

Dear Emerging Thinking staff

I wanted you to know that any information you may be fed by the Heathrow Community Relations Team or the Heathrow noise monitoring authorities is likely to be wholly misleading and grossly under-represents the number of complaints about aircraft noise that are actually being made.

They have a policy of reporting only one complaint at a time no matter how many complaints an individual makes about aircraft noise and when a member of the public complains several times and presses for their complaints to be registered they refuse to reply and do nothing. You will see this documented in the emails below, to which I still have no response.

I notice from the DfT website that there are restrictions on noise levels through a points scoring system and I feel strongly that the way the Heathrow organisation is behaving is such that it prevents a proper assessment of points by frustrating any monitoring of the points system. I urge you to investigate and get a full understanding of the level of complaints about aircraft noise.

I have tried to do so via FOI but have been told that the Heathrow noise monitoring operation does not fall under the public sector so is not subject to FOI. They are therefore allowed to act with impunity and opaquely to protect their interests while the true extent of the noise, vibration and disturbance impact of low flying aircraft over London, and the high security risk this poses, is left unchallenged.

Please bear this in mind when considering the impact of expanding aircraft capacity at Heathrow. When we first moved to this flat eight years ago we enjoyed nearly three years of no aircraft noise at all. Now we are regularly bombarded with aircraft noise at well above the WHO recommended threshold for well-being, often starting at 0430 and lasting till midnight or later, seven days a week. It is impossible to get more than four hours sleep at a time for most of the time. The noise is so intense and continuous that people have to shout to make themselves heard above it and it is often difficult to have a telephone conversation or watch TV without interruption. This has a serious effect on individuals and communities.

Noise exposure of this type has been recognised as a form of torture when applied to individuals during interrogation and it is the same in everyday life. In the spells of quiet that we do get, there is a tangible difference in community activity and interaction. Studies on school achievement and youth development with and without continuous high levels of aircraft noise would, I am sure, be very worthwhile in gauging the social impact of the noise pollution caused by low flying aircraft, and so would general health and well-being studies. These are factors that should be taken into account very carefully, with a high weighting, when looking at the balance of whether there is an economic and social case for expanding Heathrow (or any other airport, come to that). The focus is too much on economic wealth of a few rather than the well-being of society (which is the ultimate aim of government) in the media campaigning by those who stand to profit by running Heathrow and calling for its expansion. Indeed, those who stand to gain monetarily should not be allowed to use their powerful positions to influence the outcome of this debate.

Another serious factor to consider on the Heathrow airport debate is that the current flight path takes incoming aircraft directly over the new US Embassy building in Vauxhall (surrounded by a large number of new high rise, densely constructed residential buildings) at very low altitude and low speed in a predictable flight path, with densely packed aircraft along a very narrow approach line. The risk of terrorism (or mechanical fault or pilot fatigue - something that is of serious concern to pilots and their Union) is significant in these conditions and with so many very tall new buildings creating unpredictable and unknown wind effects, the cumulative risk is very high indeed over an extremely densely populated area of London. Therefore, flying aircraft low over London on approach to Heathrow has an inherent very high risk and potentially very high impact. It is not a matter of if an accident will happen, but when. We have seen an increasing number of incidents involving aircraft on approach to airports in the past twelve months and, with increasing numbers of flights, increasing reliance on new and complicated sensitive technology, and pilots working increasingly longer hours within ever tighter aviation frameworks, a crash (like the helicopter crash in Vauxhall recently) in central London is inevitable at some point. It would only take a fault of a few seconds at aircraft approach speed and altitude for it to crash into the ground or a tall building if something went wrong.

I am copying this email to the DfT complaints office because I want to investigate whether there are any controls or censure that DfT can exercise over the Heathrow noise monitoring organisation, on which I presume they rely, to get them to record full details of aircraft noise complaints and to respond with common decency to complaints made by members of the public. It is completely unacceptable that they do neither.

Regards

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