

London City Airport: 25 Years of Deception



On Saturday 28th July the Queen visited London City Airport twenty-five years after she unveiled a plague to officially open it. It has been 25 years of deception of local residents.

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Local people were fooled into thinking they were only getting a small airport with a limited number of “whispering” planes. London City was given permission on the basis that there would be no more than just over 30,000 flights a year using turbo-prop aircraft. Now the airport has permission for 120,000 jet aircraft.

All this has been justified in terms of assisting the local economy. Yet the airport employs fewer local people than a large supermarket and only about 2,000 in total. It does not contribute oodles of money to the local economy: well over 60% of its passengers are business people heading for Docklands and the City; they don't spend money locally. Few of them stop off in the local cafes for a “Full English” breakfast!

In the beginning.....



Little did local people expect these planes to be replaced by jets

I remember sitting in the cramped studios of Radio Thamesmead in the 1980s debating City Airport. The aviation industry representative reassured listeners in soothing terms that he was a man of his word: all he wanted was this small airport with the famously ‘whispering’ planes. How things changed!

It is instructive to quote the words of the Inspector at the Public Inquiry where permission for the airport was given:

Summarising my views on noise control, aircraft types should be restricted.....and flights should be limited to the equivalent of 30,160 DASH-7 movements per year, 120 per day from Monday to Friday and 40 per day on Saturdays or Sundays.

He made it clear that, for the sake of the local community, those were the only conditions on which he was recommending permission be given. May 1985 saw the outline planning consent granted from the secretary of State on the basis of the Inspector's recommendations. The first aircraft landed on 31 May 1987, with the first commercial services operating from 26 October 1987.

A litany of deception:

In 1989 just two years after its opening the airport owners submitted a planning application to extend the runway, allowing the use of a larger number of aircraft types.

In 1992 the application was approved and it opened in March 1992. At the same time the glideslope was reduced to 5.5 degrees to allow a larger range of aircraft to serve the airport. The glideslope (the angle at which planes descend) had been 7 degrees so as to reduce the number of people disturbed by the noise.

In 1998 approval was given to increase the number of passenger flights.

In 2002 a jet centre catering for business jets was opened. They were not to be included in the total number of flights permitted to use the airport.

In 2009 the airport finally got permission to increase flights from a maximum of 80,000 – 120,000 a year.

Broken Promises

Promise broken: Just 2 years after it opened an application was made to extend the runway and use larger aircraft.

Another promise broken: Within a few years of that, approval was sought and given to increase the *number* of flights

Yet another promise broken: Business jets introduced

And another broken promise: Flight numbers allowed to rise to 120,000

The quieter turbo-propops are gradually being phased out, being replaced with the noisier jets. Because the jets require more space in which to take off, in recent years flight paths have been extended bringing significant noise to places such as Leytonstone, Wanstead and Dagenham, many miles from the airport.

For most of its 25 years the taxpayer has funded all the policing of City Airport. It is now owned by a hedge fund with no connection to and probably feels little responsibility for, the local community ?

It's been a right royal con, ma'am.

- **25 years ago** local residents were promised just 30,000 planes, all of the small and pretty quiet
- **25 years on** they are faced with 120,000 aircraft, the big majority being jets.
- **It is just not believable that the airport had any intention of keeping the promises made 25 years ago.** It has been a quarter of a century of expansion based on deception. Expansion supported by the local authority, Newham Council, and a supine Consultative Committee which is meant to hold the airport to account.