# Grimshaw confirmed as lead architect as Heathrow submits £49bn, M25-moving third-runway plan



Grimshaw has been confirmed as lead architect on Heathrow Airport’s newly submitted £49 billion expansion plan, after the airport operator formally lodged proposals with the government for a third runway and wide‑ranging terminal upgrades. The submission, which Heathrow describes as a “shovel‑ready” bid, largely revisits layouts first made public in 2016 but with an escalated scope and cost that the airport says now totals £49 billion — more than three times the £14 billion estimate given in 2019. According to Heathrow, the scheme is structured to be privately financed and designed to deliver a significant boost to UK aviation capacity. (Heathrow said this in its press release.)

At the heart of the proposal is a 3,500‑metre runway to the north‑west of the existing airfield. The scheme as presented would require a major rerouting and partial burial of the M25 motorway beneath the new runway footprint, together with widened carriageways and junction improvements to handle the additional traffic and provide operational resilience. Grimshaw’s remit, as lead concept architect, covers two new buildings linked to Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners’ Terminal 5, a northern satellite terminal and an enlarged Terminal 2 with its own satellite facility — elements the practice says are intended to improve passenger experience, integrate with local communities and incorporate sustainability innovations developed during the design stages.

Heathrow’s own breakdown of the headline £49 billion figure gives a sense of the project’s internal logic: the airport states about £21 billion would be for the new runway and airfield infrastructure (including the M25 realignment), roughly £12 billion for new terminal capacity such as a proposed T5X and satellite buildings, and about £15 billion to modernise existing terminals. The operator has set an ambitious delivery ambition — reiterating that it would aim for an operational new runway within around a decade if consenting and financing proceed to plan — and has outlined milestone targets for further consultation and planning applications. Those ambitions are presented as part of Heathrow’s case that the expansion can be reconciled with the UK’s net‑zero by 2050 commitments. (These points are drawn from the airport’s public statement.)

The submission follows formal political backing for a third runway signalled earlier in the year, when the Chancellor announced government support and the Department for Transport invited competing bids. Heathrow says it is aiming for a final round of public consultation in 2027, a formal planning application by 2029 and then a Development Consent Order process to clear the way for construction — timetables the airport frames as compatible with its private finance model and industry delivery assumptions. A government decision on which scheme to back is expected later this year.

Not everyone accepts Heathrow’s timetable or its costing. One publicly declared rival is the Arora Group, which has lodged a competing “Heathrow West” proposal developed with Bechtel and design partners including Scott Brownrigg. Arora’s plan proposes a shorter, c.2,800‑metre runway sited to avoid the M25, and a new western terminal (branded Terminal 6), a strategy the company says would cut complexity, reduce disruption and see headline costs reported at under c.£25 billion. Arora argues its concept would be faster and cheaper to deliver and is designed to meet high sustainability standards such as BREEAM Excellent. The airport operator has countered that only its scheme can meet government targets for having a runway operational by the mid‑2030s.

The project’s legal and political history remains a live part of the debate. In 2020 the UK Supreme Court overturned a Court of Appeal ruling that had found the government’s earlier approval unlawful for failing to take adequate account of the Paris Agreement, a decision that cleared the way for the expansion’s return to the planning arena. Environmental campaigners described the Supreme Court ruling as a setback, and they warned that the planning stage would be the moment for full and rigorous climate assessment.

Campaign groups have renewed that challenge since the latest submission. Tony Bosworth, a climate campaigner at Friends of the Earth, told Construction & Civil Engineering magazine that it was difficult to reconcile a major runway expansion with the UK’s legally binding climate targets, and called for “a fully transparent and democratic decision‑making process”. Friends of the Earth’s broader campaign materials set out why the organisation believes further runway capacity would increase greenhouse‑gas emissions and damage local air quality, and they urge policymakers to prioritise rail investment and regional airport upgrades rather than expanding hub capacity at Heathrow.

Grimshaw, for its part, sets out on its project pages a long‑standing role in shaping the masterplan and stresses design priorities such as passenger experience, community integration and sustainability. The practice says it was appointed following a competitive process and is leading the concept and developed design stages within the integrated design team. Heathrow and its design partners frame these interventions as ways to reduce the local environmental footprint and improve surface access, but those assertions will be scrutinised during the statutory planning process.

Costs, complexity and local impacts are central to why the submission has reignited public scrutiny. Heathrow points to constrained capacity at the country’s busiest hub and to projected passenger demand growth as justifications for a third runway; opponents and some rival proposers argue that the commercial and engineering risks — not least the M25 realignment and the scale of enabling works — make alternative options more deliverable and less disruptive. Which account the government finds more convincing will shape not only the future of the airport but also the wider policy debate about how the UK balances economic ambition, decarbonisation and transport planning.

The immediate path ahead is procedural but consequential: ministers must decide which scheme, if any, to endorse; further public consultation and detailed planning scrutiny will follow; and the competing claims about deliverability, cost and climate impact are likely to intensify as the project moves into the formal consenting phase. Whichever way the decision goes, the Heathrow submission restarts a long‑running national argument about connectivity, growth and environmental responsibility at a point when policy makers must reconcile fast‑moving climate commitments with infrastructure choices that will shape emissions and communities for decades.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/), [[3]](https://mediacentre.heathrow.com/pressrelease/detail/23454), [[4]](https://grimshaw.global/projects/aviation/heathrow-expansion/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/), [[2]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/), [[4]](https://grimshaw.global/projects/aviation/heathrow-expansion/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://mediacentre.heathrow.com/pressrelease/detail/23454), [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/), [[2]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.thearoragroup.com/news/the-arora-group-finalises-landmark-heathrow-airport-expansion-proposal), [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/16/top-uk-court-overturns-block-on-heathrows-third-runway), [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/), [[7]](https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/stop-airport-expansions)
* Paragraph 8 – [[4]](https://grimshaw.global/projects/aviation/heathrow-expansion/), [[3]](https://mediacentre.heathrow.com/pressrelease/detail/23454)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/), [[3]](https://mediacentre.heathrow.com/pressrelease/detail/23454), [[5]](https://www.thearoragroup.com/news/the-arora-group-finalises-landmark-heathrow-airport-expansion-proposal), [[7]](https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/stop-airport-expansions)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/), [[3]](https://mediacentre.heathrow.com/pressrelease/detail/23454), [[5]](https://www.thearoragroup.com/news/the-arora-group-finalises-landmark-heathrow-airport-expansion-proposal), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/16/top-uk-court-overturns-block-on-heathrows-third-runway), [[7]](https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/stop-airport-expansions)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://ccemagazine.com/news/heathrows-49bn-expansion-plan-retains-grimshaw-as-lead-architect/> - Construction & Civil Engineering magazine reports that Grimshaw has been retained as lead architect for Heathrow Airport’s newly submitted £49 billion expansion. The article describes a north‑west 3,500‑metre runway, a scheme that would cross and require realignment and burial of part of the M25, two new buildings linked to Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners’ Terminal 5, a northern satellite terminal and an enlarged Terminal 2 with a new satellite. It notes government backing announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, a rival Arora Group proposal, the project’s legal history including the 2020 Supreme Court ruling, environmental opposition and a proposed timetable for consultation and planning.
3. <https://mediacentre.heathrow.com/pressrelease/detail/23454> - Heathrow’s official press release confirms the airport submitted a ‘shovel‑ready’ proposal for a privately financed third runway and wider modernisation, summarising a total investment figure of £49 billion. The statement breaks the total into £21 billion for the new runway and airfield infrastructure (including M25 realignment), £12 billion for new terminal capacity such as a T5X and satellites, and £15 billion for modernising existing terminals. Heathrow sets out delivery ambitions — an operational runway within a decade and planning application milestones — and reiterates commitments to net zero by 2050 along with community and transport improvements.
4. <https://grimshaw.global/projects/aviation/heathrow-expansion/> - Grimshaw’s project page outlines the firm’s long‑standing role as concept architect on Heathrow expansion and presents the practice’s vision for a sustainable, world‑class hub. The page describes Grimshaw’s appointment following a competitive process and highlights their work on concept and developed design stages for the masterplan. It emphasises design priorities such as passenger experience, integration with local communities and sustainability innovations that informed earlier iterations of the expansion concept. The content corroborates Grimshaw’s formal involvement with Heathrow’s expansion work and situates the practice within the Integrated Design Team engaged on the project.
5. <https://www.thearoragroup.com/news/the-arora-group-finalises-landmark-heathrow-airport-expansion-proposal> - The Arora Group’s press statement presents its competing ‘Heathrow West’ proposal submitted to government, developed with Bechtel and design partners including Scott Brownrigg. The release outlines a shorter c.2,800‑metre runway and a new Terminal 6 west of Terminal 5, deliberately avoiding rerouting the M25 to reduce cost, complexity and disruption. Arora argues the scheme is faster, cheaper (reported under c.£25 billion) and more deliverable within the government’s target timeframe, while targeting BREEAM Excellent and reduced environmental impact. The statement highlights costed timelines and a strategy to minimise community and construction disturbance compared with the airport operator’s plan.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/16/top-uk-court-overturns-block-on-heathrows-third-runway> - The Guardian’s 2020 report explains that the UK Supreme Court overturned a February Court of Appeal decision which had found the government’s approval of Heathrow expansion unlawful for insufficiently considering the Paris Agreement. The article outlines legal context: the Court of Appeal had been the first UK court to base a ruling explicitly on the Paris accord, and the Supreme Court’s reversal allowed the project to proceed to the planning stage. It records campaigner disappointment, notes the need for full climate considerations at the planning phase, and sets out the continuing political and environmental controversy around the third runway.
7. <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/stop-airport-expansions> - Friends of the Earth’s campaign hub summarises the organisation’s opposition to airport expansion, including Heathrow, on climate and local environment grounds. The page recalls the 2020 legal victory at the Court of Appeal and the later Supreme Court reversal, explains why campaigners argue additional runway capacity would increase greenhouse gas emissions and harm communities, and presents policy positions opposing net airport expansion unless aviation emissions can be credibly reduced. It sets out actions for supporters, presents evidence on local air quality and carbon impacts, and stresses alternatives such as greater rail investment and demand reduction for flying.