

An Apple A Day Keeps the Bulldozer Away? Airport's Runway Plan Threatens Historic Village



In a poignant move that showcases poetic activism at its best, on November 13 a group of politicians, celebrities and concerned citizens planted an orchard behind this picturesque 16th century inn in Sipson Village outside of London. The new apple orchard may not last long enough to bear fruit: most of the village and the country around it will be destroyed if plans for a third runway for Heathrow Airport go through.

As British Liberal Democratic party leader Nick Clegg points out, "□The Government is absolutely wrong to stubbornly push ahead with a third runway at Heathrow. How can Gordon Brown go to Copenhagen and credibly call for big reductions in carbon when he has such a dire environmental track record at home?"

The orchard plot was purchased by Greenpeace then subdivided among some 57,000 sub-owners in order to throw legal roadblocks in the face of a takeover of the site for airport development. Cox's apple trees were planted. The species is named after Richard Cox, who bred and introduced the apple in the mid 1800s and is buried in the proposed runway site.

Air travel has a devastating effect on our atmosphere and is a major, disproportionate contributor to global warming. Earlier this year writer George Monbiot sternly questioned the need for the third runway, which can only be expected to increase ozone-damaging air travel, just as widening a road ensures increased vehicle traffic. He noted that with upcoming climate talks and impending caps on emissions, air travel will, and should be, hit hard: "Aviation accounts for 0.78% of total business turnover in the UK. Yet it is responsible for 13% of the country's total greenhouse gas emissions. Any fair pricing of greenhouse gases would make flying prohibitively expensive."

The fundamental issue here is the widespread acceptance of the need for growth as a measure of prosperity. Until governments and business adapt how they measure progress to take into account the negative environmental and social effects of growth--the effects which are now termed "externalities"--we will be continually challenged to fight to preserve historic buildings, delightful trees, and the other vital threads of our ecosystem's fabric that make life worth living.