



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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Heathrow Airport Limited
The Compass Centre
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Hounslow
Middlesex
TW6 2GW

By email: quieter@heathrow.com

Our reference: BS27710

17 July 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Heathrow Noise Action Plan 2024-2028 Consultation

I write as the MP for Runnymede and Weybridge in response to the above-referenced consultation.

Runnymede and Weybridge is a constituency of vibrant communities which have grown as a result of our excellent transport links and connectivity, including our international gateway via Heathrow. Heathrow is a major source of direct and indirect employment locally, attracting investment and economic opportunities to the constituency and neighbouring towns.

However, alongside the benefits, our proximity also presents challenges. One of the most significant of these is the impact of flight paths, and associated noise pollution, on the wellbeing of residents. Reducing local air and noise pollution is one of my priorities for Runnymede and Weybridge.

As the aviation sector recovers from the pandemic, we look with renewed focus on the next challenges it faces: ensuring sustainability and achieving net-zero, and minimising the impact on local communities. The Sustainable Aviation Fuel industry set to grow exponentially in coming years, backed by significant Government support, but the respite from aircraft noise experienced by local communities at the start of the pandemic highlighted the need to move faster on reducing the airport's noise impact on residential areas surrounding Heathrow.

I believe, with ambitious plans for improvements to emissions levels and noise reduction, residents of Runnymede and Weybridge can harness the benefits of a thriving aviation sector with Heathrow at its centre, without being disproportionately affected by the environmental consequences.

I have heard from community groups and individual constituents who have written or met with me to let me know their concerns on the issue of aircraft noise pollution, including in response to my recent request for feedback in relation to Heathrow's fourth Noise Action Plan (NAP).

I welcome Heathrow's consultation on the NAP which sets out its strategy for managing and reducing the impacts of aircraft noise over the next five years.

Reducing Heathrow's noise contour

The measures taken by Heathrow to reduce its noise contour (that is, the area surrounding the airport most affected by aircraft noise) are encouraging but more needs to be done for those affected. Reports of high/distracting levels of noise from flight paths in areas of the

constituency indicates the ongoing substantial impact of flight noise on my constituency.

Figures cited in the consultation show a reduction of the 55 Lden (normal conversation volume) contour from 245 km² in 2006 to 176 km² in 2019. Heathrow predicts a further decrease in this significant noise contour to 148 km² by 2026 – an additional reduction of 15%. I am pleased to see that the maps included in the annexes to the consultation indicate that most of Thorpe, within my constituency, will be taken out of this noise contour by 2026. However, Egham will remain within the 55Lden contour by 2026 under the current NAP. I would welcome dialogue to discuss how the final NAP can be built on in the future to further reduce Heathrow's noise footprint over the Egham area.

Despite the maps appended to the NAP showing Englefield Green as being outside the current 55 Lden contour, feedback from community groups and residents demonstrates that this is one of the areas of my constituency most affected by aircraft noise. This results from the town being situated at an elevated ground level close to Heathrow flight paths, and I recommend this is looked into further.

Constituents have also reported consistent aircraft noise in Weybridge, due to both westerly and easterly flight paths following a southerly route over the town. This is corroborated by the typical daily flight path maps contained in Annex 3 to the NAP.

Heathrow should give further consideration to how the noise impact on Englefield Green and Weybridge can be alleviated as part of the future airspace strategy design contemplated by the NAP.

Interdependencies between noise and air pollution

Runnymede and Weybridge is, to varying degrees, affected by both noise and air pollution from Heathrow. I strongly support proposals contained in the consultation which have the potential to mitigate both forms of pollution for the benefit of constituents and others living in areas surrounding the airport, such as increasing the use of Pre-Conditioned Air (PCA) where available. Using PCA means that planes will not have to rely on Auxiliary Power Units to keep air conditioning on while engines are not running on the ground. As well as reducing noise, phasing out the use of Auxiliary Power Units will also reduce emissions, with consequent benefits for air quality.

The consultation states that Heathrow has completed airspace change to accommodate its Slightly Steeper Approaches trial as a permanent procedure for approaches from December 2021. I understand that trialling for steeper gradient departures has also taken place.

Steeper climb rates for departing aircraft have the potential to reduce noise for communities further from the airport. I am strongly supportive of adopting steeper climbs wherever possible because of the beneficial effect that this will have for reducing aircraft noise across Runnymede and Weybridge. I welcome that Heathrow is conducting a study on the effects of steeper climbs and has deployed monitors to measure noise distribution effects in order to inform its future strategy on airspace design. I will continue to monitor progress in this area closely, and I would be grateful to receive updates on how that study is progressing, with a view to providing feedback on proposed changes to airspace strategy.

The NAP also discusses the adoption by many airlines of a reduced thrust setting for aircraft during take-off. While I understand that this has a beneficial environmental effect by reducing nitrogen oxide emissions by 30% or more compared to using full thrust, there can be a small increase in noise experienced by those further away from the airport under the departure flight path, due a decreased angle of ascent. My constituents already face excessive flight noise, and I recommend that further work is done to improve air quality without the consequence of negative noise impacts on my constituency.

By way of example, one of the main drivers of air pollution associated with the aviation industry is emissions generated by surface traffic travelling to and from the airport. I am strongly supportive, in principle, of a Southern Rail Link to Heathrow which would assist in alleviating traffic volume and road vehicle emissions in surrounding areas.

On the broader balance of issues between noise and carbon emissions, I am pleased that

significant progress is being made towards a more sustainable aviation sector. I recently responded to the Department for Transport's consultation on the proposed timeframe for the introduction of Sustainable Aviation Fuel. My response to that consultation can be found here: www.drben Spencer.org.uk/news/response-government-consultation-net-zero-aviation

Predictable respite from noise

Heathrow's proposals on increasing predictable periods of respite from noise for local communities are a step in the right direction. This is especially important at night when noise pollution can have the most harmful effects.

In particular, I welcome the following measures:

- Heathrow's commitment to working with community groups to develop a preferred night route trial to share noise across local communities after 23:00, with the aim of providing predictable periods of respite from night operations.
- The introduction of a voluntary ban on operations after 00:00 and before 04:30 from 2025, aiming for a minimum 10% increase by 2028 in the number of nights without late flights per year compared to 2019 levels.
- Heathrow's aim of increasing nights without aircraft movements after 11:45pm relative to 2019 levels.

Heathrow's plans for the construction of the taxiways required to enable easterly alternation (to the London side of the airport) by the end of 2028 will also assist in providing predictable respite from noise to more local communities.

Community engagement and scrutiny

I welcome the regular dialogue that I have had with Heathrow to date regarding the impact of the airport's operations on my constituency. I look forward to this partnership being enhanced in the future by the stakeholder engagement measures envisaged by the NAP.

I know from my own engagement with Heathrow and local community groups that effective dialogue is essential. However, community groups have fed back to me that they feel unsupported in substantive engagement with Heathrow. Heathrow must ensure a full and meaningful way to identify the issues, and therefore the strategies that will have the greatest impact for improving quality of life and wellbeing for those affected by the airport. These groups will also be instrumental in holding Heathrow to account on the commitments it has made to noise reduction and management in the NAP.

I am encouraged by several measures proposed by Heathrow to augment community engagement, including funding the appointment of a Chairperson and Technical Advisor to the Noise and Airspace Community Forum (NACF), which has replaced the Heathrow Noise Community Forum (HNCF) in which local representatives from Runnymede and Weybridge have been involved.

It is hoped that the strengthened NACF will bring together industry, government and regulator, local authority and community representatives in one place and help to amplify their concerns with a view to influencing the noise management strategy in a way which is most effective for their communities. Heathrow should evaluate the effectiveness of this forum to ensure that it fulfils its objectives.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information on the issues addressed in this response, which I am happy to discuss further in person.

Yours faithfully,

BEN SPENCER

Dr Ben Spencer MP
Runnymede and Weybridge