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The entrance to London Luton Airport (Photo by Richard Heathcote/Getty Images)

Concerns at airport plan

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A series of concerns have been submitted by Luton Borough Council over expansion of London Luton Airport in documents published ahead of a planning inspectorate examination of a development consent order (DCO).

A preliminary hearing is due to be held at Venue 360 in Gipsy Lane next week to discuss the procedure for Luton Rising's application.

The local authority's airport company, London Luton Airport Limited, trades as Luton Rising, which will be represented at the Riverside Suite on Thursday, August 10, at 10am. This meeting will be followed by two initial open floor hearings, both at the same venue. One is in the evening of August 10 at 6.30pm, with the other on Friday, August 11, from 10am.

The local authority's issues are:

If the development complies with government policy (and emerging guidelines) on limiting and reducing the number of residents significantly affected by aircraft noise;

Whether the 2019 baseline is appropriate given that the airport operation that year wasn't compliant with the planning conditions, leading to elevated noise levels;

If the noise levels decrease over time;

And whether there's an appropriate balance between growth and noise reduction, with the airport adequately sharing the benefits with the local community as set out in government policy.

The council asks for "further engagement with the noise consultant to address these issues", which may eventually be considered during the DCO examination.

On access, LBC's transport consultants have raised several issues including:

The 2016 base year model is seven years old and it's unclear how the pandemic may have changed travel patterns since 2019 when the airport operated at 18 million passengers per annum;

Greater clarity is needed on the assumptions underlying the assessment, such as the percentage of those using sustainable modes of transport and whether East West Rail has been assumed;

Uncertainty about the impact upon the strategic highway network if hard shoulder running isn't included;

And the Eaton Green road link is shown as a dual carriageway, which is a change from a previously approved scheme and the local planning authority requires justification for its need.

LBC raises further matters over climate change and emissions, health and wellbeing and about controls, monitoring and enforcement.

A call has been made for all UK airport expansion plans to be stopped in a progress report from the national climate change committee. Its response to government plans for net zero suggests "our confidence in the UK meeting its medium-term targets has decreased in the past year".

The committee warned: "While increased transparency embodied in the carbon budget delivery plan is welcome, a key opportunity to raise the overall pace of delivery has been missed." Until "a viable UK-wide capacity management framework is in place, all UK airport expansion plans should be stopped". This framework should be operational by the end of 2024 at the latest, it added.