



HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION

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Utilisation of the UK's Existing Airport Capacity

1. The Historic Houses Association (HHA) represents Britain's historic houses, castles and gardens in private ownership. Its membership of more than 1,500 properties throughout the UK represent an astonishing variety of our cultural heritage, ranging from intimate family homes to some of Britain's most important and widely-recognised buildings. Nearly 60% of HHA member houses open their doors to the public, welcoming 13 million visitors, while one in five of all HHA properties offer educational visits and there are more than 300,000 such visits annually. The HHA estimates that approximately two-thirds of Britain's built heritage is privately owned and maintained and between them HHA members represent, collectively, one of the greatest 'ownerships' of listed buildings in Britain, including both I and II* properties as well as Grade II properties.
2. The beneficial effect that public visiting to these places has on the wider economy is estimated at an additional £1.6 billion, from inbound tourists alone. More than 26,000 people are directly employed by HHA members or are employed in businesses in their grounds.
3. The costs of maintaining Britain's private houses, castles and gardens are significant and expenditure by private owners in looking after England's historic environment is substantial. HHA owners spend £102 million per year (HHA Survey, 2013), but the backlog of urgent repairs at HHA member houses totals over £750 million, an increase of £360 million on the figure six years earlier.
4. Britain's historic houses are an important resource, benefiting the entire nation. 80% of international visitors say that their principal reason for visiting Britain is connected to heritage and culture. Historic houses provide character, distinctiveness and a sense of place and help create pride in where people live. 87% of British people think that the historic environment plays an important part in the cultural life of the country.
5. It is widely acknowledged that one of the most effective ways to conserve a historic building is to ensure that it has an economically-viable use and that it can be a place which people and businesses want to live in, work at, visit and enjoy.
6. The HHA welcomed the publication of the Airports Commission's discussion paper on aviation noise and particularly supported the comments on tranquillity which the Commission rightly recognised as '*a valuable resource which can increase feelings of calm and wellbeing and have positive effects on a person's quality of life*'.
7. The HHA is concerned about the potential effect of airport expansion on historic places and visitor attractions. A case in point is Hever Castle, which is blighted by frequent low flying aircraft.

This has had a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of the Castle and is evidenced in the decline of visitor numbers in recent years and visitors' negative comments.

8. One of the main reasons people visit a rural attraction is the expectation of peace and tranquillity, a point recognised in the Commission's paper. However, when there is a westerly wind, Hever's visitors are subjected to severe aircraft noise every two minutes and at peak times every minute. This noise is significant and halts conversations and this is one of the definitions which the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) uses as indicative of intrusion and annoyance, as quoted by the earlier report on aviation noise.

9. We urge the Commission to take strong account of the settings of visitor attractions and historic places in its consideration of its proposals for airport expansion. Our heritage is irreplaceable and vulnerable and should be specifically protected against the impact of aircraft movements which can adversely affect their cultural, historic and economic value and people's enjoyment of them.

10. As the HHA's concern is for the protection of the UK's historic environment, we have been selective in the questions about airport connectivity which we have responded to, below:

Question 7.3

Is overall transport connectivity between London and the regions at an appropriate level?

Improvements to surface travel connectivity between London and the regions might remove some of the pressure on flightpaths in the skies around London and the south east, if more inbound passengers were to be encouraged to fly into regional airports. There are acute problems not only for residential areas in the south east, but for some of Britain's most important and inspirational places as a consequence of inappropriate, high capacity flightpaths. At present these flightpaths are causing damage to the settings of nationally important historic sites, such as Hever Castle in Kent, creating very substantial noise pollution and visual intrusion. Not only is the setting of Hever detrimentally affected to a very high degree, but the flightpath to and from Gatwick has seriously damaged business at the site. Wedding bookings have been greatly reduced due to aircraft noise and acting as a location for film making is now completely out of the question.

What are the social or economic consequences of changes to air connectivity?

There should be no increase in flights into and out of Gatwick and Heathrow unless improved flightpaths can be used, so surface connectivity is preferable to air connectivity. The economic consequences of failing to deal with the twin issues of noise pollution and visual intrusion caused by inappropriate, high capacity flightpaths could be exceptionally serious for some businesses, like Hever Castle. Historic properties must be enabled to develop businesses which underpin their economic viability, or potentially risk decline.

Question 7.7

Are there particular pros and cons to airport developments moving through the NSIP or Town and Country Planning process?

Airport developments should be subject to the National Planning Policy Framework and its associated guidance. The NPPF provides some protection for the settings of historic sites and the associated practice guide, produced by the Historic Environment Forum, in association with English Heritage, makes it clear that developments, including airport developments and their associated flightpaths, should not detrimentally affect the settings of historic properties.

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