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13 November 2008

Council gives in to 'bully boy' tactics, opening door to airport's expansion by stealth

Campaigners have condemned the decision last night by North Somerset Council's South Area to allow Bristol airport's controversial 'walkway' to go ahead without a full planning application saying that the airport had used 'bully boy' tactics to ride roughshod over the concerns of local communities.

The Stop Bristol Airport Expansion group said that the councillors' decision has opened a back door that will allow the airport to expand by stealth.

The mood from the majority of councillors last night was that that the airport should submit a full planning application because they still considered the 'walkway' as an extension to the terminal building.

However, SBAE said that the airport's use of a narrow and outdated point of law intimidated councillors into believing that the issue would be sent to a judicial review with a risk that would land the council with costs – a fear that pushed councillors into allowing 'permitted development' for the 'walkway'.

SBAE spokesperson Hilary Burn said: "The councillors caved in because they were frightened that if this decision was referred to the Secretary of State and was awarded against them the Council would have to pick up the costs. But their decision has opened the door to the airport's expansion by stealth.

"We shall continue our preparations for the proposed planning application to take passenger numbers up to 10 million per year by 2016."

NSC councillors had already given a 'resounding 'No' when the 'walkway', which is a two-storey structure more than four times the length of the existing terminal, was presented in May for 'permitted development,' agreeing with arguments from local residents and campaigners that the walkway could increase the airport's capacity and should therefore be submitted to the scrutiny of a planning application.

SBAE campaigners believe that the airport wants to avoid such scrutiny and the conditions that may be attached through planning controls. They point out that if the walkway genuinely has no connection to the airport's plans for growth, a full planning application could have been submitted any time in the last six months as requested by NSC.

Passenger throughput currently stands at approximately 6.5 million, the figure

forecast in BIA's Master Plan for 2010.

BIA management stated at the last Airport Consultative Committee Meeting (23 October 2008) that passenger numbers could grow to 7.3 mpa or even to 8 mpa through changes within the terminal and greater efficiencies.

ENDS

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For further information on SBAE visit: www.stopbia.com