

ACF ACTIVITY: JUNE AND JULY 2017

Aviation Communities Forum

Overall policy environment

It's clear from discussions with officials in the department that maximising growth in what are seen as increasingly challenging economic circumstances is the government's top priority after Brexit. It's also clear that aviation is seen as an enabler of growth and therefore that anything which might constrain the industry or impose additional costs on it is a hard sell.

Although we face a challenging policy environment, I do think that the new senior aviation team at the department have absorbed some of the messages we've been trying to convey and can see the arguments for change in a range of areas. They seem to recognise that growth at any cost is not sustainable. The aviation strategy Call for Evidence, talks about "a new approach to reducing noise annoyance" and mentions possible different ways of looking at noise targets, regulation, compensation and the trade off between growth and noise. Of course the document is also very positive about airports making full use of their existing capacity but it's just possible that we will begin to see more balanced policies begin to emerge. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating however.

Growth noise and government policy

One of the key themes in our recent engagement with ministers and officials has been that there needs to be a fair balance between growth and noise, specifically that growth should only be permitted if noise is proportionately reduced. The Gatwick community groups have written to the airport inviting its proposals for achieving the government's policy that "... growth in aviation should ensure that benefits are shared between the aviation industry and local communities ... This means that the industry should reduce and mitigate noise as airport capacity grows" (Aviation Policy Framework, page 55). I'd be happy to provide more details on this if anyone is interested.

Current airspace change consultations - CAA

There are several significant PBN related airspace change consultations underway or recently closed (including Newcastle, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Southend). It's difficult to know whether this is coincidence or coordinated, but there seem to be common themes:

- technology enabled concentration of flight paths
- facilitating increased capacity with no commitment to compensating noise reductions
- little attempt to assess concentration against dispersal / respite options, effectively ignoring a key theme in the Government's airspace consultation
- no compensation proposals for those more severely impacted.

We've written to the CAA to express concern that none of the current processes are compatible with its new airspace change proposals, and that they are all being done ahead of any policy changes announced by the Department. There is likely to be a meeting with the CAA on this in September.

Airspace consultation

You may recall that a letter was sent to the Secretary of State on 13 June by over 40 community groups setting out our joint views on the government's airspace consultation. We wrote at the same time asking for a meeting with the Secretary of State so that we could convey those views

in person. I received the attached response a couple of weeks ago. I've since been told that our request for a meeting has been turned down by both the Secretary of State and the new Aviation Minister Lord Callahan. The department are well aware that this will be taken as a further sign that ministers have little interest in community concerns.

We understand that the government plans to publish its new airspace policies in October this year.

Aviation Strategy

More recently the department has published a Call for Evidence on a new UK aviation strategy.

This closes on 13 October and will be followed by separate consultations on a range of areas including the proposed objective to "support growth while tackling environmental impacts". The department's current plan is for that specific consultation to take place in the second half of 2018, with the strategy itself published by the end of 2018.

The call for evidence suggests that in some areas, such as noise reduction targets, compensation and clearer policy goals, the messages we've been pressing may have been heard. But we've told officials that we are concerned about the interaction between the airspace consultation and the aviation strategy process, specifically that they will reach conclusions on the former which will then constrain their consideration of the full range of options in the latter. We've asked them to consider accelerating the growth/environment module of the strategy and so avoid the need for a two stage process.

Night flights

The government's decisions on night flight restrictions for designated airports were announced on 13 July. Although some aspects are mildly positive, overall they are a significant disappointment. There's been some correspondence with Lord Callahan both in advance of and following the decision which I attach in case you're interested.