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Dear Supporter

As we approach our Annual General Meeting (more about this later) this is a good opportunity to bring you up to date on airport related issues, locally and nationally.

Passenger Numbers

As a consequence of Covid-19 Stansted's annual passenger throughput fell from 28.2 million in 2019 to just 7.4m in 2020 and 7.1m in 2021. The Civil Aviation Authority recently published its final airport statistics for 2022, showing that Stansted handled 23.3m passengers last year, which is 83% of its pre-Covid throughput. The recovery has continued this year and we expect Stansted to handle about 26m-27m passengers in the 12 months to 31 December 2023.

Other UK airports are also gradually returning to pre-Covid levels of business. Last year, Gatwick handled 70% of its pre-Covid business level, Luton 73%, and Heathrow 76%.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, expansion plans which were shelved during Covid are now being dusted down and prepared for submission. Luton recently submitted a formal application for an increase in its current cap of 18 million passengers per annum (mppa) to 32mppa.

Luton is Stansted's main competitor and has ambitious growth plans. It has just opened a new automated shuttle train (the "Dart") connecting the airport terminal to Luton Airport Parkway station in just over three minutes, replacing the previous bus transfer service.

The journey between London St Pancras and Luton Airport terminal now takes under 35 minutes, compared to around 50 minutes to/from London for the Stansted Express.

Stansted's other main competitor, Gatwick, will soon submit a planning application for permission to convert its existing stand-by runway for use by scheduled flights – effectively making it a two-runway airport. If approved, this would enable Gatwick to handle 75mppa. This compares to its pre-pandemic (2019) level of 46mppa and 33mppa handled last year.

Meanwhile, Heathrow remains tight-lipped on the timing of its proposed third runway. This obtained Government backing in July 2018 and cleared various legal challenges in the Supreme Court in December 2020. Heathrow appears to be waiting for stronger evidence of a recovery in the air travel market before committing to this £15 billion project.

Even without Heathrow expansion, it is clear that Stansted will face stiff competition from other airports over the coming years. Many will ask how all this planned expansion can be reconciled with the Government's statutory duty to achieve 'Net Zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2050? You might want to write to your local MP and ask that question!

Future Development of Stansted

Manchester Airports Group (MAG) is currently updating its so-called Sustainable Development Plan (SDP) for Stansted which will set out its long term plans for the development of Stansted. In the next few months we expect that a draft version of the Stansted SDP will be published for consultation.

We will want to scrutinise this very carefully to ensure that the future plans for Stansted are truly sustainable. We have learned from the past that the word "sustainable" is MAG-speak for "profitable".

New Flight Paths

We seem to have been waiting for ever to be presented with a shortlist of potential new Stansted flight paths for public consultation. There is still no confirmed date for the start of the consultation.

When flight paths are changed there are always winners and losers and so, again, the proposed changes will need to be considered very carefully and when we have the details we will communicate the proposed changes to our members and provide advice on how to respond to the consultation.

Night Flights

As previously reported, we expect the Department of Transport (DfT) to launch a public consultation on night flights later this year. Stansted currently has an annual allowance of 13,700 flights during the 6½ hour period from 23:30 to 06:00. In the year to 31 March 2023, Stansted had a record 12,307 flights during the controlled period which represents 90% utilisation of the DfT limit.

A longstanding agreement with Uttlesford District Council prohibits Stansted Airport Ltd (STAL) from lobbying the DfT for any relaxation in the restrictions on night flights. We know from past experience that we will need to be very vigilant to ensure that both MAG and STAL abide by this agreement.

Our position is that there needs to be a gradual phasing out of night flights, except emergencies, by 2030 and that the night period should be extended to the full 8 hours from 23:00 to 07:00. Night flights are the biggest single cause for complaints about the airport and we will use the upcoming consultation to press the case for these changes on behalf of local residents.

Annual General Meeting

Members are cordially invited to attend our AGM which will take place on Wednesday 14 June 2023 at the Silver Jubilee Hall, Takeley, starting at 8.00pm. If you are planning to attend, it would be helpful if you could let us know by 12 June, by emailing info@stanstedairportwatch.com or by telephoning the SAW office on 01279 870558.

The AGM agenda is attached. Our annual accounts will be posted on the SSE website at <https://stanstedairportwatch.com/about-us/financial-accounts/> as soon as they become available and printed copies of the accounts will be provided at the AGM.

With many thanks for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely



Brian Ross, Chairman