



## LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE – FRINGE EVENTS

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**EVENT:** **Not in my backyard! How can planning balance local and national interests?**

**LOCATION:** Premier Inn Manchester Central, 7-11 Lower Mosley St, Manchester. M2 3DW

**HOSTING:** Demos & Heathrow

**DATE & TIME:** Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept; 12.45pm

**SPEAKERS:**

- Hilary Benn MP - *Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*
  - John Longworth - *Director General, British Chambers of Commerce*
  - Nigel Milton - *Heathrow Airports Ltd's Public Affairs and Community Relations team leader*
  - Philip Collins - *Chair of the Demos Board of Trustees and writer on The Times, Chair*
  - Betsy Dillner - *Community Campaigns manager, Generation Rent*
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### PANEL DISCUSSION

Hilary Benn MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, addressed the fringe by stating large developers build at the rate that people buy houses, and consequently don't always meet the larger need for housing.

Benn argued that the market, on its own, was not meeting the demand for three-bedroom houses and the United Kingdom is building the smallest homes in Europe.

Where infrastructure, such as schools and transports is put in place first, Benn argued, local communities are more likely to accept new housing developments.

The aim, Benn said, was to turn Nimbys into Yimbys.

Betsy Dillner, community campaigns manager for Generation argued that the phrase 'nimbyism' was often used negatively when its cause was a result of decision makers not listening to local concerns.

Dillner argued that there was a need to better engage local people in the decision making process and that the alternative was an increase in anti-politics attitudes.

She also argued that local people should be trusted more in terms of their understanding of the need to balance local concerns with the public good.

Nigel Milton, Heathrow Airports Ltd's Public Affairs and Community Relations team leader, spoke about the issue of airport expansion, with particular reference to Heathrow. He quoted a poll of 9,670 residents, carried out by Populus, showing a greater range of opinion in London and surrounding areas than is currently being represented by some of their MPs.

He argued that airport capacity was a national issue and that a decision on the expansion of Heathrow needed to be made because the debate had gone on too long.

Chair of the meeting, Philip Collins asked Milton why he thought the decision has taken so long.

He replied that the problem stemmed from politicians concerns about the reaction of voters in marginal, London constituencies.

John Longworth, director general, British Chambers of Commerce, spoke about the importance of infrastructure to his members. He said that businesses needed good transport, good buildings and energy security for them to function and, consequently, pay the taxes which supports services that we all value and depend on. He said there were seven pillars of infrastructure: road, rail, airport, seaport, digital connectivity, energy security and housing.

Longworth pointed to the speed of decision making and implementation in China, as compared to the United Kingdom. He contrasted the time it had taken to reach a decision on airport expansion in London, whilst China has built 35 new airports.

He argued that residents who live near to airports benefit from increased property prices and that a decision needed to be made about a hub airport in the south east.

#### Question and answer session

Ruth Cadbury, Labour parliamentary candidate for Brentford and Isleworth, suggested to Milton that the option of not building a third runway at Heathrow would not necessarily mean a loss of jobs.

Milton responded that if Heathrow did not get a third runway, there will be a decline in direct and indirect employment in the local and wider area.

John Stewart, from the anti-airport expansion protest group HACAN, returned to Longworth's point that residents of West London had benefitted from the closeness of an airport. Stewart argued that HACAN had supporters from far beyond West London with concerns about the possible expansion of Heathrow.

Mary O'Rourke, from The Society of Labour Lawyers, also returned to points made by Longworth.

She said that China was not a good example to learn from because of their attitude to human rights. She also asked Milton why Heathrow did not acknowledge that local residents, including herself, were not disturbed by flights early on Sunday morning.

Milton responded that it was not true that Heathrow said that there were no flights at this time and that it was mainly an issue to do with flights from the Far East.

Steve Ranger, delegate from Congleton Labour Party, returned to the issue of local involvement in decision making. He directed his question to Benn and said that in a large unitary authority such as Cheshire, consultation can be adversely affected because of the remoteness of some areas from decision makers.

Benn responded that there were some good examples of where neighbourhood planning had worked, such as Thame in South Oxfordshire. He argued that local communities need to be better involved at the early stages of decision making.

Dillner argued that democratic structures need to be refreshed to better engage those most affected.

Unless local people were involved at an early stage, she said, they would be left with no option but to resist plans already in progress.

Milton said that it was too easy to slip into procrastination on planning decisions and that government needed to explore ideas of how to allow local communities to share in the national benefit from infrastructure developments.

Longworth argued that the most successful countries had long term plans for infrastructure and that there was 20 times more trade between countries who had a direct air link.

Collins concluded that the issue of planning had proved again to be one of the most interesting on the political agenda and that there was a need for resolution on the issue of local versus national interest

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