

Uttlesford District Council to bar press and public from secret meeting about Stansted Airport planning inquiry

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Earlier this month, the leader of the council's Liberal Democrat opposition, [Cllr Alan Dean](#) (Stansted North), said that a cross-party group of 10 councillors had called for the discussion amid concerns about the subject of the inquiry: an appeal by Stansted Airport owner Manchester Airports Group (MAG).

Then, Cllr Dean would say only: "The subject is the Stansted Airport expansion application that was refused by the council's planning committee in January 2020 and whose appeal is being started next month [January].

"These councillors are requesting that we have a comprehensive discussion on the topic in light of its possible impact on the future of the district."

On Wednesday (Dec 30), Cllr Dean would add only that he was asking the administration to explain its decision not to publish the motion. The *Indie* has asked the leader of the council, Residents for Uttlesford's (R4U) Cllr John Lodge, and the chief executive, Dawn French, to justify the secrecy.

The agenda, published on the council's website, says public and press are excluded from the airport debate because of "information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings".

The meeting behind closed doors is the latest procedural twist in more than two years of controversy which has seen the council approve and then refuse MAG's plans to raise the passenger cap at Stansted from 35 million a year to 43m. Before lockdown, the airport handled 28m a year.

In November 2018, the then Conservative-run council voted to approve the increase. But the Tories were routed by R4U in the May 2019 local elections and the decision was sent back to the planning committee and reversed in January this year – defying independent legal advice and the authority's own officers.

Planning councillors ruled that MAG had failed to demonstrate its proposals would not result in an increased detrimental effect from noise and pollution and other environmental impacts. The councillors also regarded MAG's infrastructure proposals as inadequate.

MAG had argued that its proposals could be delivered without any increase in the 274,000 flights a year that are currently allowed, but

Following MAG's appeal against UDC's revised decision to the Planning Inspectorate, a public inquiry before three experts is set to begin at the Radisson Blu hotel on January 12 and continue until April.

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