

Airspace Workshop

The workshop was organised by the BIA with help from National Air Traffic Services (NATS) and a third party facilitator. This is not part of the expansion planning process but part of a nation-wide process to reassess how the planning for air paths is assessed using latest technologies to ensure that the UK's airspace uses the right flight paths. The NATS criteria involves any aircraft flying above 7,000ft. Aircraft in this category require the Department for Transport to work with NATS to ensure that the airspace is utilised wisely. Any aircraft paths below the 7000ft limit come under the responsibility of each local airport but are also governed by a NATS framework. The workshop was part of a multi-stage process with a view to designing the inputs for planning criteria that will be used at BIA. The law governing this process requires the airport to engage with the local community.

The people at the meeting were generally from local parish councils. They all started off on the wrong foot in that they wished to link this consultation with the planning application; it therefore took a little time to get settled into the flow of the meeting! The overall feeling was that the designing of the input was frankly an exercise in consultation for the sake of it, with many of the items discussed likely to be common factors to many of the other planning sessions. Nevertheless the workshop ran for two and a half hours and we did focus on the key outputs required for the meeting.

Topics which came up are:

- Noise.
- Range of environmental emissions.
- Safety.
- Efficient use of fuel.
- Factors affecting amount of disturbance to local residents.
- Night flying and the reduction of night flying where possible.
- Preventing air traffic from flying over areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The major takeaway from this meeting is that the various factors need to be viewed as interrelated components and balanced accordingly; for example, questioning what the impact of a further 10% of fuel might be versus the height that the plane can be flown at. The issues about favouring one variable against another are how does one factor trade off against another, so the absolute importance of noise has to be offset against fuel emissions. The reality is that the exercise is too simplistic when you pick one to two factors as points to major on. The airport representatives nevertheless looked for a prioritised score from each of the members of the workshop as to which are the most important factors. My concern with this approach is this allows them to focus on those elements that they asked to be prioritised with a list of other factors that they wished to be balanced against.

There were a couple of useful things discussed:

- 1) The whole focus of this NATS consultation was to achieve an increase in fuel efficiency, a reduced amount of noise and an improved performance in aircraft

emissions. This on the face of it looks ok. The new NATS framework means that the existing use of airspace may well allow a higher level of aircraft usage in any given period of time. This could mean that night flying could be reduced with an increase in daytime flying for the same level of capacity at the airport.

2) There was a level of discussion about the flights being geographically spread more widely, so that local residents would share in an equal amount of disruption! This was constrained when we looked at areas of outstanding natural beauty, which may not be flown over.

The next step of the process would involve BIA introducing some modelling with locals to explore the impact of varying flight patterns under 7,000ft. This would be likely to happen after Christmas. This would appear to let BIA introduce a significant variation in aircraft modelling around the backdrop of more efficient use of airspace overall and as such we need to question their travel plans carefully.

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