



## THE FUTURE OF FILTON AIRFIELD

### STATEMENT FROM SAVE FILTON AIRFIELD CAMPAIGN GROUP

It is perhaps ironic that Filton Airfield where for the last century it has created some of the most famous names in aerospace and transport (Bristol Aeroplane Company, Bristol Siddley Aero Engines, Bristol Cars, Bristol Buses) and creates significant prosperity for the City and County of Bristol, has its future in the hands of the county that borders Bristol, South Gloucestershire. The message we are receiving from senior councillors in South Gloucestershire Council is that they would prefer to see the airfield closed, which as we will go onto explain does not set the right environment for **Bristol's** aerospace industry currently located at Filton & Patchway, nor does it send the right message to companies that may wish to relocate at Filton.

Over a century ago, Filton became the birthplace of aerospace in the UK. Today, go to the world's major aerospace centres at either Seattle, St Louis, Toulouse or Cincinnati and they all know Bristol and what it stands for; British excellence in aerospace.

Let us be very clear, our Group's concerns are not merely based on nostalgia for all the magnificent things in aerospace that have happened at Filton; but if the airfield is to close we are concerned not only about the long term viability of industry currently at Filton-Patchway, who create jobs for the City of Bristol, but also the future, where if the airfield is to close, major job and wealth creating opportunities will be lost.

**Today** there are thousands of highly skilled aerospace jobs based around the airfield. It has been well documented that for every aerospace worker at least another 2 or 3 jobs are created in other business sectors. As we are now witnessing, this concentration of highly skilled workers has caught the imagination of companies who are involved in electrifying the South West's railways, who need engineers and who are considering locating to the area as Bristol. This is because Bristol through its aerospace interests maintains a natural pool of highly skilled, high value engineering resources.

To close the airfield, change its status and surround Airbus, GKN Aerospace and Rolls-Royce with housing will put significant pressure on those businesses. Their new residential neighbours will (quite naturally) be concerned if the aforementioned engineering companies wish to sustain



development of their sites in order to maintain their positions as world class organisations. There will ultimately be a conflict of interests between industry and residents. As an example, this was witnessed when Rolls-Royce was gaining planning permission to develop its now world-class manufacturing facilities at Patchway. Closing the airfield sends the wrong signal to industry, with the result that Bristol's current aerospace companies who provide long term, sustainable, high value jobs, will be squeezed out to other areas of the UK, or indeed other parts of the world where the business environment is more conducive. Bristol's aerospace heritage is at risk.

If this happens it is only inevitable that the rail companies mentioned previously could view South Gloucestershire's decision to grant planning permission on the airfield as not being in the best interests of industry and it will not set the right business environment for those engineering companies wanting to move to the area.

At a time when we are trying to increase youth employment in the area, encourage young people to go into aerospace through apprenticeships with the local colleges, it is at odds with this that we are literally talking about digging up a key part of Bristol's aviation infrastructure. That is not a positive indication to the young people of the City of Bristol who want a career in aerospace and aviation.

It should not be forgotten that Filton airfield currently has a vast suite of navigational approach aids. These are extensively used by national professional pilot training establishments. The local military also make extensive use of Filton for navigational training. With the operational closure of RAF Lyneham the number of airfields available locally for military navigational training is diminishing.

**The Future** has significant opportunities for the airfield. The Department for Transport has indicated only just recently that London's airports are filling up quickly with passenger aircraft. This provides a massive opportunity for Filton to capture non-passenger (and we stress non-passenger) transport which will inevitably have to move from London's airports as passenger traffic will have priority. We would call on Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council to view this



positively and to jointly and proactively campaign for non-passenger business, with perhaps even corporate aircraft to move from London's airports to Filton. Achieving this will again bring long term sustainable business to Filton, create additional high value jobs and maintain Bristol as one of the world's premier aerospace hubs.

**In these austere times and in order to protect and develop the local economy we need to ensure that the airfield remains open and is proactively developed.**

**In summary:**

- Closing the airfield is the wrong decision for the future prosperity of the City of Bristol;
- Closing the airfield will set the wrong environment for our aerospace companies and they will ultimately be squeezed out of the area;
- If the airfield is closed, then significant future business opportunities will be lost. Based on the Department for Transport's recent studies, ***we call on the City of Bristol and South Gloucestershire Council to actively campaign for new business to come to the airfield.***  
and;
- Bristol's position as one of the key aerospace centres for over 100 years will be lost.....**forever.**

*Submission to Bristol City Council, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2011*

*Save Filton Airfield Campaign Group  
[www.savefiltonairfield.org](http://www.savefiltonairfield.org)*