

Cllr Alastair Singleton - Statement to B&NES Cabinet

In 2019 Bath and North East Somerset Council declared a Climate Emergency, and included in the text explicit opposition to further expansion of Bristol Airport. That opposition has been regularly and steadfastly reiterated, most notably in July last year when Cllr Sarah Warren gave compelling evidence to the Bristol Airport Appeal.

What happened last week was morally wrong.

Though I make no criticism of the Planning Inspectorate's professionalism set within the legal context in which they must work, the decision they handed down was morally indefensible.

What is equally indefensible is that the government has also failed to call in the decision for being a breach of national policy and of national significance.

Thousands of our constituents in B&NES, as well as tens of thousands across the West of England and countless more up and down the country, feel profoundly let down, betrayed even, by this decision and many are increasingly angry. They were prepared to trust the system. They can see that the case against expansion is overwhelming, and they put their faith in the government and a Prime Minister who claims that climate change is a top priority and told COP 26 that we were at 'one minute to midnight' to protect them. They have been profoundly let down.

This country has a long and honourable tradition of non-violent civil disobedience in the cause of social justice, and its latest flowering is deeply rooted in the climate crisis. I expect that we will now see escalating levels of civil disobedience, and I fully respect – admire even - those who choose to pursue this path. When the system lets you down, when democratic process fails to deliver and threatens the wellbeing your children and those who come after you, what resort do you have other than civil disobedience?

No one seeks wantonly to break the law, but there are times when doing so is surely the moral thing to do, when failure to act is to be complicit in a greater moral dereliction.

Cabinet – the situation looks bleak, but the game is not yet dead. I ask you to redouble our opposition to Bristol Airport's expansion, and to work resolutely with our neighbouring authorities, with WECA, with Bristol Airport Action Network and other civil society groups as they examine the options for further appeal or Judicial Review, and develop the strategy to prevent this idiocy.

The cause, quite simply, could not be more important. Let's show those who have been betrayed that principled, clear-sighted politicians, with the right values, wedded to integrity, will stand up for them, and that we will not rest until we prevail.