

AIRPORT EXPANSION

Oh for FACC's sake



FARNBOROUGH airfield critic Colin Shearn was slapped with an antisocial behaviour injunction last year after raising too many questions about its noisy operations.

Mr Shearn was chair of Farnborough Noise campaign group until he stepped down after being barred from attending public meetings of Farnborough Aerodrome Consultative Committee (FACC) under an order obtained by Surrey Police last August. Just weeks later, Farnborough launched a consultation on its long-term growth plans, which include raising the cap on flights from 50,000 to 70,000 a year and from 8,900 to 18,000 at weekends.

But at least meetings of FACC are held in public. Campaigners against airport expansion in Birmingham say they have been barred from every single meeting of Birmingham Airport Consultative Committee (BACC) since 2020, as they have all been held behind closed doors.

Government guidelines on airport consultative committees, drawn up in 2014, say committees "are encouraged to open their meetings to the public, unless there is a legitimate reason why it is inappropriate to do so". Further guidance is provided on how committees can ask the public to leave after the main business while they handle any legally confidential matters.

But while BACC publishes the agendas for meetings, which are attended by representatives of Birmingham Airport Company and councils from across the Midlands, its website simply reads: "Please note that the Airport Consultative Committee does not meet in public." Requests from Stop Birmingham Airport Expansion to open the meetings have been refused.

BACC's position is especially concerning as its chair, Colin Flack, is also chair of UKACCs, the national body that develops best practice advice for airport consultative committees.