

Chapter two – the impact of noise

You ask for views on the impact of aircraft noise. We can comment on this from personal experience as we have the misfortune to live directly under the Southern approach to Heathrow airport. We would like to make the following points:

- Aircraft noise has a material negative impact on our quality of life. Richmond has lovely parks, good theatres, nice restaurants and great transport connections. We also have really friendly neighbours and a real sense of community in our street. Despite this, as soon as we can afford to, we are planning to move away from the area in order to escape the scourge of aircraft noise. Although we thought we knew about the planes before we moved here, the day to day reality (especially at night) is so much worse than we expected.

Night flight noise

- The greatest disturbance is caused by the first plane to land in the morning (at around 4.30am). This wakes us up and (even if we are able to get back to sleep) reduces the quality of our sleep for the rest of the night.
- Any aircraft noise before 7-7.30am on weekdays and 8.30-9am at weekends disturbs our sleep as this is time during which (if we weren't disturbed) we would usually be asleep.
- Aircraft noise is also more intrusive at night as it happens against a background of lower background noise.
- Night time noise is even worse in windy weather when planes seem to rev up their engines.
- WHO guidelines say the sleep period should be at least 8 hours for most people. The WHO guideline limits are clearly not being met as the period between the last evening flight and the first morning flight is significantly less than this.
- Your consultation (2.21) says no linkage has been proven between aircraft noise and insomnia. We read this with some incredulity. There is no doubt in our minds that our sleep is badly affected by aircraft noise. If there are no studies to prove this perhaps it is because the studies have never been done. I note there don't appear to be any proving that night flights don't disturb sleep either!! You should not take the absence of studies as evidence that there is no impact. We are living proof that night flights disturb sleep.

Day time noise

- We have a lovely garden but rarely sit out in it in the summer as it is impossible to relax or to hold a proper conversation when there is a plane flying over us every couple of minutes. It is impossible to make yourself heard above the noise for around 30 seconds when the planes are directly overhead.
- In the summer many cultural activities are completely ruined by aircraft noise. We used to go to an open air theatre performance every summer, but gave up after a couple of years in which the actors were completely drowned out by the planes. Last year at Kew Gardens, during a concert by Status Quo (not renowned for being the quietest of bands) the aircraft noise was so bad that at one stage the band stopped playing and commented on it!

Alternation

- It appears to be widely believed that runway alternation provides a half day of 'peace and quiet' for those living under the flight paths. However as someone living directly under the Southern approach to Heathrow, we are also impacted (although to a lesser extent) by planes landing on the Northern runway. Alternation does provide some respite to those living further away from the current approaches (e.g. in central Richmond) but not for those immediately under, or living between (as in Kew) the two.
- An extra runway, even if it reduces (at least in the short term) the numbers of planes landing directly over us, could actually increase the noise we suffer if the third approach path was to be over Central Richmond.

Summary

- We regard the current situation as simply unacceptable and regard the possibility of any increase in the numbers of planes with horror.

Chapter three – noise measurement

Ways of measuring noise

- The science is complex and we wouldn't profess to understand it all. However, any system to measure noise needs to take account of the amount of noise each individual plane makes, since each one disturbs us.
- It also needs to take account of the number of times we are disturbed in a day. Obviously (to us anyway) one hundred planes a day is more disturbing than two a day.
- Also, as stated above, night noise (when there is no other background noise) is even more disturbing.
- As I understand it the current system of measuring noise does not do this and so clearly does not reflect the experience of those of us on the ground.
- The UK appears to believe that it only when noise averages out at 57 decibels or above that people start to get annoyed. This is clearly too high and conflicts with the WHO Guidelines for Community Noise state that night noise levels should not exceed:
 - Inside bedrooms – 30dB LAeq (8-hour) or 45dB LAmax fast
 - Outside bedrooms (window open) – 45 dB LAeq (8 hour) and 60 LAmax fast.

Chapter four – quantifying noise impact

- We welcome the acknowledgement that noise has a quantifiable economic impact which should be taken into account.
- However, beyond the purely economic impacts isn't it time that we stopped pursuing GDP growth at all costs and started using wider measures of the overall wellbeing of society. If this was done properly there is no way that further airport expansion would be on the agenda at all.

People affected

- There is a growing population and a shortage of housing in South West London which means that whether or not any sizeable developments take place there will continue to be infill development and an increase in the density of occupation which means it is inevitable that the number of people living under the Heathrow flight paths will increase. Any attempt to quantify future noise impact needs to take into account the growing numbers of people likely to be affected.

Chapter five – ways of reducing noise

More planes but not more noise!!

- The claim that 'noise from UK aviation will not increase despite a near doubling of flights over the next 40 years' is laughable. We can't believe that you are seriously considering this as a plausible scenario. We have been promised quieter planes for years and yet continue to suffer noisy planes with little sign yet of a reduction in disturbance. Technological advances in aviation are consistently delayed.
- It would be little consolation if the planes were slightly quieter if there were more flights and/or we lost our alternation and/or night flights were extended.

Other measures

- Steeper descents might provide some respite and would be welcome.
- A ban on night flights would be welcome and would at least solve the problem of the impact on sleep.
- The idea of spreading the noise around in order to give everybody some respite would not work for us as by the time the planes are over us they are on the final approach path which we understand can't be varied.

Insulation

- We were desperate enough for sleep to have had loft insulation and ugly secondary glazing installed in our house (a building of townscape merit) by BAA and it has not made a sufficient difference to enable us to sleep through night flights.
- In summer the secondary glazing only has any impact if the windows are kept shut. This causes additional problems in sleeping prior to the first flight as the bedrooms become too hot for good quality sleep to be possible.

- Some neighbouring properties have been unable to have this work done as their windows and lofts were deemed unsuitable by Heathrow's chosen contractor! A problem of the BAA insulation/secondary glazing system is that planning authorities oppose its use for listed buildings of which there are many in Richmond and the scheme is confined to a single supplier whose product is not generally suitable for listed buildings. You should therefore not place much value on insulation as mitigation.

Other

- We are busy people with day jobs and limited resources. We find ourselves ranged against the powerful aviation industry which can muster huge resources and manpower to produce detailed and complex arguments in favour of expansion, whereas the individuals and community groups who oppose them do not. However those who have the resources to shout loudest are not necessarily right, and we would urge you to treat the industry responses, and those of the consultants and researchers financed by them, with a healthy degree of scepticism.
- I know this is only one of several consultations, but as well as the noise, we suffer additional air pollution, occasional blue ice falling through people's roofs and bodies falling out of planes, fear of accidents, and growing difficulty in finding household insurance that covers the possibility of a bomb on a plane causing damage to our house.