

Richmond Thematic Community Conversation: Heathrow Expansion, including a Third Runway

Date: 23 July 2026

Chair: Cllr Gareth Roberts, Leader of Richmond Council

Summary

Richmond Council convened residents, councillors, MPs, campaigners and officers to discuss the Government’s draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS) and the implications of a possible third runway. The meeting aimed to explain the consultation and planning process, gather local evidence for the Council’s response, and help residents prepare their own submissions.

The discussion focused on the Government’s four tests—economic growth, noise, air quality and climate change—and whether the proposed policy gives sufficient weight to local health, environmental and quality-of-life impacts. Speakers repeatedly questioned the strength of the economic case, the use of airport-wide rather than local noise measures, reliance on legal air-quality thresholds, uncertainty around surface transport funding, and dependence on future technologies to control emissions.

Residents described existing aircraft noise, disrupted sleep and respite, sensory impacts, concerns about wildlife and protected sites, and uncertainty about ultrafine particles and construction traffic. The meeting closed with a call for residents and organisations to submit evidence-based responses, while Richmond Council reaffirmed its opposition to expansion and its preference for a “better, not bigger” Heathrow.

AGENDA

19:30 -19:35	Welcome and introduction to the Community Conversation
19:35 -19:45	Presentations providing the background to the consultation process
19:45 -20:10	Presentation and discussion on noise pollution
20:10-20:30	Presentation and discussion on air pollution
20:30-21:20	Open discussion
21:20 - 21:30	Event close

PANEL MEMBERS:

- Cllr Julia Neden-Watts, Chair of the Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sports Services Committee (London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council)
- Cllr Phil Giesler, Business and Growth Lead Member ((London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council)
- Munira Wilson MP for Twickenham
- Sarah Olney MP for Richmond Park
- Ruth Cadbury MP for Brentford and Isleworth and Chair of the Commons Transport Select Committee
- Paul Beckford, No Third Runway Coalition
- Jamie Fisher, Head of Policy and Strategy, (London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council)

MEETING NOTES

1. Welcome	
Welcome	• The Chair welcomed residents joining in person and online. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together Richmond Councillors, MPs, action groups, and residents to: ○ Raise awareness about the Heathrow Airport National Policy Statement (HENPS) consultation which closes on 1 September 2026. ○ Hear directly from residents so their views can be incorporated into the Council's submission. ○ Provide information which can be used by residents and local organisations in their individual submissions.
2. Opening presentations	
Jamie Fisher, Head of Policy and Strategy, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.	• The Government revived plans for Heathrow expansion in 2025 as part of its growth strategy and is now reviewing the HENPS. • The policy would establish the need for a north-west third runway, potentially adding around 260,000 flights a year, subject to the 'four tests' tests on air quality, noise, climate change and economic growth. • Richmond Council is concerned that the framework favours expansion, underestimates local health and environmental impacts, and relies too heavily on mitigation and legal thresholds; it instead supports a better, not bigger, Heathrow with stronger noise and air-quality protections, a meaningful night-flight ban and independent scrutiny of the economic and environmental case.
Ruth Cadbury, MP, Chair of Transport Select Committee	• The Transport Select Committee will scrutinise the draft HENPS through public evidence sessions covering its economic, environmental, health and infrastructure impacts, assessing the robustness of the Government's four tests and the implications of designating the scheme as

	‘critical national growth infrastructure’. The Committee expects to report by 27 November, ahead of a Parliamentary decision by the end of December 2026.
Paul Beckford, No Third Runway Coalition	Details were provided on the consultation process. The new Prime Minister’s past opposition to Heathrow expansion could be an opportunity to change course. The scheme’s economic case was questioned. The shorter, less accessible consultation compared with 2018 is problematic.
3. Noise pollution	
Jamie Fisher, Head of Policy and Strategy, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.	- Noise will be assessed on an airport-wide, rather than a local basis. Areas like Richmond might see more noise through more concentrated and the longer duration of flights over this area. It is crucial to assess how often, where and when the flights take place. - The HENPS refers to a “night-flight ban” - in practice this is a 6.5-hour period with no scheduled flights. The Council is concerned that Heathrow expansion could reduce the duration of respite periods.
Summary of discussion	- Residents and panel members raised concerns that the proposed night-flight ban applies only to scheduled flights, meaning delayed aircraft may still land, and questioned whether existing rules are sufficiently enforced or transparent. - Discussion highlighted Government analysis suggesting that Heathrow expansion could expose around 900,000 additional people to aircraft noise, bringing the total affected to approximately 3.4 million. Participants argued that health impacts, including sleep disturbance, sensory sensitivities and mental wellbeing, should be assessed more fully before the planning process advances. - Residents questioned the economic case for a third runway, noting reduced projected national growth benefits, rising costs and uncertainty over surface-transport funding. Alternatives discussed included increasing capacity through larger aircraft while retaining two runways. The conversation also explored runway alternation, changing wind patterns and the distribution of noise across Whitton, Isleworth, Kew and surrounding communities. Further questions covered aircraft altitude, noise-limit enforcement and steeper landing or take-off gradients.
4. Air quality and climate change	
Jamie Fisher, Head of Policy and Strategy, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.	On air quality, the test is that the scheme must not cause any new breaches of legal obligations or make existing breaches materially worse. The Council’s view is that this is too narrow. The Government’s targets are not based on the World Health Organisation’s targets on Air Quality, which the Council has committed to in its Air Quality Strategy.

	- On surface access and transport, the sticking point is who pays for it. There is a target that 50% of journeys made to the airport will be via public transport, but Heathrow has in the past indicated that it expects the Government to pay for these improvements. - On climate change, the test is the scheme must not result in an increase in carbon emissions that are significant enough to have a material impact on the UK's legally binding carbon budgets. Residents are entitled to ask whether the emissions are genuinely compatible with net zero. The Council is wary of relying on uncertain future technologies. - Climate impacts should be independently tested.
Summary of discussion	Discussion highlighted concerns about how material air-quality impacts would be judged, with projected increases of 55% in NOx and 60% in PM2.5 from 276,000 additional flights. Other issues included reliance on sustainable aviation fuel that is not yet available at the required scale, compatibility with net zero commitments and potential legal challenge, effects on wildlife and parks, the health risks and monitoring of ultrafine particles, existing non-compliance with PM2.5 objectives, and whether construction traffic, workforce accommodation and wider environmental impacts on communities around the M25 and M4 have been fully assessed.
5. Open forum	
Summary of discussion	- The open forum explored political, policy and transport alternatives to Heathrow expansion. Speakers said the Prime Minister's previous opposition and commitment to rebalancing growth towards the North could create opportunities to challenge a scheme whose projected net UK economic benefit was described as negligible. - The Mayor of London remained opposed, the GLA Environment Committee was preparing a cross-party consultation response, and campaign groups were encouraged to collect robust evidence. Participants discussed alternatives for meeting travel demand, including greater use of domestic and international rail and a more strategic approach to freight.
6. Close	
	Closing remarks urged residents to submit concise, evidence-based consultation responses focused on the Government's four tests, while MPs, campaigners and the Council reaffirmed its opposition to expansion and its preference for a better, rather than bigger, Heathrow.