

Leeds Climate Commission Statement¹ on the Leeds Bradford Airport Planning Application

The Leeds Climate Commission is a voluntary body set up to bring individuals from organisations and groups from the public, private and third sectors together to support and guide climate action in the city. It has always been recognised that at times this would not be easy and would involve difficult decisions.

The organisations represented on the Commission have a range of views on the outcome of the Leeds Bradford Airport planning application, with strong opinions held on either side of the argument.

For some, this decision is at odds with the city's climate emergency declaration, it impacts on the credibility of our commitment to reach net zero by 2030, it could damage the willingness of the public and of organisations in the city to commit to climate action, and it sends a negative signal in the run up to the UK hosting COP26 later in the year.

For others, in the absence of a national aviation strategy to coordinate levels of flying across different airports, the denying of the planning application would have simply diverted passenger growth to other regions, preventing the necessary upgrading of the airport and failing to support the local economy.

These positions cannot be easily reconciled and will continue to provoke debate in the Commission and within the city.

Despite the differences in view, the Commission does agree the following:

1. That reducing the impact of aviation on climate change is critically important.
2. That we cannot place significant faith in the potential for new technologies (biofuels or electric planes) to significantly reduce the impact of flying in the next decade, or rely on tree planting to substantially offset the impact of flying in the next decade.
3. That the carbon impact of aviation comes disproportionately from a small number of frequent flyers and this needs to be reflected in schemes and initiatives that shape consumer demand for aviation.
4. That we recognise the desperate need for a national aviation strategy that is consistent with the 6th carbon budget and its recommendations in order to provide a context for a coordinated, UK-wide approach on this issue.
5. That in light of this decision, and of the Commission's recent annual report that found that prior to the pandemic direct carbon emissions from the city have been falling by less than 4%² a year when reductions of above 10% are needed, the City urgently needs to accelerate ambitious new plans to tackle its direct carbon emissions and to promote investment decisions that are compatible with this.
6. That such new plans should be an integral part of an inclusive economic development strategy for the city that focuses on the creation of good quality green jobs.

¹ This statement is issued by the Leeds Climate Commission, but it cannot be taken to reflect the views of any individual members of the Commission.

² This is based on data to 2019. The impacts of more recent initiatives may not yet be apparent, and some of the changes triggered by the lockdown (e.g. increased working from home or reduced business travel) may continue to impact on carbon emissions once the lockdown has ended.