

*Councillor Steve Curran,  
Leader of the London  
Borough of Hounslow*





# WEST LONDON COUNCIL LEADER CALLS ON AVIATION COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO WORK TOGETHER TO SEEK GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

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*Hounslow Council has long been clear in our recognition of the significant local and national economic benefits of Heathrow Airport, and about our belief that the benefits of proximity to Heathrow need to be greater for our whole community.*

**T**hat recognition has driven our calls to Government for an Aviation Communities Fund to support the local economy and communities through skills and re-employment initiatives, business support and investment in local infrastructure.

We have been clear too, that our partnership with the airport to maximise those benefits can address negative impacts, the climate crisis, and our local environment. We are committed to working together to secure local employment and to shape the area around Heathrow as a better place to live, work and visit. Together we must ensure that future airport and airport-related development delivers sustainable, suitable facilities and infrastructure, well-located and coordinated to minimise disruption and maximise community benefit.

That challenge and that partnership has never been more necessary. In 2019 Hounslow was among London's fastest growing economies, with growth in transport, distribution and accommodation, and information, media and communication. But Covid-19 slammed the brakes on, with aviation hit hardest, along with retail, hospitality and leisure.

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jobs lost (with young people twice as likely to suffer job losses as the over 50s). Previously unimaginable job losses at Heathrow and associated businesses - concentrated in lower-skilled roles - hit women, those on low-incomes, the unemployed and those from BAME communities hardest.

Oxford Economics' new analysis of Covid-19's impacts on West London's economy which updates their 2020 study, now shows Hounslow's GVA to have contracted by an estimated 11.3% last year (more affected than London as a whole at 9.4%), with some of our biggest sectors - travel, hospitality, and leisure - severely affected. Accommodation and food services saw GVA almost halve. Transportation and storage may see a GVA drop of 19%, demonstrating Hounslow's critical exposure to reductions in Heathrow's activity.

It is estimated that these two sectors alone will account for half of all jobs losses through 2020 and 2021. Restrictions-easing is expected to help partial economic recovery in London, but we don't expect to see employment return to pre-pandemic levels until at least 2023.

Against that backdrop, we can perhaps remind ourselves that Hounslow Council has sought to be at the forefront of the campaign to recognise the particular damage done to Aviation Communities nationwide by the pandemic. In November last year we organised and led the 'Aviation Communities 2020: From the Ground Up' summit, alongside partners in the West London Alliance, at which prominent parliamentarians and senior council leaders from across the UK highlighted how communities around airports have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

At that time, Oxford Economics' independent research forecast that up to £1bn could be lost from Hounslow's local economy due to Heathrow's downturn, with more than 40,000 jobs at risk across West

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London. Official figures from August 2020 reported 40% of the borough's working population were either unemployed or on furlough.

The summit was the first concerted effort to bring together aviation communities nationally and to highlight the challenges and opportunities they faced. As I said then, hundreds of thousands of people in communities reliant on the aviation industry are facing widespread unemployment, deprivation and barriers to securing future work. Those communities, so impacted by the pandemic, are still missing from the discussion around the impact on airports and airlines.

At that time, I called on the Government to recognise the devastating plight of aviation communities, and for a place-based approach which targeted investment in training, reskilling, low carbon jobs and local infrastructure which would support wider recovery to enable Britain to build back better and greener.

We had hoped that the summit



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would be the start of raising the levels of consciousness within Government, and with other key people and organisations, about the very real plight our communities are facing. We hoped for a national, shared commitment to finding solutions together. Sadly, so far, the response from Government- as with our calls for certainty about longer-term council funding to meet the costs of Covid-19 - has been silence.

As a council, with that uncertainty about long-term Government funding, Covid-19's costs and Brexit's impacts, we will do our part. We will work in partnership

to help rebuild the economic cornerstone Heathrow represents for us; building back better, not bigger. We will keep supporting those who need it and deliver our recovery ambitions, without losing sight of those who face real barriers during the rebuilding.

We recognise that communities across the country are facing difficulties. Aviation communities are feeling this particularly so and the sector and its supply chain are amongst the hardest hit and least likely to recover at pace as the rest of the economy speeds up when the roadmap ends. This necessitates a common response from those areas

home to aviation and requires targeted investment and support from Government.

Hounslow Council and the West London Alliance have a long history of collaboration and partnership working. We now want to broaden the conversation. The political administrations are working collaboratively, cross-party, to identify and remedy shared challenges for the collective benefit of communities. We now wish to extend this to all aviation communities. Collective voices are more powerful than lone voices and that is why we must now come together to work collaboratively with each other and Government in pursuit of solutions.

Together, we can support aviation communities from the ground up and ensure they are not forgotten.

We want to hear from those that want to be part of the conversation. ■

**Councillor Steve Curran is Leader of the London Borough of Hounslow.**