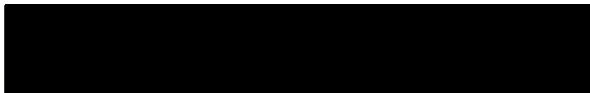


HEVER CASTLE



Heidi Alexander



Chief Executive's Office:



evercastle.co.uk

13th March 2025

Dear Ms Alexander

I am frustrated at your announcement that you are minded to approve expansion at Gatwick. We, the taxpayer, spent literally millions of pounds determining where the next airport expansion would take place in the South East of England. The conclusion of that report, that took a great deal of time as well, was that it would be at Heathrow, not Gatwick. Do you feel the experts who concluded this report that cost so many millions of pounds are wrong? I have to say, as a taxpayer, I massively resent that you choose to ignore what I had understood was a decision made through a fair and proper process.

The local news tells us it will create 14,000 new jobs, yet most businesses around here struggle to find staff and, of course, all the local authorities cannot find enough places to build houses as it is and the problem around Gatwick is many times more than most as it is surrounded by 3 AONBs and one National Park while also being within the green belt.

The railway line to Gatwick is already very busy and there are no plans to make it bigger. Compared to Heathrow, it has terrible connections to the rest of the country. We also have water shortages in the southeast, and clearly 14,000 extra jobs which have to ultimately result in at least 7-14,000 new homes. There is a question as to how you will service those properties, and is the Government willing to spend a significant amount of money on extra hospitals, schools, doctors surgeries as well as further improvements to the road network?

I am also particularly disappointed that this decision has been made despite the fact that Gatwick Airport has the misfortune of being in the wrong place where it comes to one of Britain's most important heritage properties. Hever castle gets 400,000 visitors a year and I do not think you will find any of them thinking it is great that planes fly over these beautiful gardens and grounds, not least as the Grade 1 listed castle is within a Grade 1 listed park and garden which is within an AONB.

In the past the Labour Party appeared to very much value the nation's best heritage and, in particular, the best areas of landscape. England does not have a huge amount of protected landscape and it is particularly fortunate for London that there is this amazing area immediately south of it. The planning restraints on this piece of ground are significant. You cannot build a factory in the AONB even if you hid it by trees and bunds, even if you could not hear it or see it. Yet it would appear that it is OK for you to put more planes over the top of this special landscape which make both noise and a visual intrusion.

AN EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER


Would Hever Castle be due any compensation, as clearly if we have even more planes joining the ILS to land at Gatwick, which I am sad to read would be the case as the runway apparently will only be used for take-offs and not landings, that is very bad news for Hever Castle and will affect our accommodation business as it already does, not least as double glazing is not generally the 'done thing' with a Grade 1 listed 14th century castle. Indeed, one would not get listed building consent for it.

I cannot help thinking that the worst case scenario for Hever Castle is we may have to close as a visitor attraction as it is hard enough and expensive enough to run as it is, but if this Labour Government is actually going to encourage even more noise, I am not certain what our future is. It is not unusual to get one plane a minute at busy times – expansion of the airport will make this more frequent and there might well be times where there is continuous aircraft noise. The tragedy is we are in this otherwise extremely beautiful tranquil valley. When we have an east wind(sadly barely 30% of the time) Hever is a fantastic place to hear birdsong including the Nightingale – I expect they will stop coming if we get more planes as they will genuinely not be able to hear their potential mates.

Other airports are not the same - few if any are surrounded by this much protected landscape and, certainly, the area around Heathrow is far from peaceful. It seems you are happy to put the message out that we do not really care about our beautiful landscape and our most visited parts of it, especially those which are an important part of England's history and heritage and on the doorstep of the capital. Planes are a higher priority despite the fact they create a lot more pollution than most other forms of transport and, indeed, are significantly cheaper as a mode of transport compared to the train, which I had thought we were trying to encourage people to use more.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Chief Executive

