

Police seeking to silence airport critic-in-chief with injunction

SURREY'S chief constable is seeking to silence Farnborough Airport's chief critic through the courts after applying for an Anti-Social Behaviour Injunction (ASBI) against Tilford man Colin Shearn just weeks before the airport launched its expansion plans.

The ASBI application was signed by Surrey Police's legal provider Weightmans LLP on behalf of the chief constable Tim De Meyer on August 16 following complaints of anti-social behaviour by the airport, the Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee (FACC), and neighbours of Mr Shearn.

This came just three weeks before Farnborough Airport launched a consultation on its "long-term growth" plans, which include raising the cap on flights from 50,000 to 70,000 annually, and from 8,900 to 18,000 at weekends on September 11.

Mr Shearn, a retired chairman of DHL's biofuels business who has worked

BY DANIEL GEE
daniel.gee@farnhamherald.com
07583 633922

for several airlines, founded the Farnborough Noise campaign group in 2019 to hold the airport to account over changes to flightpaths blamed for rapidly-increasing overflights in many rural areas and villages locally.

Mr Shearn was expected to contest the ASBI in a hearing at Aldershot County Court yesterday, saying he has only exercised his "democratic right" to raise questions at FACC meetings and has not harassed committee members "in any way".

But the active legal proceedings have effectively prevented Mr Shearn from engaging in the current consultation, and he has stood down as chairman of Farnborough Noise.

This has prompted complaints by the campaign group, which claims to have more than 2,000 supporters, that Mr Shearn has been "singled out" and "only



Colin Shearn addressing a 2021 protest at Farnborough

a couple of weeks before the start of consultation".

Surrey Police has defended its timing of the ASBI, saying it applied for the court order in March 2023, "but the court was not able to accommodate the hearing until August 2023".

But Farnborough Airport refused to comment, saying "it would not be appropriate for us to comment on an ongoing police investigation", while the Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee (FACC) did not respond at all.

What is Farnborough campaigner accused of?

SURREY POLICE'S application for an injunction states Colin Shearn has conducted an "aggressive and relentless campaign against Farnborough Airport, the FACC and individuals connected to these organisations over the last two to three years".

Mr Shearn is accused of "bombarding the airport company, the Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee (FACC), Rushmoor Borough Council, the Civil Aviation Authority, the National Air Traffic Service and the DfT with endless questions about air traffic which he alleged causes disturbance to him and the people he claims to represent".

It goes on to state all of Mr Shearn's 589 complaints to the airport in 2022 "were answered", as were his 80 questions to the FACC. This is strongly disputed

by Mr Shearn and Farnborough Noise.

The Tilford campaigner is also described as "adopting a belligerent and aggressive style, distorting or misrepresenting a point of view to suit his agenda".

And the application goes on to add "although, as a member of the public, Mr Shearn is entitled to attend and speak at FACC meetings, his conduct and attempts to take over the meetings and to interrupt proceedings and his ignoring of protocol has resulted in him being muted during online meetings and refused access in person".

On one occasion, at being barred from a committee meeting, the application states Mr Shearn "attended in person anyway, but his access was blocked by security" and he "later confronted

attendees afterwards, recording them without their consent".

However, Farnborough Noise is not the only group to make representations at FACC meetings. In July 2021, more than 40 members of groups including Extinction Rebellion, Waverley Friends of the Earth and Alton Climate Action Network tuned into a FACC meeting on Microsoft Teams to demand more scrutiny of the airport's environmental impact.

Farceful scenes ensued as the FACC chairman Phillip Riley refused to answer questions by members of the public and repeatedly muted campaigners.

Waverley Borough Council leader Paul Follows accused Mr Riley of "shouting people down" and was almost muted himself until he pointed out he was a committee member.

Ex-police commissioner speaks up for Shearn

COUNCILLOR David Munro, the former Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner, replaced Cllr Paul Follows on the FACC last year, and provided a statement to Mr Shearn's solicitor defending the campaigner prior to yesterday's court hearing.

In it, Cllr Munro says his experience of Mr Shearn's conduct at FACC meetings "did not amount to harassment or anything like it".

Commenting on the February 9, 2023, in-person meeting of the FACC at Hart District Council offices in Fleet, in which the police claim Mr Shearn was denied access and "confronted attendees", Cllr Munro said: "I didn't observe you accosting any other members

and to me you were polite, even friendly.

"As I said at the time, I considered your course of action ill-judged and likely to be counter-productive – but I did not witness any threatening or harassing actions.

"As far as I can remember, you weren't physically present at the meeting itself. I met you on the way out and, similarly, didn't witness any antisocial behaviour."

At a subsequent FACC meeting in June, at which Mr Shearn was granted access to the public gallery, Cllr Munro said: "I do not remember you trying to disrupt the meeting in any way, asking for, and receiving, permission to

make some points to the meeting in accordance with FACC's procedures. You were always polite."

Cllr Munro concluded: "During our acquaintance as one of your ward councillors which started in April 2022, I have formed the opinion that you are a person of trenchant views and do not shrink from expressing them – sometimes, as I have alluded to above, I think you have not helped yourself by being firmer than the occasion has required.

"But you have been to me, publicly and privately, invariably polite, even though we have disagreed about some matters. I have never witnessed you being rude or threatening to people."

Why are campaigner's neighbours involved?

SEVERAL of the complaints of anti-social behaviour cited by Surrey Police relate to a dispute with neighbours in Tilford.

It is claimed Mr Shearn has in the past disrupted works to trees or hedges by reporting neighbours for "perceived environmental/rural offences".

Mr Shearn claims these complaints by neighbours are "not material", as they date back to 2009 and only events in the past six months should be considered in an ASBI claim.

Responding on this point, a

police spokesman said: "As part of the application for an ASBI, we are required to provide examples of anti-social behaviour which are then considered by the judge.

"Evidence which can be taken into consideration includes any which has taken place one year before the commencement of the legislation under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, which came into effect in November 2014 (so evidence can be submitted from November 2013)."

It is also alleged Mr Shearn has

"gone out of his way" to contact the owners of light aircraft seen flying "below what he considers to be a reasonable height" over the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The application states Mr Shearn confessed to using a laser range finder to determine the height of aircraft, and was given "words of advice" by Surrey Police for endangering aircraft safety.

Mr Shearn's case was scheduled to be heard at a hearing at Aldershot County Court yesterday.

Campaign rejects Farnborough's narrative

THE FARNBOROUGH Noise campaign group has responded strongly to a Q&A with Farnborough Airport CEO Simon Geere, featured in last week's newspaper.

In a lengthy response to be printed in full next week, the group disputes Mr Geere's assertions, particularly on environmental impact, stating that private jets from Farnborough

are 30 to 40 times more polluting than commercial flights per passenger mile.

They argue that expansion plans disregard the government's Climate Change Committee's advice on curbing aviation emissions. And the group accuses the airport of misleading the public and failing to engage with the community, pointing to ignored

questions and aggressive tactics against opposition.

They also challenge job and economic impact claims, suggesting the focus should be on sustainable businesses – urging a re-evaluation of expansion plans, emphasising the environmental, social and economic trade-offs between jet growth and the well-being of local communities.

MURDOCH
ASSET MANAGEMENT

With careful planning, you could reduce the impact of Inheritance tax significantly or even completely.

We can help you manage your finances and ensure you know all the relevant information to make the best decisions for you and your legacy.

Contact us today.