

24 July 2014

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Airports Commission
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Dear Sir/Madam

Airports Commission: Utilisation of the UK's Existing Airports Capacity (Discussion Paper 06).

Natural England welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above consultation which focuses on the domestic and international connectivity provided by regional and DA airports and airports serving London and the South East other than Heathrow and Gatwick, and considers what recommendations the Commission could usefully make to shape this context.

As the Government's advisor on the natural environment, Natural England's purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Our response focuses the question set out in Chapter 7: *Could either the NSIP or Town and Country planning process be improved, either the process itself or development of supporting policy, to support developers and meet the needs of local communities?*

Under both the NSIP and the Town and Country planning process consideration will need to be given to the environmental impacts of any proposals to enhance the utility and connectivity at airports serving London and the South East. A National Policy Statement in relation to airport development will enable the effective implementation of the NSIP process. It will be important in setting the context for airport development and in guiding assessment principles, such as for Environmental Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment, as well as providing guidance on generic impacts as other NPSs have done.

Utilization of existing capacity may involve changes to airport operations, flight paths, surface access, safeguarding activities and may require land take to accommodate the changes. This could adversely affect biodiversity and landscape through direct effects such as habitat loss or fragmentation, as well as indirect effects resulting from changes to air quality, water quality, light pollution levels, noise, disturbance and visual impacts. There would need to be careful consideration of the potential for adverse impacts on nationally and internationally designated nature conservation sites such as European Sites¹ and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); nationally protected landscapes including National Parks, the Broads and AONBs; and other sites of importance for nature conservation, landscape, habitat and species.



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Under both the NSIP and the Town and Country planning routes the impacts on the natural environment will need to be fully assessed and Natural England would wish to be involved from the outset. Early consideration of impacts on the natural environment allows time for the development of innovative solutions to mitigate for any adverse impacts on the natural environment, as well as consideration of potential enhancement opportunities.

To this end Natural England has developed its aviation sensitivity mapping tool which can aid the early scoping of potential issues to aid avoidance and mitigation of impacts on the natural environment. This is available on request from Natural England.

Natural England has also introduced an improved service to provide discretionary advice related to pre-application planning proposals, supported by the introduction of charges – our Discretionary Advice Service (DAS). We recommend visiting our [website](#) for further information on this service.

If you have further questions regarding our response to this consultation, please contact [REDACTED], Senior Environmental Specialist on [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

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