

Whatever they might tell you – the majority in Alderney don't believe a word of what they are being 'sold' by the Bailiwick Politicians.

One thing is certain; when politicians, public bodies and so called 'experts' shower you with a proliferation of paper in an attempt to persuade you that whatever their preferred scheme is going to cost and however much it goes against the wishes of the residents they purport to serve, they realise that they are in trouble. They have the sudden realisation that the 'smoke and mirrors' illusion that they have been carefully generating all this time is far removed from the "having received widespread backing from the Alderney community" belief and that they are very aware that they are heading for defeat.

On recent days we have seen a co-ordinated issue of support for the £24 million (we still believe it will finish up closer to £50 million) spend on revamping Alderney's airfield and turning it into a level two airport for no good reason.

The initial salvo being fired by deputy Mark Helyar on Tony LeBlanc's Youtube programme 'Tony@12, where unfortunately Mark spent seven minutes relaying to listeners that as far as Option C+ was concerned, he was completely out of his comfort zone, spending most of his time repeating quotes that had been made by other politicians.

Deputy Helyar did provide one piece of amusement when he said that "States of Guernsey estimates are usually correct." Really? Guernsey airport Terminal was budgeted in 2002 at £16.3m and finally cost £21m. (£26m & £33 in today's money).

The 2019 estimate for the long overdue repair work was £12.5 m, increased up to £24.5m for Option C+. With work not expected to be completed until 2025, anticipated inflation rates will considerably reduce the purchasing power of that figure. With the initial 2019 estimate already subject to three years' worth of inflation, one wonders how much the present estimate will rise by the time the work is completed.

Then came the Press Releases from both Guernsey and Alderney States, supporting each other, articles from Alderney's two aviation experts, who represent us in the Guernsey Chamber, plus, as always, the usual 'double act' input of a sort of pseudo questionnaire from the Chamber of Commerce.

All very dramatic, supporting the 'party line' of spending a great deal of money (that the States doesn't have) on expanding Alderney's airport and feeding yet more taxpayer's money into the existing £100 million Aurigny 'Black Hole' support fund.

We had imposed upon us the usual multiplicity of reasons for needing to expand, such as future proofing, standardisation of the Aurigny fleet, reducing PSO subsidies and of course how, by spending a fortune now, will prove to be economically sound over time.

They say the 'devil is in the detail' and for the first time in print, it was announced that the proposed refurbishment would only go ahead subject to "agreement being reached with the States of Alderney on a contribution to the costs."

I wonder how many Alderney residents knew that the States of Alderney's P&F had re-emphasised its pledge to contribute to this essential project. Essential to whom?

With the prospect of only two rotations a day between Alderney and Guernsey and, according to Deputy Helyar, no consideration being given to the Alderney Southampton route, limited services to feed the Guernsey hub is what Aurigny have always wanted: and here we are giving it to them on a plate!

Never mind, it will give you 20,000 extra seats, but to where it doesn't say. Nor is where we are going to find an extra 20,000 passengers to sit in them, but who seems to care: Aurigny will have twisted the States round their little finger and will have got their way yet again.

Why is it so important not to accede to Aurigny's desires? It is because they have been able to pile up an unbelievable amount of debt by way of loan guarantees, write offs and trading losses. Helyer insisted it was only a 'paper debt'. Not if they are called in they aren't.

By pouring in yet more taxpayer's money, Aurigny can look forward to a great future, doing exactly what they want. Operating as they do, under the protection of Guernsey's 'Closed Skies' policy, their future monopoly status is guaranteed.

If the States of Guernsey want to maintain that status, there is nothing you, or I, can do about it. It will be up to the politicians to persuade Aurigny that although they do a magnificent job as a level two carrier out of Guernsey, disposing of their Dornier aircraft will leave them trying to operate as a level three carrier; but with the wrong type of aircraft.

The only way that the Alderney populace can get back their once renown flexibility and their even more renown 35 minute 24/7 medivac service to the PEH is for Aurigny to withdraw from the Alderney route and work in harmony with an appointed level three carrier.

Alderney needs to be able to feed passengers into Aurigny's Guernsey hub, but must have total freedom and flexibility to operate to anywhere else it wishes in order to expand its horizons and make the Alderney hub commercially viable.

In short, the present proposals will result in a great deal of money being spent for which, for a great part, there is no need. Don't forget that in Aurigny's past, there was no need for a PSO and it didn't cost the Bailiwick taxpayer anything.

The funding has already been approved to carry out the upgrade work needed to bring the existing runway up to standard (Option B), but with an Alderney hub operated by a level 3 carrier, the additional costs needed to change from an airfield to a level 2 airport go away; as will the need for the £2million a year 'Alderney subsidy'.

The conversion of the airfield to an airport and the upgrading of the Airport Fire Service from Cat 2 to the Cat 5 needed for ATR aircraft, is permanent. You cannot go back if you find you have made a mistake. Bearing in mind that level 2 aircraft (ATR) will probably only operate twice a day, all of the upgraded facilities will only be needed for a limited period of time each day, making costly downtime of staff and facilities inevitable.

Guernsey does not operate an 'Open Skies' policy. This means that whatever the taxpayer wants in return for their money, Aurigny, using the Guernsey States to their advantage, can effectively block any operator, large or small, from operating into, or out of Guernsey airport. Even if Aurigny did agree to release the level three Alderney operation, it would still be in a position to control what any new incumbent carrier was allowed to do. The result being that any prospective third level carriers that wished to service Alderney would be starting with their hands tied behind their backs.

As a last plea to all Guernsey States Members, although you are required to make a decision very soon, the project will not be completed until 2025. That means another three years of abysmal service to Alderney and another £6 million in subsidies paid out. You have the power to stop this from happening, but it needs honest deliberation from within if you are to see the reality of what you may, or may not, be about to do.