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Gatwick Can be Quieter

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Dear Sir Howard

Response of Gatwick Can Be Quieter (GATCAN) to Airports Commission Paper Number 5 - Noise

Gatwick Can Be Quieter

Gatwick Can Be Quieter (GATCAN) believes that Gatwick Airport Ltd (GAL) can actively reduce the noise pollution from arriving aircraft that blights neighbourhoods near to and far from the airport. GCBQ represents residents in the Gatwick area who are adversely impacted by aircraft noise, with a particular focus on the population centres to the East of the airport in the Eden Valley, which have been increasingly affected by aircraft in recent years. The trend has been for NATS, working with GAL, to repeatedly channel arriving aircraft on Westerly operations on specific vectors over these communities.

We promote the adoption of best practice in operations and noise control at Gatwick Airport by actively campaigning for such measures as a steeper descent for arriving aircraft, a dramatic reduction in night flying, better distribution of flights, respite and quieter planes.

We welcome this opportunity to enter the discussion on the subject of Noise following the publication of Paper Number 5.

Communities in the Eden Valley conservation area are very concerned about noise issues

18/10/2013

from existing and future projections of airport usage at Gatwick Airport. The prospect of a second runway which GAL have now announced after earlier denials, would make the dimension of the problem that much greater.

Whilst we are uniquely concerned with the problems faced in this immediate locality, the potential increase in passenger numbers from c30m to 50m and ultimately 95m with a second runway will impact, profoundly, on a much wider area. Hence this aspect of the work of the Airports Commission is most significant.

The Eden Valley and Edenbridge

The Eden Valley embraces a wide area whose northern boundary for the purpose of this exercise is the M25/Sevenoaks axis and the southern nodes are marked by East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells. Edenbridge, a town of 8000 people is located in the middle of this rectangle, 11 miles to the east of Gatwick. In addition to the urban areas described, this is an area of tranquillity within the Green Belt and adjacent to the Ashdown Forest, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Residents in this area face three challenges to their amenity, the impacts of which are cumulative

1. The concentration of flight paths, a consequence of the Government's policy of minimising the area of noise impact as described in Chapter 3.12 of the APF.
2. With one runway and a prevailing wind regime, 70% of all landings are from the east over Edenbridge and its satellite communities. Frequently, landing aircraft are also interspersed with aircraft having just taken off, flying in the opposite direction over Edenbridge, at a higher elevation but at fuller throttle, producing a constant noise pattern. (This might explain why at certain times, inbound aircraft are noticeably lower than at other times.)
3. These features are compounded by the historic night flight regime which allows Gatwick (GAL) the luxury of a 24 hour operation, which means that disturbance is a 24 hour reality.

Given the triple impact of penalties for people living under the Gatwick footprint, therefore, the numbers contained in your table 2.1, unweighted for this triple impact, surely misrepresent the size of the population apparently exposed to noise disturbance at Gatwick compared to other locations. We believe Eden Valley residents are placed at a distinct disadvantage by making this somewhat crude analysis.

Key Shortcomings of the Consultation Process

The policy employed by the Government has hardened from one which places "an emphasis on protecting the quality of life of local communities" (Philip Hammond) to one which "stresses the need to balance these concerns with the economic benefits which aviation brings" (Patrick McLoughlin). The new approach manifests itself in a number of key areas throughout their draft Consultation (March 2013).

The Airports Commission appears to be adopting the Government's strengthened approach. We believe, however, that there is a need for the Airports Commission to adapt

this stance on a number of aspects. We will also be drawing attention to some other issues which have been overlooked in your approach to aviation noise. The sheer magnitude of the changes which are in prospect will not just be affecting a small minority of rural hamlets, but an increasingly large swathe of tranquil countryside, the increasingly overflown AONB's, and the sizeable communities. A fairer balance can still be struck (we believe, must be struck) but not in the way Government policy is pointing and we believe the Commission should be providing balance.

Flight Concentration and Trade-Offs.

The Government's decision to maintain flight concentration represents the continuation of a policy which has been in operation since 1996. We believe it was introduced without proper consultation of the communities it now increasingly affects. The trialling of the SPL/NP-NAV regime will permit a heavier concentration of aircraft over narrow corridors meaning that even more flights than before will be directed over Edenbridge and neighbouring communities. The only prospect for respite will come from a change in wind direction.

By removing flight concentration as an item for further deliberation, Government's approach has prevented a discussion on trade-offs. This is unreasonable.

In his Sustainable Framework Scoping Paper for UK Aviation of March 2011, the then Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond, volunteered discussion on trade-offs as a general principle. We consider this topic (dispersal versus concentration) should not be overlooked as a natural candidate for an overall trade-off determination because clearly the interests of the minority are being overridden for the wider commercial benefit, without any form of practical acknowledgement.

As a general principle, we would like to see the Airports Commission adopt a proactive approach to the application of trade-offs to resolve this, and other such matters.

Airport Consultative Committees (ACC's).

The Secretary of State has recognised the need for better engagement between airports and local communities particularly with respect to noise issues. The APF, however, has placed even greater reliance on voluntary agreement between communities and the aviation industry (See APF 4.6-4.10).

This laissez-faire approach is based on the belief that ACC's are fully representative of the communities they represent, a view we fundamentally contest.

Our experience of GATCOM is that the only "community" interests which are served are those of the airport operator, airlines and the main Councils who will benefit from the revenue streams which will increase from expansion. As an example, West Sussex Council has already voted in support of Gatwick's plans for a second runway. KCC have added their support to the idea that capacity at Gatwick should be expanded. These powerful authorities have voiced their opinion without any consultation with those most likely to be affected by the noise.

Can it really be said that these decisions form part of a co-ordinated policy of engagement between airports and local communities, including those communities likely to experience the disbenefit of noise and congestion?

If the Government is determined to place its reliance on these organisations to reach voluntary agreement on such complex topics, then GATCOM and its GAL controlled sister organisation NATMAG, need to be more open and transparent. NATMAG is a key committee at GAL which is chaired by Tom Denton, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility. It has the fundamental strength of bringing together representatives of GAL, NATS, the airlines and selected local representatives. Such bodies need to be professionally and independently chaired and more representative of the local councils whose communities are affected by noise. As an example of their closed culture, recent applications by Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells District Council to become members of GATCOM were firmly rejected. They also need to be independently funded, whereas at present GATCOM is largely funded by GAL - with implications for its independence.

We have raised this aspect because local communities' contributions to the noise debate are not being heard given the Government's misplaced faith in the current structure of ACC's, and there is no mention in your paper of this topic. We believe there is a need for much greater transparency throughout, a theme we return to below. and this should be a prominent feature of your response to Government.

Self Regulation: Airport Master Plans and Noise Action Plans (NAP's)

The Government places considerable importance on these entities and on the face of it, they give the industry the opportunity to present a glowing picture of its forward plans, including its plans for noise mitigation. In practice, things can be very different particularly where noise issues are concerned. Master Plans and NAP's of course are self monitored and have no regulatory mechanism or measurement targets with real "consequences" for failure to meet such plans. They are approved by the DfT., largely without question.

This structure is not conducive to the building of public trust, in fact it can be very corrosive especially when claims are being made by the operators about noise targets and the incidence of complaints falling.

Therefore, while these compliance aspects may not be part of your direct remit, we do believe that given the complexity of the issues around noise, the absence of an effective partnership based on trust and openness between the airport and the local community complicates your ability to deliver workable outcomes.

All too frequently we hear from the operators that there is no noise problem or the problem is in decline. As an example, the evidence at the Edenbridge Workshop of December 2011 compiled by GAL (but only after the publication of their Master Plan) established that there is a problem and a packed assembly hall at Langton Green (Tunbridge Wells) last month shows that community concerns are increasing. Yet the DfT's own noise maps show both communities to be outside the noise complaints threshold - is that really believable?

The Commission has promised "a fresh and independent view at arm's length from politics" which places you in an advantageous position to persuade Government that it needs to adjust its approach to these aspects of its Aviation policy.

Independent Noise Regulator (INR)

Given the above, we are taking this opportunity to comment on independent compliance. On page 49, you have asked for views on the pros and cons of independent noise regulation. Given the widespread lack of trust in the present system and the misplaced emphasis being placed on self regulation when the stakes are so high, we believe that some form of INR is essential at local airport and inter-departmental level.

At local level, we are disappointed that the Government is planning to appoint ACC's to monitor the implementation of noise management and NAP's. For this to be workable, ACC's must be transformed and we would like to see some form of INR to oversee their performance..

Furthermore, given the potential conflict of interest at inter- departmental level, we also believe that some form of independent regulation is essential to ensure fair play for the work being done by the CAA in its various new roles.

This will require more work and definition of the role of independent regulation and we consider a separate consultation with expert proposals for discussion should be implemented.

Other Issues

We have already addressed the cultural issues of an industry apparently in denial as regards its relationship with its locality. You have made reference to the Fly Clean Fly Quiet initiative which UK airports like Gatwick have been remarkably slow in introducing.

But the noise problem is not only about the type of aircraft and the numbers of movements, but the culture of noise mitigation itself which should reach into the cockpit and the mindset of the crews who are operating the aircraft. The manner in which an individual aircraft is flown can have noise reduction and fuel consumption implications which would benefit both operator and community alike.

We notice that different aircraft engage engine manoeuvres at least 12 miles out from Gatwick ; some even lower their landing gear early and fly at lower levels compared with other aircraft. One suspects that such operational behaviour can have a negative impact not only on noise but fuel consumption also.

Discussion Paper 5 Aviation Noise

We address your Paper in chronological order.

Chapter 1. Opening Remarks

In 1.2 you acknowledge that Noise will be a central issue for both phases of the work of the Commission including your deliberations on "sweating" existing capacity and the expansion of new capacity in the longer term. It is worth pointing out that Gatwick residents could be faced with both scenarios.

In 1.12 you make reference to airports being required to confront trade offs whether this be concentration versus dispersal or restrictions on night flights and you are seeking examples of international best practice. In our opening remarks we commented that trade-offs should be considered more widely, as a means of squaring the circle between those supporting expansion and those for whom expansion and the extra noise that comes with it would act

as a disbenefit.

One example of a trade-off we support would be the idea of compensating the policy of flight concentration on the one hand by restrictions on night flights on the other.

But if that was simply to mean more daytime flights which in itself would raise public concerns, this would devalue the trade off on offer so care is clearly required to ensure that the overall benefits are not degraded by such means. However, as discussed earlier, we believe that the concept of trade-offs should be more rigorously pursued.

Chapter 2. How does Noise Affect People?

As you have recognised, there is considerable debate as to whether the adoption of the noise metric of 57LAeq16h is truly the point at which noise becomes intrusive. In our contribution to the APF we stated the following

- The average noise that leq measures is meaningless because it includes the quiet periods when there are no planes. It does not tally therefore with the way people experience noise.
- It excludes the hour between 6am and 7am – a busy hour of the day (on 3 September 2012 there were 44 movements at Gatwick, the majority landings).
- There is a predominance of computer derived contours which tend to give too much weight to individual planes (which have become quieter) and not enough to the number of planes (which have increased significantly).
- On the ground measurements are not being taken in areas further away from airports, but these are the places which in recent years claim to have experienced a considerable upsurge in aircraft noise.
- The methodology is inconsistent with the Environmental Noise Directive.

We have seen reports which argue that the noise differential in rural areas could be as high as 10decibels because the background noise is lower. Setting that aside, we have already drawn your attention to our belief that an unweighted comparison between the numbers affected by noise within this contour at Gatwick is not representative (last paragraph 1 above).The onset of another runway would add considerably to these statistics.

Furthermore, the maps which were presented by the DfT as part of the Night Flying Restrictions Consultation showed that while Marsh Green is within Lden55bBA, other surrounding parishes such as Cowden and Hever for example were outside. All three parishes are shown to be outside Lnight8 hours and Lnight 6.5. the night noise contours selected to measure the onset of annoyance. Given that the normal flight path was also outside these contours, this is difficult to comprehend.

Furthermore, neither is this consistent with the findings of the two open meetings (in Edenbridge December 2011 and Langton Green July 2013) held to discuss community concerns at which night noise was stated as a key concern by the public who attended.

This all raises questions about the credibility of the measurements, the placement of and

the control of data from the relatively few noise monitors positioned in the area. There have been many requests from the community for more noise monitors but there has been a noticeable inability or reluctance by the airport to provide more.

We share the view that the contours adopted are not representative of the noise regime experienced by this community and data credibility needs to be borne in mind as a consideration by the Commission.

You have observed that the number of complaints is not necessarily an accurate measure of those who suffer annoyance. In the past, the response of Gatwick's Flight Evaluation Unit (former name) to people making complaints about a particularly noisy experience has been ineffectual, i.e. basically outside the airport's control. This is hardly designed to encourage further public input, so we share the conclusions you have drawn.

We are concerned by the linkages which have been made between sleep disturbance and health impairment and the impact on productivity. This is particularly relevant in the summer when people tend to sleep with their windows open.

We would like to see further greater recognition given to the impact of noise on the health profile of communities who will be affected by the concentration of flights.

a recent GATCOM meeting, Catt Hewitt, who is the Deputy Director at the Aviation Environment Federation (AEF) made a presentation on aircraft noise and its effect on those on the ground. Her main points were that the numbers affected by aircraft noise have been significantly underestimated and furthermore the threshold for noise to become intrusive is lower than previously assumed. In her presentation, night respite was given high priority since aircraft noise can significantly affect health by causing sleep deprivation.

merous studies have shown that aircraft noise at night increases hypertension, even among people who don't wake up. Many of the health issues specifically associated with night noise from aeroplanes are of course summarised in the Government paper [ERCD Report 1208, 'Aircraft noise, sleep disturbance and health effects: a review'](#), 22 January 2013

Sleep deprivation caused by planes has been linked to reduced concentration and performance in adults and cognitive defects in children. However, while a single study on sleep may not specifically relate to aircraft noise due to ethical constraints as well as other complexities involving the isolation of noise effects on human physiology, there are clear parallels between the sleep disturbance caused by aeroplanes documented by the WHO, and general sleep studies attempting to quantify the effects of sleep deprivation. One such parallel study was carried out by researchers at the University of Warwick, UK. After reviewing 15 studies of 470,000 people over 25 years in eight countries, they concluded that 'short sleepers' – those getting less than a full 5 hours of sleep per night – had an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancer. Many other studies have found that sleep loss causes immune system deficits (NewScientist 2 February 2013 pp31-39).

One study reported in the European Health Journal dated 2 July 2013, investigated the effect of night-time aircraft noise exposure on endothelial function and stress hormones in healthy adults. They concluded that aircraft noise is more annoying i.e. 'stressful' to unconscious subjects than railway noise or road noise at the same equivalent decibel

level. It is generally agreed that this difference in response is partly due to the intermittency of plane flights, but most particularly the levels of low frequency noise produced by jet engines.

merous scientific reports show how noise can cause major physiological changes at subconscious level, even in the short term and during daytime hours. Scientific studies have also clearly established a direct dose response relationship between aeroplane noise and Myocardial Infarction. Furthermore, epidemiologic studies have demonstrated association between long-term exposure to aircraft noise and increased incidences of arterial hypertension, cardiovascular disease, levels of obesity, dependency on anti-anxiety drugs and increased suicide rates.

The public health issues are of major concern, and not least because many people under flight paths are currently unaware of how the noise from planes affects their health, and therefore how they can make informed choices about how to reduce noise effects.

We need to be reassured that noise limits which are set fully comply with those put forward by the World Health Organisation.

Chapter 3. Measuring Aviation Noise

From our daily experience, the magnitude of the noise will be characterised not only by the technical configuration /age of the aircraft but also the height and manner at which it is flown. We go into further detail at the appropriate point but suffice to say, there is a wide and visible variation between the observed heights of aircraft approaching Gatwick. It is also fair to say that even small adjustments in height can make a considerable difference to the impact for people on the ground.

Equally, we notice that the relatively small adjustments in the route of approach taken by individual aircraft can make a profound difference to noise experiences on the ground.. These differences (of height and route) are observed very frequently and could, if managed on a consistent basis, provide a form of respite.

Turning to the actual duration of the noise experience, it is also noticeable that certain of the newer generation of aircraft operated by Easyjet for example generate a particularly intrusive whining/screech noise which can be heard a longer distance away than other airlines/aircraft. We do not know whether this is a technical issue or the manner in which different airlines/pilots operate their aircraft but is a possible example of a cultural issue described in 2.4 above.

We do not understand the argument that the new, wide body jets are “quieter” because they embody the best of new technology. Our local experience is that they are actually noisier than smaller aircraft perhaps because they appear to approach Gatwick at much lower altitudes than smaller aircraft. Certainly the impact of the larger jets frequently provides the most disturbance and with the growth of long distance movements which tend to use the bigger aircraft and to arrive early in the morning, this can only get worse.

You have asked for opinions on the adoption of alternative methodology for the measurement of airport noise imprints.

It seems to us that the collection of data needs to be handled by independent agencies and made available transparently. GAL should also be required to post regular website updates

of the interpreted data from individual meters for individual flights with information about airlines/aircraft breaching their operating standards for noise. We believe each plot should provide details of the height of approach/departure of each aircraft being measured.

Secondly, the spread of meters needs to reflect the aircraft noise footprint. Their distribution is sparse in the outer areas and the reluctance of the authorities to increase their number is manifest.

We have no problem with there being a weighting for night movements over day movements because we believe this would reflect the greater intrusion presented at night. We also believe the summer night weighting should be even higher because people tend to sleep with windows open at night for obvious reasons.

Chapter 4. Quantifying noise effects

A simple noise and social survey is presented as one method of identifying people's reaction to whether there is a noise problem as opposed to a laboratory study. The dose-response derives the likely response by a selected population to noise exposure.

We have no information to determine whether dose-response surveys have ever been tried out on people living in the Eden Valley when changes to flight management policies were introduced in 1996 (concentration) and 2003 (night flight quotas).

Both methods that you have outlined (simple social surveys or laboratory tested programmes) would require a level of sophistication and a greater knowledge of the volumes and precise route plans but in principle we would support this approach, conditional upon the full participation and involvement of the communities likely to be affected in the formulation of the survey and the openness of its interpretation.

Your approach enumerates a number of conclusions drawn from various studies. We do not think that the use of average noise levels (favoured in early studies) provides an appropriate method of establishing a realistic measurement of disturbance. The impact of one noisy aircraft, particularly at night, can have knock-on effects for sleep disruption even though subsequent aircraft movements are made by quieter aircraft ("once awake, always awake").

We have also considered your presentation of more recent attempts to categorise noise disturbance and in particular ANIS (1982) and ANASE (2007). From ANIS the measure of 57L Aeq16h was derived and remains the preferred Government metric even though the later work has stated (and is "generally accepted") that "more people are annoyed by a given level of aircraft noise exposure than they were when ANIS was conducted." You go on to say that local issues may have distorted the results of the ANASE study which would appear to support the Government's reluctance to change the criteria.

We believe that local issues should surely be taken into account because a national standard, which does not reflect local realities, is unlikely to produce a result which is fit for purpose. In section 1, at the beginning of this presentation, we have stated the unique combination of circumstances which blight the community beneath Gatwick which are not experienced at other locations. We could add that a single runway operation offers less opportunity for respite than is possible at Heathrow so the local factor must, in our opinion, be accommodated in your evaluation process (and the statistics adjusted in the light of those circumstances).

Night Noise.

This is perhaps the most unpopular aspect in the local community of Gatwick's licence to operate; it is also perhaps the most misunderstood and misrepresented aspect of GAL's operations.

We were frankly most disappointed by the Government's approach to night noise; by separating consideration of this aspect from the overall policy framework the opportunity for reaching a balanced approach to the treatment of aircraft noise has been obfuscated. The latest version of the APF devotes but two paragraphs to the subject stressing the value of voluntary schemes such as the night curfew scheme operated at Heathrow. The chances of GAL offering to voluntarily introduce a night flight curfew can only be considered to be less than negligible, so it is highly disingenuous to intimate it.

There is no explanation in the draft APF of the manner in which the Night Noise consultation will be incorporated into the overall noise equation.

We are therefore appreciative that the Commission has included this topic in its overall consideration of Noise and its impacts. This does at least provide the opportunity for the consideration of trade-offs for those communities which are blighted by a combination of factors of which night noise is but one.

From comments made by the senior representative of GAL - Mr Tom Denton- at the December 2011 Edenbridge Workshop, maintaining the existing freedom of night operation enjoyed by GAL is crucial to their one runway expansion programme. While they have somewhat ingenuously claimed that they do not intend to seek to increase their quota arrangements, this nonetheless means there will be considerably more night flights as the expansion programme occupies the unused night slots. A second runway may of course increase their appetite for more night capacity.

At the height of summer schedules, the frequency of landings at Gatwick through the sleeping hours can be as high as one every 6 minutes (source the Gatwick website; for example 8 July 2011:). The headroom for more night flights during the summer and winter allocations is 1500 and 1800 (respectively) as contained in your Paper which represent potentially huge increases over current levels. With the increasingly long-haul nature of operations and the voluntary ban on night flights at Heathrow, Gatwick retains a high propensity to capture new (early morning) throughput.

The Gatwick Master Plan is based on increasing the number of passengers to 40.5 million a year by 2020 and without a second runway. It is estimated that this will, on average, equate to an extra 117 flights a day. To achieve this we surmise that it would be necessary to increase, and not reduce, the number of night flights, despite denials on this subject by GAL at the recent workshops. The key point is that the airport is not currently utilizing the permitted night flight allocation and statements by GAL on this subject are inherently misleading.

Whether or not you take the Government noise level selection, or lower levels as recommended by WHO, it is surely not unreasonable for communities living alongside airports to seek a ban on flights at certain times of the night.

Although the faster phase-out of noisier categories of aircraft is sensible, the number of QC/4 now being operated at night is relatively small, apparently. A QC/2 ban would be more meaningful but likely to be contentious given the size of this category. More attention therefore should be given to the height and manner in which the aircraft are flown (landing).

Monetisation

In our response to the APF, this organisation expressed its dislike of monetisation in principle as it removed the onus of responsibility away from the industry to reduce its noise impact by direct means.

We also dislike the idea being posed by your questionnaire that impacts on health can be compensated this way. Compared with removing the source of the problem eg by a complete ban on night flights or reducing the impact of noise by respite or by technological improvements for example, buying off people financially is unacceptable.

We also doubt whether an adequate unit of compensation can be devised and whether the intention would be to financially compensate those who are directly affected if, as part of an overall trade-off arrangement, compensation was introduced.

Should a scheme to compensate residents be introduced, we believe the metrics should recognise the scale of disturbance (by decibel count), frequency of movement, and be time related (day versus night). We believe the fund should be supported from the revenues received from airlines being penalised for breaches of the noise regulations and paid directly to the affected parties in cash.

We do believe that operators should be prevented from reducing or discounting landing fees during quiet periods of the day/week/year. We understand that night landing fees are very much lower than daytime charges (we have been told that zero fees apply at certain times) which is encouraging more discount night arrivals than is desirable.

The present policy also encourages the use of old, inefficient and noisy aircraft without penalty in off-peak day operations. We consider fees should be directly linked to a £ fee per measured dBA approach.

We also believe that penalties for breach of noise regulations are derisory (and do not exist for landing infringements). We believe that as part of a package of regulatory changes these measures should be updated and the proceeds directed to the benefit of those individuals/communities directly affected by the breaches caused.

We trust you will find our answers to the questions contained in this chapter of the Paper to be instructive. Certainly we believe this to be an area where the DfT has presented an unconvincing approach to some key topics and we trust the Commission will be responding accordingly in its recommendations.

Chapter 5. Mitigation

Probably the most important missing ingredients in the safeguarding of the public interest by successive managements at Gatwick, is public trust. This is due to a combination of features including the constant denials that a material noise issue exists and the insistence of working through Gatcom which can hardly be described as a representative body as we have described.

So we believe it is somewhat unfortunate that the Commission has chosen to quote

Sustainable Aviation's claim (5.2) that "noise from UK aviation will not increase despite a near doubling in flights over the next 40 years". The absence of any qualification or perhaps a counter view from an equally authoritative body more in tune with the interests of communities which live next to airports, presents the reader with a potentially biased picture.

You have based your approach to mitigation on the four headings adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Balanced Approach, the route selected for the APF. We would like to place on record that we do not understand why you have followed the Government's decision to consider Mitigation through Operational Restrictions only in the last resort. Doing so will not achieve the balanced approach to these issues and rules out some low hanging fruit solutions.

Reduction of noise at source through technological improvement.

We agree with the idea that airports should incentivise their clients by the use of favoured tariffs for quieter planes.

Mitigation through land use planning.

No comment

Mitigation through operational procedures

You have laid out the virtues of concentration of flight paths versus dispersal and we have already discussed our belief that this needs to be considered within an overall discussion on trade-offs.

You have concluded that steeper angle approaches may be prevented by the new technologies under development (Ironically this provides a timely reality check on Sustainable Aviation's opening boast ie technology improvement may be reaching the point where it actually reduces noise mitigation).

We actually disagree with both your observations. In practice, we witness major discrepancies in the heights with which individual aircraft approach Gatwick on a regular daily basis. Secondly, we notice that not only do lower flying aircraft increase the quantum of noise overhead, but there is a further impact; the length of time over which the noise disturbance lasts is extended the lower the aircraft flies. In summary, the higher the planes pass overhead the greater the benefit for the community-this is an easy deliverable because it already happens in certain cases, but there is no regulatory framework to enforce it.

The manner in which planes are operated is relevant in other ways. You have mentioned the trade-off between fuel efficiency and lower noise through technological improvement. From our observations we believe there are considerable economies which could be made without raising safety issues.

We would like to see a proactive regulatory approach. This could be achieved by the introduction of steeper angles of descent so that all aircraft maintain higher (and quieter) heights of approach for longer (as some aircraft are already achieving voluntarily). There should also be noise restrictions for aircraft landing as is already applied to departing aircraft.

We agree, more advance information from the operators on their flight planning would be

appreciated particularly to those operating major tourist venues in the Eden Valley but we see no determined effort by Gatwick to work with local communities such as ours in an open and transparent way (other than through our one KCC representative on Gatcom) so in response to your enquiry, we offer Gatwick as an example of worst practice.

Mitigation through operational restrictions.

You have presented this as being the ICAO's option of last resort after the above measures have been exhausted.

Let us assume that all reasonable measures have been exhausted and communities such as ours continue to face unreasonable blight, in this case we understand you would consider the following restrictions:

Differential landing charges.

As discussed above, we tend to agree with you that their introduction provides a soft option for airlines to delay the introduction of quieter aircraft. However, the differential between night and day landing charges which heavily incentivise airlines to operate at night, and tourists (predominantly) to travel at night should be challenged and discouraged.

Operating restrictions - Night operations.

We have already commented that we believe the discussion on night noise should not have been separated from the APF process, which prevents a comprehensive discussion as part of the overall debate on noise. It also degrades the opportunity for a complete discussion on trade-offs.

Our views on night noise were communicated in detail to the DfT and have been incorporated in the relevant sections of this presentation. In the context of health issues and night flight disturbance we opined that we did not see it as a cost benefit exercise but a concern in its own right and should certainly deserve more attention in the next phase of DfT's work. The same comment applies to the work of the Airports Commission.

It is perhaps worth recording that in the Gatwick Noise Action Plan, voluntary action number 55 contains the statement that it will merely continue to monitor Government research and only "where applicable and appropriate" adopt the guidelines of WHO. This is hardly proactive leadership material by either the Government or the industry.

Noise Envelopes

We have commented in the past on the concept of noise envelopes and our views can be summarised thus:

- If Edenbridge was situated within a noise envelope, in the absence of any other improvements eg respite, it would remain blighted and reliant solely on technology changes which take years to feed through. Meanwhile traffic levels would be increasing.
- Given subsequent developments in policy our general feeling about noise envelopes is that the Government has, in concept, already consigned the rural community to a noise straight jacket by its adoption of flight concentration as a policy. Earlier comments on trade-offs therefore are of particular relevance so that the rights of rural communities are not sacrificed to protect the interests of the wider economy.

- Given the lack of consensus on what constitutes an appropriate noise marker for disturbance, our caution has hardened against noise envelopes.

Independent Noise Regulator

As discussed earlier, we are very much in favour of a truly independent Noise Regulator appointed for each main airport and whose costs we suggest could be paid from penalties extracted from airlines who breach noise regulations.

Compensation

As discussed in Chapter 4 above, we are broadly against financial compensation in favour of agreement on acceptable levels of noise management. We would say, however, that we are concerned that the debate on airports expansion has been ongoing for more than a decade during which time house owners in certain locations have effectively been blighted for this whole period. In the case of Gatwick, the reverse position has been experienced especially as until very recently GAL had been declaring that they had no aspirations to seek a second runway. This uncertainty for house owners is unreasonable.

So we would not rule out the principle of compensation as part of a trade-off measure of last resort where it has not been possible to agree a fair selection of measures to balance the needs of the few against the wider economic interest.

Conclusions

We have explained that we are not qualified to offer solutions on some of the more technical areas of your Paper but we have offered informed views from our unique experience as a community increasingly burdened with aircraft noise.

We have cited Night flights as a key area for greater regulatory control. In principle we believe that Night flights at Gatwick are unacceptable and many are denied the possibility of a decent night's sleep. The situation is exacerbated by the absence of minimum height controls and noise controls for landing aircraft. We believe that Night flights into and out of Gatwick should initially be severely curtailed and in the absence of an acceptable trade-off, be stopped altogether.

We do not consider that operational restrictions should be considered as matters of last resort.

You have also requested input on other relevant topics and here are our views:

We have raised our concern at the absence of any comprehensive thinking on trade-offs especially as the conventional means of resolving noise issues, eg dispersal and respite, appear to be unworkable in your opinion, in the case of Gatwick. We think this approach is unfairly narrow which may be a reflection of hardening attitudes to those who have genuine noise issues. In this context we have expressed our concern that flight concentration has been accepted without question, especially if it spills over into the government's approach to Noise Envelopes.

We have explained in some detail why the lynch pin of government policy - the reliance on self-regulation and voluntary solutions between the operators and the community for key areas of the APF, is absolutely unworkable. We have cited GATCOM and NATMAG as unfit

for this purpose as a local example of a process which needs to be financially independent of the operators, chaired by a professional and independent Chairman, properly representative and inclusive, and formed of committees who can speak with authority and holds regular and open meetings.

We have not seen an adequate definition of “community” which is a term which frequents the thinking in Government references to voluntary agreements. Given that some larger councils comprising the word “community” have more in common with the airport operators, the rest are reliant on outcomes determined outside their control. In agreeing to support Gatwick’s second runway without consultation with the rest of the “community” within its aerial footprint, Kent County Council and West Sussex County Council have provided clear illustrations of this point.

We have expressed our concerns that Noise Action Plans and Master Plans have no regulatory teeth, there are no penalties for missed targets and are administered and measured by the authors who publish them. We believe this is not a realistic or credible way to proceed. More emphasis is required to create a culture within the industry which recognises the need for noise amelioration as part of its corporate and individual day to day performance plans.

An independent system of regulation or group is needed to provide the checks and balances required for the management of the expansion of the Aviation industry and to resolve interdepartmental conflicts of interest. We doubt for example whether the CAA can be considered an independent advisor on the subject of airports noise management.

We have stressed the importance of a cultural change to drive down the quest for a greater awareness of the impact of noise on communities at flight deck level. More noise meters are required and monitored by an open and transparent system regulator. The choice of noise contours does not appear to correctly represent the actual and perceived noise levels experienced by communities under the Gatwick flight path.

In principle we are against financial compensation except as a last resort solution

Given that no-one knows where many of the new routes will be created to handle the kind of expansion foreseen in this process, there must be an opportunity, as part of any government decision, for an open and transparent means of consulting with the public to explain how flight routes might be expanded before they are set in stone. The APF pays lip service to this undertaking but it needs more definition and commitment.

Transparency, Openness and Corporate Social Responsibility - Gatwick Airport Ltd.

We would seek to establish a co-operative working relationship between legislators, GAL and all the local communities troubled by airport operations, including those directly under the flightpaths.

Corporate Social Responsibility is about doing what is reasonable and appropriate as a stakeholder in the local community. We are therefore extremely disappointed that the Gatwick Master Plan demonstrates that this philosophy has yet to be embraced and that GAL remains content to do only that which is absolutely necessary in order to achieve compliance with minimum regulatory

standards in respect of noise. We believe that GAL should instead be making positive commitments to:

1. adopt recognised noise management best practice in all its operations and activities; and
2. allocate appropriate resources to encouraging and incentivising airlines, NATS (air traffic controllers) and pilots to adopt noise management best practice in all their activities.
3. Drastically curtail and ultimately cease night flights.

GAL repeatedly declares that it is not responsible for national airspace policy, the routing, control, operation or noisiness of aircraft. Whilst this may technically be correct, it is wholly disingenuous, since aircraft would not be operating in the area were it not for GAL's close working relationship with NATS. GCBQ believes by simply aiming for expanding the number of flights to meet the existing statutory limits is not an acceptable aspiration as communities are already suffering from noise disturbance. We maintain that in order to earn the trust and respect that it clearly seeks, GAL must change its attitude and behaviour, publicly acknowledge its indirect responsibilities for the adverse local environmental impacts of aviation, and engage positively with stakeholders.

We trust this response to your Paper is seen to be constructive and we look forward to discussing the contents with your committee in due course.

Yours sincerely,

James F Sheridan FRICS

on behalf of the members and supporters of GATCAN

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