted prior to 2010.

The Airports Commission is set up

By the start of 2012 the aviation industry had recovered its voice. It mounted a huge campaign for new runways to be built; not specifically a third runway but for expansion generally. It argued that, if it did not take place, the UK would fall behind the rest of the world and its economy would suffer as a result. Much of the media carried the same message day after day. The pressure on the Government became intense. The Prime Minister David Cameron and his deputy, the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg, agreed to set up a commission to look at the future needs of aviation to report back just after the next General Election in 2015. The Airports Commission was established. Justine Greening was moved to the post of International Development Secretary to be replaced by the more compliant Patrick McLoughlin. Theresa Villiers became Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Government asked the financier and academic Sir Howard Davies to chair the commission. He was supported by a small number of commissioners, each expert in their own area - climate change, infrastructure projects, urban planning etc – and serviced by a team of bright young civil servants largely drawn from the Treasury and the Department for Transport. The Commission's remit was to: examine the scale and timing of any requirement for additional capacity to maintain the UK's position as Europe's most important aviation hub; and identify and evaluate how any need for additional capacity should be met in the short, medium and long term.

It was required to produce an interim report by the end of 2013 and a final report by summer 2015. That timing meant that, if it recommended new airports or new runways, the decision to endorse or turn down its recommendation would fall to the next Government. The Coalition Government would not need to break its promise about no new runways within its term of office. Commissions are very often ways of governments postponing difficult and potentially unpopular decisions. That was clearly the case here. The aviation industry saw the setting up of the Airports Commission as the vehicle which could make new runways respectable again.

The question for HACAN was whether we should ignore the Commission or try to influence it. We knew it was a very different body to the old Department for Transport (DfT). Perhaps it had to be. When trying to promote Labour's third runway, the DfT was closed to debate, too cosy with the industry and discredited by its shading dealings with BAA. The Commission was much more transparent and willing to discuss issues. We took the view that, although we risked getting sucked into a process which might lead to a third runway, we had to engage. We had to try to influence the body charged with the task of assessing future aviation demand, including the need for new runways. This became even more important when the Commission was given the additional task of making recommendations on future aviation noise policy. Our big concern! I saw this as a real opportunity to push a number of our strategic objectives at the highest level: an end to pre-6am flights, a commitment to respite, the adoption of more meaningful noise annoyance metrics, the setting up of an Independent Noise Regulator. In all, I had three face-to-face meetings with Howard Davies, and several more with members of the Secretariat.



I had three face-to-face meetings with Sir Howard Davies, the financier and academic chosen to head up the Airports Commission

Heathrow accepts all eleven of the Commission's conditions for a third runway

Nigel Milton told me Davies expected Heathrow would accept just 3 or 4 of the conditions – the toughest ever imposed on an airport. The moment the Board accepted all 11 was when Nigel could say 'I'm proud to work for this company'.

The Commission came out in favour of a third runway at Heathrow rather than expansion at 'regional' airports or a second runway at Gatwick but only if the airport agreed to 11 conditions.

I've set out a summary of them in the box. These were the toughest imposed on any airport in UK history. Nigel Milton told me Howard Davies expected Heathrow would accept three or four of them. The Heathrow Board accepted all eleven of them! Nigel said that was the moment he could say 'I'm proud to work for this company'. When the senior management team recommended to the Board that it accept all eleven recommendations, there was debate and discussion but no stubborn resistance. John Holland-Kaye didn't need to threaten to resign in order to persuade the Board. The business case made to the Board was that they would be more likely to get a third runway if they accepted the conditions, even though it meant adding a considerable premium to the basic cost of the runway in order to pay for measures to help the local communities. Heathrow still had to lobby Government and Parliament to endorse the Commission's recommendation that a third runway be built but its acceptance of all the conditions would make that task a lot easier.

The conditions:

- A ban on all scheduled night flights in the period from 11.30pm to 6am
- No fourth runway
- A legally binding 'noise envelope' putting firm limits on the level of noise created by the airport
- A new aviation noise levy to fund an expanded programme of mitigation
- An independent aviation noise authority
- A legal commitment on air quality
- Heathrow should spend more than £1bn on community compensation
- Heathrow should compensate those who would lose their homes at full market value plus an additional 25% and reasonable costs
- The establishment at Heathrow of a Community Engagement Board with an independent chair
- The provision of training opportunities and apprenticeships for local people
- Heathrow incentivizes a major modal shift for those working at the airports and for those using it so fewer arrive by car.

* The first condition *A ban on all scheduled night flights in the period from 11.30pm to 6am* was the responsibility of the Government to deliver. It was Government which set the night flight framework for the airport, not Heathrow. What Heathrow was indicating was that, if the Government chose to go for a night flight ban, it would accept it.

Ground-breaking noise recommendations

I wrote at the time:

‘Whatever now happens to its recommendation that a third runway should be built at Heathrow, the Airports Commission will be remembered for its ground-breaking recommendations on aircraft noise’

The Commission came out in favour of more meaningful metrics to assess noise annoyance, backed the concept of respite as an option at all airports and strongly advocated the setting up of an Independent Noise Authority. It laid the foundation for the much-improved aviation noise policy which the Department for Transport developed over the next few years to the benefit of communities across the country. Rick Norman, Heathrow’s Head of Noise, told me he was in no doubt Commission moved things forward on noise: ‘there was honesty about its approach.’

Following the recommendations in Airports Commission’s report, significant progress was made on noise issues.

■ Building on the Commission’s work, the Department for Transport made, under the civil servants Isobel Pastor and Tim May, an historic decision to introduce **improved noise metrics**. The much-discredited 57LAeq contour as the point of the ‘onset of community annoyance’ was officially replaced by the more meaningful 54LAeq and 51LAeq contours. The Department also recommended a suite of metrics be used including the ‘N’ metric which measures the number of planes above a given noise level which fly over a community in a day. HACAN had been pressing for these changes for over two decades. Much credit must also go to Darren Rhodes, the CAA’s noise guru, whose 2014 SoNA report showed the relevance of lower metrics. There are still people living outside the 51LAeq contour disturbed by noise and that needs addressing but this was a major breakthrough.

Guided by Isobel Pastor and Tim May, the DfT made an historic leap-forward on metrics

■ At an airport level, Heathrow developed new approaches to noise. It set up a **Strategic Noise Forum** which brought together representatives from the aviation industry, the Department for Transport, the local authorities, Transport for London, the Aviation Environment Federation



Ian Jopson, now Head of Sustainable Aviation at NATS, backed an innovative night flight respite trial carried out by the Forum.

and HACAN to look at ways to improve the noise climate at the existing airport. It was keen to be more than a talking shop. It helped develop Heathrow’s Noise Action Plan and gave feedback to the respite working group which had been set up (see next page). It developed and backed a respite trial in South East London to give communities a week clear of night flights. Ian Jopson, now Head of Sustainable Aviation at NATS (air traffic control), played an important role in facilitating this. Ian, a committed environmentalist, was always seeking ways to reduce the climate and noise impacts of flying. The trial brought respite but the way it was designed had some unintended consequences, so some communities, particularly those in the vicinity of Brockley, got more night flights than they previously had. The trial was discontinued but was an early example of HACAN working with the industry to try to introduce practical improvements on the ground. The Forum was also involved in Heathrow’s plan to increase the angle of descent to 3.2 degrees.

■ HACAN had long-argued that Heathrow should match the other major airports in Europe and provide some help with **sound insulation** for everybody living within the 55Lden contour. To say we were surprised when Heathrow said it would do this (if a 3rd runway was built) is an understatement. We were shocked! Because of the much larger numbers impacted by Heathrow, it would cost a lot more to provide help with insulation than at Europe's other major airports. The total cost was estimated at over £2.5 billion. It meant that people under the flight path living within about 18 miles from the airport would get some help with insulation, with the greatest assistance being given to those closest to the airport.

■ Under the excellent direction of Nicole Porter, an experienced acoustician from Anderson Acoustic Ltd, work was started on **respite**. The steering group, of which I was a member, soon discovered that very little research had been done in the UK or abroad on what meaningful respite might look like. In 2018, a ground-breaking report on the subject was published. Around the same time the Department for Transport reversed its policy that flight paths should be concentrated over as few people as possible and recognized respite as a legitimate option which airports could pursue. A huge change which HACAN had consistently lobbied for for a decade and more.

I interviewed Nicole. She had done a degree in physics and acoustics before working at the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington for eight and a half years. A lot of her time was spent on environmental noise assessment, covering all aspects of noise and working alongside leading acousticians such as Bernard Berry and Ian Flindell. She then moved to NATS and later the CAA, working for ERCD alongside Darren Rhodes. This was her stepping stone to aviation noise. In 2001 set up her own consultancy, mainly looking at how aviation noise affected local communities. She was then approached by Anderson Acoustic Ltd which was working at Heathrow at the time to assist them. She is now an Associate Director at Andersons. Nicole became a key figure in moving forward Heathrow's noise agenda. She is a respected researcher and superb communicator who is always looking for solutions to problems.



Nicole told me she found the right people at Heathrow to move things forward on noise; people who were keen to solve problems.

She told me that at Heathrow she found the right people to move things forward on noise and the environment: Matt Gorman, passionate about climate change; Rick Norman, Jane Dawes, Pete Rafano, Brendan Creavin, Xavier Ho and others all keen to deliver noise improvements for the community; Cheryl Monk and Laura Jones, engaging with the community; all keen to solve problems, which tied in with her approach. She was keen never to shut things down. If told there were problems, her question would be, but are they insurmountable?

Nicole also made the interesting observation that Heathrow was willing to invest in research; often research that would not just be of use to itself but would also to benefit the industry and communities more widely. I suspect that this was one reason why so many prominent experts in their field were willing to work with Heathrow (see page 46). Heathrow was also helpful in providing technical assistance to research HACAN carried out. As, for example, in this study we published in 2019 advocating a fairer distribution of flight paths: <http://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NoiseRelief.pdf>

■ HACAN built on the Airport Commission's recommendation of **an independent noise authority** by convening meetings of the industry and local authorities to push the issue. We did this together with **Gavin Hayes**, the director of Let Britain Fly, part of London First, the body which represents big business in London. Initially, much of the aviation industry, apart from Heathrow, was suspicious of the idea. HACAN and London First jointly staged a high-profile seminar to promote it. Amongst the speakers were Sir Howard Davies, representatives from Heathrow, Gatwick, the CAA and from a similar body which operated in France. Together with Let Britain Fly, we persuaded prominent supporters and opponents of a third runway to back an Independent Noise Authority: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/10/heathrow-critics-supporters-independent-ombudsman-airport-noise>. And at a later stage Heathrow and HACAN issued a joint statement and press release backing the concept of an independent authority in order to counter some of the resistance there was to it.

HACAN and the business group London First jointly staged a high-profile seminar to promote the idea of an independent authority

■ HACAN commissioned a report on **night flights** from the consultancy AvGen. We wanted to prepare a case for a longer period without night flights should a third runway go ahead although of course we were not advocating a new runway. The report showed that the extra capacity provided by the third runway could allow an eight hour night to become the norm for residents. Some nights it would be less but most of the time communities could enjoy eight hours through the introduction of respite at night which would represent a considerable improvement for those under the existing flight paths where 5.5 hours was the scheduled break: <https://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/AvGen-study-v1.1.pdf>

Historic progress was being made on noise policy. Much has yet to be done of course, particularly around implementation but significant changes were taking place. We were fully aware that a number of parties we worked with saw the improvements as a way to facilitate a third runway. It is the tightrope we were walking. But we could not neglect this unique opportunity to get in place measures which would improve aviation noise policy not just for our members around Heathrow but for communities under flight paths across the country. By failing to engage we would have failed these communities. Our engagement did something else too, well expressed by the respected academics Griggs and Howarth: 'With the participation of HACAN [in the summit], its demands for aircraft noise were in part legitimized by those defending expansion.' (*Comparing (De)Politicisation in Europe*).

I wonder whether climate campaigners did not miss a similar opportunity to move forward the climate agenda. The Airports Commission had been guided by the Committee on Climate Change (the Government's advisers) which argued that one new runway could be built in the UK without breaching the country's climate targets, although that would limit growth at other airports. The Commission did not find there was a market for significant growth at airports outside the London area, but added that, if demand was higher than expected at these airports, it might need to be restrained to enable the UK to stay within its carbon targets by putting in place a carbon price which would have added significantly to the price of a ticket. At a stroke, Davies mainstreamed aviation climate concerns. He gave climate campaigners the ammunition to make arguments to restrict growth. The opportunity may have been cast aside because so many only saw Davies as the man who recommended a third runway. I'm not suggesting they dropped their opposition to the runway but that Davies could have been used more effectively.

The second campaign against a third runway

The Airport Commission's recommendation in 2015 that a third runway be built at Heathrow saw the campaign against the runway start up again in earnest. It might surprise some readers that we could and did campaign against the runway at a time we were working constructively with Heathrow on noise matters and had endorsed a number of the ideas in the Airport Commission's report. I don't believe there was a contradiction. Our members fully expected us to oppose the runway (though in some areas further from the airport flight paths continued to be the main concern).....and actually so did Heathrow. I don't intend to go though the campaign in detail as that is not the focus of this publication. But I need to spend a few pages giving an outline and flavour of it in order to illustrate what Heathrow did differently from the previous campaign.

By adopting a very different approach from the 2003-10 campaign Heathrow 'out-campaigned' the third runway opponents.

Why Objectors lost	Why Heathrow won
Failed to activate sufficient 'committed' supporters; couldn't persuade enough people to attend most of the events they staged	Heathrow cultivated and highlighted local support for the runway through the astute campaigning of Back Heathrow
Parliamentary lobbying was professional but lacked Heathrow's resources to mount significant campaigns across the UK	Ran a much more ambitious, professional and effective public affairs operation than ten years earlier
No widespread recognition that a 'new' Heathrow was emerging and that it was putting forward a plan much more acceptable to politicians than pre-2010	Included community concerns in its plans in a way it never did before; accepted all the Airport Commission's recommendations
The Heathrow villagers, whose homes were under threat, were less united in their opposition to a 3 rd runway as a result of the cash offer made by Heathrow	Heathrow made one of the biggest cash offers in UK history to people who would lose their homes or be blighted by noise
The direct action, while dramatic, was less focused than 10 years earlier	Decision-makers who met Heathrow's senior management are likely to have recognized its calibre and 'values-based' approach
The legal challenge on climate grounds, while it went all the way to the Supreme Court, was lost	Heathrow's work on climate was seriously innovative, as outlined in its Heathrow 2.0 document

The points above are fairly self-explanatory but on the next couple of pages I elaborate the first point which I feel was critical. If opponents of the runway had been able to mobilize significant numbers of local people, the other points in the table, though important, would have become less significant. If, for example, the opposition had been able to persuade 100,000 people to march through London, that would have sent a powerful message politicians would have found difficult to ignore. The objectors came nowhere near that.

Objectors lost the battle on the ground

1a. Objectors failed to activate sufficient numbers of their committed supporters.

Opinion polls showed that around 45% of local people backed a third runway, with a third firmly opposed. Those figures hadn't changed in a decade. But what we had been able to do in our previous campaign was cover up our lack of majority support through high-profile rallies and stunts, energetic political lobbying and dramatic interventions by the direct action group Plane Stupid. In reality, only 3,000 people turned out to a major rally in 2008 which, thanks to Greenpeace funding, had been heavily promoted. And perhaps half of those were environmental activists from outside the area. But we had got away with it.

By 2010 we had successfully managed to convey the impression that it would be politically toxic for any Government to build a third runway. This time round we were found out...by Heathrow. From its defeat in 2010, Heathrow had learnt, as already discussed, it had to engage more with community concerns but it also knew that it had to identify and exploit its opponents' weak points. To do this it set up and funded the lobby group Back Heathrow whose main task was to 'de-toxify' the third runway in order to demonstrate to politicians that it had enough local support for it not to be political suicide for them to back it. Back Heathrow did a first-rate job but if more of our supporters had been more active, politicians might still have taken fright at the idea of a third runway. After all, in total, hundreds of thousands of people were against it. We simply couldn't mobilise them.

The new challenger: Back Heathrow

Back Heathrow - www.backheathrow.org - described itself as a grassroots group, giving a voice to those communities which backed a third runway. Although independent from Heathrow, it received massive funding from the airport. And so was able to distribute hundreds of thousands of leaflets, commission opinion polls and pay for billboard advertising. It was hugely successful. It often drove the opposition to fury but Back Heathrow under Rob Gray, an experienced campaigner and former journalist, fought a brilliant campaign: media-savvy, focused, targeted, ruthless. The resources helped but money alone can't buy those qualities. It identified and homed in on its opponents' weak spots. In *Victory Against All the Odds*, written about our previous campaign against the third runway, I had questioned the strength of our support: 'I had doubts just how strongly the majority of people of West London were committed to fighting the expansion'. This time Back Heathrow made that visible. It was at our meetings and rallies to point to any vacant chairs and empty spaces. It commissioned polls from Populus which showed that around 45% of people in the boroughs closest to Heathrow backed a third runway, with about a third firmly against. Populus was criticised for asking leading questions. It probably meant it overstated the support for a third runway but not by much. Independent polls showed similar results.

Under Rob Gray, Back Heathrow fought a brilliant campaign: media-savvy, focused, targeted, ruthless

Back Heathrow got one poll showing 50% support and used that figure ruthlessly. It claimed 100,000 supporters. Opposition campaigners always challenged the figure. It didn't matter. Back Heathrow was showing that there was support for a third runway. It didn't matter either that some of its adverts were criticised by the Advertising Standards Authority. What mattered was that its one clear message was getting through: a third runway had enough support not to be politically toxic. And we struggled to counter it. Not just because we couldn't afford polls and billboards, but because we couldn't generate a groundswell of active opposition amongst local residents. Back Heathrow also targeted very precisely the communities it needed to influence: Asian communities close to Heathrow which valued the jobs a third runway might bring; and those Asian communities which would be under the flight path of a new runway. Certainly, when we had leaflets distributed in those areas we got no response. When Rob Gray moved on he was replaced by Parmjit Dhanda, a former Labour MP, a local boy who had grown up in the area. An astute appointment.

1b. Objectors staged creative events but they failed to generate enough local support

We were good at our stunts and demonstrations. Although HACAN led on many of them, a lot were the result of joint work by an emerging coalition of local residents, environmentalists, local authorities, sympathetic politicians and direct action activists – similar to the sort of coalition which had been the foundation of our victory in 2010. Here are some of the events.



'No ifs, no buts, no 3rd runway'

The words of Prime Minister David Cameron when he was in opposition became the slogan – and one we all made memorable – of the campaigners against a third runway. HACAN paid (a lot of money!) for an Advan to tour the streets of London for several days, stopping outside Parliament, where many MPs joined it, as well as visiting local groups in their own areas.



We held a major rally in Parliament Square in the heart of London, expertly brought together by the veteran campaigner Jeff Gazzard. Amongst the speakers were politicians from all political parties, environmentalists, local residents and all the candidates for Mayor of London. Several thousand turned out but numbers were disappointing in view of the fact that it was preceded by the biggest leaflet drop opponents of a third runway had ever done, targeting hundreds of thousands of people.



HACAN organised an indoor event in Central London. Like the Parliament Square rally it boasted a top array of speakers including the new leader of the Liberal Democrats Vince Cable, and for the first time a speaker from UKIP, Cliff Dixon. But, again, the numbers attending were small. We were

not able to fill a hall with a capacity of just over 600. We knew the opposition to the runway was much greater than this but we could not mobilize it.

HACAN worked with Conservative MP Zac Goldsmith in staging a star-studded event in Richmond in South West London. Zac hired Richmond Theatre for an evening where a panel of celebrities including the funnyman and writer Gyles Brandreth and international film star Hugh Grant judged the entries to a 'No ifs, no buts' video competition we had launched with Zac. People were asked to make short videos spelling out why a third runway was a bad idea. Quality entries poured in. The theatre was packed. Perhaps people will turn out for a show!



I'm grateful to Rob Barnstone whom HACAN employed for a year for coordinating these and other events. He also did solid work with MPs, councillors and at the party conferences.

Why objectors could not mobilize their supporters?

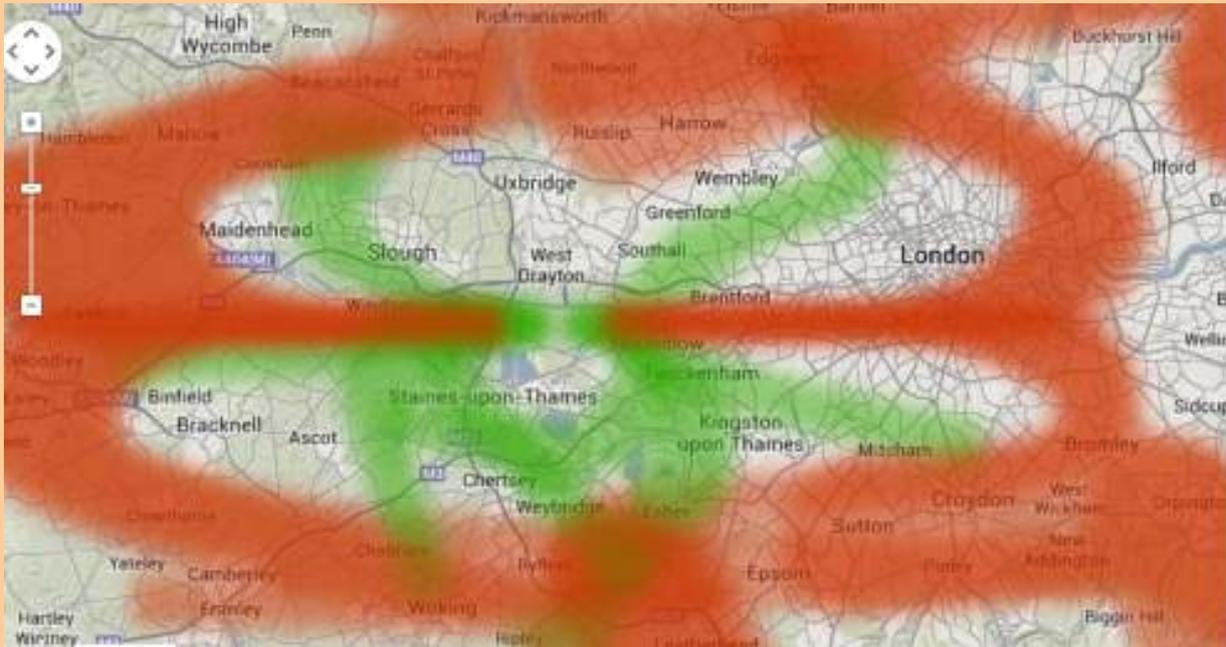
I would suggest a number of reasons:

- Most local people are not activists. They will only become engaged when there is a very clear and pretty immediate threat to them. When other runway options were still being considered a third runway was only a *possible* threat.
- Even when the decision was made it was still a *distant* threat, as far as a decade away. People were being asked to participate in a campaign lasting years.
- There was no clarity on where exactly the flight paths would go.
- We failed to get across to enough people in West London under the existing flight paths that a third runway might reduce their half day's break from the noise (in order to divide the extra planes more equally amongst all the runways). For many of them a third runway was happening somewhere else.
- We should have used the word 'runway' much less. It was pretty meaningless to many people. I've come to the view that most communities can be quite disinterested in how many runways are planned; the only thing that matters is if and how they might be impacted.
- We should have concentrated on spelling out the impacts community by community, area by area and recognized that, even amongst our supporters in some areas, there was support for a third runway once they understood it would provide them with more respite (see page 27)
- And of course there remains the possibility – hard to prove one way or the other – that more people than we thought were not unduly bothered about living under a flight path.

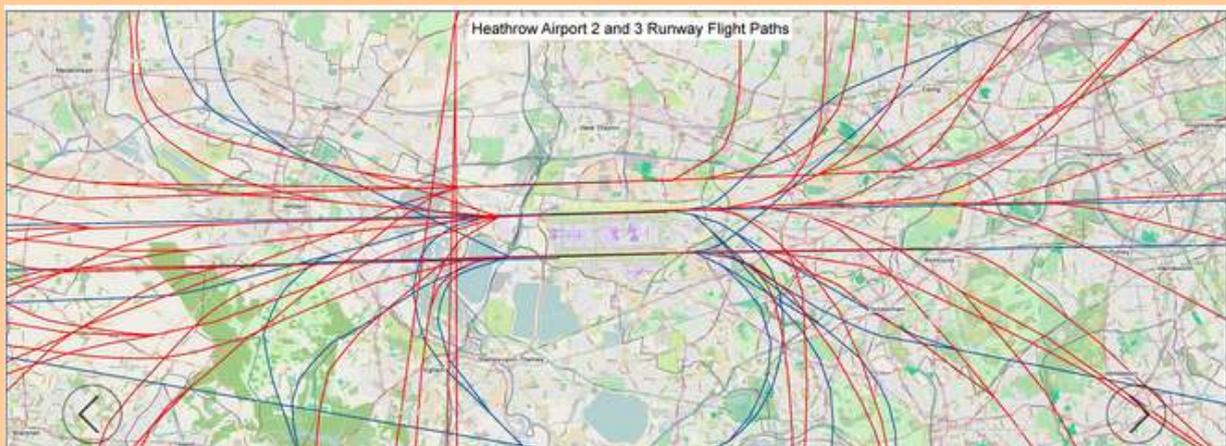
Could we have rallied the troops behind an alternative?

Another runway at Gatwick or Stansted, or a new 4-runway Estuary Airport – the so-called 'Boris Island' because it was strongly backed by Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London – would have impacted far fewer residents than a third runway at Heathrow. Any of these options would have won considerable support from Heathrow residents but would have been an anathema to environmentalists. Boris Island, which would have meant the closure of Heathrow, was also strongly opposed by many West London local authorities who feared the impact on their economies. We settled for just making the economic, social and environmental case against a third runway. When I debated with the admirable [Daniel Moylan](#), the Mayor's aviation adviser, I could say nothing about growth. We had opted out of that debate and so failed to face up to the reality that the pressure for expansion in London and the South East will grow since, as emerging economies become richer, there will be more people flying on business and for leisure (currently less than 20% of the world's population has ever flown). Air travel within Europe might fall if rail picks up but there will be more intercontinental travel. London will continue to be the magnet for it in the UK. The question of how that growth is to be catered is something residents and environmentalists will need to confront.

Flight paths, not runways, was the issue for many



Those were the pre-Covid flights using Heathrow in one month (red arrivals; green departures). Huge swathes of London and the Home Counties overflowed, covering an area 25 miles, and sometimes further, from the airport. The issue for communities was flight paths. And respite from the noise the biggest request HACAN got: predictable flight paths, rotated, to allow for a predictable break for residents. Areas in West London within about 10 miles of the airport got a half day's break from the noise when arrivals switched runways at 3pm. The message we got from communities further from the airport was less about a third runway and much more about flight paths. Many were agnostic about the runway. It wasn't an issue for them.



When Heathrow committed to a period of respite for all if a third runway was built (see page 36), many communities saw the prospect of getting a break from the noise for the first time. Dedicated flight paths would be introduced and rotated (see indicative map above). Some new areas would be affected but many in those communities already impacted by all-day noise realized the runway would benefit them. These included HACAN members. Agnostics came to back the runway.

Trouble and strife in the campaigning ranks

It was HACAN's night flight report outlining how the extra capacity provided by the third runway could allow for an eight hour night to become the norm for residents - <https://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/AvGen-study-v1.1.pdf> - which sparked it off. A few campaigners were not just concerned about it but hostile to it. They felt it might help legitimize a third runway. There *was* a debate to be had. My view was that one report like this was not going to swing the third runway decision one way or the other. But they didn't want debate or discussion. I certainly understood where the Heathrow villagers were coming from: if your home is threatened, future policy on night flights is of little interest to you. But it also became clear that in the eyes of one or two environmentalists, residents were dispensable when it came to the crunch. I want to stress it was just a handful; and to reassure my many friends in the environmental movement that I know they do not take that view. Of course behind some of this was the belief that, despite the considerable resources we had put into campaigning against the third runway, HACAN was too close to what some regarded as 'the enemy', Heathrow, because we worked with them on noise issues. Most members of the coalition against the third runway could live with this. But those who wanted HACAN to leave the coalition – perhaps in particular wanted me to go – did not let up. We decided that, in order to avoid a very public split, we would step away from the coalition for a while.

The No3rdRunway Coalition goes on to a more formal footing



The No3rdRunway Coalition went on to a more formal footing. It was skillfully chaired by Paul McGuinness who understood the need to bring the diverse interests together. Initially it received some funding from the Goldsmith Trusts but subsequently was largely funded by Hillingdon

Council, the borough which stood to lose over 800 homes if the third runway went ahead and whose veteran leader Ray Puddifoot has been a consistent opponent of Heathrow expansion. It employed Rob Barnstone and Paul Beckford. Paul, its Policy Director, who became my successor at HACAN, was an effective lobbyist and a consensual figure who sought to reach out across the political and campaigning spectrum. HACAN did not rejoin the coalition. There were some within it who would have resisted the return of HACAN very strongly and we made no effort to rejoin. I



Paul Beckford, its Policy Director, was an effective lobbyist and a consensual figure who sought to reach out across the political and campaigning spectrum

continued to be disappointed by the indifference shown by of a handful of environmentalists to the interests of local communities. As it turned out, we found complementary roles, with HACAN specialising in noise and flight paths while the Coalition turned its attention to some of the broader issues.

The Coalition brought together an All-Party Parliamentary Group, commissioned economic-related reports from the New Economics Foundation and continued to have a presence at the party conferences. It didn't become involved in the day-to-day Heathrow issues or in the design of future flight paths.

Parliament backs Heathrow

In June 2016 Parliament finally voted. It approved the National Policy Statement which set out the case for a third runway by 415 to 119 votes; a huge majority. The airport was given the greenest of green lights to start drawing up details plans for the new runway. The result was a tribute to the lobbying operation mounted by Nigel Milton and his public affairs team but also recognition from many MPs of the new direction Heathrow was taking.

Nigel Milton had told me when I had interviewed him that under **Emma Gilthorpe**, in charge of the expansion team, Heathrow had taken a very different approach from previously in thinking about how its third runway proposals would affect its key stakeholder groups.

Under the pre-2010 plan, Nigel Milton reckoned the benefits were:

Shareholders	9/10
Aviation industry	10/10
Passengers	7/10
Colleagues	7/10
Community	1 or 2/10

This time round aim was for to be 7/10 for all stakeholders.

He told me the 2010 scheme 'was designed by people within the perimeter fence for those within it.' This time round it was done in a very different way.

I will pick up this narrative again later but first I want to turn to a non-third runway related event which had a profound impact on Heathrow, and on HACAN: the 2014 airspace trials.

Airspace Trials

The background is this. Airports across the world are moving from a ground-based system to a satellite one in order to guide planes. The new system – called Performance Based Navigation (PBN) - will allow for more precise flight paths. They will save airlines time and fuel, reduce the CO₂ per aircraft, improve the resilience of airports, and, if the flight paths are rotated, allow for respite for communities. Time-limited trials were proposed to test the capability of aircraft to make more precise movements when taking off. HACAN supported the trials on the basis that precision flying could facilitate respite if the new flight paths were rotated. But the trials brought a big increase in flights over certain areas: a bombardment of all-day flying. Complaints went through the roof. Huge public meetings were held. The trials were halted.

Map 2: Westerly operations - trial routes



This map shows a day of departing flights during the trial. The trial routes are marked with the stars. There are 2 different paths for each of the 3 routes. The path that is used is dependent on the runway in use for departures. In the morning we use one runway for departures and the other for landings. At 15:00 - roughly halfway through Heathrow's working day - we swap over. This works on a weekly cycle. For more information on this please see our runway alternation pages on the website. The red stars show the routes from the northern runway and the blue stars show the routes from the southern runway (see overview for an illustration of how this works).

Teddington Action Group stirs things up.....

In 2021 the Times named Teddington as the best place to live in London.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/teddington-best-place-to-live-london-uk-zhn55lvpc>



Teddington is a suburb in South West London. Wikipedia describes it thus: *“Mostly residential, it stretches from the river to Bushy Park with a long high street of shops, restaurants and pubs. There is a suspension bridge over the lowest non-tidal lock on the Thames, Teddington Lock. Teddington and surrounding areas have some of the highest house prices in the UK outside of Central London”*.

Teddington has always had noise from planes taking off from Heathrow. It is just six miles from the airport. HACAN has had members living in the area since the 1970s. They joined because of the aircraft noise.

During the 2014 trials Teddington was one of the areas which experienced intense, concentrated noise. Teddington Action Group (TAG) was formed. Some of the ‘taggers’ as they called themselves didn’t accept that after the trials things went back to the way they were previously, despite Heathrow paying for studies which showed that they did. Heathrow had invited the communities impacted by the trials to appoint the consultants, sit on the steering committee and oversee the studies. But some residents could not accept the findings of the studies they had managed; seemingly because it didn’t tally with their own perceptions. It wasn’t always clear what the ‘taggers’ were saying or if they were speaking with one voice. Some seemed to argue that they had few planes before the trials. Others blamed the trials for trends which were already in place: more concentrated flight paths and one of the routes seeing more long-haul late evening departures than previously.

It is relatively common for something to happen which alerts and sensitizes people to aircraft which have always flown over them but which they didn't notice or weren't bothered by previously. This is what the bombardment of 2014 did to some people in Teddington and elsewhere. As Cheryl Monk, at the time in charge of community relations at Heathrow and one of the key people developing Heathrow's new approach, said to me: 'If only there *had* been a change, it would make my job so much easier!'



Cheryl Monk, then head of community relations at Heathrow said to me: 'If only there *had* been a change, it would make my job so much easier!'

It is a small step from thinking Heathrow lied about the trials, to believe the airport lies about everything.

Most people who had attended the packed meetings during the trials ceased to be active after they ended. But a minority had trapped themselves in a terrible dystopian downward spiral of despair believing everything was a tissue of lies. It is a quite logical next step then for these people to look at a group like HACAN which was working constructively with Heathrow on noise issues and conclude that we were, at best, ineffectual patsies taken in by the spin of Heathrow and, at worse, collaborators with the airport, colluding in its lies.

And so began a TAG campaign to undermine us, myself in particular. On twitter it centered round the combative Neil Spurrier and his constant stream of tweets. The tweets were invariably – and sometimes viciously - backed up by other 'taggers'. They would also verbally attack me before public meetings. We were publicly criticised in forums and to other campaign groups, and our legitimacy and representativeness questioned with public bodies like the Department for Transport. The culmination of this was a TAG plan to take over HACAN at our 2018 AGM and install its own people as officers. I learnt

It is a logical next step to see HACAN, working constructively with the airport, as taken in by Heathrow or colluding in its lies

TAG campaigned to undermine HACAN, culminating in an aborted coup to take us over at our 2018 AGM

subsequently it was only aborted when they realised the robustness of our constitution would have made a coup difficult.

To this day I ask myself whether HACAN, whether I, could have handled the situation differently. I had gone through similar emotions to those they were experiencing almost 20 years earlier when flight paths operations over me in South London changed. Did I fully appreciate how angry and, in some cases, disturbed these people were? HACAN came to them with what we saw as viable solutions but we perhaps failed to grasp that these bewildered people were at the stage of simply crying out for help. However, although there were some truly decent people within TAG who worked with us and other groups, what we started to struggle with was TAG's conviction, bordering on arrogance, it was always right. Moreover, HACAN could not endorse positions which we believed were not backed up by the facts. Nor would we sacrifice the interests of other areas in order to please TAG. I remember having an email discussion with a leading TAG supporter about the way her flight path solutions would adversely affect other areas. She simply refused even to acknowledge there was a problem. This ran counter to all we stood for. Our values and credibility were rooted in factual accuracy and getting the best deal for *all* residents.

To this day I ask myself whether we could have handled the situation differently

The impact of the trials on Heathrow

But of much more significance than TAG's view of HACAN was the impact the aftermath of the trials had on Heathrow. The most visible thing to emerge was the Community Noise Forum.

The Heathrow Community Noise Forum

Heathrow brought together community groups, local authorities, airlines, the Department for Transport, NATS (the air traffic controllers), the Civil Aviation Authority and ICCAN (the Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise). Aply chaired by Matt Gorman, it provided up-to-date information and allowed community groups and local authority representatives to raise their concerns. In fact, half the meeting was given over to communities to give presentations.

The issues raised generated reports and investigations. For example, Heathrow commissioned a report from the CAA into the wider implications of steeper ascents following representations by TAG. Heathrow also commissioned area-specific studies, carried out by Nicole Porter and her colleagues at Anderson Acoustic Ltd. These in-depth reports can be found on Heathrow's website. Nicole told me that the real value of the reports was to 'confirm what people are experiencing'.

The Forum set up sub-groups, chaired with patience and tact by Rick Norman, which looked in detail at the more technical issues and invited community input into Heathrow's Noise Action Plan and other key documents. Heathrow paid for a noise expert (from a consultancy based in the Netherlands) to give independent advice to community organisations. (In practice, TAG monopolised him!).

This was engagement which was unmatched at probably any other UK airport

This was engagement on a scale which I suspect Heathrow had not envisaged and which was unmatched at probably any other UK airport. And yet the meetings breathed suspicion and antagonism, much of it coming from the communities who had not come to terms with the trials. Perhaps inevitably, they were over-represented at the Forum.

Yet the meetings breathed suspicion and antagonism, much of it coming from people who had not come to terms with the trials

There was a frustration from many community members that Heathrow's engagement was slow in leading to improvements on the ground. It is a frustration I shared but it needs to be put into context. Few large organizations move quickly and, at the time, a lot of Heathrow's focus was on developing plans, including flight paths, for a third runway. However Rick Norman when I interviewed him told me he had a lot of sympathy with the frustration expressed by the residents. I believe it is something Heathrow still has to get right. Quicker results on the ground would ease the frustration.

This lack of results fed into the post-2014 trials paranoia that Heathrow was simply lying about wanting to take action. It was this which led a minority to sour the atmosphere, to the utter frustration of the rest of us. The atmosphere at times was so confrontational and some of the individuals so vocal that many other people didn't feel comfortable speaking up in the meeting. Nobody will forget the moment Kathleen Croft, who for many years represented a community as close as you can get to the airport boundary and so experienced a level of noise unmatched

by the rest of us (and somebody who from years of experience knew Heathrow had improved), became so fed up hearing the same, predominately male, confrontational voices that she switched on her mobile and went round every person in the room to show what it was really like to live with aircraft noise! The reaction of one of my interviewees, *Good on you girl*, was shared I suspect by 90% of the room.

Darren Rhodes



Darren Rhodes seemed to be a particular TAG target. He presented a number of noise reports to the Forum. He went above and beyond what he was required to do, visiting people's homes and working into the small hours of the morning to assess if flight paths had changed yet he remained under constant attack. Darren had graduated from Loughborough University in 1993 with an honours degree in aeronautical engineering. Following this, he conducted research work in aircraft design, noise modelling and noise abatement operating procedures and obtained a PhD for aircraft noise research in 1998. He sits on a range of international

bodies. I don't know if TAG attacked him because they believed he was incompetent or because they feared he might be correct. I certainly found him to be helpful. When HACAN did a report into flight paths in SE London, Darren offered, free of charge, a week's work from the CAA to verify our figures: <http://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Corridors-of-Concentration-Report-1.pdf>

I asked my interviewees how they felt about the antagonism which at times verged on personal abuse.

Jane Dawes said she could understand the frustration – it was often felt by local communities - but she was 'saddened' by the way stronger voices often drowned out others. She felt some communities could put themselves in the shoes of others but some had difficulty in seeing beyond their own experiences.

Matt Gorman, whose chairing probably held the Forum together, told me it was a small group who were publicly confrontational but others would come up to him privately afterwards and say they could see what Heathrow was trying to do. He felt the Forum needs broader, more representative groups rather than self-selecting people.

Nicole Porter believed Heathrow had picked the right people from the Company to be at the Forum. They were prepared to be 'fired at' and for the most part didn't go on the defensive but listened and tried to present transparent information in a meaningful way. But this great communicator did admit that making a presentation to the Forum could be stressful, particularly as she was never sure how it would be portrayed on social media.

I wouldn't want any of this to be read as arguing big corporations should not be criticised. Often they only move when their feet are held to the fire. If they don't feel an element of pressure, the campaign groups are not doing their job properly. But some of the behaviour of the community groups went way beyond that. What interests me is how engagement can take place without the abuse.

Meaningful engagement.....without the abuse

- Ongoing, meaningful engagement should lead to action. And, at its best, it will enable stakeholders, including residents, to help shape an airport's policies and plans.
- Meaningful engagement is the airport 'doing the right thing' by its community but it also needs recognition from the community that the airport has a business to run.
- It should be with a diverse range of people, each probably representing an organisation. To allow this diversity, meetings should be held in the evening and travel expenses available to attendees.
- The airport should expect robust debate but personal abuse should not be tolerated.
- I'd be loathe to exclude people as some airports might use this as an excuse to shut down legitimate debate but if a group or an individual persistently refused to accept verifiable facts, an airport would be entitled to say there is no more it can do for them.

Heathrow gets to work preparing for a new runway and new flights paths

The 2016 Parliamentary vote giving in principle backing to a third runway required Heathrow to draw up detailed plans for third runway which included how it would meet the key conditions it was asked to fulfill by the Government. It would then need to consult on its plans before submitting them to a planning inquiry. The inquiry would make a recommendation to the Government which would take the final decision on the new runway.

It was the consultations on the runway and flight path proposals which showed how much Heathrow had changed

At the same time, Heathrow was being asked to draw up plans for new flight paths. Whether or not it got a third runway, there would be the biggest change to flight paths since the airport opened with the move to a satellite system to guide planes. This new system was being introduced globally so airports around the world were required to reassess their flight paths to ensure they were compatible with the new system.

In my view, it was the consultations on the runway and flight path proposals which showed how much Heathrow had changed as a company. The Department for Transport is now expected to adopt many of Heathrow's ideas in its guidelines for airports across the UK; and the Civil Aviation Authority, when I spoke with them, told me that Heathrow had set 'the gold standard' on flight path consultation.

If this was new territory for Heathrow, it was equally the case for HACAN. Our AGM endorsed our position that, while retaining our opposition to a third runway, we needed to engage with Heathrow in order to get the best possible deal for residents if the runway went ahead; and to influence the new flight paths. To do this effectively, I took the view that, if we were to have influence, we had to work hard to make ourselves as central as we could to the new processes. More than that, we had to get into a position to help shape them.

To some, this was seen as HACAN getting ever closer to Heathrow. That was to misunderstand what we were trying to do. You can stand outside a system and refuse to engage with the process. That is a credible position. But, if at anytime

If you choose to work within the system, you should strain every sinew to shape that system.

you choose to work within the system, you should strain every sinew to shape that system. Turning up at the occasional meeting to have a chat with Heathrow or to shout at them is not going to cut the mustard.

We had a huge opportunity to shape the process. Heathrow knew it had to deliver in order to win the cherished prize of a third runway. It also knew it had to get its flight path changes right or it would be in serious trouble. This was the moment, perhaps above all others, when Heathrow would discuss and make concessions. I also had become convinced that under John Holland-Kaye's leadership Heathrow wanted to do the right thing.

The flight path consultations

I will start with the flight path consultations. These were consultations like no other both in their scope and content. Communities and other stakeholders were being asked what sort of flight paths they wanted; indeed, were being given the chance to help shape and design the flight paths.

Heathrow conducted a huge consultation with leaflets sent out to more than 2 million households. Over 40 exhibitions were staged. Focus groups were also held.

Heathrow asked what was most important to people in the design of flight paths: whether it should:

- aim to affect the fewest number of people (through concentration over selected communities);
- give as many people a period of respite as possible, even though the total numbers impacted would be higher;
- avoid new areas.

Heathrow stressed that it was not a referendum but said it would try to design the flight paths most people wanted. People opted for respite, with avoiding new areas where possible. By far the least popular was the first option of all-day concentration.

Heathrow's follow-up consultation revealed it was drawing up its new flight paths in accordance with what most people wanted: provide respite; with a pledge to avoid new areas if possible. Moreover, Heathrow committed to *everybody* getting a period of respite if a third runway was built (though, of course, a third runway would have resulted in more new areas being overflown and reduced respite for some people in West London who would have seen their half-day respite cut to a third in order to allow all communities to get a break from the noise). This was pioneering stuff. For over a decade, HACAN had campaigned for the fairest possible flight paths (though without a third runway!). Heathrow had now committed to introducing them.

When I interviewed her, Jane Dawes told me that past experience had taught them it was important to involve communities in helping shape the design principles for the flight paths. Nothing like this had ever been tried anywhere else in the world. Heathrow was doing something never previously attempted; and as part of the most complex airspace changes ever carried out. Jane believes that what Heathrow did was of such significance that it will influence how flight path changes are carried out for years to come.

Nothing like this had ever been tried anywhere else in the world. Jane Dawes believes that what Heathrow did was of such significance that it will influence how flight path changes are carried out for years to come. I hope she is right. I think she may be.



The airspace team under Jane Dawes, Head of Airspace, was keen to deliver for residents wherever possible

Preparation for a third runway

It is worth spelling out **the conditions** which Heathrow was required to show it had met if it was to have any chance of getting a third runway:

- ensuring 6 more domestic routes from Heathrow by 2030: Belfast International, Liverpool, Newquay, Humberside, Prestwick and Durham Tees Valley;
- implementing measures to deliver on its commitments of no increase in airport-related road traffic and more than half of passengers using public transport;
- providing a ‘world-class’ package of support for communities affected by expansion including noise insulation for homes and schools;
- putting in place measures to mitigate the impacts of noise including legally binding noise targets, periods of predictable respite and a ban of six and a half hours on night flights;
- honouring its commitment to pay home owners 25% above the market value rate, plus costs, for the compulsory purchase of their homes if they were needed to make way for the new runway.
- ruling out a fourth runway

The Government had watered down the original conditions recommended by the Airports Commission but these were still stringent conditions. Moreover, Heathrow had to demonstrate it had consulted effectively on them. Everything was laid out in the National Policy Statement.

Heathrow set about putting in place the necessary bodies and procedures. I look at some of them.

The Noise Envelope Design Group

Heathrow was required to design a ‘noise envelope’ which would set an overall noise framework within which growth would be allowed. The framework was intended to give local communities some certainty about future noise levels while incentivising the industry to use quieter planes and improved operational practices. The Noise Envelope Design Group – made up of representatives of airlines, NATS, HACAN, local authorities and local businesses, with ICCAN in attendance – played a key role in advising Heathrow on what the envelope should look like. Sensitively chaired by Lisa Lavia, the Managing Director of the Noise Abatement Society, the members of the group, with a diverse range of interests, worked well together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I was very conscious that if the concept could be made to work here it could be rolled out to other airports.

The Noise Expert Panel

The Noise Expert Panel which Heathrow appointed contained seriously impressive people like Professor Stephen Stansfeld who directed the latest work on the World Health Organisation Noise Guidelines, Stephen Turner, one of the most respected noise experts in the country (see my interview on page 47) and Lisa Lavia. Their job was to give independent expert advice to Heathrow, particularly on the more technical aspects of noise. Such was their standing that, if they endorsed something Heathrow was doing, it is unlikely it would be challenged. For example, the Panel endorsed the modelling procedures Heathrow was using in assessing the noise impact of the third runway. It would mean it would be foolish to challenge them at the Public Inquiry.

The Community Engagement Board

The National Policy Statement required Heathrow to set up and fund a Community Engagement Board. This replaced the Consultative Committee which, under the chairmanship of Professor Roderick Smith, had worked well. But the Board had a wider remit: to commission research of its own; to go into the local communities to meet residents and local businesses; to assist those whose homes were required for the third runway; to assess the quality of Heathrow's consultations. I was on the panel which appointed Rachel Cerfontyne as the chair of the Community Engagement Board. Rachel had established an impressive pedigree as Deputy Chair of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, where she had spent nine years.

She proved to be an effective and independent chair of the Community Engagement Board. The Board set up a number of specialist sub-committees like TENAG (covering environment and transport) which, under its chair Kris Beuret, was effective in questioning Heathrow in an informed but non-confrontational way and eliciting honest and useful responses. I'm pleased to say I played a part in persuading Kris, whom I have known for many years, to take the role and helped suggest suitable people to sit on the sub-committee.

There was progress on night flights too. Although we were very disappointed that the guaranteed period without scheduled flights was just 6.5 hours, up from the current 5 hours, but less than the 7 or 8 hours we had pressed for, we had detailed discussions with Heathrow and the airlines to see how rotating the runway used at night could give communities a lot more than 6.5 hours on most nights.

Respite during the day was guaranteed by Heathrow for everybody who would be under the new flight paths, up to about 7,000ft. During my 20 years with HACAN, this was the single biggest demand we received. A third runway obviously would mean that in total more people would be overflowed than at a two-runway airport but it would also allow more communities to get increased periods of respite.

I outline Heathrow's air pollution and climate preparations further on in the publication.

Overseeing the noise work was **Rick Norman, Heathrow's Head of Noise**, an affable man, well-liked by his colleagues and regarded by them as key in pushing forward the noise agenda. Rick had joined BAA in the 1990s. He had lived through the momentous changes that had taken place within the company and had helped shape them.



Rick told me that an early turning point for him came in 2003/4. He was at a committee meeting of the Airport Council International when the Head of Noise came up to him and said he was disappointed an airport the size of Heathrow wasn't doing more on noise.

Rick believes the EU's Environmental Noise Directive of 2002 was important in developing noise policy. It placed duties on member states; and at Heathrow it gave him the legal backing to push things forward. The result was the improved noise measures contained in the Noise Action Plan (covering the period 2005 – 09).

Rick had done his dissertation for his MSC on Noise Management at Airports in 1995/6. He was an early advocate of an independent noise body, raising it with the Department for Transport in the 2000s. But he, too, identified 2010 as a key moment when Heathrow realised it had to do things differently.

Over the years Rick has come to the view that noise is as much about people as it about technical matters

Over the years Rick has come to the view that noise is as much about people as it about technical matters such as metrics or the height of the aircraft. The people impacted need to be involved in the noise debate and in finding solutions. He said it is no good putting artificial noise cut-off points, such as 4,000ft or 7,000ft, if they do not tally with people's experiences. He believes Heathrow's invitation to residents to help shape the flight paths was a step-change in community involvement.

Heathrow had made a point of going out to meet people in their own surroundings. HACAN had accompanied Rick to meetings (and had organised some of them) in areas as distant from Heathrow as Whitechapel, the Royal Docks, Brockley and Stockwell – all at least eighteen miles

'People impacted need to be involved in the noise debate and in finding solutions'

from the airport. Matt Gorman mentioned to me his meetings had included a pub drink with members of Teddington Action Group in their area to hear the noise for himself. And Jane Dawes said Heathrow took the opportunity to make private visits to different community areas to get a greater understanding of the noise climate they experienced and to see if there were any special factors exacerbating the noise in a particular place. Rick made the point it was important in talking to people not just to focus on the people who were disturbed by the planes or, at the other extreme, those who were enthusiastic backers of aviation, but, through focus groups and the like, to hear the views of the people in the middle. An airport needed to get an accurate picture of the impact it was having.

You may argue – and I would agree – that these sorts of meetings in a community should be standard practice for an airport. Sadly, they are not at many airports, outside perhaps of official consultations. And it was not what Heathrow had done in previous eras.

Rick expects the situation will improve at other airports. The guidance from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) – called CAP1616 – means that airports need to engage when designing their flight path changes. It requires the sort of community involvement many of them are not used to. Nicole Porter told me she and colleagues have now been engaged by a number of airports across the country to assist them, since they know that the CAA guidelines require them to have, in effect, a ‘social licence to operate’.

Rick believes the realistic way forward is to develop an approach which has got something in it for all stakeholders. For example, it was no good simply saying to the airlines that they ought to operate fewer flights in order to cut overall noise levels. However, what would work is making growth conditional on using quieter aircraft and employing improved operational practices. Rick said the way forward must be to aim for agreement from all stakeholders for a 10 year framework, setting out clear objectives and outcomes which could be checked every year. He felt that Government and the industry should be looking how to make this happen rather than pursuing ‘an endless quest for an ideal that will never come’.

He drew a parallel with coal mines. His family were miners. It was a hard, nasty job but the miners fought against any pit closures. It was their livelihood. What they wanted the best possible working conditions to be put in place and the environmental impact of the mines on their villages to be minimised. That’s what the good employers strived to do. Rick felt a similar approach should be adopted by airports.

I was keen to know from Rick and from Jane Dawes the extent to which Heathrow’s approach was influencing airports outside the UK. Jane made the point that international airports have regular dialogue and discuss their successes and non-successes. Rick is the chair of the Airport Council International Noise Task Force. He told me that there are ‘leaders and watchers’ amongst the airports but many had signed up to a more progressive approach. Rick is a modest man and I had to press him on the extent Heathrow is leading the change. He eventually admitted that Heathrow is now seen as the airport to go to and ask about noise because of what it is doing.

‘Heathrow is now seen as the airport to go to ask about noise’

Climate change



Heathrow was not required to meet any specific climate conditions when planning for its third runway. It knew, though, it would not get permission for any new runway if it breached wider climate targets. The Government's official advisers, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), made it clear that a new runway could be built without breaking Government's 2050 carbon target for aviation although that would limit growth at other airports and maybe require deeper decarbonisation in other sectors of the economy.

Some campaign groups went to the courts arguing that the Government should have considered the implications of the Paris Agreement when deciding to give Heathrow permission to draw up detailed plans for the third runway. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court which found in favour of Heathrow.

The airport had set out its plans to tackle climate emissions from the third runway in its Heathrow 2.0 document:

<https://www.heathrow.com/content/dam/heathrow/web/common/documents/company/heathrow-2-0-sustainability/a-great-place-to-live/Heathrow2.02.pdf>

Its three main objectives were these:

- An aspiration to make growth from the new runway carbon neutral
- A Centre of Excellence for sustainability at airports & in the wider aviation sector
- Power Heathrow with 100% renewable electricity from April 2017, as a first step to operating a zero carbon airport

Ironically, given this was the area where it faced a legal challenge, Heathrow's work on climate was seriously innovative, particularly its aspiration of making the third runway carbon neutral, with a UK-based off-setting scheme to make that happen. Heathrow had involved leading environmentalists like Ed Gillespie and Tony Juniper, former CEO of Friends of the Earth, in drawing up its strategy.

Matt Gorman, a key figure driving the strategy, expressed frustration to me at what he regarded as the 'inward-looking' and 'intellectually lazy' approach of many environmentalists towards aviation.

'Do we really think that China is going to introduce measures to cut flying? Or India? Or maybe even the US?' he asked with some passion. He argued carbon had to be taken out of flying by adopting a solution that was globally acceptable. He believes sustainable fuels are the way forward and told me real signs have emerged, particularly over the last two years, that wealthy corporations are prepared to invest serious money to make that happen.

'As far as Heathrow is concerned, not just any new runway but the airport, including all flights, would need to be net-zero - and that is non-negotiable.'

Matt Gorman

When I interviewed Andrew Dakers, the CEO of West London Business and a life-long environmentalist, he told me: 'Heathrow is one of the most committed airports in the world' in its determination to achieve zero-carbon aviation.

Matt Gorman had told me that prior to the pandemic Heathrow was virtually full and 16m passengers were flying from regional airports to other hub airports to connect to another destination, i.e. if you constrain a hub airport in a global transport network you rarely stop people flying - there are other connecting journeys available to them.

He ended by saying that, as far as Heathrow and a third runway is concerned, not just the new runway but the airport, including all flights, would need to be net-zero - and that was non-negotiable.

Air Pollution

One of the conditions Heathrow had to meet was this: *implementing measures to deliver on its commitments of no increase in airport-related road traffic and more than half of passengers using public transport*

Essentially, this condition related to air quality. Pre-pandemic, the air quality in the Heathrow area was not good. A few areas exceeded the legal limits. This was mainly down to emissions from vehicles using the surrounding motorways, some of the busiest in the UK. If the third runway had opened around 2026, there would almost certainly have been real air pollution problems in the first few years after its opening as the move towards hybrid and electric vehicles necessary to cut pollution would not have gathered sufficient pace.

Heathrow committed to limiting its use of the third runway until air quality in the surrounding areas met the legal limits. It said that, if necessary, it would introduce a charge on vehicles entering the airport. It was also drawing up plans to cut the number of staff driving to work by looking to upgrade public transport

and active travel. This would free up space for some additional parking for passengers. Its aim was to have no additional airport-related traffic on the roads than before the third runway opened. The air quality plans were being drawn up by the impressive **Andrew Chen** and his team but, in order to meet the targets, new rail and bus schemes would need to be developed. Heathrow persuaded Val Shawcross, who opposed a third runway, to chair its Area Transport Forum. Her appointment was a coup. She is a former London Deputy Mayor for Transport and is well-respected and well-connected across the sector. I have known Val for many years. There is no doubt in my mind she will do an excellent job with the Forum even if Heathrow remains a two-runway airport.



The serious pollution problems were mainly down to the emissions from vehicles using the surrounding motorways

Community Compensation

A key condition was this: *honouring its commitment to pay home owners 25% above market value rate plus costs for the compulsory purchase of their homes if needed to make way for the new runway.*

Around 800 homes would be required to be compulsory purchased and demolished to make way for a third runway. Heathrow invested a lot of time with these communities. Nigel Milton told me he went to many evening meetings, a lot of which were with these communities close to airport, and under threat. This was very different from previous practice when 'the perimeter fence was as far as Heathrow went in every sense of the word'.



Residents whose community and homes were under threat gather round the television in the local pub for news of Parliament's vote on a 3rd runway.

Nigel admitted mistakes were made – sometimes, for example, he engaged with the wrong people, those who shouted the loudest. But he does believe the meetings made a difference. He was happy to do them; happy to be put on the spot. He singled out Cheryl Monk, then Head of Community Relations at Heathrow, for the role she played in communicating with the residents.

Inevitably with communities under threat, these were tense meetings, with worried and sometimes angry people. I asked Nigel how he felt about the criticism that came Heathrow's

Heathrow invested a lot of time with the communities under threat, meeting with them on a regular basis

way. He told me understood where the anger was coming from. He recognised the broken promises of the past. He knew the people he met with 'were not bad, nasty people'. But he was determined to give people the truth, even if at times it was not what they wanted to hear. John Holland-

Kaye had stressed to his colleagues 'not to make promises we won't be able to keep'. Nigel said it was made easier because he knew he was speaking on behalf of a changed company.

He didn't take the criticism personally. The people didn't blame him as a person. He cited a memorable occasion at a meeting at Stanwell Moor where the residents had found out it was his birthday, baked him got a birthday cake and sung Happy Birthday. This was at a time Heathrow was looking to knock down their homes.

Over the years I became very familiar with these communities and made good friends within them. What Nigel says rings very true. These were people who on the whole valued the airport. Many of them or members of their family had worked at the airport. They realised that having an international airport on their doorstep brought prosperity to the area. I sense that many saw themselves as part of the airport 'family' in a way that would never be the case with Richmond or Teddington. But what they wanted was a fair deal from the airport; for Heathrow to be a considerate neighbour. Matt Gorman told me that for him 'the most emotive part of the expansion project' was thinking about the people who didn't want to lose their homes at any cost.

Heathrow's offer to residents to pay the pre-blighted value of their home, plus 25%, plus stamp duty and removal costs was extended to over 2,000 households who would be severely impacted by the noise of aircraft landing at and taking off from the new runway. This would not be compulsory purchase but any resident who wanted to could take up the offer. If all residents did so, the total cost to the airport of this plus the compulsory purchase would have been over £1 billion.

There is little doubt that the offer divided the community. It is probably true that most people would not have left of choice but many found the offer acceptable. It meant that Stop Heathrow Expansion didn't have the same level of support as its predecessor body, NoTRAG, could command ten years earlier.

The alternative which some residents supported

When the Airports Commission narrowed the options down to Heathrow or Gatwick, it was actually looking at 3 schemes. In addition to Heathrow's third runway, it had shortlisted the



Jock Lowe, the brainchild behind the Heathrow Hub scheme

extended runway proposal put forward by Heathrow Hub. The idea was to build a new runway west of the existing northern runway but on the same alignment; in effect, an extended runway. Its backers cited a number of advantages over Heathrow's scheme. The number of homes that would need to go would be far less. It could be built more cheaply and growth could be phased in more easily. Heathrow argued it would be less generous to local communities and it certainly would mean many more planes for people under the flight path to the northern runway.

Heathrow Hub said the way to minimise this was to use and rotate curved flight paths so that most communities got more respite than they do today. It was the brainchild of Jock Lowe, Britain's best-known Concorde pilot. We bonded over respite! His idea of multiple rotating flight paths was music to my ears. For local communities, the issue is usually not how many runways there may be but how many planes are likely to go over their homes in any one day. Jock was to become a valued adviser to us on flight paths.

Heathrow involved credible experts

One of the most striking features of Heathrow's preparation for a third runway was the way it had managed to persuade some of the country's leading experts in their fields to become involved. I've touched on their different roles already. Amongst them were people who would not have been natural supporters of a third runway. Val Shawcross had been fiercely opposed. Stephen Turner had given evidence against Terminal Five. Stephen Stansfeld had written extensively about the impact of aircraft noise on children, often in conjunction with Charlotte

Many of them continued to oppose a third runway but understood that, if it was going to happen, this was a real chance to influence a company that was looking to do the right thing

Clark who was now engaged by Heathrow. Tony Juniper was an outspoken environmentalist; Kris Beuret, passionate about social justice and inclusive engagement. I had known most of these people for many years.

They hadn't suddenly become unprincipled men and women. Many of them continued to oppose a third runway. But they also understood that, if it was going to happen, and it looked likely, there was a real chance to influence a company that was looking to do the right thing. Moreover, environmental good practice, and good practice in community engagement, developed here could become a model which could be used as other airports not only in the UK and Europe but across the world.

I interviewed Andrew Dakers, the Chief Executive of

West London Business. Andrew had grown up under the flight path in West London (and still lives under it). He had stood as the Liberal Democrat candidate in the Brentford & Isleworth constituency at the 2005 General Election. He was perhaps the only Parliamentary candidate who camped out in a field close to Heathrow during the 2007 Climate Camp. His previous jobs included a period at WWF. He is passionate about climate change. He told me that his view probably remains that there should be no new runways but it became clear to him from the Airport Commission's findings that expansion was going to



Andrew Dakers, the Chief Executive of West London Business, who had camped out at the 2007 Climate Camp, became a supporter of a third runway

happen somewhere and he came to the view it should be concentrated at Heathrow. There was merit in having a hub airport. It assisted the UK's position in the global economy, giving business a good range of opportunities. He also believed that the Heathrow leadership was managing both the environmental and local impacts of expansion. It had a staff team in place do this which was not the case at the other airports. Andrew said that it is often the case that, when the will is there, it is the bigger airports which can lead the way and make a significant national difference. They have the resources to influence the thinking of the airlines and politicians. He believed 'Heathrow is one of the most committed airports in the world' to achieving zero-carbon aviation. He was also interesting on the potentially positive impact Heathrow's commitment to climate change could have on the practices of the smaller businesses in West London in areas like procurement. The London West Innovation District was supported by Heathrow. He said Heathrow won't lower its standards. SMEs will need to raise theirs. But he also said it was important Heathrow understood SME's operated at much smaller scale than the airport and for most small and medium-sized businesses local, practical action on the ground was of utmost importance for Heathrow to have maximum impact.

Putting it all in perspective

Stephen Turner has had dealings with Heathrow for 40 years. I turned to him to put the changes into perspective. He is one of the best known and most respected acousticians in the UK. Currently the President of the Institute of Acoustics, he had been a civil servant in the noise division of DEFRA (the Department for Environment) and for many years worked in consultancy, including Bureau Veritas. But it was as a young officer working for the Greater London Council in the early 1980s that he first encountered Heathrow.



The Terminal 4 Inquiry had not long ended. The Inspector had made permission for the terminal conditional on there being an annual flight limit of 275,000. In the early 1980s BAA was still a publicly owned company. As such, the Department for Transport set a lot of its rules, including many of the noise regulations. Even after the airport was privatised in the late 1980s, Heathrow wasn't completely its own boss when it came to noise management. The Department for Transport still set many of the noise regulations and Heathrow did seem at times to use this as a shield to hide behind.

Even after it was privatised in 1987, Heathrow wasn't completely its own boss when it came to noise. The Department for Transport still set many of the regulations.

At the Terminal 5 Inquiry in the mid/late 1990s the Department's noise policy was heavily criticised. Stephen, who gave evidence for the local authorities opposing

the fifth terminal, told me that BAA (and presumably the Department) had predicted that the daytime noise would reduce as planes became quieter and that therefore noise going forward would not be a problem. It only looked at the time period from 0700- 2300 and also only considered people living within the 57 decibel contour. I certainly remember the look of astonishment on the face of a senior civil servant when, around 2002, I told her that people well outside the 57 contour were moving house because of the noise.

I very much got the impression from Stephen that the Department's Heathrow noise policy was, at best, incomplete. There were no night noise contours routinely produced, no environmental noise monitors, and its sleep policy was based on evidence that was increasingly being challenged. It took the work of the Greater London Council and the affected local authorities and people like Stephen to unearth many of these inconsistencies and, indeed, to install the first noise monitors that measured the noise as it affected people. He told me that the lack of trust in the BAA and the Department at the time was palpable.

At the Terminal 5 Inquiry the Department's noise policy was heavily criticised. It assumed noise would reduce as planes became quieter and that therefore noise going forward would not be a problem.

Terminal 5 was of course given the go-ahead after an Inquiry lasting just two months short of four years. Stephen told me it lasted so long it used to have its own Annual Dinner Dance! But evidence to the Inquiry did open up the noise debate. World-renowned experts like Stephen Stansfeld from Queen Mary's College and Brigitte Berglund, who oversaw the World Health Organisation's 1999 Noise Guidelines, were brought in to give evidence.

However, Heathrow was not able to exert more control over noise policy until the introduction of the EU Environmental Noise Directive (END) in 2002. This required airports to draw up noise action plans. And the plans had to be signed off by both the Department for Transport *and* DEFRA. Heathrow, off its own bat, began to draw up END contours annually rather than every 5 years as required by the Directive. Furthermore, with other noise modelling software becoming available, Heathrow had become less reliant on the Department for Transport's ANCON model.

Stephen told me that in the 2000s the Department for Transport seemed very cautious about taking initiatives on aviation noise policy. It was nervous about the noise action plans when they were first mandated by the European Union. Eventually, it began to grow in confidence and came to understand initiatives like noise action plans had the potential to improve the noise climate, reduce the number of complaints, while not disrupting the effective operation of the airport.

Heathrow insisted the Noise Expert Panel gave independent advice. In fact Heathrow wanted honest answers to a range of 'jaw-dropping' fundamental questions.

Stephen was appointed as the independent auditor of the implementation of Heathrow's second Noise Action Plan, published in 2013. Heathrow stressed to him that it wanted an honest and independent view. And, of course, Stephen was invited to chair the Noise Expert Panel. Heathrow insisted that the group give

independent advice. In fact, it was in everybody's interest that it did so. As I said on page 46, if the group approved a methodology or process, it was unlikely to be challenged subsequently.

Stephen said that Heathrow, in preparing for the Public Inquiry on the third runway could have taken the easy way out and done the minimum required. It went way beyond that, employing impressive consultants such as **Richard Greer** from Arup.

Stephen told me that the range of the questions Heathrow wanted honest answers to was 'jaw-dropping' - for example, it asked how to improve Webtag (the Government software used to assess the monetary impacts of noise, pollution etc of a development) for the purpose of assessing the third runway.

Everything came to a shuddering halt with the first legal challenge and then with Covid. I asked Stephen the same question I asked many of my other interviewees – did he think the groundbreaking work would survive? He felt it certainly would if a third runway came back but also believed that, although there was a risk it would disappear, the chances were it would be used elsewhere, particularly if Heathrow could be persuaded to open up its archives.

Finally, I put to Stephen my belief that Heathrow was a changed company. He agreed, without hesitation.

The reasons Heathrow changed

Heathrow has moved from an untrustworthy pariah to being an airport developing some of the most innovative policies and practices in the world.

The key factors behind the change:

- 1.** It understood it had little choice but to change after the third runway was refused in 2010.
- 2.** It had a chief executive in John Holland-Kaye who wanted change and was prepared to provide strong leadership to achieve it.
- 3.** He had around him a team who not only bought into the change agenda but actively strove to push it forward.
- 4.** It began to embed that change within the organisation.
- 5.** It publically acknowledged and apologised for past mistakes.
- 6.** It revolutionised its relationship with local communities. Not only did it seek to reach out to them and to try to understand their concerns but also asked them to help shape its future policies and practices.
- 7.** It led the way in finding solutions to climate change, one of the biggest issues of our age.
- 8.** It was willing to put money into research which benefited other airports in the UK.
- 9.** It was willing to be unpopular with some others in the aviation industry – for example in its early support for an independent noise regulator.
- 10.** It began to operate an efficient airport without which its other arguments may have lacked credibility.

Will the change last?

We can never be certain but I believe it will. I think this for a number of reasons.

1. Although Heathrow has had to let a lot of its senior staff go due to Covid-induced cutbacks, many 'change-makers' still remain at the airport. Much will depend on them.
2. Much will also depend on the new staff coming in or being promoted adopting a similar approach. Resources will be a bigger problem post-Covid.
3. A key factor – perhaps *the* key factor – is that John Holland-Kaye is still there. At some stage he will choose to step down. The choice of his successor will be critical.
4. The staff who have moved on are likely to bring the Heathrow approach with them.
5. The new attitudes towards noise, flight paths, climate change and community engagement are probably firmly enough embedded within the airport's thinking not to be reversed.
6. Heathrow made real efforts to ensure as many people as possible within the organisation bought into change. I was invited to address a number of major conferences of Heathrow staff. My role was to outline where communities were coming from and what was most important to us. I spoke alongside leading environmentalists like Professor Sir David King, former chief scientific adviser to the Government, and others. These weren't PR events for Heathrow to sell its community or environmental credentials. They were internal events put on by a company trying to bring its staff along with it as it travelled in a new direction.
7. ICCAN, the independent noise authority, which both Heathrow and HACAN had long fought for, is in place. ICCAN has established credibility with most local community groups. Residents who have met Rob Light and his team have been impressed with their fairness and ability to listen. I think ICCAN will grow in strength and push other airports to adopt the sort of noise policies Heathrow has been developing.
8. Some of Heathrow's ideas are already starting to appear in the thinking of the Department for Transport, some European bodies and at a few other UK airports.
9. There is growing interest from other European airports and further afield in Heathrow's ideas.
10. There are books in the pipeline from some of the key figures at Heathrow during the decade of change which will embed the policies and practices developed.

Endpiece

My own view is that there will be no going back to the 'old' Heathrow. The change has become too ingrained for that to happen; so ingrained I think that there will be no desire within the company to resurrect its former self. Sometimes when change takes place going back becomes inconceivable. I'm reminded of the campaign in the 1980s by the Disability Action Network for accessible buses in London. Wheelchair users blocked Oxford Street as part of a campaign of direct action. Forty years on London's bus network is fully accessible. Nobody would ever consider of going back to the 1980s. The change within Heathrow is not as solid as that but it is very difficult to envisage the company returning to an era of broken promises, limited community engagement or inaction on noise, air pollution or climate change.

That is not say it will not face challenges. It will have fewer resources to spend on these matters as it recovers from the Covid losses. During this time it will be required to deliver on extensive airspace and flight path changes. It will want to grow again at a time when aviation must reduce its climate footprint. And – a theme of this publication – it will need to ensure that its policies result in more rapid improvements for communities on the ground.

What will be interesting will be the extent Heathrow's pioneering work has a wider ripple effect. Globally is currently seen as the 'go to' airport on noise. Its work on climate change is pioneering. The Civil Aviation Authority regarded its consultation on flight path changes as the 'gold standard'. Will other UK airports follow suit? Given they have fewer resources, will they be able to? Will airports internationally recognise the benefit of Heathrow's approach? Will companies outside the aviation sector seek to adopt some of Heathrow's ideas?

The future will be interesting. What is clear is that Heathrow's work over the last decade or so will make it a different future than it would otherwise have been.

Printed by Rap Spiderweb

ISBN 978-1-3999-0035-5

Published August 2021