

Night Flights Consultation

Bullet point briefing from HACAN

This briefing is intended for people who want to get the main points of the consultation document at a glance. It focuses on the main areas of interest to HACAN supporters.

The consultation was published in January 2013. It can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/66837/consultation-document.pdf

Responses need to be in by 22nd April. To be emailed to night.noise@dft.gsi.gov.uk or sent to Night noise consultation, Department for Transport, Great Minster House (1/26), 33 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 4DR

General

The consultation just covers Heathrow, Stansted and Gatwick, the three ‘designated’ airports. These are the only airports where the Government takes responsibility for setting the night flight regime. It is a two-part consultation. This first part is looking for ideas and evidence which will inform its detailed proposals in part two which is due out in the Autumn for consultation. The Government will need to have firm, final plans in place by March 2014 as the current agreement with the airlines runs out in October 2014 and the airlines need at least 6 months to readjust their schedules.

Current situation

16 flights are allowed between 11.30pm and 6am on a typical night. Some nights there are more, but over a year, it must average out as no more than 16 each night. This is known as the “night quota” period. There are no scheduled take-offs during this period, though, in practice, there are evenings when, because of delays during the day, there are take-offs after 11.30pm. The first flight arrives about 4.30am. Between 6am and 7am, there are no restrictions. In fact, this is one of the busiest hours of the day. There are over 65 flights - the only hour when planes are permitted to land on both runways, at least for some of the time.

Evidence the consultation wants

A lot of this consultation is asking for detailed technical, operational and economic evidence. Much of the detail on technical and operational matters will need to be provided by experts in their field and is only touched on in this briefing.

The consultation neither rules in, nor rules out a ban on night flights. A decision will be taken once it reviews the evidence presented to it in this consultation.

HACAN’s Key Points

- **Reiterate our basic position: a ban on flights between 11.00pm and 6am and a progressive reduction between 6am and 7am.**
- **Failing that, we would want to see some of the measures suggested in the consultation which reduce noise put into place – see overleaf**

1. Increase angle of descent

Welcome if it is done well. This would be welcome as it would mean the planes would be higher over most communities and lower over none. There is one proviso to this: we would want to see a *continuous* steeper angle of descent; if it became less steep before it reached the airport, there could be significant noise problems for those areas where the change was made from one angle to another.

2. Introduce night-time easterly preference at Heathrow

HACAN is neutral on this. We have always remained neutral on the question of preference as we have members on both sides of the airport and simply encourage people to express their own preference. Normally aircraft land into the wind. Easterly preference at night means that the planes would land over Berkshire not just when there is an east wind (as they do now) but also when the west wind was blowing at less than 5 knots. In practice, this would mean fewer planes landing over London before 6am and more over Berkshire. There are no scheduled take-offs before 6am.

3. Displaced landing thresholds

Welcome. This is a technical way for saying that the planes would land further down the runway. This would reduce noise, particularly for those communities overflown just before the plane lands.

4. Respite periods

Welcome so long as there are no areas which lose out. There are already (in theory anyway) respite periods for communities in the boroughs closer to the airport as aircraft are meant to use different runways on alternate weeks. This doesn't apply to communities further from the airport. HACAN has worked hard over the last few years to get respite for these areas. We are pleased to see it included in the consultation.

5. Possible trade-off between fewer night flights and making operational freedoms trials permanent

Instinctively against trade-offs but...given the choice, some of our members would accept some element of operational freedoms in return for no flights before 6am. Others would not but many would not express a view until they saw the detail of what was on offer.

6. Compensation and insulation schemes

Support any more generous schemes that are on offer.

7. Night noise, annoyance and health

The health effects are such that it is, in our view, not possible to justify night flights.

8. Night flights: needed for economic reasons?

Not convinced they are. There is a long section on this topic but very different from what we have seen in previous consultations where the assumption has been that night flights bring overall economic benefits. This time the DfT recognizes that "the nature of these impacts is not clear-cut and is a source of debate". HACAN feels it can claim credit here because the CE Delft report we commissioned, which highlighted the considerable economic costs of sleep disturbance, is being given equal billing with the Oxford Economics' study commissioned by Heathrow Airport. The DfT does not accept everything in the CE Delft report but has treated it seriously, having had several in-depth conversations with its authors. HACAN will continue to press that the economic costs of night flights are weighed against their economic benefits.