



Heathrow 3rd runway

Two weeks ago, BP's new chief executive stated that the company will be carbon neutral by 2050. He did not, however, give any indication of how this will be achieved, or lay out any milestones along the way.

It felt like just another promise from a company that had made them before, as when they rebranded to "Beyond Petroleum" in 2001, without actually changing any of the core dynamics of their fossil fuel based business. I hope not, but I fear this was a cheap promise made with no plan for delivery.

But the Supreme Court's verdict against building the third runway at Heathrow proves that in terms of government activity, these promises are no longer like that. The judges argued that the proposal for a third runway was incompatible with the government's commitment to the Climate Change Act.

I suspect that when the government waved through the Climate Change act last year, requiring a zero carbon UK by 2050, they didn't actually expect they would have to *do* anything or change any policy in this parliament. After all, today's MPs may not even be alive in 2050, let alone in government. A long distance target gives a virtual free ride for the first few years.

I can make that kind of commitment myself: the Church of England will treble its attendance by 2050; I will quadruple my charitable giving by 2050; the Diocese of Southwark's cricket team will be a Church

Times Cup winning side in 2050. I can keep shooting out statements like this for fun, because they are so far away that no one will hold me accountable for them. They are all nice aspirations, but having to *do* something about them makes it all trickier.

Rather remarkably, in the case of the Climate Change commitment, for once, something has actually happened. Like the little boy pointing out the emperor has no clothes, the Supreme Court has pointed out that you can have Heathrow expansion or you can have zero carbon by 2050, but you can't have both.

It seems that this hasn't yet sunk in. Grant Shapps' response was this: "This government is absolutely committed to airport expansion, but we want to make sure that expansion is environmentally friendly."

There may be a universe in which this will be possible; there may be a time when there is such a thing as "clean" aviation fuel, and flying planes is environmentally friendly. (Personally, I'd love it to happen, as travelling by air gets you to exciting places.) But that time is not now, nor will it be the case for at least the next twenty years.

For sure, there will be an economic hit. But A. that's life B. it's not as big an economic hit as occurs when you have to spend billions on flood defences because global warming means the seas will rise etc.

It's the dawn of a new age of government.

Feb 2020 Thought. for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.