

Department for Transport (DfT) Consultation – Night Flying Restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted Stage 2 Consultation

Response from Kent County Council

Kent County Council (KCC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Answers provided are in regards to Gatwick Airport as its associated flights affect parts of West Kent.

Q1: Do you agree with our preliminary view as to the new studies on health effects?

Kent County Council (KCC) does not agree with the preliminary view on the new studies on health effects, as although causality between noise and the risk of cardiovascular disease is statistically unproven, the impacts on people's lives of sleep disturbance from being awoken by aircraft noise is obvious for all affected. Therefore restrictions need to be put in place now, rather than wait for conclusions from continuing academic research.

Although further research is welcomed so that with robust evidence, the various impacts of aviation noise, including health effects, can be taken into account in economic appraisal alongside other costs and benefits; the very real and experienced impacts of sleep disturbance from aviation noise at night cannot be merely consigned to the appraisal process and weighed up against the economic benefits of night flights.

Q2: Do you have any further views on the costs and benefits, including health impacts, which we should take into account in our decision?

Health issues associated with night flight sleep disturbance should not be regarded as a cost benefit exercise in the appraisal process, but rather, a concern in its own right.

The linkages which have been made between sleep disturbance and health impairment, and the impact on productivity, are of real concern, despite causality remaining unproven. This is particularly relevant during the summer when people tend to sleep with their windows open and therefore the benefits of sound insulation are neutralised. Greater recognition must be given to the negative impact of noise on the health profile of communities who are affected by the concentration of night flights.

Night noise is perhaps the most unpopular aspect for the local communities to the east of Gatwick in Kent, specifically in the districts of Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling. Although KCC recognises that maintaining the existing freedom of night operation enjoyed by Gatwick is crucial to the airport and the economy as a whole, there is a common belief by local communities, that night flights at Gatwick Airport are excessive, and that many residents are therefore denied the possibility “of a decent night’s sleep”. The situation is exacerbated by the absence of minimum height controls and noise controls for landing aircraft.

KCC therefore urges that more regard is given to the nature of impacts on people caused by continuous aircraft over-flight during the night around Gatwick; and not seek to confine the issue to a cost benefit analysis in appraising the impacts, which then influences the decision on the regulation of night flights.

Q3: Do you agree with the proposed environmental objectives?

The proposed environmental objectives do not go far enough in terms of measuring whether they are achieved.

Although the first objective to ‘limit and where possible reduce the number of people significantly affected by aircraft noise at night’, is an objective which we support; measuring its achievement by the area and number of people within the 6.5 hour night quota period contours, and in particular the 55dB contour, is not an adequate measurement method. It is acknowledged that the consultation document states that the World Health Organisation considers average night noise levels above 55dB to be increasingly dangerous for public health. However, it is evident from experience in West Kent, where in areas outside of the average noise contours, aircraft over-flight at night (predominately arrivals) causes sleep disturbance for residents. Whether it is only ‘dangerous’ in terms of health at a certain decibel level is arbitrary, sleep disturbance is still detrimental to health if people are awoken by levels of noise lower than 55dB.

The noise impacts are further exacerbated by the largely rural nature of this area, the towns of Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge notwithstanding, where background noise levels, especially at night, are low compared to urban areas and therefore aircraft noise is considerably more intrusive. Some research argues that the noise differential in rural areas could be as high as 10 decibels because the background noise is lower.

The use of ‘average’ noise contours is in itself flawed, especially for measuring night noise disturbance, given that the noise from a single noisy overflying aircraft can cause someone to wake up regardless of the ‘average’ noise levels over a period of several hours. Even if one noisy aircraft does not cause an interruption to sleep, several aircraft might have this effect, but these conditions may still not register above the decibel threshold when measuring ‘average’ noise. Therefore Single Event Noise levels and the frequency

(number of incidences) of that exposure should be the measure of compliance with this objective on the basis that it is noise from individual aircraft, not 'average' noise that causes sleep disturbance.

Although the second objective, to 'reduce sleep disturbance resulting from use of the noisiest types of aircraft', is an objective that KCC supports, its method of measurement does also not go far enough. Restricting the 'number of movements of the noisiest types of aircraft (Quota Count [QC]/4 and above) during the night quota period' needs to go further to extend the operational ban on QC/4 aircraft in addition to the proposed extension of the ban of QC/8 and QC/16 aircraft.

KCC does not support the third environmental objective to 'allow growth in movements up to existing night movement limits and within noise quotas', but rather that night movements should be reduced. The consultation document states that Gatwick currently uses only around 83% of its year round ATM limit; and uses on average only around 50 to 60% of its winter night noise quota count (QC) limit and 70 to 80% of its summer quota count. Therefore there is substantial scope for increased night flights within its permitted quota, which would not be acceptable to KCC.

Although KCC supports the intention of the fourth environmental objective to 'encourage the use of quieter aircraft during the night quota period', measurement through average QC points per movement, will not provide a realistic portrayal of the historic trends and a reduction of noise at source. Individual aircraft create noise at a certain level, some noisier some quieter, and the use of an 'average' is misleading. If there are only a few noisy aircraft that wake people at night, but the majority of aircraft are quieter, the 'average' will not reflect the fact that some noisy aircraft do operate and cause distress, and instead portray that on 'average' there is noise reduction at source.

Q4: Do you agree that the next regime should last until October 2017?

Agree that it is sensible that the next regime should last until October 2017 to cover the period of the Airports Commission publishing its recommendations on airport capacity and the Government making a decision on those recommendations. A subsequent review of the regime in 2016 (ready for new regime implementation in October 2017) should allow sufficient time for the Government to take account of the Airports Commission's conclusions in summer 2015. The subsequent regime, post 2017, can then be aligned with the recommendations (if they are adopted) for use of airport capacity. This is particularly relevant with the recommendation in the Airports Commission's Interim Report (December 2013) for the creation an Independent Noise Authority, which if implemented by the Government, would provide advice to the Department for Transport (DfT) in setting the next noise regime post October 2017.

Q5: Do you have any views on the revised dispensations guidance?

No comment.

Q6: Do you agree that we should maintain the existing movement and noise quota limits until October 2017? If not, please set out your preferred options and reasons – this could include the noise and economic impact of any alternatives.

Kent County Council (KCC), on behalf of its residents who are disturbed at night, would prefer that there were no night flights. However, KCC also recognises the economic arguments for allowing limited night flights, particularly long haul flights from emerging economies, which bring economic benefits to the UK.

However, KCC does not agree that the existing movement and noise quota limits should be maintained until October 2017, but rather that night movements and noise quota limits at Gatwick should be reduced in order to give residents under the flight paths, who are over-flown all day long as well as at night, are at the very least, allowed a decent night's sleep.

As previously stated, Gatwick currently uses only around 83% of its year round ATM limit; and uses on average only around 50 to 60% of its winter night noise quota count (QC) limit and 70 to 80% of its summer quota count. Therefore there is substantial scope for increasing night flights within its permitted quota, which as already stressed, would not be acceptable to KCC.

Gatwick's business aspirations are to compete with Heathrow; therefore it should be subjected to similar night noise restrictions as Heathrow. While it is acknowledged that night flying restrictions at Heathrow are tighter because of its surrounding urban environment, KCC urges that rural areas should also be given protection from night noise. This is especially relevant given that background noise levels are lower in the countryside compared to urban areas; therefore noise from aircraft over-flight is more noticeable in rural areas.

If Gatwick's night air traffic movement (ATM) limits remain set at 3,250 in winter and 11,200 in summer, this contrasts with far tighter night time movement controls at Heathrow (2,550 in winter and 3,250 in summer). Therefore Gatwick's air traffic movement (ATM) limit exceeds Heathrow by 27% in winter and is almost 3.5 times greater than Heathrow in summer. It is however acknowledged that Heathrow's noise quota count (QC) limit is higher than Gatwick in winter and only 18% less than Gatwick in summer, as this reflects the fact that long haul aircraft are larger and noisier at Heathrow and the airport is busier all year round, whereas Gatwick has a summer peak season and is served by generally smaller and supposedly less noisy short haul aircraft. Nevertheless, the number of movements (ATMs) permitted at

night at Gatwick is greater than Heathrow and this should be made more equal between the UK's two biggest airports,

At the height of summer schedules, the frequency of landings at Gatwick through the sleeping hours can be as high as one every 6 minutes, e.g. on 8 July 2011 (source the Gatwick website). With the night ATM limit averaging at 61 ATMs per night in the summer, or one aircraft movement every 6.4 minutes, these high frequencies of aircraft over-flight are still within the permitted movement quota. Therefore in order for the situation for local residents to improve, there needs to be a reduction in the number of permitted movements at night.

Given that Gatwick is also currently operating at far below its permitted night noise quota count (QC) limit (at only 50-60% in winter and 70-80% in summer), there is the potential to increase the proportion of noisier aircraft that make up the number of night flights. Aircraft used on long haul routes are larger, and often noisier, therefore this is also likely to occur at Gatwick with the increasingly long haul nature of their operations, as the airport seeks to compete with Heathrow on long haul routes to emerging markets. This will also result in Gatwick having an increasing propensity to capture new early morning (night time) flights arriving from long haul destinations. Therefore the quota count (QC) limits for Gatwick also need to be reviewed.

Local communities must be protected from further increases in night flying and it is also not unreasonable for communities living alongside airports to seek a reduction in the number of night flights.

Q7: Do you have any comments on our forecasts to October 2017?

No comment on the forecasts. However, the use of 'average' noise contours is a flawed method of measuring the impacts of noise as people do not hear 'average' levels of noise; rather it is the noise from individual aircraft that wake people up at night. Use of area and population within 'average' noise contours does not represent those affected by noise outside of the contours. In the case of Gatwick, arrival noise affects a large area and many people who live under the approach paths but are far outside of the area of 'average' noise contours.

Q8: Do you have any views on how the benefits of quieter aircraft can be shared in the future between communities living close to the airport and the aviation industry?

Of particular annoyance at Gatwick is the high pitched "whining" tone of the airframe noise from the A320 group of aircraft. This has been investigated by the Environmental Research and Consultancy Department (ERCD) of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and found that the tone is emitted at the 500-600Hz frequency and therefore is close to the peak sensitivity of the human ear. Close to the airport it is masked by other noise, but at around 7-15 nautical

miles from the airport it is very audible. This is an example of aviation noise that may not be within the area of the 'average' noise contours, but affects people further out from the airport that live under the approach paths. This is particularly a problem in West Kent with arrivals into Gatwick. KCC urges that these aircraft are either retrofitted with equipment to prevent this high pitched "whine", or if this is not feasible, they should be banned in favour of quieter aircraft.

Although the faster phase-out of noisier categories of aircraft is sensible, the number of QC4 or above aircraft now being operated at night is, apparently, relatively small due to the scheduling ban between 23:30 to 06:00 (although the QC/4 ban is not proposed to be extended to the whole night time 23:00-07:00 period). Therefore more attention therefore should be given to the height and manner in which the aircraft are flown on their landing approach in order to reduce noise impacts.

Q9 (a): Do you agree with extending the operational ban of QC/8 and QC/16 aircraft to the entire night period (23:00 – 07:00)?

Agree with extending the operational ban of QC/8 and QC/16 aircraft to the entire night period (23:00-07:00). However, given that there were no QC/16 or QC/8 departures at Gatwick and considering that a QC/8 or QC/16 arrival is likely to belong to an older Chapter 2 aircraft which have been phased out; the time extension of the ban should go further and include QC/4 aircraft in order to have a meaningful impact.

The impact of one noisy aircraft at night can have knock-on effects on sleep disruption and deprivation, even though subsequent aircraft movements are made by quieter aircraft, on the saying that "once awake, always awake". Therefore the noisiest aircraft (including QC/4) should be banned, and the ban extended to the entire night time period (23:00-07:00) and not just the night time quota period (23:30-06:00). This is so that people are not prevented from getting to sleep in the 'shoulder' period between 23:00 and 23:30, or awoken too early (if that is the case) between 06:00 and 07:00.

Q9 (b): Do you agree with our assessment of the costs and benefits in the draft Impact Assessment?

Do not agree with the assessment of costs and benefits in the draft Impact Assessment as it does not consider the costs to local residents of keeping the existing night noise regime (it only considers it a benefit in terms of having night noise controls through a noise quota and movement limit identical to the previous regime). There is the potential to increase night flights at Gatwick due to the under-used quota which could be filled in the coming years of the new regime. Therefore this will subject local communities to increases in night noise above that which they currently experience, even though it is within the existing quota limit which is being maintained, and thus is not viewed as a change in policy option. Additional night flights will create productivity costs

with local residents suffering from sleep disturbance as well as costs in term of health, although these are statistically unproven and have not been monetised.

Q10: Are there any other changes to the regime which we should consider?

None other than those already stated, i.e. a reduction in the number of permitted movements and noise quota for Gatwick so that it is of a similar magnitude to Heathrow.

Q11: Do you have any further comments on the scope for trialling new operational procedures which have potential noise reduction benefits in the period up to 2017?

KCC welcomes the inclusion of night time respite trials and was supportive of Gatwick's recent night arrivals respite trials. Although KCC also acknowledges that respite will bring benefits to some at the expense of others, and so there needs to be a clear justification for the areas that will benefit, to the detriment of others, from the alternation of flight arrival paths. However, thus far, we have not seen any analytical evidence of the benefits and disbenefits to communities under the two alternating flight paths. It is essential that the impacts on people, and not just operational improvements, are assessed in order to inform local stakeholders' views on the merits, or otherwise, of rotating respite at night, and at other times of day.

Alternating respite was a central part of the Gatwick Airport Ltd and NATS London Airspace Consultation with arrival and departure routes below 4,000ft and 4,000-7,000ft being re-designed from a 'swathe' to a single precision route (with an alternating precision respite route) using performance based navigation. The night flying regime, including the impacts on local communities of night time respite, must be taken into account once NATS has designed the new airspace routes following their consultation which closed on 21 January 2014, and before an airspace change proposal is submitted to the CAA.

KCC welcomes further work on increasing the angle of descent. There are observed major discrepancies in the heights with which individual aircraft approach Gatwick Airport, on a regular daily basis. Lower flying aircraft increases the quantum of noise overhead and the length of time over which the noise disturbance lasts is also extended the lower the aircraft flies. Therefore, the higher the aircraft pass overhead, the greater the benefit for the community and so we welcome this being delivered through steeper angle descents.

Paragraph 5.15 states that a night time runway preference scheme at Gatwick is not considered likely to have any great noise benefits. However, given that

Runway 26 operations with aircraft arriving from the east and landing into the prevailing westerly wind occurs 73% of the time, and high proportion of night flights at Gatwick are arrivals, West Kent gets over-flown by low flying descending aircraft during the majority of nights. Therefore, if there is an opportunity for a Runway 08 (easterly) preference when there are slight westerly winds below a certain speed, similar to runway direction preference procedures being tested at Heathrow; this should be investigated for Gatwick. This would provide some respite for people living to the east of Gatwick, whose current only form of meaningful respite from night time arrivals is from a change in wind direction, which happens on average only 27% of the time.

Q12: Are there any other matters you think this consultation should cover?

The differential between night and day landing charges, which heavily incentivises airlines to operate at night, and tourists (predominantly) to travel at night, should be challenged and discouraged. It is proposed that operators should be prevented from reducing or discounting landing fees during quiet periods, i.e. during the night. There is a general understanding that night landing fees at Gatwick are very much lower than daytime charges (due to greater available slots at these times), and that zero fees apply at certain times (due to excess capacity during the night), which is encouraging more discount night arrivals than is desirable. Gatwick's night fees should be higher than daytime fees to discourage night flights.

Also, airports should incentivise their clients by the use of favoured tariffs for quieter planes. Gatwick Airport's charges should be directly linked to a fee per measured decibel.

Q13 (a): Do you agree with the locations of the proposed new noise monitors at Heathrow? If not, are there alternative locations you would favour and why?

No comment.

Q13 (b): Do you agree with the proposal to apply runway-specific limit adjustments for easterly departures at Heathrow? If not, please give reasons.

No comment.

Impact Assessment Questions:

Question 1: Do you agree with our assessment of how movements and quota usage are likely to change over the period to the end of the summer season 2017 at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted?

In regards to Gatwick, the assumption of future growth based on historic growth rates during the high growth period is a sound methodology and as the forecasts show, it is unlikely that either movements or quota count will reach the existing limit/cap. However, as stated in response to earlier questions, the existing noise and movement limits do allow for significant permitted growth in night flights at Gatwick, which could occur if historic growth rates are exceeded in high growth assumption scenarios due to rapid economic growth during the recovery and an increase in demand for aviation. Such growth in night flights would be unacceptable in terms of night noise for people living under flight paths. Therefore the permitted number of night flights and night noise quota count limit should be reduced in order to protect residents from this potential increase in night noise over the coming years.

Question 2: Do you agree with our assessment of the costs and benefits of option 1 at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted? Would you expect there to be any additional costs and benefits?

As previously stated, we do not agree with the assessment of costs and benefits as it does not consider the costs to local residents of keeping the existing night noise regime (it only considers it a benefit in terms of having night noise controls through a noise quota and movement limit identical to the previous regime). There is the potential to increase night flights at Gatwick due to the under-used quota which could be filled in the coming years of the new regime. Therefore this will subject local communities to increases in night noise above that which they currently experience, even though it is within the existing quota limit which is being maintained, and thus is not viewed as a change in policy option. Additional night flights will create productivity costs with local residents suffering from sleep disturbance and costs to their health, although these are statistically unproven and have not been monetised.

Question 3: Do you agree with our assessment of the costs and benefits of option 2 at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted? Would you expect there to be any additional costs and benefits?

As previously stated, we agree with extending the operational ban of QC/8 and QC/16 aircraft to the entire night period (23:00-07:00) as in policy option 2. However, given that there were no QC/16 or QC/8 departures at Gatwick and considering that a QC/8 or QC/16 arrival is likely to belong to an older Chapter 2 aircraft which have been phased out; the time extension of the ban should go further and include QC/4 aircraft in order to have a meaningful impact.

The impact of one noisy aircraft at night can have knock-on effects on sleep disruption and deprivation, therefore have productivity costs and health costs, (albeit not statistically proven or monetised), even though subsequent aircraft movements are made by quieter aircraft, on the saying that 'once awake, always awake.' Therefore the noisiest aircraft (including QC/4) should be banned, and the ban extended to the entire night time period (23:00-07:00) and not just the night time quota period (23:30-06:00). This is so that people are not prevented from getting to sleep in the 'shoulder' period between 23:00 and 23:30, or awoken too early (if that is the case) between 06:00 and 07:00.



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31 January 2014