

Dear Sir / Madam

Application by Gatwick Airport Limited seeking Development Consent for the proposed Gatwick Airport Northern Runway Project (Ref: TR020005)

Comments from Gatwick Obviously Not further to the Secretary of State's letter dated 28 April 2025

We refer to the letter dated 28 April 2025 sent on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport ("SoS"), the additional information submitted by Gatwick Airport Limited ("the Applicant") dated 24 April 2025, the Examining Authority ("ExA") report dated 27 November 2024 ("the Report") and the letter sent on behalf of the SoS dated 27 February 2025.

For reference, Gatwick Obviously Not (GON) is a community group that campaigns on behalf of people living in west Kent and surrounding areas whose health, wellbeing and quality of life is adversely affected by Gatwick Airport.

We are extremely concerned about certain of the noise proposals made by the ExA, the SoS's views on those proposals and the further proposals submitted by the Applicant in its additional information.

Although our comments focus on noise issues, we support the wider comments submitted by the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC). In particular we agreed with GACC that the DCO should not be granted and the ANPS should be revised before any decisions on major airport expansion, such as the NRP, are approved. We further agree that the need case is unproven, and the calculation of benefits flawed. In contrast, the increase in greenhouse gas emissions arising from an expanded airport should weigh significantly against approval, particularly given the uncertainties arising from the high-ambition scenario and the need to align with 1.5 degrees of warming. We note that no account appears to have been taken of the economic harm on other parts of the economy that will be required to cut GHG emissions faster and harder as a result of the NRP if it is to be approved.

In addition, we support the ExA's noise insulation and surface access proposals and reject the Applicant's comments on those proposals.

Noise issues

We are extremely concerned about some of the proposals made by the ExA, the SoS's views on those proposals and the further proposals submitted by the Applicant in its additional information.

In particular, we consider that the Air Noise Limits, both as proposed by the ExA and as amended by the Applicant, would be a gross departure from national aircraft noise policy in the short and long terms and would have extensive harmful effects for local communities and those under flight paths.

In our view both the ExA's and the Applicant's proposals fail to comply with policy in the following key respects.

a. Sharing of benefits

The Aviation Policy Framework (APF) states that *"as a general principle, the Government therefore expects that future growth in aviation should ensure that benefits are shared between the aviation industry and local communities. This means that the industry must continue to reduce and mitigate noise as airport capacity grows."*

In addition, the ANPS says that noise envelopes must *"... achieve a balance between growth and noise reduction"*.

None of the current noise envelope proposals deliver the APF policy principles or achieve a balance between growth and noise reduction as required by the ANPS.

As regards the requirement that the benefits of growth should be shared, it is unquestionably the case that none of the current proposals achieve this goal. The airport projects that it would benefit from very significant growth as compared to historic and baseline positions while communities would suffer substantial increases in noise compared to the baseline. The test that the benefits of growth should be shared is not currently met in any plausible way. In its Report the ExA has made an attempt to assess whether the benefits of future technological improvements are being shared but has made no assessment of whether overall benefits are being shared, as both the Aviation Policy Framework and the ANPS require. This is a material oversight and a misinterpretation of policy.

In addition, the Aviation Policy Framework test that noise should reduce as capacity grows is not met by current proposals. The applicant's Central Case baseline forecast (i.e. without the development) is that the 2029 Leq 16 hour Day 51 dB contour will cover 120.1 km². For the initial five-year period following opening of the northern runway the ExA and the SoS have proposed a Leq 16 hour Day 51 dB noise envelope limit of 125 km² and the Applicant has propose a limit of 135km². Both these limits are an increase on the baseline position.

No other noise benefits are proposed. Therefore, the policy requirements for noise to reduce as capacity grows and for the benefits of growth to be shared is not achieved by any of the current proposals.

In order to be policy compliant day and night period noise limits should reduce from the baseline position as airport capacity increases (consistent with GON's previous proposals). In addition, harm caused by noise must be mitigated and the benefits of growth shared, for example by a ban on night flights.

Notwithstanding the above, if the SoS intends to accept the general arrangements proposed by the ExA (which GON does not accept is policy compliant) she should in no circumstances increase the 51 dB LAeq 16h limit of 125 km² and she should mandate a lower limit for years 6 -10 together with a review mechanism thereafter (see detailed comments on the review process below).

b. Night flights

The ExA and SoS have proposed night period noise limits broadly consistent with those suggested by the applicant. If these limits were implemented the SoS would have removed the possibility of banning night flights as a means of striking a balance between the aviation industry and local communities, and made it virtually impossible to achieve outcomes consistent with government noise policy.

The ANPS requires a ban on scheduled night flights between 11pm and 7am if Heathrow was to develop a third runway. The ANPS is clearly stated to be an important and relevant consideration for applications for any airport nationally significant infrastructure project in the South East of England, not just Heathrow. Indeed, the ExA specifically raised the question of a ban on night flights as proposed in the ANPS during the inquiry.

Despite this, the ExA failed to include any discussion of the requirement in its report. By making specific reference to a night flight ban in the ANPS, Parliament has made clear that relying solely on future government night flight restrictions is not a sufficient measure and does not provide sufficient community protection where an airport is seeking consent for major expansion.

We also note that the proposed summer night period limits provide headroom for additional night flights in the summer period and offer no protection in the winter period.

The SoS should mandate a ban on night flights as a condition to any approval of the DCO. In addition, the SoS should require that a comprehensive package of measures is put in place to incentivise the use of the quietest aircraft at night outside the hours of a ban, as also required by the ANPS.

c. Noise level certainty

We understand that the SoS's noise limit proposals relate to the 92-day summer period 16 June to 15 September inclusive. If that is the case, they do not satisfy the APF requirement that noise envelopes should give communities certainty about future levels of noise, because there would be no restrictions on noise outside the core summer period. Instead, noise levels would be completely unlimited for 75% of the year including extremely busy times such as Easter, Christmas and the Autumn holidays. That would be both wholly unacceptable to communities and wholly non-compliant with policy.

The noise envelope requirements should cover all periods of the year, providing for policy compliant reduction in noise and benefit sharing at all times, or delivering alternative benefits, such as a ban on night flights.

d. Inappropriate metrics

The ExA's and SoS's proposed noise envelope uses a single, average noise, metric, Leq. It is widely accepted that Leq does not portray aircraft noise as experienced by communities, and all relevant policy and guidance advises against its use as a sole metric.

The APF says *"... we recommend that average noise contours should not be the only measure used when airports seek to explain how locations under flight paths are affected by aircraft noise."*

The CAA's noise envelope guidance, CAP 1129, recommends using a *"combination of parameters"* and states that *"where unilateral agreement cannot be achieved using standard metrics, consideration should be given to designing envelopes using other metrics provided that they are scientifically valid and robust"*.

The ANPS requires noise envelopes to be tailored to local priorities and to be defined in consultation with local communities.

The SoS's proposed noise envelope metrics do not meet any of these tests.

Any noise envelope should include a suite of metrics and limits to be agreed with all stakeholders.

e. Noise envelope limit reviews

The ExA and SoS have proposed noise limits that would apply in years one to five and from the sixth year of dual runway operations but removed any provision for reviews of those limits thereafter.

That is an extraordinary position for the ExA and the SoS to take. Every stakeholder involved in the inquiry, including the Applicant, proposed that there should be a process for renewing noise envelope limits periodically with a general expectation that limits would reduce over time. The ExA initially endorsed that view and made specific recommendations in that respect.

The ExA's rationale for dropping the requirement that there should be a review mechanism appears to be that noise reductions beyond year five are increasingly uncertain. This is inconsistent with the government's view, which is that it expects aircraft noise to continue to decline, and with the views recently expressed by Sustainable Aviation on behalf of the aviation industry.

Failure to mandate a review mechanism would also undermine one of the government's objectives for noise, namely that they should create incentives for the industry to reduce noise. Without a mechanism to require longer term noise reductions, there would be no incentive for Gatwick to continue to reduce noise.

Finally, the absence of a review mechanism is wholly incompatible with the ANPS which specifically states that "suitable review periods should be set in consultation with the parties mentioned above [local communities and relevant stakeholders] to ensure that the noise envelope framework remains relevant". In the absence of a review process, the proposed framework would cease to be relevant within a few years. The ExA's and SoS's proposals wholly ignore this requirement.

Failure to mandate a review mechanism would mean that the noise limits at Gatwick would become out of date and ineffective with no means for updating them. That would be a wholly irresponsible approach to policy delivery and entirely unacceptable to communities around the airport.

The SoS should engage with all stakeholders to develop an agreed review mechanism.

It would be particularly unacceptable to allow the Applicant to request reviews of the noise envelope limits in the way it has proposed, which would inevitably increase noise and community impacts, but not to allow other interested parties to request reviews or to mandate a broader review process as favoured by virtually all parties.

Yours faithfully

Gatwick Obviously Not