

Leader of the Council

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Dear Secretary of State

UK Airspace Policy Consultation

Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC), South Bucks District Council (SBDC) and Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP) welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on UK Airspace Policy.

The area around Iver in South Buckinghamshire is nationally unique in being impacted upon by a number of national infrastructure schemes including the expansion of Heathrow Airport, HS2, Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH), Crossrail and the M4 Smart Motorway Project. Our support for the Heathrow Northwest Runway option does not seek to diminish the range of likely negative implications from expansion at Heathrow, such as aircraft noise, posed by the future operation of an expanded airport and third runway on the southern border of Buckinghamshire.

As a national consultation we are also mindful that Buckinghamshire residents and business also benefit from access to Luton Airport which impacts on the north east corner of the county through aircraft noise.

With regards to Airspace policy and regulation BCC, SBDC and BTVLEP support the proposed reform of airspace. In particular, we support the use of modern technology to enable airspace to be redesigned and used more effectively to ensure aircraft stay on precise and direct routes when taking off and landing at airports. This has the potential to remove the need for stacking and the ability to have steeper ascents and descents which can reduce noise impacts on local residents. In addition this can lower emissions with both air quality and carbon benefits.

We note that the number of flights is rising including growth at Luton and overall in the South East the number of air traffic movements will rise significantly should the third runway at Heathrow be approved. Aircraft using the new third runway will overfly areas within southern Buckinghamshire that have not been overflowed previously causing a significant change in the quality of life. The change to airspace is likely to have negative health impacts for residents, service users and employees in the newly affected areas. Minimising the need to affect new populations and business should be the first principle in designing airspace. If new communities and companies are to be affected then the area of that impact should be minimised through design and management of airspace. Respite for predictable periods should then be applied equally across all affected populations.



We support the role of the Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise, providing it is truly independent, and it has the capability and capacity to develop specialist skills in aviation noise which can then assist and advise local authorities. We question though whether the proposals provide sufficient clarity over which agency will be responsible for the operational monitoring and potential enforcement of noise controls whether these are imposed by the Secretary of State, CAA, local authorities or the airports themselves through airspace changes or DCO/ planning application conditions.

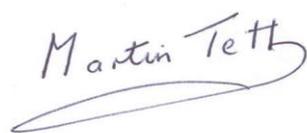
The changes to the compensation policy are welcomed, although it is surprising that southern Buckinghamshire currently has no properties which can access compensation for the impact upon them from aircraft noise. As yet it is not clear whether as a result of the third runway any of our residents and businesses will be able to access compensation. We support the principle that newly affected residents, businesses and services should be considered separately for compensation and that compensation should also be paid to recognise an increased and new impact not just when noise levels exceed a certain metric. We note that studies have shown aircraft noise is perceived differently by different people and so there may be differential impacts including disturbed sleep and reduction in overall wellbeing even though noise during the day or night is below a set metric.

Whilst we support consultation and transparency it has been noticeable at consultation events that, residents who were anxious to find out if they would be affected by the changes, were unable to be given information at this stage in the process. This has had the effect of overshadowing the positive parts of the consultation that modernisation of airspace and the aircraft fleet can further limit noise and other impacts.

We question how local communities may have a meaningful say on airspace matters particularly the distribution of flights. No community welcomes aircraft noise and unless there are obvious benefits to quality of life such as improved respite or less frequency of overflights, then the loudest voice is generally heard. In issues relating to southern Buckinghamshire we want to assure our communities that their concerns will be as equally heard and acted upon as others outside of South Bucks. For our communities affected by Luton flights we would also urge that the noise impacts on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are considered at the earliest opportunity when designing and then deciding upon new or revised flight paths and corridors.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment on the airspace design principles and we look forward to working with the airports serving Buckinghamshire to shape their airspace plans either as part of planning applications they bring forward or as part of changes proposed to reduce the noise impacts from those airports.

Yours sincerely,



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cc:

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