

From: **Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

To: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 13 March 2017**

Subject: **Department for Transport consultation: Night Flight Restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted.**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All divisions in Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks

Summary:

The Department for Transport (DfT) launched a consultation on the next regime of night flight restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted on 12th January, closing on 28th February. All local Members in the affected districts of Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks were asked for their views to feed into Kent County Council's (KCC) response, which was based on the *Policy on Gatwick Airport*, adopted by Cabinet in December 2014. KCC's response focuses on Gatwick Airport only.

The DfT's proposals set a new environmental objective to "*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.*" For Gatwick, the DfT propose to retain the existing movement limit (the number of flights that can arrive/depart between 2330 and 0600 in a winter or summer season) and reduce the noise quota limit (the amount of noise energy that can be produced over the same period).

KCC's response argues for a reduction in the number of night flights allowed at Gatwick in accordance with our *Policy on Gatwick Airport*. The current number of permitted night flights is unacceptable and the DfT should reduce the night movement limit at Gatwick to at least a level that is comparable with Heathrow.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to note the KCC response to the consultation on night flight restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted.

1. Background

- 1.1 Night flight restrictions of some form have been in place at Gatwick since 1971, with the night flight regime limiting the number of movements between 2330 and 0600 since 1993. Aircraft noise is particularly disturbing at night time and can cause next day tiredness and fatigue. There is also growing research into the effects of night-time aircraft noise on the educational attainment of children, cardiovascular health and psychological well-being.
- 1.2 However, the Government recognises the economic benefits of night flights, particularly in terms of passenger air fares and time-sensitive freight distribution. It is difficult to balance the interests of the communities near airports with the interests of the passengers and wider economy.
- 1.3 The current regime began in October 2014 and expires in October 2017. Therefore, the Department for Transport (DfT) has consulted on the details of the next regime. The consultation began on 12th January and closed on 28th February 2017.

2. The current regime

- 2.1 The night period in which restrictions apply is 2300 to 0700, being subdivided into the shoulder periods of 2300 to 2330 and 0600 to 0700 and the “night quota period” defined as 2330 to 0600.
- 2.2 All aircraft arriving and departing during the night period (2300 to 0700) are classified into one of seven bands based on how noisy they are (“quota count (QC) classifications” – QC/16 (the noisiest), 8, 4, 2, 1, 0.5 and 0.25 (the quietest)) or as ‘exempt’ (QC/0).
- 2.3 During the night quota period (2330 to 0600) flights are restricted by two measures:
 - 1) the total number of aircraft movements and;
 - 2) amount of noise emitted (the cumulative QC of all aircraft movements, i.e. a noise quota).

In addition, during the whole night period (2300 to 0700) the noisiest aircraft (QC/16 and 8) are banned entirely and in the night quota period (2330 to 0600) QC/4 aircraft cannot be scheduled, but can fly if they are delayed.

There are different limits for both the total number of aircraft movements and the noise quota for the summer and winter (seasons are defined by the BST changes). Every aircraft counts towards both limits except QC/0 aircraft, which are exempt from both. There are some special dispensations that allow some aircraft to fly without counting towards the movement or noise quota limits, for example humanitarian aid flights. At Gatwick this represented 474 flights in summer 2016.

2.4 Winter 2015/16 and summer 2016 limits and actual usage is shown in table 1.

	Limits	Actual usage	Proportion
Summer night movements	11,200	11,303*	101%*
Winter night movements	3,250	1,872	58%
Summer noise quota	6,200	4,915.75	79%
Winter noise quota	2,000	953	48%

* Due to the ability to carryover unused allowance, this is permissible usage.

3 Department for Transport proposals for the new regime

3.1 The consultation sets out a range of proposals for the next regime, which are explained below in A-G. Table 2 compares the proposed movement and noise quota limits for the three controlled London airports.

- A. The proposed environmental objective is to “*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.*” This would be measured by (a) the area and number of people in the 48dB _{LAeq 6.5hr night} contour (the area that is on average exposed to an equivalent continuous sound level of 48dB during the night quota period (2330 to 0600)); (b) the average QC per movement; and (c) the number of movements in the night quota period. Note: 48dB is lower than the previously used 55dB contour reflecting new evidence of the effects of noise on sleep disturbance and health.
- B. The next regime should be set for 5 years. This does not preclude bespoke local arrangements being set, either through the planning process or by other means, during the next regime.
- C. A new QC/0.125 category will be introduced to reflect the forthcoming introduction of quieter aircraft. If QC/0.125 is not introduced then the Airbus A320neo, which is expected to comprise a third of easyJet’s fleet at Gatwick, would be able to operate at an unlimited number all night as it would have an ‘exempt’ QC classification.
- D. All aircraft, including QC/0, will count towards the airport movement limit but QC/0 will remain exempt from the noise quota limit. This is intended to incentivise the use of quieter aircraft and give communities certainty on number of flights.
- E. The current aircraft movement limits for Gatwick are proposed to remain the same for the next regime, i.e. 3,250 in winter and 11,200 in summer.

- F. Gatwick's noise quota is proposed to be reduced to reflect the current noise quota usage. It would be reduced by 17% in winter (to 1,655) and 21% in summer (to 4,870). This has been calculated based on the most recent summer and winter seasons' average QC per movement so that the airport will not use more quota than at present if it uses all its movement limit.
- G. The consultation says that it will consider whether to gradually reduce the noise quota amount over the regime, starting at 100% and ending at 80% in year 5 if this will incentivise the use of quieter aircraft without presenting an unachievable target.

	Gatwick	Heathrow	Stansted*
Summer night movements	11,200	3,250	8,100
Winter night movements	3,250	2,550	5,600
Summer noise quota	4,870	2,540	4,650
Winter noise quota	1,655	2,340	3,310

* The proposals increase the movement limit at Stansted to account for the significant number of existing exempt aircraft movements that will now count towards the limit.

4 Summary of KCC's response

- 4.1 The full KCC response is appended to this report.
- 4.2 The consultation response has been formulated in line with the adopted *Policy on Gatwick Airport* (Cabinet, December 2014, also appended). All Members in the districts of Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks were sent notification of the proposals and asked for their input to KCC's consultation response.
- 4.3 The consultation response agrees with the general objective to reduce the number of people significantly affected by aircraft noise but we strongly urge the DfT to go further in their ambitions so that a true reduction is felt by the affected communities rather than a continuation of the intolerable situation at present.
- 4.4 The response agrees with the proposed length of the next regime and welcomes the possibility of local bespoke arrangements being put in place. However, this method of setting controls requires agreement and representation from all appropriate bodies without unfairly disadvantaging anyone.
- 4.5 KCC agrees with the introduction of the QC/0.125 category and for QC/0 aircraft to count towards the movement limits. The total number of QC/0 aircraft in summer 2016 was 53 so this equates to a small reduction in the movement limit, and prevents all-night operation of the new generation of quieter aircraft. This will provide increased certainty for residents on the expected number of flights each night.

- 4.6 However, KCC strongly disagrees with the proposals to retain the existing movement limit at Gatwick. Gatwick is permitted 11,200 aircraft movements in the summer and 3,250 in the winter compared to Heathrow's 3,250 and 2,550 respectively. Our response argues for a reduction in the number of night flights allowed at Gatwick in accordance with our *Policy on Gatwick Airport*, which states that the current number of permitted night flights is unacceptable and the DfT should reduce the night movement limit at Gatwick to at least a level that is comparable with Heathrow.
- 4.7 Additionally, KCC disagrees with the proposed noise quota limit at Gatwick, arguing that it should go further. The reduction in the limit will prevent noisier aircraft being used on existing routes but will not further encourage the use of quieter aircraft because Gatwick's current operations are compliant. In the winter, in particular, the proposed movement and noise quota limits will allow growth compared to the present operations, which would worsen the situation for West Kent's residents. The possibility in the consultation of staggering a decrease in the noise quota over the 5 year period would achieve a reduction in noise and afford the airport and airlines time for their operations to change.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 None.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 None.

7 Equalities Implications

- 7.1 None. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed for the KCC *Policy on Gatwick Airport*.

8 Other Corporate Implications

- 8.1 None.

9 Governance

- 9.1 The consultation response was approved by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport.

10 Recommendation

- 10.1 Members are asked to note the KCC response to the consultation on night flight restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted.

11 Background Documents

- Appendix A: Draft response to night flights consultation
- Appendix B: KCC Policy on Gatwick Airport

12 Contact details

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