

Annual Review 2020



An Extraordinary Year

The year 2020 was extraordinary, dominated by two issues, namely:

- Our efforts to challenge the proposals submitted by Manchester Airports Group ('MAG') to increase Stansted's permitted annual throughput from 35 million passengers to 43 million;
- The Covid-19 pandemic and its impact upon the demand for air travel.

Taking these points in turn:

Planning Application

Following a six-month review by the new Planning Committee, appointed after the Residents Party took control of Uttlesford District Council ('UDC') in May 2019, a special meeting of the Planning Committee was held on 24 January 2020 to consider new issues raised by SSE concerning the Stansted Airport Planning Application. At the start of the meeting SSE made a wide-ranging presentation to the UDC Planning Committee setting out the case for refusal.

The outcome was that the Planning Committee, consisting of 12 members, decided by 10 votes to zero to overturn the earlier conditional approval. Two Committee members who were closely associated with SSE abstained from the vote, based on precautionary legal advice.

UDC's decision to refuse permission was closely followed (7 February 2020) by the news that SSE had lost its High Court challenge. This had begun in 2018 and had been aimed at forcing the application to be determined by the Secretary of State rather than by UDC. Now that UDC had reversed its position, the High Court decision could actually have been viewed as helpful.

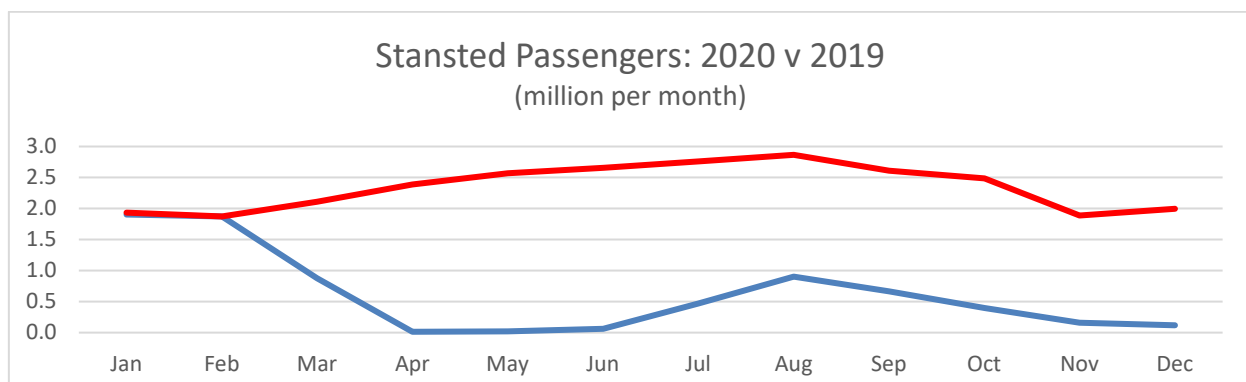
However, we judged that MAG would almost certainly appeal against the UDC decision and this would automatically trigger an expensive and resource-intensive Public Inquiry where the odds would be stacked in MAG's favour. We therefore decided to appeal against the High Court ruling. Our reasoning was that if our challenge succeeded in the Court of Appeal, the planning application would be dealt with under the Development Control Order ('DCO') process which was more affordable, less resource intensive and, in our view, offered a greater prospect of success.

Unfortunately, the Court of Appeal would not allow our appeal and, as expected, MAG lodged an appeal against UDC's refusal, waiting until 24 July 2020, the final day allowed, before doing so.

The Planning Inspectorate wasted little time in laying down the rules, format and timetable for the Public Inquiry and there was then a frenetic four-month period during which time we had (amongst other things) to hire barristers and expert consultants, submit our detailed Statement of Case and provide comprehensive Proofs of Evidence on eleven separate topics. The Inquiry was scheduled to start on 12 January 2021, just under a year since UDC's refusal decision.

Covid-19 Pandemic

This began to take its toll on the aviation industry in early March 2020, as can be seen below:



For 2020 as a whole, Stansted handled just 7.4 million passengers, compared to 28.1 million passengers in 2019. Notwithstanding this huge reduction, MAG remained fully determined to secure approval for its plans to increase Stansted's annual permitted throughput from 35 million to 43 million passengers.

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Aside from the Airport Planning Application and the Covid-19 pandemic, other notable events and developments in the course of 2020 were as follows:

Ten Year Anniversary

Sunday 24 May 2020 marked exactly ten years since BAA abandoned its second runway plans for Stansted in 2010, following an eight-year SSE campaign which challenged BAA at every turn.

A second Stansted runway was at the heart of the 2003 White Paper, confirming Government proposals that had been put forward in July 2002 to make Stansted bigger than Heathrow. These proposals had shocked the local community and led to the establishment of SSE in August 2002.



By the time BAA finally conceded defeat and withdrew its second runway plans for Stansted, it had spent over £200 million on preparatory work, including buying up land and houses which were to be demolished to make way for the expansion of the airport.

The £200 million wasted by BAA was just a fraction of the cost to local residents in terms of stress and uncertainty, and the property blight which had plagued the local area for eight years.

New Website

The original SSE website served us well for almost 18 years but technology had moved on and a new platform was needed. The new SSE website went live in June 2020 and we took the opportunity to refresh the appearance, improve the graphics and simplify navigation for users.

Calendar

The SSE Community Calendar was once again a sell-out success, raising much-needed funds for the campaign, particularly at a time when our financial resources were being stretched to the limit by legal proceedings and the costs of preparing for the upcoming Public Inquiry.

The Calendar also provides local residents (and many buyers and recipients from much further afield) with a monthly reminder of the outstanding landscape and heritage which makes the local area around Stansted Airport such a special place, and worth fighting for to protect from over-development.