

Boris airs plan for Heathrow-on-Sea

Opponents of expansion are reviving plans for a new airport in the Thames estuary, write **Steven Swinford** and **Marie Woolf**

THE backlash against the blight of Heathrow has resurrected demands to switch the capital's principal airport to the Thames estuary.

Boris Johnson, the Tories' London mayoral candidate, announced this weekend that Heathrow was a "planning error" and ministers should consider phasing it out, instead of pressing ahead with a third runway – and a possible sixth terminal.

His intervention comes as campaigners claiming to represent 2m people under the flightpath seek to block the expansion plans. They plan a legal challenge on the grounds that the consultation, which closes at the end of this month, is not valid.

Lawyers are examining evidence that the Department for Transport failed to include research predicting a third runway would cause excessive nitrogen dioxide emissions.

Johnson is calling on the government to re-examine plans for a new airport on artificial islands in the Thames estuary, where planes could take off and land round the clock without disrupting residents. "If you look at what is going on in other countries around the world, in Hong Kong, in Washington – it's not impossible to move the capital's biggest airport," he said.

"What we don't want to do is entrench a planning error of the 1960s by further expansion at Heathrow. We should look at whether there's a solution to the east, in the Thames estuary."

Heathrow began life as a fighter airfield in 1945, on the west side of London to shelter it from Luftwaffe attacks. Since then it has grown into Britain's

Current expansion plans

The current total of 1,315 flights/day will rise to 1,923 if a third runway is built. Up to 2m local residents will be affected



biggest airport, but because it is only 15 miles from the centre of London, most of the 477,000 flights a year fly in over the capital to land. Campaigners are concerned that the addition of a third runway, which would see the number of flights rise to up to 702,000 a year, will increase noise pollution and the risk of an accident over the capital.

Edward Lister, of the 2M Group that represents 12 local authorities under the Heathrow flightpath, said: "It's a difficult place for an airport. The more flights

there are, the more the risk of an accident in the most densely populated part of the country."

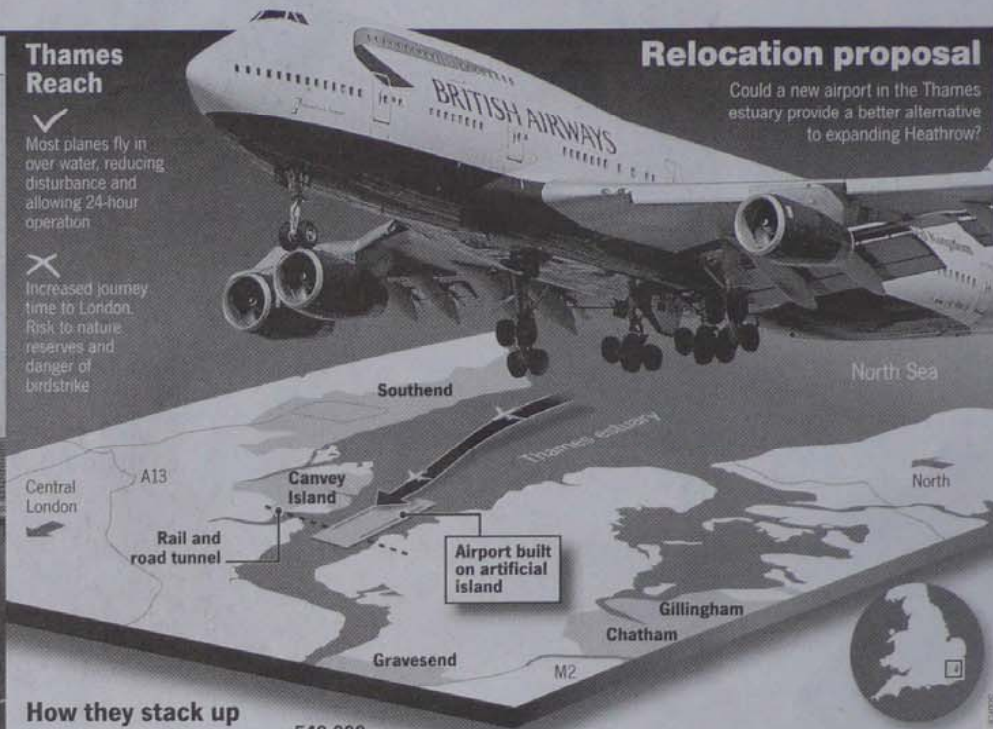
Since the 1960s, 13 major cities including Paris, Milan and New York have moved their airports further out. In Hong Kong, the government spent six years and \$20 billion building an airport on an artificial island and linking it by bullet train to the city.

In Britain, however, similar proposals have repeatedly been blocked. In the 1970s a scheme to build an airport on Maplin Sands near Southend-on-Sea in

Thames Reach

✓ Most planes fly in over water, reducing disturbance and allowing 24-hour operation

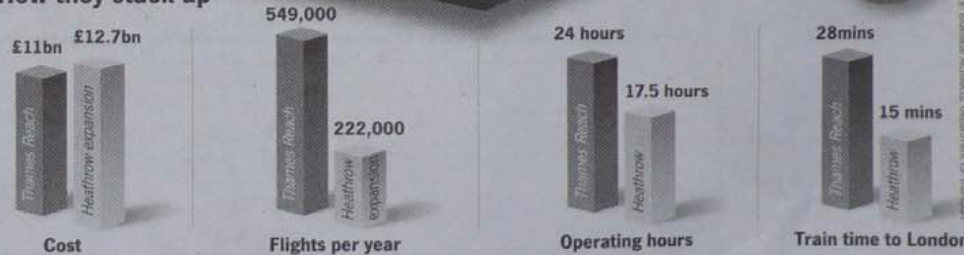
✗ Increased journey time to London. Risk to nature reserves and danger of birdstrike



Relocation proposal

Could a new airport in the Thames estuary provide a better alternative to expanding Heathrow?

How they stack up



Essex was abandoned because of a shortage of public funds.

In 2005 the government rejected four options to build airports in the estuary on the grounds of cost, environmental damage and the risk of a plane being downed by a birdstrike. It approved the expansion of Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted instead after lobbying by BAA, the airport operator, and airlines.

Officials estimate that building a third runway at Heathrow will cost £13 billion as the government attempts to meet European

Union targets on noise and emissions. Proposals for new airports either floating in the Thames estuary or on the coastline were costed at £7.6-£13.9 billion.

Sir Peter Hall, president of the Town and Country Planning Association, believes it is time to "retire" Heathrow and build a new airport to the east of the capital. "If you located an aircraft properly in the Thames estuary virtually all the flight movements would be over the North Sea. There would be no constraints on development at all," he said.

Among the schemes rejected in 2005 was Thames Reach, an airport devised by a London firm of architects. According to the plans, it would have been built on reclaimed land in the Thames estuary near Cliffe in Kent and Canvey Island in Essex, at a total cost of £11 billion.

Mark Willingale, partner of Bluebase, the architectural practice behind the plans, said: "It's a terrific opportunity. You've got a combination of 116,000 new homes in the Thames Gateway with new roads and trails to serve

them, the location is ideal for an airport. We just wish the government had the vision to see it."

The transport department said it has no plans to reconsider its veto on the estuary. Lord Soley, director of Future Heathrow, a pro-expansion group, said: "If you build a new hub airport you don't need Heathrow so what do you do, close it down? We're talking 72,000 jobs on the airport alone. It is unrealistic."

Time for a new airport
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Crash theory

INVESTIGATORS believe the crash-landing of a British Airways Boeing 777 at Heathrow last month may have been caused by ice clogging its fuel supply, according to a leaked memo to US regulators, write Steven Swinford and Paul Eddy.

The Air Accidents Investigation Branch is examining whether water leaked into fuel tanks and froze on the 10½-hour flight from Beijing.

The discovery, if borne out by laboratory tests, may force airports and airlines to review safeguards and checks on fuel before long-haul flights, when planes on some routes are exposed to temperatures as low as -75C. Pilots say, however, that heating systems and friction from air passing over the wings should keep the fuel warm.

The BA jet landed 1,000ft short of the runway after both engines failed. There were no obvious computer malfunctions or problems with the engines, and tests on fuel recovered from the jet and other planes that refuelled in Beijing in the same period show that it met specifications.

Boeing said: "The 777 has been in service for 12 years and has flown around 3.6m flight hours, during which there have been no fatalities. It would be inappropriate to comment at this stage."

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Do the Lambeth walk

In the late 13th century, with the Catholic church in crisis, the reputation of the papacy at a low ebb and no obvious candidate to take over as Pope, the cardinals sent for Pietro di Morrone, a Benedictine hermit. Morrone, unworldly and humble, did not want the job, even attempting to flee when it was pressed upon him. But he became Pope Celestine V, his claim to fame being a decree giving popes the right to abdicate the papacy, which after a few years he promptly did.

When Rowan Williams was enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury five years ago, he was no hermit. Even his admirers would concede, however, that his background as an academic theologian — he became Oxford University's youngest professor in the 1980s — had left him rather unworldly. His champions believed that his mild-mannered, thoughtful but determined approach was exactly right for an Anglican church facing deep schisms over homosexuality and the ordination of women.

Five years later they must be disappointed. The schisms in the church have deepened, exacerbated by the archbishop's support for women bishops, a red rag to conservative Anglicans. His handling of the even more divisive issue of gay clergy, which got off to a poor start with the appointment, then withdrawal, of Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading, has been weak. Instead of leadership, there has been wobble. Couple that with a style that could have been designed to empty the pews and the church has a problem.

While his time in office has not been good for the church, which had to defend itself recently over figures showing more Catholics attending regular Sunday worship in Britain than Anglicans, the archbishop has often entered the political debate, attacking the Iraq war and "humanity's selfishness" over the environment. Never before, though, has he created such a storm as with last week's comments on sharia (Islamic law).

When two members of the General Synod call

on him to step down, when David Blunkett, the former home secretary, describes his remarks as "dangerous", when Downing Street slaps him down and the primate of Nigeria accuses him of "most disturbing and most unfortunate" comments, you know that he has put his foot in it. What was he thinking of, venturing into this territory and saying it "seems unavoidable" that some aspects of sharia will be adopted in Britain?

He would say he was trying to correct common British misunderstandings about sharia. It is not, as he put it, "all the darkest images of Islam", such as the repression of women, stoning, flogging and mutilation. His second aim appears to have been to make a plea for "a higher level of attention to religious identity and communal rights" to be embodied in the law more generally. But the archbishop and his advisers must have known that most people would not have spotted such subtleties. He should have anticipated, in particular, concerns over safeguards for women deprived of basic rights under several forms of sharia. Many Christians were disturbed by what appeared to be a surrender to multiculturalism. Moderate Muslims saw his remarks as feeding anti-Muslim prejudice. If his aim was to help to achieve greater social cohesion, he failed.

The government was quick to slap down Dr Williams but its record is far from unblemished. Why, if sharia is not for these shores, does the benefits system recognise polygamy among Muslims? Where is the debate about matters of practical concern, such as the practice of many Muslims in Britain of marrying first cousins, leading to a high proportion of babies with birth defects?

People are alarmed by the notion of "no go" areas for non-Muslims and about the erosion of traditional British values. These are legitimate topics for a public debate which has much further to run, but the archbishop is not the man to lead it. It would be better for him to search his conscience and consider retiring to academia to allow a shrewder figure to lead the church.

No, honestly — MPs are our best guard against a surveillance society

Life without privacy is intolerable. Behind the Iron Curtain and in Mao Tse-tung's China people lived in constant dread that anything they said would be recorded or reported, even by close family members. The best way to survive was not merely to say nothing but to think nothing, too. That was the grim success of state terror.

In the past week our growing awareness of the extent of surveillance in the United Kingdom has invited comparison with the former East Germany. In fact there is little similarity — for now at least. The British state does not forbid political debate nor stifle dissent.

However, even where the motivation is not political, depriving a person of privacy still renders their life miserable. In Britain those who have so far found themselves in this position are victims not so much of MIS as of the press.

Yet there has been little public concern because those who are violated are often celebrities — for example, members of the royal family. Those who occupy the limelight (even if only because they are unwittingly born into it) are widely thought to deserve all that is coming to them.

Most of us would be devastated if we had to endure for a day or two what such people experience on a daily basis. For instance, if the transcripts of our telephone calls were printed in newspapers — as the Prince of Wales's, believing that which of us would not regret things that we had said, unless the conversation was private?

A recent book on press intrusion has even shocked many journalists because it reveals that access to our bank accounts and telephone records can easily be brought by unscrupulous investigators. Quite often someone who is not a celebrity but who strays into the public gaze for 15 minutes of infamy finds his or her private life exposed to criticism and ridicule. Because attention moves on quickly to other people and things, we never know what lasting damage has been caused.

In the nuptial over the bugging of an MP's conversation with a consultant detained in prison we should not conclude that the biggest current threat to our privacy comes from the state. For the time being it does not. Our media will always be vigilant on our behalf against government encroachment into our lives. But none is likely to defend us from intrusion by other organs of the media.

Nor is the danger confined to the media. Today shops openly sell spy equipment. It is not difficult for people to penetrate our lives in order to steal our identities, blackmail us or simply make our lives hell.

The government does not take the issue seriously, perhaps because it is embarrassed at having massively extended the reach of its own surveillance. Its own carelessness with our personal



Michael Portillo

data demonstrates that it does not grasp what damage can be done when sensitive personal material is divulged.

We viewed the communist regimes of Europe with both horror and amusement. It was not only intransigent that vast numbers of citizens had their conversations recorded, it was also ludicrous. Eavesdropping on such a scale was a symptom of an inefficient state. How many people were employed typing transcripts? Who had access to read the volumes of material produced? Let alone make judgments about their significance? At what economic cost were thousands or millions of workers switched to spy on each other?

It is in that area that the comparison with modern Britain is more apt. Now that about 300 public agencies have the right to carry out surveillance, the British state is evidently mushrooming. For the moment it is at least as comic as it is sinister.

The issue about recording the conversation of Saïq Khan, the MP, with Bahar Ahmad is precisely about whether the surveillance process is properly controlled. Apparently ministers had not given their consent and did not know of it. Evidently, then, the system works badly.

Much nonsense has been written that MPs should not be placed above the law. The real points are quite different. First, constituents with serious problems and often justified grievances against government agencies will worry, reasonably or not, about speaking to their MP if they think the conversation might be bugged.

Second, any government finds a number of MPs a real nuisance because they ask awkward questions. The public relies on MPs to do just that. So we need safeguards against the executive using bugging as a way to discredit its political opponents.

The best guarantee is to require the prime minister personally to authorise any interception against an MP. That can be effective because prime ministers still fear cross-examination in parliament and are reluctant to tell a blatant lie in case it is later found out.

Democracy does not function if ministers can answer in every case that things occurred without their knowledge and beyond their control. Then nobody is accountable. Recently ministers have pleaded ignorance about almost everything that matters: financing scandals in the Labour party, the red records of 25th child benefit claimants and now the bugging of Khan.

Indeed, ministers have responded to the public's declining trust in politicians by arranging to know about and decide upon ever fewer issues. They subcontract an ever larger number of decisions to quangos and committees of experts.

If the public thinks that this improves the quality of decision-making, it is wrong. Politicians may be slimy or mendacious, but at least they are

public figures operating in the glare of publicity.

The experts to whom they devolve the decisions they fear to take are often little more than jumpers behind closed doors. They do not fear accountability as ministers must. If voters understood their own interests better, they would demand that every decision of consequence be taken by a minister and that all the details of anonymous decision-making bodies be disclosed.

To make matters worse, ministers fear of parliament is declining. The scandal over MPs' allowances further diminishes the public's respect for the House of Commons. The cry goes up that the house must cease to regulate itself.

It is easy to see that self-governance has not been a total success — to put it mildly.

Nonetheless, the house is much more transparent than it used to be and more transparent than other institutions are today. MPs now declare their outside interests, for example.

To journalists or broadcasters reveal what financial interests they have helped to shape their views? Having moved from one camp in the other, I can say that it is a great relief no longer to have to tell the public exactly how I earn my living.

The Commons needs to reform much more and do it quickly. But our democracy rests upon parliament being sovereign. If MPs are merely state employees, and if the executive can tell them what to do, then parliament will surrender that sovereignty and we the public will be the principal losers.

For instance, it is understandably awkward for MPs to have to vote on their own salaries. They leave the bad press that it brings them. But still it is extraordinary that most are ready to accept instead of the government should dictate their pay. If the executive directs parliament then the relationship upon which our representative democracy is based will be inverted. The government should depend on parliament, not the other way around.

Of course the executive is happy to see parliament weakened, to change its standards up to date, to bring it less efficient. Although Gordon Brown and David Cameron appreciate better that the Speaker that Commons reform is urgent, we should not trust them because their interest is to give themselves an easier ride.

In a surveillance society, life would be unbearable. Neither the government nor the media will protect us against its development. Parliament provides our best defence. We must bop, against the odds, that it can autonomously bring its standards up to date. We need it to retain responsibility for its own affairs. We depend upon its remaining sovereign.

Simon Jenkins is a writer

Time for a new airport

Heathrow airport, unlovely and unloved, will soon become even more unwieldy if the government has its way. An airport that regularly shows itself to be congested, badly run, electrophobic and simply in the wrong place, is to be expanded. Its fifth terminal will soon be opened, to be followed by a sixth. At the end of this month the consultation period on plans for a third runway will end. This is a project that ministers appear determined to speed through the planning process. The consequence will be that the number of flights using Heathrow will expand from 480,000 to more than 700,000 a year, inflicting further misery on the 2m people in 12 local authorities who campaigners say suffer a serious loss of quality of life as a result of being under the flightpath.

Even at this stage it is not too late to call a halt. The argument is straightforward. Most countries have built new airports well away from the cities they serve. Heathrow, the world's busiest inter-

national airport, grew out of an old RAF fighter station, not careful planning. Flights in and out pass over the city, inflicting significant noise, pollution and potential danger. If BA flight 58, which crash-landed at Heathrow last month, had come down seconds earlier, the likely loss of life would have been huge.

There is a simple and affordable solution. A new airport could be built on artificial islands in the Thames estuary, away from the overcrowded city but close enough to be served by fast transport links. Boris Johnson, Tory candidate for London mayor, has given his backing to it, describing the expansion of Heathrow as entrenching "a planning error of the 1960s". There is a proposal on the table, an £11 billion scheme to build an airport on reclaimed land near Cliffe in Kent and Canvey Island in Essex. Money is no reason to reject it; the third Heathrow runway will cost £15 billion. Heathrow can never be a sustainable solution to Britain's 21st-century needs. A new airport in the Thames estuary just might

Democracy does not function if ministers can answer in every case that things occurred without their knowledge

Archbishop, you've committed treason

My text for today is "Hold fast that which is good". 1 Thessalonians 5:21. These are prayers I heard so regularly in prayers at my Anglican girls' school that I have been unable to forget them. I draw them to the attention of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who seems to have forgotten them. At least, he seems to be losing his grip on what is good in this country and, indeed, to be throwing it away with both hands in his curious suggestion that aspects of sharia should be recognised in English law.

In an interview on Radio 4 last Thursday, Rowan Williams said that the introduction of parts of Islamic law here would help to maintain social cohesion and seems unavoidable. Sharia courts exist already, he pointed out. We should "face up to the fact" that some British citizens do not relate to the British legal system, he said, and that Muslims should not have to choose between "the stark alternatives of cultural loyalty or state loyalty".

What he went on to say was more astonishing. He explained to the interviewer, in his gentle, wordy way, that a lot of what is written on this confusing subject suggests "the ideal situation is one in which there is one law and only one law for everybody". He went on: "That principle is an important pillar of our social identity as a western liberal democracy." How true.

However, he continued: "It's a misunderstanding to suppose that that means people don't have other affiliations, other loyalties, which shape and dictate how they behave in society, and the law needs to take some account of that."



Minette Marrin

Our law maintains the best virtues of our society. Anybody who does not accept it does not

country the outstandingly just and tolerant state it is; it is one of the last remaining forces for unity as well.

What is also good and essential to this country is the law itself. It has evolved over centuries from medieval barbarities into something, for all its faults, that is civilised. Our law expresses and maintains the best virtues of our society. Anybody who does not accept it does not belong here.

When other legal systems or other customs clash with ours, we prefer ours, to put it mildly. At least we should, what has troubled me for years is the way that exceptions and excuses tend to be made, in the name of multiculturalism, for practices of which we do not approve. Victoria Climbié's terrible bruises were ignored because of assumptions about the cultural norms of African discipline. Last week it emerged that someone in government has sold the moral pass on polygamy: husbands with multiple wives in this country are now to get benefit payments for each wife.

In the midst of all this moral confusion and relativism, is that premier prelate in the land holding fast that which is good? Far from it. He is recommending multiculti legal cherry-picking in which individuals would be free to choose the jurisdiction they preferred for certain matters. He even admits that his proposal introduces, "uncomfortably", the idea of a market in the law, "a competition for loyalty".

One encouraging sign is the almost universal fury that our foolish archbishop has aroused. He has miraculously united the irreconcilable in opposition to himself, from Christian extremists to mainstream Muslims, from Anglican vicars to godless

English and his powers of ratiocination; he is woolly of face and woolly of mind.

In any case, you do not need to follow anybody's argument to understand that legally recognising aspects of sharia is either unnecessary or undesirable. If it aspects in question accord with English law (the Anglican archbishop is speaking of England, presumably), there is no need to offer any extra provision or recognition to foreign courts. They are of no interest to the law. If they do not accord with English law, they are unacceptable and should be repudiated, or even proscribed.

All this has nothing particularly to do with it being Islamic law at issue. He same would apply to any other religion: Hindu, Mormon or wiccan. However, there is a lot to be said against sharia at the desire of a reported 40% of British Muslims to live under it. That explains, in part, the present outrage. Sharia is rightly feared here: it is disputed, sometimes primitive, grievously in need of reform and wholly unacceptable in Britain.

So what possessed this troublesome priest to stir up this predictable fury with its divisive and unnecessary suggestion? Why did he choose to speak not just in a quiet academic meeting but also in the public glare of The World at One? And call it on? It has most certainly not been good for ordinary British Muslims, as they well understand. It has, however, given comfort to Muslim extremists, who will see this as the thin end of their Islamist wedge.

Williams's behaviour looks like vainglorious attention-seeking, but it is also something much worse. To seek to undermine our legal system and the values

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