

Response to DfT Night Flights Consultation

22nd May 2024

Introduction

Night flights, other than emergencies and humanitarian flights, should be banned at all UK airports as soon as possible. There is ample evidence to show that depriving people of sleep can cause very serious health deterioration.

Limiting Noise

The best way to limit noise at Heathrow would be to introduce a night flight ban of 8 hours.

If night flights continue to be permitted, they should be limited to those that are genuinely essential and their impacts should be tightly regulated. Targets should be set to drive down the number of aircraft movements.

We would like to see the quota limit reduced progressively over the duration of the regime. The QC system should include targets for reductions in noise quotas over the next regulatory period.

Dispensations and late running operations

The experience of many communities around Heathrow is that late flights are permitted for reasons that have nothing to do with the listed dispensations.

The definitions of flights qualifying for dispensations are inadequate, as is the accountability of those who grant dispensations. Events that should be included within normal planning are being claimed as dispensations, to the cost of local communities.

It remains inappropriate that Heathrow get to approve their own dispensations. The lack of independent oversight results in a system open to abuse and one that is not fit for purpose.

At Heathrow there is regular late running of aircraft with insufficient evidence provided as to why this was necessary – if indeed it can be justified. Greater transparency on the reasons for late running should be provided with significant financial penalties for regular breaches of the peace at night.

Early Morning Arrivals

There is significant disturbance caused to members by flights in the 0430 – 0600 period. Many communities further from Heathrow experience night-time disturbance from aircraft noise, before 0430, and as early as 0400 in some parts of south, southeast, and east London. 0430 is counted as the arrival time at Heathrow but disturbances should be counted the time planes enter London airspace.

We would like to see proposals developed that reduced the number of arrivals before 0600.

Night Noise Objective

We would welcome clarity from the Department as to the measurement and metrics that will be put in place to judge the success of the night flights regime. How is Government seeking to reduce the harm that these flights cause? Noise abatement objectives need clear targets and enforcement rules to ensure that best practice is followed.