

TIMES

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Heathrow: park strife

Tranquil, peaceful setting could be ruined by more flights, says psychologist

Reporter
Calum Rutter
will.harrison@newsquest.co.uk

HEATHROW expansion risks ruining Richmond Park as a place for Londoners to escape the city, risking their mental health, according to a psychologist.

Proposed new flight paths would mean, for the first time, 47 low-flying arrivals an hour as well as between 17 and 47 more departures an hour being routed directly over the park.

And mental health specialist Dr Alison Greenwood said this could seriously damage people's well-being.

Dr Greenwood, who encourages people to treat themselves with "nature prescriptions", said: "I regularly walk or sit in Richmond Park with people suffering from all kinds of mental dis-

stress, and I see first-hand the powerful healing qualities of being in such a magnificent natural setting, with clients visibly relaxing, smiling, and expressing a sense of freedom, release, connection, optimism and meaning.

"And when I ask my clients to describe what it is they most appreciate about spending time in the park, adjectives such as 'tranquil', 'quiet', and 'peaceful' are among the most frequently used."

Richmond Park is London's largest park, a National Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is visited by 5.5 million people a year from London and beyond.

And the government's own "25 Year Environment Plan" states: "Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of well-being.

"It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression."

Dr Greenwood said this makes the plans seem "irrational", and argued her point in an article written for Friends of Richmond Park (FRP).

She wrote: "Natural spaces are a precious resource in addressing our current mental health crisis; noise pollution has a significant negative impact on our mental health; and noise pollution that destroys the restorative properties of our natural spaces is clearly damaging on both fronts."

A consultation is currently open to the public to comment on last week's new masterplan for the third runway.

Emma Gilthorpe, Heathrow's Executive Director for Expansion, said: "Expansion must not come at any cost. That is why we have been working with partners at the



Concerns have been raised about the effect of airport expansion on Richmond Park

airport, in local communities and in Government to ensure our plans show how we can grow sustainably and responsibly – with environmental considerations at the heart of

expansion.

"This consultation is an opportunity for people to have their say on our preferred masterplan, so it's really important that as many peo-

ple as possible take part. We look forward to hearing your views."

Residents can have their say at aec.heathrowconsultation.com/

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