

**BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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| <b>From: Strategic Director (Place)</b>               | <b>Report Number: N100</b>                                  |
| <b>To: Executive Committee<br/>Strategy Committee</b> | <b>Date of Meeting: 13 January 2014<br/>16 January 2014</b> |

**LONDON AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT PROJECT: RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report sets out a response to a consultation being undertaken by the National Air Traffic Service (NATS) to rationalise the way in which airspace is used in the UK. The consultation relates to the first stage of a wider programme that will ultimately deal with all London airports by 2020.
- 1.2 The consultation relates solely to the management of airspace and is not connected with the publication of the interim report by the Airports Commission into airport capacity and connectivity in the UK.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That, subject to any amendments which the Committee may wish to make as a result of its consideration of this matter, the comments contained in Appendix (b) to this report form the basis of the Council's response to the consultation.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

**3. Key Information**

- 3.1 The current airspace management arrangements in the UK were developed more than 20 years ago. Technological advances in aircraft design and navigational systems mean that the existing airspace is not being used as effectively as possible. Additional costs are being incurred by the aircraft operators as well as unnecessary pollution: for every one tonne of fuel saved by the operators it is estimated that three tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> would not be produced.
- 3.2 The intention is to manage the arrival and departure of aircraft by allowing them to make use of continuous climbs and descents rather than the current stepped arrangements. In turn the need for holding areas would be reduced as a transition is made towards the adoption of 'point merge' principles. This would correspondingly improve the noise environment around the major airports. Overall the project proposes a fundamentally different approach to the management of airspace.

- 3.3 The current consultation relates to changes to the airspace serving Gatwick, London City, Southend, and Biggin Hill airports **only**. The management of airspace serving Heathrow, Luton and Stansted airports will be the subject of a separate consultation at a later date.
- 3.4 The consultation document has been split into parts, each covering the justification and effects to the airspace and traffic flows at each airport. Parts B to F have been designed specifically for environmental stakeholders while Part G deals with technical issues and the effects on the aviation community. It is Part F that is of direct relevance to Babergh and Mid Suffolk. This covers the proposed changes to London City Airport, London Biggin Hill and London Southend routes over parts of Suffolk, Essex and Kent.
- 3.5 The consultation is focused upon changes to the routes serving Gatwick Airport at all altitudes and London City Airport in the intermediate airspace (4,000 to 7,000 ft). London Biggin Hill and London Southend airports use some of the London City Airport arrival routes and some changes to the arrival routes in the intermediate airspace serving these airports is also proposed. Low altitude changes at London Southend and London Biggin Hill Airports are not within the scope of the consultation.

*What happens at the moment?*

- 3.6 Air traffic control currently sort arriving aircraft into a stream or 'sequence' of aircraft for landing during busy periods. An efficient sequence is where the aircraft are safely spaced, ensuring the runway is fully utilised and that flights are not unnecessarily delayed in the air.
- 3.7 Ensuring that the spacing between aircraft is optimal reduces the time aircraft spend queuing to land, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and local noise impacts. The process is usually facilitated through the use of holding stacks where aircraft circle above one another while waiting to land. The 'holds' for London City arrivals were established in the 1980s when traffic levels were much lower than today and developed as a contingency.
- 3.8 Regular use of the holds was not expected when they were established and they are limited in terms of the number of aircraft they can accommodate. Air traffic controllers can therefore rarely rely on using the holds alone. Instead they often resort to using complex navigation instructions (known as 'tactical vectoring') in order to queue aircraft at relatively low altitudes (3,000 to 4,000ft) over parts of London. This means that at present London City arrivals do not follow a single flight path which in turn has implications for London Biggin Hill and London Southend arrivals.

*What is being proposed?*

- 3.9 In order to address these issues a 'point merge' system is being proposed whereby aircraft queue to land in an extended flight path around an arc rather than a 'hold'. The aircraft would fly around the arc until the next slot in the landing sequence is free at which time air traffic control would turn the aircraft off the arc into the landing sequence. The generic benefits of this system according to the NATS are:

- Enhanced safety,
  - Reduced delays,
  - Reduction in the area regularly overflowed at lower altitudes,
  - Reduction in stepped descent,
  - Reduction in stepped climb, and
  - Reduced average fuel and CO<sub>2</sub> per flight.
- 3.10 The map reproduced in Appendix (a) shows the consultation swathe for the proposed arrival routes, including the 'point merge' system, into London City, London Biggin Hill and London Southend. As will be noted the area involves parts of South Suffolk and North Essex.
- 3.11 In order to avoid the Shoeburyness Danger Area aircraft entering into the proposed 'point merge' system from the north would typically be at a height of 12,000ft. At present aircraft arriving from this direction are generally descending below 7,000ft over Hertfordshire and Essex and then to 3,000 or 4,000ft over parts of London.

*What are the potential implications?*

- 3.12 The Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONBs are predominantly overflowed by Stansted and Luton arrivals. The proposals contained within the consultation document envisage that on average an additional two smaller aircraft per hour / per day (6am to 10pm) would overfly South Suffolk at an altitude of approximately 12,000ft. It should be noted that London City Airport is closed on Saturday afternoons and Sundays.
- 3.13 The consultation document envisages that these additional flows could be anywhere within the thick lines identified on the map reproduced in the Appendix. The noise levels associated with this additional flow, given the type of aircraft using London City Airport, is described as being comparable to having a 'conversation at one metre'. The relatively few London City arrivals associated with the proposals would not have a significant effect on the Stansted and Luton arrival flows which, as already indicated, will be considered in Phase 2.
- 3.14 The potential impact of the current proposals upon South Suffolk and the AONBs is very slight. The NATS should however be informed that overflying of the AONBs should be avoided wherever possible to maintain a sense of tranquillity. The adoption of shorter flight paths to the south of the AONB would therefore be preferable in order to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and noise impacts. This view is reflected in the response to the consultations questions as set out in the Appendix.

**4. Financial and Resource Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial or resource implications arising directly from the content of this report.

**5. Risk Management**

- 5.1 There are no significant risks arising directly from the content of this report.

**6. Consultations and Communication**

6.1 A briefing note was sent to all Councillors on 18 October 2013 and representatives from NATS gave a presentation to County and District Councillors on 9 December 2013. The event was also attended by District Councillors from Colchester and Tendring.

**7. Equality Analysis**

7.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from the content of this report.

**8. Shared Service / Partnership Implications**

8.1 This report relates to a matter affecting Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

**9. Appendices**

| Title   | Location |
|---|----------|
| (a) Map showing swathe for London City Airport arrival routes | Attached |
| (b) Response to consultation questions                        | Attached |

**10. Background Documents**

[www.londonairspaceconsultation.co.uk](http://www.londonairspaceconsultation.co.uk)

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## APPENDIX (b)

The questions posed by the National Air Traffic Service in Part F of the consultation document appear in the grey boxes below. The suggested response follows.

### 1. Point Merge enables a reduction in average fuel and CO<sub>2</sub> per flight.

**Altering routes to fly around environmentally sensitive areas rather than overhead is likely to mean more fuel burn and more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions because the altered route would usually be longer. In general which should take precedence – minimising over flight of sensitive areas by flying a longer route around them, or flying the direct route overhead the area to keep the route shorter and minimise fuel burn and CO<sub>2</sub>?**

- **Flying longer routes around environmentally sensitive areas should always have greater precedence than flying overhead on shorter routes which minimise fuel burn/CO<sub>2</sub>.**
- **Flying longer routes around environmentally sensitive areas should generally have a greater precedence than flying overhead on shorter routes which minimise fuel burn/CO<sub>2</sub>.**
- **Flying longer routes around environmentally sensitive areas should be given equal weighting to flying overhead on shorter routes which minimise fuel burn/CO<sub>2</sub>.**
- **Flying shorter routes which minimise fuel burn /CO<sub>2</sub> should generally have precedence over flying longer routes around environmentally sensitive areas.**
- **Flying shorter routes which minimise fuel burn/CO<sub>2</sub> should always have precedence over flying longer routes around environmentally sensitive areas.**
- **Don't know.**

**What, if any, factors should be taken into account when determining the appropriate balance of flying around environmentally sensitive areas versus overhead (for instance the altitude of the aircraft may be a factor or the frequency/timing of flight)?**

### COMMENT

In general flying longer routes around environmentally sensitive areas should be given greater precedence than flying directly overhead however if higher altitudes can be achieved, especially during the weekend periods when greater use of the countryside is used for recreational purposes, a shorter and more direct route may be appropriate.

## **2. Point Merge would change the location of flight paths.**

**This proposal is seeking to change the way aircraft use airspace by developing a system for managing arrivals based on Point Merge, rather than holding stacks/vectoring currently in use.**

**Please indicate the extent to which you support or oppose our objective of providing a future arrival system based around Point Merge.**

**Please provide any additional information you think is relevant to our objective to redesign arrival routes around a Point Merge system.**

### **COMMENT**

In principle the adoption of a 'point merge' system for aircraft arrivals is supported as a means of minimising fuel burn and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in view of the contribution it would make to addressing climate change issues. While the adoption of 'point merge' principles for London City, London Biggin Hill and London Southend arrivals are predicted to have a very marginal impact upon South Suffolk and North Essex at this stage, the potential cumulative effects with the proposals for Heathrow, Luton and Stansted (Phase 2) need to be fully understood before unqualified support can be offered.

The tranquillity of the Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONBs should be safeguarded in the design processes for Phases 1 and 2 but this should not be at the expense of creating unintended consequences for other towns and villages nearby.

## **3. Arrival routes for London City, London Biggin Hill and London Southend.**

**Please indicate which, if any, place(s) or area(s) within the consultation swathes you think require special consideration in the on-going design process. Please describe the characteristics of these locations stating whether they should be considered do to concerns about noise impact, visual impact and/or any other impact?**

### **COMMENT**

Special consideration should be given to the Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONBs in the routing of London City, London Biggin Hill and London Southend arrivals to minimise noise impacts and visual intrusion. Both AONBs are important to tourism and the local economy and the proposals should not undermine their attractiveness.

## **4. Phase 2 Changes**

**Please provide any other information that you feel is relevant to the on-going development of the airspace covered by this consultation.**

## **COMMENT**

The Council notes that it is the stated intention of the National Air Traffic Service to involve local authorities in the subsequent phases of the London Airspace Management Project and considers the comments made about maintaining the tranquillity of the Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONBs are fully taken into account when designing Phase 2. In relation to Phase 2, the Council would wish to be engaged at an early stage.

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