

BBC "Look East" interview of Cllr John Lodge (JL), Leader of Uttlesford District Council on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in the 6.30 p.m. bulletin. Transcript of the item on Stansted Airport's planning application refusal and the interview by the BBC's Stewart White (SW) from The Chairman's Room at Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden.

### Introduction

Start 06:40 minutes into the programme.

SW: Well, next how a revolution in local politics has led to a stand-off between one of the biggest airports in the country and Uttlesford District Council.

At the last local elections, traditional political parties were ignored, and a residents' group was voted into power. On Friday, those councillors turned down a plan for a big increase in passenger numbers at Stansted Airport.

We'll hear from the council leader in a moment, after this from Alex Dunlop.

Alex Dunlop (AlexD): More planes and more passengers for Stansted, versus a local community which fears more pollution and more congestion. The country's third biggest airport wants to expand. Not a second runways, but permission to extend passenger numbers by nearly a quarter, to 43 million people a year. The first stage of these plans were (sic) approved by Uttlesford District Council two years ago, but last year there was a seismic political shift locally as this lot (picture of Residents for Uttlesford poster on screen) took over.

The complexion of the council was transformed. A Conservative majority of 24 was slashed to 4, with the Residents for Uttlesford holding a new majority; 26 out of 39 seats. Part of their manifesto was to look closely at Stansted's expansion plan; and last Friday their planning committee did just that.

Cllr Barbara Light: We cannot allow this airport expansion to go through and add to the destruction of our planet.

Cllr Alan Dean: We do not want to go down in history as the people who did nothing when they could.

AlexD: With a majority of ten votes to nil, they rejected the plan. Not good news for many local businesses. Richard employs 12 driver and was hoping to take on more. His firm did 1,700 trips to Stansted last year alone.

Richard Ellis (Barnston Luxury Travel): We rely heavily on the airport for our income. Obviously, green is an issue, but, I mean, Stansted, I always felt, a location, with green fields all around it, transport links are already here. I don't really understand why they couldn't expand it.

AlexD: This (map) is Uttlesford district; taking in local towns like Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted. The airport is considering its next move, but is highly likely to appeal. Today people in Thaxted (are) all too aware that a legal battle could be expensive for the council.

First female interviewee in Thaxted: Where is that money coming from? If it's coming out of our, hmm, council tax, perhaps, I don't agree that it would be a great investment.

Second female interviewee in Thaxted: Seems a bit unfair. When you're trying to make a decision what you believe in; and err, it's going to cost you for that belief.

AlexD: Business and tourist leaders are furious that Stansted's expansion has been put on hold; but local councillors insist their decision is a new model of accountability, driven by issues and local concerns.

SW: Well, Councillor John Lodge is the leader of the Residents for Uttlesford group. He believes that local government should be just that, and not based on national political parties.

JL: It should be the model all around the country. Absolutely! Westminster politics should not impinge on local politics to the degree that it does. We should not have directions from Westminster coming to the local, err, Westminster parties, who then act on them at a local level. Absolutely the wrong model and we are in the forefront of changing that.

SW: The Stansted proposal...

JL: Hmm, hmm...

SW:... lots of people; the union, tourist industry say that what Stansted wants to do is a good thing. Why do you think it's a bad thing?

JL: We don't think it's a bad thing, Hmm, Uttlesford district is a very, very strange district; very small district with two market towns with a population of not more than about 40,000 between them. And yet, in the middle of that, we have the third largest airport in the, in the country that wants to grow to become the second largest airport in the country. And I want to work with the airport to make sure that we grow together harmoniously.

SW: But you will know that airports and big organisations need to plan 20 years in advance, not just three or four years in advance; and you are actually stopping them from doing that.

JL: No, no, we're not stopping them. This has got to be part of a national infrastructure consideration. It can't be considered in isolation, in small Uttlesford district.

SW: Isn't it the truth, though, that a lot of people in your very beautiful market towns and villages just don't want the airport there.

JL: Hmm. There're obviously people who think that. It's not necessarily the case that we had, necessarily, a majority of people who said they don't want the airport. We are absolutely working to the interests and to the benefit of the whole district.

SW: What, what would the airport have to do to, to come back to get permission to increase.

JL: I think, in the very simplest of terms, without going into details, they will have to make sure that they fully mitigate any effects on the (sic), which will come from the expansion.

SW: But they've offered to put a lot of money in to the local community for sound-proofing, to buy properties.

JL: Hmm. They've offered that. I think the answer is, we haven't yet got to the right, the right solution.

SW: Is that not the right amount of money?

JL: Hmm. It's not necessarily the right amount of money. There are a lot of other things that need, that need....obviously, money, money is important.

SW: And what do you say to those people that Stansted is good and it should be here and it should be supported by the local authority?

JL: It is a very important part of our economy. We absolutely want to see it thrive. It has got an opportunity still to expand and we want to fully bring them into the Uttlesford family.

SW: Mr Lodge, thank you.

JL: A pleasure.

**Ends 12:26** minutes into the programme.

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