

Cowden Parish Council response to ‘Airports Commission Paper Number 5 – Noise’.

Cowden Parish Council is delighted with this opportunity to further formally comment on the subject of Aircraft Noise and in particular the impact and opportunities available to reduce the effect on communities like Cowden.

Cowden Parish Council has submitted responses to various consultations from bodies associated with Gatwick Airport and the effect of operational activities on the community. Its response to this latest consultation echoes that of previous responses supported by local and district councillors and the Rt. Hon. Sir John Stanley MP.

The anticipated announcement surrounding a proposal for a second runway at Gatwick was not unexpected, but well timed in conjunction with the night flying consultation and continued interest in Aircraft Noise abatement enabling various threads to be pulled together. The projected commercial growth of Gatwick, current underutilisation of existing quota's and a second runway provides the route to a substantial increase in capacity above even the significant numbers projected already. With this comes the need to manage Aircraft Noise.

Cowden Parish Council provides the following comments against each section of the Consultation.

Section 1 – Introduction

Cowden village is situated in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and lies on the confines of Kent adjoining Sussex. The village is located approximately 5 miles from Edenbridge, 6 from East Grinstead, and 9 miles west from Tunbridge Wells. The village comprises approximately 323 households with just under 800 people and is adjacent to Gatwick airspace.

For many years Cowden has suffered an increasing level of aircraft activity over the Parish. It is also increasingly that the altitude of some aircraft, and hence noise, is considered to be an increasing nuisance factor with aircraft approaching, in some instances, below 2000 feet; 30% of the Parishioners supporting the Parish Plan identified aircraft noise as an issue. The parishioners concerns have increased significantly in the last 18 months. The relevance of defining those affected is reliant on an accepted method of measurement, whilst noise contours are a means of capturing absolute levels of noise, these do not relate to ambient noise levels, time of day (or night) nor are they regulated by an independent body.

Aircraft Noise over the Parish of Cowden has become an increasing concern for our residents, in particular with regard to their quality of life. As a result, this has become a regular agenda item for Parish Council meetings and has been raised with Sir John Stanley MP, local and district councillors, through GATCOM and Gatwick Airport.

Despite various consultation, workshops and debates the issue of Aircraft Noise appears to be increasing with more and more local communities raising their voices in this arena. Langton Green & Tunbridge Wells are just two more communities to raise their involvement.

For true rural communities, like Cowden, aircraft noise is a dominating feature as there is little else for it to compete against. Whilst GATCOM and NATMAG advertise their community involvement this tends to be applied with a 'generic brush', which to a certain extent is understandable. However in taking this approach the impact on communities can be lost, and proposals carried forward through the unregulated organisations, GATCOM and NATMAG.

Section 2 – How Does Noise Affect People

The Parish Council's key concerns reside with the different ways noise affects people and in particular relative to the area that they live within. The background ambient noise levels are not considered in noise measurements and hence the impact on the community. Whilst various studies are cited within the consultation document, the relationship to actual communities is not, we believe, proven. As such the use of this information in this context is not clear.

The impact of night flights should also not be underestimated and a factor applied given the significant disturbance, for the same noise level, that a night flight causes relative to a day flight. Disturbed sleep patterns are a recognised serious health consideration.

Section 3. Measuring Aviation Noise

Whatever document, official body, consultation or other source concerning aircraft noise, it is apparent that there is no common agreement.

The use of the noise metric 57LAeq16h is deemed to establish the level at which noise becomes intrusive. However, the relationship of this to the community and ambient noise levels is key to establishing when a 'noise level' is deemed to be intrusive. There is neither such quantitative measure nor independent body responsible for these aspects. Cowden is pictorially represented as being outside of the night flight Lden55bBa Night8 hours and Lnight6.5, yet with no other noise at night the effect is still significant. Unless there is a means to correct these anomalies in the "measurement mechanism" the issues will not be resolved but carried forward with the belief that resolution has been achieved. The value and hence assertions being linked to these measurements is, therefore, questionable.

Section 4 Quantifying Noise Effects

The methods applied are those, in the main, established or developed many years ago when noise was less of an issue for communities. Technology has made significant progress in these areas and the opportunity to revise these methods in conjunction with an independent body could provide a mechanism and methodology that would achieve a greater level of agreement across communities than exists today. This would be a positive step in both understanding the issues and hence the ability to implement a solution that is more likely to be acceptable on a greater scale.

Section 5 Mitigation

The opportunity to mitigate either partially or fully the effect of noise is possible through commercial channels and 'encouraging' operator's to pull through technology into their fleets at their earliest opportunity. Whilst it is recognised that airframe longevity contradicts this to a certain extent, other commercial factors are available (increased fees based on noise pollution for a given aircraft type) to Gatwick to 'encourage' noisier (to be defined) aircraft to operate at more appropriate times.

The opportunity to learn from other communities, both within the UK and overseas should be considered to establish all of the options available.

Whilst noise levels may not increase as cited, the persistence of noise will increase. The use of respite as one solution is still a concern given that with the increased aircraft flight density being projected, the potential installation of a second runway at Gatwick all lead to having to manage more aircraft in the sky. As a result, for the given noise level, respite is a short-lived option and will be quickly leap-frogged through more aircraft being pushed out over more areas to try and manage the issue.

Section 6 Conclusion – How to respond

Given the complexity of the subject matter Cowden Parish Council has responded as laid out within this document.