

Gatwick airport plans to carry on as if the world is no...

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It was a touch depressing [to read this in the FT today](#):

Gatwick airport is to push ahead with expansion despite the hit to the business from the pandemic and mounting concerns over aviation's impact on the environment. The UK's second busiest airport will launch a public consultation next month to bring its standby runway into regular use at a cost of £500m, increasing annual passenger capacity by two-thirds over the next two decades to more than 70m.

We face a climate crisis, but as the FT also notes, the expansion is consistent with government policy, which anticipates demand for flying increasing by 50 per cent from 2018 levels by 2050. Climate change has not changed that. The plan is instead that flying will continue on the basis of new fuels or other hydrogen or electric-powered aircraft.

Do I think that is likely? Candidly, I do not. I see no chance of that change happening: if it was going to I think we would be seeing a lot more progress than the very limited number of experimental battery-powered aircraft of extraordinarily limited capacity now being trialled.

But at the core of this plan is a much more worrying assumption. It is that we can continue to justify building the aircraft themselves, and still meet climate change requirements. And it is also assumed that we can continue to consume as if the planet can forever sustain our every desire. Neither of those assumptions is in any way consistent with the demands that the planet is actually imposing on us to consume less.

Gatwick is, of course, the airport that already claims it is a zero-carbon location - by conveniently ignoring the vast amounts of carbon that the jets going down its runways send into the atmosphere. These emissions, defined as 'scope 3' by the greenhouse gas protocols, can currently be ignored by the proposed climate accounting put forward by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures and the International Financial Reporting Standard Foundation, because they are assumed to be the responsibility of 'someone else'. That, ultimately, is an argument that can always be resolved by

blaming the emissions on the final consumer - which is the way I suspect many businesses will seek to deny their responsibility for the environmental harms they will be causing in coming years.

But this excuse is not true. Gatwick already facilitates vast carbon consumption of a form that is wholly unnecessary, and which is created by a relatively small part of the population: most people do not fly on holiday each year, and it is a small minority who consume most flights, and then almost entirely for leisure purposes.

So, the question is, why is this matter even being considered now? What sort of insanity is this? And when will we get our heads around the fact that climate change is going to demand that we change our consumption behaviour unless that is we want to see the planet destroyed as we continue to struggle to live on it? Will the messages of climate change damage, now so apparent, never sink in? It would seem not, at least with the management of Gatwick airport.

And yes, whilst I mention it, this is a reason for [sustainable cost accounting](#). That accounting system is deliberately designed to inject reality into business decision making. Gatwick seeks to be basing its thinking on fantasies. Something ash to bring it down to the ground.