

Report to Planning Services Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 13 September 2011

Portfolio: Planning and Technology

Subject: Developing a sustainable framework for UK Aviation. Scoping Document. Consultation.

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Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To agree that the following responses be made in respect of this consultation;

- (1) That the Council welcomes sustainability considerations being given a much greater prominence in future aviation policy;**
- (2) That the Council welcomes the decisions to reject further runways at Gatwick, Heathrow and particularly Stansted;**
- (3) That the Council notes that a new owner and operator for Stansted may be secured shortly, but that there are risks if that new owner does not continue with the local dialogue that the present owner and operator has pursued;**
- (4) That the Council will have to remain vigilant in responding to details in the new framework, and, in particular, to what this implies for Stansted, North Weald and Stapleford. Similarly, changes to the impacts of night time flight restrictions could have positive or negative impacts which will require further consideration;**
- (5) That the Council considers whether it would favour concentration of aircraft descent paths, or whether it favours wider dispersion, and then to answer question 44 directly.**
- (6) That the procedure agreed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 January 2011 (Minute 70) is used to ensure that the Panel's recommendations meet the consultation deadline.**

Report:

1. The Department for Transport is consulting on this document, in particular because it suggests that the previous Government's 2003 White Paper entitled The Future of Air Transport is fundamentally out of date, because it fails to give sufficient weight to the challenge of climate change.
2. The 2003 White Paper was a considerable document in its own right, but was supported by a raft of daughter documents, and was preceded by a South East Regional Airports Study (SERAS).
3. SERAS2 was considered by Cabinet on 30 June 2003 in a substantial report, with a considerable number of agreed recommendations; a copy of that report is attached as an

appendix to this report. It can be seen from that report that, whilst the description “sustainable” was beginning to be used, there were many points that challenged whether the treatment of air travel compared to other forms of travel was fair (for example the taxation of aviation fuel compared to taxes on other vehicle fuels).

4. Among many points, this Council expressed objections to the expansion of Stansted, and in particular to the magnitude of the possible expansion of Stansted which that White Paper envisaged (perhaps the most worrying being long term options predicated upon greatly increased air travel showing Stansted to have four parallel runways with the existing terminal expanded to serve two such runways and a complete new terminal of similar scale to serve two further runways.)

5. It is worth recalling that there was a subsequent legal challenge to the White Paper by objectors groups, and that one of the key points in that challenge was that air travel was not being treated in a sustainable and consistent manner compared to other modes of travel.

6. One might reflect that, by showing such specific plans for the future, the then Government was being open and transparent about such scenarios.

7. Stansted was subsequently granted permission after a Public Inquiry to increase its capacity to 35 million passengers per annum (MPPA) using the existing single runway. The British Airports Authority (BAA) were the then operators of Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted but were forced to sell Gatwick, and are being forced to sell Stansted.

8. Proposals for expansion of Stansted to include a second parallel runway (known briefly as the G2 scheme) were heading to a Public Inquiry, but BAA eventually withdrew those proposals.

9. The Coalition Government quickly made it clear upon coming to power that they would not approve a second runway at Gatwick or Stansted, or a “third runway” at Heathrow.

10. The economic climate has seen reduced air travel, particularly at Stansted for the time being, albeit that the detailed analysis which underlay the 2003 material showed that changes in the economic cycle or other factors such as wars or terrorism had short term rather than long term impacts; in general, over time air travel has consistently increased.

The proposals in the consultation

11. This consultation is neither an attempt to revisit all the detail of the 2003 material, nor to bring the information up to date, nor to make lesser options or predictions. Although the foreword indicates that there is an urgent need for a genuinely sustainable framework to guide the aviation industry, the document is not a draft of that.

12. Rather, this document is more a synthesis of points that the Government wishes to make, and which herald work that is being undertaken on many factors, but which have not reached conclusions. The stated aim of the document is to define the debate as the Government develop their long term policy for UK aviation.

13. The document contains sections giving statistics and some commentary on;

Aviation and the economy

- The UK aviation sector of the economy.
- UK connectivity.
- Making better use of existing capacity.
- Aviation’s contribution to sustainable economic growth.

Aviation and climate change

- Information on Greenhouse Gas Emissions.
- The Climate Change Act.
- UK Aviation CO2 emissions.
- European Union Emissions Trading System.
- International agreements.
- Aircraft Technology.
- Airspace management.
- Biofuels.
- Alternatives to travel.
- Non – CO2 climate impacts of aviation.
- Adapting to climate change impacts.

Aviation and the local environment

- Community involvement.
- Noise.
- Night noise.
- Air Quality.

14. It is difficult to comment further or take issue with the statistics, or suggest that the list is other than what one might expect.

15. There is a list of 49 questions, at least some of which might make good examination questions, and would require a considerable effort to answer sensibly. It is not proposed to respond to this consultation in that way.

16. However, attention is drawn to the 44th question, which is;

Is it better to minimise the total number of people affected by aircraft noise (e.g. through noise preferential routes) or to share the burden more evenly (e.g. through wider flight path dispersion) so that a greater number of people are affected by noise less frequently?

17. At present aircraft can have many origins, but would proceed fairly directly to their destination. They will then, potentially have to be stacked, which involves circling, and descending in stages, before being slotted by National Air Traffic control, and then making a final approach to Stansted. One can characterise that as being quite a dispersed pattern, and hence the noise can be experienced by different locations at different times and on different days or nights.

18. It would be possible to seek a more concentrated and direct descent (which would be less noisy and with less change of noise as the aircraft descends gradually turning less); however, a consequence of such concentration would be that a location such as Nazeing may be under the flight descent on a regular basis rather than an occasional basis.

19. The Council receives very few noise complaints directly about aircraft noise, although BAA Stansted has a noise complaints and investigation system. That said, it is important not to over emphasise this as an issue. Members may have views on this.

Concerns

20. The Government suggests that part of its philosophy is to make existing airports better rather than bigger; at a general level that is difficult to take issue with. Indeed the new owners of Gatwick have and will operate that airport differently from how BAA would have done. However, whilst a new owner of Stansted may have some different approaches, it is more difficult to see radical change. A fundamental facet of the design of Stansted has always been to have short journeys from arrival points through the terminal to the planes, and the entire structure was intended to be light, airy and give clear views through much of the terminal building. It has also tended to concentrate on closer destinations, and operates more for budget operators than national carriers. It is difficult to envisage how one could eke out much more capacity by doing things better at this site, so it might come under pressure for expansion sooner than those airports which can be made better before they are necessarily made bigger.

21. Some would argue that aviation is very unsustainable for short flights compared to high speed rail (see paragraph 17 of the 2003 Cabinet report). However, there are considerable tensions about further expansion of High Speed Rail through the Chilterns, so until an alternative exists, one may have to accept the devil already known.

22. In other planning documents, the Government is placing weight on sustainability (but without necessarily indicating which definition of sustainability is being used.) If sustainability means a reference to all three economic, social and environmental considerations/dimensions then that is fair enough. However, if it is meaning that economic considerations trump the other considerations then that is a different matter.

23. The Government is separately consulting upon a new National Planning Framework, which is intended to be a brief document rather than equivalent to the works of Shakespeare. However, this document at paragraph 2.17 indicates an intention that the final aviation framework document will fulfill the role of a national planning policy for aviation. Quite how "pro" growth of aviation it will be, set against environmental concerns, and the views of local communities who get benefits when they fly, but who suffer the effects of aviation, remains to be seen.

24. The major expansion of Stansted was always locally considered to be a possible future threat to North Weald. However, this document is of no assistance in understanding a Government view of a particular airfield's further development. Stapleford Abbots was granted permission for a small section of surfaced runway, but the expansion of that has been resisted by the Council previously. How would one deal with a planning application for that expansion if it was put forward under the philosophy that it is only making that airfield better not bigger? Perhaps there would have to be a "hierarchy" of airfields.

25. In briefly re reading the responses of this Council to the 2003 material, it is unfortunate that the previous Government did not give greater weight to the points that were made then, because many of them remain just as valid eight years later.

Reason for decision:

26. The Council has long had concerns about how Stansted could develop because the District experiences limited direct benefits, but receives some adverse consequences from Stansted. (such as aircraft noise, particularly at night and in parts of the District near the descent paths of aircraft; limited employment provision, and poor direct public transport links.)

27. It is understood that there will be a further consultation on amended night time flying restrictions, which the Council will be likely to have an interest in.

28. Air quality impacts and take off routes are not normally of direct relevance to this Council.

29. BAA do seem to have been able to encourage quieter passenger and freight aircraft to be used, and have been receptive to a dialogue with local communities; a new operator would preferably continue that approach.

30. The District has seen threats from aviation proposals in the past, and has two operational airfields (North Weald and Stapleford Abbots) of some magnitude, and of at least local interest, particularly because of their history associated with the defence of Britain.

31. It is difficult to suggest many responses to this particular document, but at a later date the Council will have to keep an eye on the subsequent final aviation framework document and respond to consultation thereon.

Options considered and rejected:

Not to respond to the consultation.
To respond differently to the consultation.

Consultation undertaken: None; EFDC is a consultee in this case.

Resource implications:

Budget provision: N/A
Personnel: From existing resources
Land: Nil

Community Plan/BVPP reference:
Relevant statutory powers:

Background papers: Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:
The framework heralds other documents which will give more detail on how the environmental impacts of aviation can be handled more sustainably in future.
Key Decision reference: (if required)