

Noise Action Plans – what are they?

The UK Government recognises that aircraft noise can have adverse mental and physical health impacts. Noise Action Plans (NAPs) are “strategic noise maps for the main sources of environmental noise”, including roads, rail and airports. They are a requirement of the Environmental Noise (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended), and their purpose is to manage noise “issues and effects” from departures and arrivals at certain airports.

However, this requirement is constrained by the Government’s positive view of the contributions airports make to the economy. So, managing noise exposure must be carried out in a way that achieves “a fair balance” between negative impacts of noise (on health, quality of life and productivity) and the financial benefits of airport operations.

Airports are required to revise their existing plans at least every five years (known as “rounds”). Currently, Round 4 NAPs revisions should be underway at 15 airports. In addition to the five-year rounds, the Regulations also require revisions to NAPs where a major development occurs that impacts the existing noise situation.

Under the Regulations, when airports revise their NAPs, they must first map noise levels from airport operations using data from the previous year. The purpose of the maps is to provide a “snapshot” of the potential noise impact arising from aircraft arrivals and departures. Revised NAPs are drawn up for areas near to the airport where the noise mapping shows noise exposures of 55dB(A), Lden or more and 50dB(A), Lnight or more. The revised NAP should identify whether there are any particular or additional measures that might be taken to address those noise impacts – including noise reduction. The fifteen airports should have drawn up their noise maps in 2022.

Round 4 NAP airports:

Birmingham International
Bournemouth
Bristol
East Midlands
Leeds Bradford
Liverpool John Lennon
London City
London Gatwick
London Heathrow
London Luton
London Stansted
Manchester International
Newcastle International
Southampton
Southend

Please note that, given the impacts of Covid travel restrictions in 2021, airport operators are advised to supplement 2021 data with information from a more representative period when creating their noise maps.

Who oversees the process?

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is responsible for producing guidance on the NAP Regulations and process. Defra also formally adopts revisions to NAPs. However, revised NAPs are first submitted to Defra’s Secretary of State who should consider whether they comply with the Regulations.

The Secretary of State for Defra must also ensure that their decision on the submitted NAP is in line with UK policy measures. Current UK policy, set out in the Department for Transport’s Air Regulation Guidance, and the Aviation Policy Framework is to limit and where possible reduce the number of people significantly affected by aircraft noise, and the process to adopt a NAP usually allows for input from the Secretary of State for Transport.

If a submitted NAP is judged to comply with both the Regulations and policy, it will be formally adopted by Defra. The Regulations require that NAPs are formally adopted by Defra's Secretary of State by February 2024.

Once formal adoption of a NAP takes place, the airport is required to publish it within 28 days in an electronic format, usually on its website.

Do communities get a say?

Yes. The Regulations require that "the public is given early and effective opportunities to participate in the preparation and review of the Noise Action Plans". In addition:

Airport operators are encouraged to work with the airport's consultative committee, community groups and other stakeholders as appropriate to ensure a range of metrics are used in developing effective actions, and that actions are measured in a meaningful and appropriate way. This may include measures beyond the requirements of the legislation where appropriate.

In addition, the guidance states that airport operators might choose to carry out an informal review of progress towards implementing NAPs as part of their continuing engagement with airport consultative committees or other stakeholders.

If you are impacted by arrival or departure noise from one of the major airports on Defra's list, consider asking the airport operator for information about their:

- arrangements for public consultations
- existing noise reductions measures and noise reduction projects in preparation
- long-term strategies
- planned actions over the next five years
- provisions for implementing the revised NAP
- evaluation and accountability post-implementation arrangements – how on-going progress towards the commitments will be monitored and reported
- estimates of the reduction in the number of people impacted by noise

It is worth referring to the latest version of Defra's guidance, which explains in detail what public engagement should involve as well as what should be included in NAPs. Defra has advised AEF that it is unable to publish the full NAPs guide on its website due to "technical reasons". However, you can access the full guide on AEF's website [here](#).

AEF's map of Round 3 NAPs is [here](#), but we recommend accessing the relevant airport's website for fuller and more up-to-date information.

A summary of the process for Round 4 NAP revisions

