

HIGH WEALD COUNCILS AVIATION ACTION GROUP (HWCAAG)

DfT Night Flight Consultation

The High Weald Councils Aviation Action Group (HWCAAG) came into existence in September 2013 in response to the significant increase in both the noise and frequency of aircraft movements into Gatwick Airport and the possibility of a second runway at Gatwick. It comprises twenty-six Parish and Town Councils representing some 100,000 people from across the area to the East and South East of Gatwick. All member councils have voted and formally adopted a policy that wishes to see a ban on flights in the night period at Gatwick. This response has been discussed and approved by our member councils.

We live in an area of tranquillity and a substantial number of our residents live in the High Weald AONB. Because of the contrast between our tranquillity and noise of night flights, the effect of night flights is far greater than it would be for an urban area. We enjoy many heritage sites, most of which rely on tranquillity, which is therefore vital for the economic viability of much of the High Weald area.

The consultation has been delayed: it was originally expected in October. That means that the consultation period has been cut short, to less than seven weeks instead of the normal three months. It also means that decisions will be rushed in order that the new regime can be announced before 1st April when airlines need to start planning their autumn schedules.

We do not believe that the methodology the Department appears to have used in developing its night flight proposals is appropriate. By setting an objective of "maintaining the existing benefits of night flights" the Department has precluded the carrying out of a proper cost-benefit exercise in accordance with normal government policy. There appears to have been no objective attempt to balance the interests of impacted communities, the aviation industry, and the wider economy; indeed, the growing evidence that exposure to aviation noise, particularly at night, has adverse effects on health appears to have been ignored in favour of capacity demands from the aviation industry.

Consequently, the proposals in the consultation are neither evidence-based nor sustainable. They cannot be regarded as achieving appropriate regulation of aircraft noise at night. In our view the consultation should therefore not proceed in its current form. There is now insufficient time to carry out a new exercise prior to expiry of the current arrangements in October 2017. We suggest the government announces that it will extend the current regime for a further year, modified only by inclusion of currently exempt aircraft in the movement limit and reduction in the quota limits to current levels. Should the DfT decide a quota period is necessary we propose that the result of this consultation should apply for a maximum of two years only and, during that period, a proper assessment and a full consultation should take place.

Q1a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with our proposed environmental objective for the next regime? *(Encourage the use of quieter aircraft to limit or reduce the number of people significantly affected by aircraft noise at night, while maintaining the existing benefits of night flights.)*

While we welcome the aim to encourage quieter aircraft, we strongly disagree with the proposed objective. The objective is not appropriate. The government's role as regulator is to assess carefully the benefits and costs of night flights and strike an appropriate balance. Setting an objective of "maintaining the existing benefits of night flights" precludes such an assessment, and the government has not carried one out.

No meaningful options appraisal starts by assuming what the right answer should be. By defining its objective in this way the government has unacceptably circumscribed the work done and failed to consider an appropriate range of options.

Recent research shows that the damage to health from noise is greater than that previously thought. So the objective should be to reduce the number of people significantly affected. This can best be achieved by eliminating night flights all together. We consider the advantages of night flights are more than offset by the disadvantages which we believe to be understated. Meanwhile the aim to encourage quieter aircraft is welcomed.

Q1b. Do you have any additional comments on our proposed environmental objective for the next regime?

Although the consultation refers to the existing benefits of night flights there is no attempt to quantify them. It is stated in paragraph 1 that aviation 'directly supports around 230,000 jobs ... and contributes over £21bn annually to UK GDP.' but that includes flights at all times of day; it also includes aircraft manufacture and aerospace.¹ These benefits accrue equally to day flights and night flights. So the actual benefit per flight is small.

The economic benefits of night flights at Gatwick are particularly small. There is little or no freight which requires night-time delivery. Most of the night flights are to or from holiday destinations with no special justification on business grounds. Because of the paucity of public transport in the middle of the night, greater use is made of private transport so night flights contribute more than their share to pollution. We understand the argument that night flights allow airlines to make more use of their aircraft with three rotations a day but that is a doubtful benefit as most maintenance and depreciation are based on flying times: Any calculation of economic benefits is suspect unless it considers the hidden subsidy to airlines as a result of paying no fuel tax and no VAT, the benefit of which is about four times the revenue from air passenger duty.

Additionally, there is no monetisation of the dis-benefit to residents who live under the flight path. Health impacts of those living in the 40 – 55db Leq night contour as well as economic impact on productivity and house prices. The impact on children's cognition at the 10 primary schools in this area should also be a factor in line with the evidence provided by the CAA.² Most of the residents in the area covered by the High Weald Councils Aviation Action Group have been affected by night flights. Adding to these residents to the east of Gatwick, there is a similar number of residents to the west of Gatwick, therefore the true number of people affected must be in the order of 200,000. In reality, this figure of 200,000 must be significantly understated as the area to the west of Gatwick is much more heavily populated. It is most certainly not the 4,300 alleged by Gatwick Airport Ltd.

In so far as there are economic benefits, in some cases they could be achieved by better scheduling. If aircraft to middle-distance destinations were scheduled to depart before 11.30 pm and scheduled to return after 6.00 am the benefits of three rotations could be achieved without flights at Gatwick during the night quota period.

We must add that the Leq measurement system is inadequate and should not be used.

¹ According to the Office for National Statistics the total employment in air transport in 2015 (excluding manufacture and aerospace) was 125,900. Gross value added by air transport plus air freight was £7.3 billion (before deducting depreciation). That is under 10% of the gross value added by transport including road and rail. <https://www.ons.gov.uk>

² CAP1278

Q2a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with our proposal for the length of the next regime?

In view of the lack of an adequate consultation period and the lack of evidence, we consider the quota period should be for two years. This would give time for a thorough analysis of the balance between the economic benefits and the health impacts arising from the disturbance of night flights and a subsequent consultation. We expect these studies would lead to a reduction in both the noise and number quotas.

Q2b. Do you have any additional comments on our proposal for the length of the regime?

We agree with GACC and are disappointed that there has been no fundamental review of the night flight regime since 2006. Thus the opportunity for environmental improvements has been lost. Until 2012 there was a progressive year-by-year reduction in the level of noise permitted at night at Gatwick. A clear indication that this progressive reduction would continue was given in a Ministerial Statement by the then Aviation Minister: *"The government will take into account the freeze in quota limits during this extension period when setting the next regime and expects airlines to continue to improve their environmental performance in the interim."*³

Q3a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with our proposal to introduce a new QC/0.125 category for aircraft between 81 and 83.9 EPNdB?

We support this proposal.

Q3b. How strongly do you agree or disagree with our proposal for all aircraft quieter than this to remain QC/0 but count towards the airports movement limit?

Again, we agree with GACC and welcome this proposal. There are very few such aircraft at Gatwick at present but as the consultation paper indicates a large number are on order.

Including them in the movement quota will reassure the public that the system is comprehensive; counting them as QC/0 will encourage investment in the least noisy aircraft.

Q3c. Do you have any additional comments on proposals for the Quota Count System?

No.

Q4a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal for movement limits to remain unchanged at Heathrow?

As we are based near Gatwick, we would leave comments on Heathrow's position to them. No comment.

Q4b. Do you have any additional comments on our proposal for Heathrow's movement limit?

No.

Q5a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal for movement limits to remain unchanged at Gatwick?

We strongly disagree. They should be reduced. As shown above, the economic justification for them is weak and it is becoming apparent from a variety of studies that the damage to health from the industry is greater than previously thought. At the very least the aim should be to achieve a steady year-by-year reduction. We support the call by Stop Stansted Expansion for the Government to announce that all night flights will be phased out by 2030. However, we would strongly urge a complete cessation prior to 2030.

The winter movements' quota is not fully used. Paragraph 2.19 of the consultation paper says: *'There is however still capacity in the winter period and given the constraints on airport capacity in the south east, the Government does not think it appropriate to constrain this further'*.

³ Rt Hon Theresa Villiers. 12 March 2012.

This ignores the effects of night flights in winter. Many people sleep with a window open in winter as well as in summer and, if they suffer from sleep deprivation in summer, would also suffer in winter.

Instead, as a minimum, the winter movements' quota of 3,250 movements should be reduced to match the actual usage in the past five years of under 2,000.

Q5b. Do you have any additional comments on our proposal for Gatwick's movement limit?

All our member parish and town councils, who represent a population of about 100,000, agree that there should be no night flights between midnight and 6am. Their wish coupled with the growing evidence of the adverse effects on health of aircraft noise at night should be accepted and acted upon by Government who should pursue a policy of working towards eliminating night flights at all United Kingdom airports. Indeed, it is disappointment at the failure to cut the number of night flights which has led to the request that a proper assessment of the economic costs and benefits is made, followed within two years by a reduction in the movements and noise quotas.

Q6a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to raise Stansted's movement limits to reflect the current number of exempt aircraft in operation?

No comment.

Q6b. Do you have any additional comments on our proposal for Stansted's movement limit?

No.

Q7a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with our proposals to encourage the use of quieter aircraft at Heathrow?

No comment.

Q7b. Do you have any additional comments on how you feel noise quotas can best be set in order to encourage the use of quieter aircraft at Heathrow?

No.

Q8a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with our proposals to encourage the use of quieter aircraft at Gatwick?

We support the aim to reduce the noise quotas to match existing use. But we wish it went further. We fully agree with the GACC's view set out in the following six paragraphs.

"Having a large surplus of noise points has meant that the noise quotas have been totally ineffective in their aim to encourage quieter aircraft. The proposal to reduce the summer noise quota to 4870, which is slightly less than the actual use in the past three years, would fulfil this aim.

We are amazed, however, that the new noise quota for the winter period is proposed at 1,655 which almost double the actual use in two of the past three years. That would negate the aim of setting the limits to match existing use, and would mean that the noise quota would be ineffective and would provide no incentive for the use of quieter aircraft. The new winter noise quota should be set at around 900.

We also strongly support the suggestion in paragraph 3.25 that the noise quotas may be reduced by 5% a year to be 20% lower by 2022. That would represent a big improvement in the situation at Gatwick. It would put pressure on airlines to buy and to operate quieter aircraft. In the long run this type of measure is what encourages manufacturers to design quieter aircraft.

We are, however, worried that this is only described as 'hypothetical' and that it is not included in the summary of measures being proposed.

“Indeed in paragraph 4.6 it is stated that: ‘we would only adopt a reduction in noise quota if evidence suggests this would act as a realistic incentive for airports and airlines to use quieter aircraft rather than to penalise them with unrealistic targets.’ If this were to mean only reducing the noise quotas after the airlines had bought quieter aircraft it would provide no incentive.

We trust that the Department will resist lobbying from the aviation industry to water down this proposal. Only if the noise quotas actually put pressure on airlines to buy and operate quieter aircraft will they be beneficial: as Lewis Carroll said; ‘Medicine has to taste nasty!’ We therefore hope that this proposal can be up-graded to a definite policy when the Government announce their decisions.”

And further to the GACC view we think there should be no use of the winter quota to generate extra capacity in the summer at Gatwick.

Q8b. Do you have any additional comments on how you feel noise quotas can best be set in order to encourage the use of quieter aircraft at Gatwick?

We are appalled at the suggestion in the consultation paper (paragraph 1.38) that noise at night only affects some 4,300 people at Gatwick (the number within the 48 Leq.night contour).

We are glad that the consultation uses the 48 Leq.night measurement rather than the discredited 57 Leq, but it still measures the average noise which is almost meaningless at night. What really matters is the peak noise and number of noise events. For example, after one noise event most people can drift back to sleep. The second wakes them thoroughly and so on. Being then fully awake, it is much harder to get back to sleep. The noise metrics are inadequate. For example they do not capture the effect of the change in aircraft engine noise when altering course. This change can attract attention in the same way as movement draws the eye to the source.

Many HWCAAG member councils are members of GACC and fully agree with the conclusion of a recent research study for GACC carried out by the Dutch research agency To70 which found that: ‘*The percentage of annoyed residents is likely to be higher in areas with low ambient noise than in high ambient noise areas. It can be misleading to compare noise annoyance between different airports, when these local differences are not taken into account. Hence, the local difference between ambient noise levels should always be taken into account when calculating the annoyance.*’⁴

And further to the GACC view, HWCAAG believes that such seasonal variation in the night flight regime at Gatwick believe relying on an annual average is not only meaningless it is extremely misleading. The nature of the schedule at Gatwick means that not only should a seasonal average be taken but also a peak average of the three busiest days of the week. Thresholds should be set at N20 LMax60db, and Lnight 40db.

Q9a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with our proposals to encourage the use of quieter aircraft at Stansted?

No comment.

Q9b. Do you have any additional comments on how you feel noise quotas can best be set in order to encourage the use of quieter aircraft at Stansted?

No.

Q10. Do you have any further views on our proposals, or their potential impact on the Government's ability to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty?

⁴ <http://www.gacc.org.uk/research-studies.php>

We agree with GACC that, if the present controls on night flights by the DfT are to be replaced by 'bespoke' controls imposed locally possibly through the planning system, then any new system must involve all the councils whose populations are affected by aircraft noise.

We believe that the Public Sector Equality Duty has not been met as the allocation of night flight quotas to Gatwick was made without consideration of our residents. It is therefore beholden upon Government to right this by eliminating night flights

Paragraphs 2.28 – 2.32 in the consultation paper refer to land use planning. They are largely meaningless unless local planning authorities can have an assurance that there will be no change in flight paths over the 50-100 year life-span of new houses, schools or hospitals.

As mentioned earlier, we strongly believe that it is in the overall interest of the country to ban all aircraft movements between midnight and 6am as a matter of urgency. The World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Guidelines on Community Noise suggest that night should be defined as 11.00 pm to 7.00 am. A ban between midnight and 6am would be a good start.

The High Weald Councils Aviation Action Group supports maximum dispersal and respite so that no-one suffers unbearable noise from exact flight paths being routed over them and this should apply to night flights as well as day.

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