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Via Email: night.flights@dft.gov.uk

18 May 2023

HSPG Response to Night-time Noise Abatement Objective for Heathrow Airport

Dear Sirs

Thankyou for agreeing to the extension of time for making this submission, this response is structured to address the numbered questions in your online consultation questionnaire.

Background to HSPG – Qs 1 to 6

This response is made by the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group (HSPG), a constituted grouping of ‘willing’ local authorities and local enterprise partnerships (i) committed to jointly leading a collaborative multi-agency approach on the future planning of the functional economic area surrounding Heathrow Airport. The Group was formed in late 2015. It is independent of, but constructively engages with, Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL).

The Group collaborates on interventions that could improve the area around the airport, and acts as a conduit between the members and Heathrow Airport Limited, Government, neighbouring area interests (including the West London Alliance of London Boroughs) and other key stakeholders.

Our work includes convening collaborative action around: airport operations and airspace, strategic spatial and infrastructure planning, economic development, climate change and local environment and surface travel.

Established position of HSPG

The HSPG’s established position on Night-time operations at Heathrow is referenced in the Group’s membership Accord agreement and the set of short ‘Outcome Statements’ adopted by the Leaders of the member bodies. The Accord is framed around response to the 3 Runway airport expansion scheme, and dates to the time of independent noise expertise to Government coming from ICCAN. The Accord is now being updated.

The Outcome Statements includes calls for:

3.4 Compulsory scheduled night flight ban for a minimum period 11.30pm – 6.00am.

3.6 Provision of reliable, predictable periods of respite and relief including full runway 'alternation'.

3.7 Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise (ICCAN) to oversee and advise on mechanisms and penalties to ensure noise targets are met; to operate with full independence from the CAA and HAL.

3.8 Community compensation package including noise insulation / compensation schemes for residential and other sensitive uses (buildings and open areas), with associated regular reporting requirements on progress. The mitigation and compensation package provided by the Airport should be World class and proportionate to the impact of the expanded airport; eligibility should apply equally to existing and new premises.

HSPG responded to the previous Night Abatement Objective consultation (March 2021) leading to the extension of the life of the current NAO to October 2023, this being in part to allow a deeper review with ICCAN advice. Our response included:

....a fundamental review of the night flying regime is long overdue and it would be wrong to delay yet further still than to commence anew from 2024. This two-year roll-forward of the existing regime must not be a justification for inaction or further delay.

The period now through to 2022 and 2024 creates a unique opportunity to fundamentally review the night flying regime in an informed and balanced way; public attitudes and health impacts, economic benefits, meaningful metrics, and new opportunities afforded by modernisation of airspace capacity to reduce congestion and PBN and other new operating procedures to route aircraft more accurately. This can inform a new regime consistent with the Balanced Approach Regulation.

The current objective needs to be much more clearly orientated to reducing night noise and disturbance to the minimum, and to ensure continuous improvement in the night noise climate. This should address the frequency of aircraft overflight on affected communities and ensure that there are no night flights other than 'true' dispensations for emergencies during the most sensitive parts of the night. It is the HSPG's established position that a compulsory night ban should be adopted for a minimum period 23.30 – 06.00, as recommended by the Airports Commission.

The demands for and impacts of, night flying, and the operational tools and metrics are all complex to understand and difficult to engage with. Far greater transparency and public trust needs to be built with a proper regard to local night-time noise context and impact.

Without prejudice to this position, HSPG wish to comment on the new draft Objective. This response has been discussed and agreed at officer level across all HSPG members.

Q6 and 7

Consultation - proposed and existing wording of the Night-time Noise Abatement Objective

The previous/existing NNAO for all three designated airports includes:

“Limit or reduce the number of people significantly affected by aircraft noise at night, including through encouraging the use of quieter aircraft, while maintaining the existing benefits of night flights.”

The DfT’s new draft Night-time NAO for Heathrow states:

"Whilst supporting sustainable growth and recognising the importance to the UK of maintaining freight connectivity, to limit and where possible reduce, the adverse effects of aviation noise at night on health and quality of life".

Taking the main issues raised in the call for evidence, HSPG would make the following points in relation to the draft Heathrow NNAO.

a. Process

Regrettably ICCAN was replaced in March 2021 and since then the new arrangements housed within CAA have yet to deliver the significant review of Night-time noise policy the Government committed to. A range of work to improve understanding of the impact of aircraft noise and night-flights upon health and well-being is now underway, but this is an ongoing process and ***it is difficult to see how an Objective can be finalised without the benefit of these further evidenced investigations and clarity on the metrics to be used to measure performance and balanced decision making.*** For example, the work to review ‘dispensations’ is yet to complete.

b. An Objective and a delivery system is required specific to each airport

Previously a single NNAO for all three designated airports was operated, the format of the new consultation with three sets of repeated questions for each airport suggests that three distinct NNAOs be set, one for each airport. **This more bespoke approach is welcome, but as a minimum, each statement should include the identity of the airport and period addressed.**

The expectation is that the individual designated airport operator (with all stakeholders) deliver continuous improvement towards the NNAO through comprehensive and effective systems including the Noise Action Plan, monitoring and so forth, to demonstrably reduce or remove the nuisance caused by the *particular* night-time operations at the named airport.

The abatement measures and metrics used should be designed to address the *particular circumstances* at the named airport, capable of informing effective action, delivering the balanced approach, trade-offs and assessment including combined and cumulative effects across all the three dimensions of the adopted legal definition of sustainable development – environmental, social and economic. This should be expressed in a way that is clear to the interested member of the public.

An additional sentence or footnote with the Objective should make clear this requirement for a maintained system, and the Statement should include the name of the specific airport to which it applies.

d. Balanced sustainable growth

The introduction of “where possible” to the requirement to “limit, and where possible reduce” is a weakening the balance stuck in the previous Objective. The new Objective requires a reduction in noise at night only “where possible” without any attempt to define criteria for assessing what is “possible” nor the basis of making ‘trade-off’ balance against negative impacts.

The new wording introduces an acceptance that growth in night flights can or indeed should occur - tilting of balance in favour of economic objectives over social and environmental impacts (albeit this appears to reflect the new Overarching Objective issued by Government.)

The requirement should be to continuously reduce significant night-flight impacts and that any growth in night-time operations be conditional on it passing the tests of evidenced, balanced sustainable development (excepting genuine qualifying ‘dispensations’).

e. Lack of ambition

The expectation of Airspace Modernisation should be reduction of the total number of night-flights – which are universally recognised to be more harmful to health and wellbeing of local communities than day flights.

The Government is seeking to increase the capacity and resilience of the airspace during the day-time through the process of Airspace Modernisation at the airport and across UK and International airspace. An important aim being to relieve congestion and improve reliability so that night-flights by ‘late-runners’ and ‘early-starters’ (at Heathrow anticipating delays later in the day) are not necessary, thus reducing the number of total night-flights.

The expectation of growth in Night-flights should be removed from the NNAO.

f. Number of people affected at night-time

The new Objective moves away from the previous focus on the *number of people* affected by noise, to a greater focus on the nature of the *adverse effects on health and quality of life*. This is welcome and acceptable so long as genuine commitment and progress is made at both UK and Heathrow Airport level to develop better research and understanding of the full nature of adverse effects on sleep disturbance, annoyance, learning and health and quality of life, and the most meaningful forms of abatement and compensation, such as specification of noise insulation schemes. Another example, is addressing the balance of priority given to relieving the people that are very worst

impacted compared to the total number of people affected, the value of periods of respite, identification of the most 'valuable' periods of night (23.00-07.00), if any, and both acoustic and non-acoustic factors impacting health, annoyance and well-being.

However, uniquely the tool of population number / noise contours provides a valuable longitudinal measure of noise impact and progress made to reduce impact, and relates well with land use planning regime, design of noise insulation measures and so forth and so this tool should be retained and referenced.

It is suggested that a foot note the Objective require the maintenance of suitable locally designed population number / noise contour mapping metrics as an indicator of impact and the design of abatement strategies.

g. Freight and passengers

The draft NNAO for Heathrow only refers to 'freight connectivity' and fails to address passenger flights at all. ***Is the intention really that there be no passenger flying at Night at Heathrow or is this statement in error or incomplete?***

Heathrow is without doubt a very important freight port to UK wide economy, but Heathrow has relatively few dedicated freight-only flights, and operates *a ban on schedule freight only flights in the Night Quota Period (23.30 – 06.00)*. ***HSPG see no case to raise any expectation that this be relaxed.***

Frequent scheduled flights to Heathrow from a Worldwide network of important established and newer destinations do carry 'belly hold' freight together with passengers, by day and at night. So the economic benefits of flights to be assessed must be described far more finely, in terms of types of passenger purpose, types of freight, import and exports (and net trade), overseas destination (location, new or established sector), value to the UK economy wide and to the local sub-regional scale economy – in terms of GVA and other qualitative factors.

A Heathrow NNAO should distinctly address passenger and freight effects at local and UK levels, and be framed in the context of overarching Climate Change objectives

h. Inconsistency with the Overarching Noise Objective – distinct assessment of local and national impacts

Additional reference should be added to the Night Objective to require assessment of local *and* national economic and health impacts is necessary to bring it into conformity with the Government's own new Overarching Noise Statement:

"There should be a balance between the **local** and **national** economic and consumer benefits of night flights, both in terms of passenger and freight operations, against their social and health implications, in line with ICAO's Balanced Approach.

Add distinct reference to and assessment of local and national benefits and impacts**i. Most sensitive periods of Night**

In addition – the Objective should support attention to prioritising noise abatement strategies to address ‘the most sensitive parts of the night’ *as supported by evidence and perceived by the local community* of the particular airport.

For example, to address this, Heathrow operate additional voluntary restrictions (ATM and aircraft types) on any flights through a Night Quota Period (23.30 – 06.00) and have policy of no schedule departures 22.50 – 06.00 or arrivals between 22.55 – 04:40, and scheduled arrivals banned between 04.30 – 06.00).

The Airports National Policy Statement (June 2018) states that: *“The Government also expects a ban on scheduled night flights for a period of six and a half hours, between the hours of 11pm and 7am, to be implemented”*. (The ANPS leaves precise timing of the 6.5hrs to local determination, and reflects the recommendations of the Davies Commission into airport expansion in the South East). More recently, the York Report gives substance to an approach of a complete *silence period between 01.00 and 05.00hours*.

HSPG reiterate the need for *independent* analysis to be conducted to mirror the work done by the Airports Commission but for a 2Runway Heathrow airport scenario. This can pick up the work from the relevant studies already underway and should specifically address the question of the health impacts and whether these do indeed vary at different times of night – or not.

HSPG would argue for the most stringent approach that is consistent with the evidence particularly on the health impacts. This would as a minimum be a 6.5 hours allowance but could be anything up to a complete ban through the entire 8 hours, and that the policy should be informed by the precautionary principle i.e. where there is significant doubt we should err on the side of protecting the health of the population and maximise all available technological and other measures to limit the impact. Therefore, the onus should be on the proponents of night flights to show that the proposed pattern will not result in serious harm and also to examine the proportionality of the health and other benefits against the cost and feasibility of the action needed to avoid it.

The Objective should only be finalised and periodically reviewed with the benefit of ongoing research, and include where reference to temporal priorities in the abatement regime specific to the airport and surrounding circumstances.

Alternative wording Q9 - 11

HSPG support an alternative wording incorporating the points above.

Q12 – How should the proposed night-time noise abatement objective for Heathrow airport be assessed to ensure it is successful?

Assessing noise impacts and metrics

Night-flight noise abatement should be a major focus of the Noise Action Plan and airspace design options.

In principle, HSPG support the **Noise Envelope approach** – for example, as explored as part of the Heathrow expansion proposals. Useful metric include:

- The **Number above** – number events whereby noise energy thresholds are exceeded
- A range of **SOAEL, LOAEL, WHO thresholds with contour mapping** for longitudinal view and comparison
- **Equalities impact assessment** – live the characteristics of the populations most impacted by noise impacts
- **Qualitative techniques and research to address public perceptions** as well as quantitative techniques

Meaningful mitigation and compensation measures

More work needs to be undertaken on the impacts of day and night flying and the lessons for policy on flight paths and their usage. Including:

- **Priority periods** of the night. Is it that 8hours sleep (NHS) that is needed or what periods of night are most important to which segments of population?
- **Insulation scheme packages** – prioritise localities impacted by night noise?
- **Abatement procedures** such as directional preference, runway and flight path alternation during ‘shoulder’ periods – ensuring late night operations are not followed by early starts etc.

Economic impacts and night-time noise abatement targets

Much better understanding of attributable local and UK benefits is required of night-flights, including:

- Analysis of the use of flight routes would help define the economic purpose of flights in the night-time period. These need to be broken down between passenger, passenger and cargo, freight only and then further sub-divided.
- This analysis then facilitates scenarios to be developed in which some types of flight are shifted to other time periods (e.g. Goods to arrive earlier and be held in storage rather than ‘just in time’) which allows for opportunity costs to be assessed.

- It is crucial that analysis of impact specifically examine the potential knock-on effects to daytime operations if flights were re-timed. Given that the scope for re-timing of flights is likely to be quite different for different types of passengers and cargo (e.g. limited for express freight but much more immediately plausible for general freight) this analysis must differentiate between different types of (current) night flight. The economic and other implications associated with constraints on some types of night flying may look a decent trade-off compared to the reduction in noise and disruption.
- The economic implications would be described in terms of changes in volumes of passengers and of goods by sector and examined through direct, indirect, induced or catalytic changes in economic activity (using GVA or similar) and employment. The wider impacts would also probably include some allowance for benefits to passengers and cargo services from night flights and the associated changes in productivity which arise from connectivity via air. These would have to be modelled.
- This kind of analysis would provide a much firmer basis for making judgements about balance between competing interests because the mitigation measures for each scenario can then be modelled to look at residual noise impacts.
- The result could be a genuinely balanced judgement about policy, economic benefit, opportunity cost and residual noise impact. That is what is needed.

Climate Change

More deeply the case for night-time air cargo needs to be considered in relation to:

- unnecessary or over-dependency in the UK supply chain on over-night 'just in time' delivery systems dependant on night-flights
- the 'affordability' in terms of creeping public and market expectations for evermore rapid delivery times in the context of overarching carbon reduction and climate change objectives, as well as health and wellbeing of local communities, and
- the competitive pressure on Heathrow Airport to accept night passenger flights, 'just because the other competing hub airports do'. There is a strong case for united action.

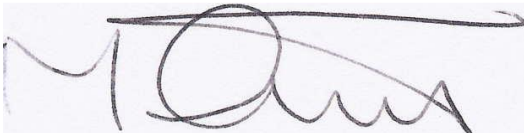
Terminology and definitions

It is essential that there is far greater consistency, transparency and clarity to the public about the meaning of key terminology such as:

- 'scheduled flights' as distinct from the total of flights
- 'ban' Vs policy

- 'complete silence period'
- Government and airport declared qualifying night-flight 'dispensations' including emergencies.

Yours Sincerely,



Michael Thornton, Lead Advisor, Heathrow Strategic Planning Group
On Behalf of HSPG members

¹ Full Members of the HSPG (and signatories of an 'Accord') are: Elmbridge Borough Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership, London Borough of Ealing, London Borough of Hounslow, Runnymede Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, Spelthorne Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Other organisations have 'Observer' status and participate in some activities, including: Government, National Highways, LB Hillingdon, LB Richmond and West London Alliance (of London Boroughs). The Group works closely with Heathrow and airport stakeholder groups such as Council for Independent Scrutiny of Heathrow Airport and Heathrow Area Transport Forum.