

Open letter to the Prime Minister

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The Rt Hon David Cameron MP
10 Downing Street
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18th February 2016

Dear Prime Minister

Organisations representing communities throughout the UK recently met to share their concerns – and in many cases their anger – about the noise impacts of recent flight path trials and other airspace changes. Some of these organisations have previously written to ministers about this issue, but no substantive progress has been made on the matters raised in those letters. The meeting felt strongly that we should write to you to call for an urgent review in relation to airspace. Since significant changes are already underway and are independent of any future decisions on South East airport capacity, such a review should not be held up by the runway debate. We urge you, therefore:

- to bring forward meaningful consultation on both the policy governing airspace change and the process for delivering it; and
- to impose a moratorium on any new initiatives leading to further trials of future airspace changes (including permanent vectoring changes), except where there is a community preference to reverse those which have already taken place, until such consultation has been completed and Government policy reviewed.

We understand that the Government wishes to reorganise airspace and that the approach for doing so has been set out by the CAA in its Future Airspace Strategy. Our experience suggests however that the current approach for making such changes is not fit for purpose. Many airspace changes including trials of possible new flight paths have, for example, taken place recently without notification for local communities, and for reasons that in some cases remain opaque.

Further, it has become clear that the principles guiding the CAA on how to assess and manage the environmental impacts of airspace change are currently too crudely defined to be directly applicable to the issues posed by the introduction of modern technologies. Performance Based Navigation, for example, enables aircraft to fly intensely concentrated routes such that those who find themselves under a flight path drawn up by air traffic controllers can be – in some cases quite suddenly – exposed to noisy aircraft at a rate of up to one per minute.

Issues such as the location of these intensely concentrated flight paths, how effectively their proposed introduction is publicised, what the trigger should be for the deployment of respite options, and whether it is appropriate to expose new communities to aircraft noise evoke strong reaction and – in our view – require clearer guidance, based on evidence on noise impacts. Independent consultants to the CAA recently reached a similar conclusion¹. Yet significant change has been taking place without formal public engagement on these critical, high level questions.

Irrespective of the decision-making process concerning a new runway, airspace change is underway and changes planned for the future will have very significant community impacts. We understand that a bundling together of questions relevant both to airport expansion and airspace change may appear

¹ <http://publicapps.caa.co.uk/docs/33/AirspaceChangeProcessIndependentReviewFinal.pdf>

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convenient. But it is our view that the Government's decision to undertake further analysis on the issue of airport expansion must not hold up the public consultation of the principles and process for assessing the community impacts of airspace change that we had been expecting to be issued early this year.

Given the strength of feeling that the changes so far trialled or undertaken have provoked in many cases – resulting in a number of trials being forced to end early and airports having to reconsider their own approach to community engagement – we request that a moratorium be placed on all further airspace change trials until such public consultation has been undertaken and the Government's policy reviewed.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Johnson (Aviation Environment Federation)

Sarah Clayton (AirportWatch)

Robert Barnstone (HACAN East, at London City airport)

Martin Baraud (GON, Gatwick Obviously Not)

Murray Barter (RAAN, Residents Against Aircraft Noise)

Louise Barton (Lydd Airport Action Group)

Peter Clymer (TWAANG, Tunbridge Wells Anti Aircraft Noise Group)

Nigel Davies (EGAG, Englefield Green Action Group)

John Davis (LADACAN, Luton and District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise)

Nic Ferriday (West London Friends of the Earth)

Stephen Hanks (Nutfield Conservation Society)

Ian Hare (PAGNE, Pulborough against Gatwick Noise and Emissions)

Rosalie James (Aircraft Noise Three Villages)

Margaret Majumdar (ENAG, Ealing Noise Action Group)

Dominic Nevill (ESCCAN, East Sussex Communities for the Control of Aircraft Noise)

Helena Paul (SEAT, Stop Edinburgh Airspace Trial)

Sally Pavey (CAGNE, Communities Against Gatwick Noise and Emissions)

Linda Penny (BIPLANE, Back Ifold, Plaistow & Loxwood Against Noise and Emissions)

Peter Sanders (SSE, Stop Stansted Expansion)

Brendon Sewill (GACC, Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign)

John Stewart (HACAN, Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise)

Mike Ward (Plane Wrong)

Peter Willan (Richmond Heathrow Campaign)

Katie Williams (Teddington Action Group)