

Unique Reference 20040142

St. Albans Quieter Skies

Comment on Secretary of State approval for growth to 19M passengers annually, with revised planning conditions – on behalf of STAQS members

We appreciate the recording of the lack of trust that exists between the local community, the Airport Operator, the Airport Owner and the Local Planning Authority that is noted within the Inspectors report

15.49 Although both the LPA and the Applicant maintained that there had been an appropriate response to breaches of the contours condition, it is clear that that view is not shared within the local community. Aircraft noise is a matter about which local residents and organisations feel strongly, and the Panel understands LADACAN's view that the communities which it represents have lost trust in the Applicant and the LPA. We return to this matter in considering the approach to mitigation (below, para 15.57).

15.254 The Panel recognises that there is considerable concern locally about further expansion of Luton Airport, underlain by mistrust due to past breaches of the noise contours condition and the ownership structure. Those concerns have been fully considered by us in assessing the implications of the increased throughput of passengers.

We have a situation where in 2014 there were conditions in place to match increases in passenger and flight numbers with the introduction of quieter aircraft to balance the benefits and the burden.

The Growth Incentive Scheme – signed jointly by the Council, Holding Company and Operator – prioritised the growth at the expense of noise.

Having reached 18M passengers in just 5 years, and exceeded the area within the permitted day and night noise contours - we had a situation where communities felt justified in expecting a period of stability for the balance to redress, as the long promised quieter aircraft were introduced to the fleet mix.

Instead, we had this application to increase passenger numbers to 19M and increase the areas of the noise contours areas further.

The Inspectors report acknowledges that there will be noise increases.

15.38 In addition to annoyance and disturbance, noise can have detrimental effect on health. The WHO Night Noise Guidelines for Europe refer to adverse health effects above 40dB, with increased concerns above 55dB, the threshold for SOAEL at night [8.83]. In his evidence, the Applicant's noise witness referred to studies which point to a potential greater relative risk of conditions such as ischaemic heart disease and hypertension in populations subject to louder levels of noise. However these studies generally consider permanent exposure to noise over the long-term. At Luton, the increased noise levels, whilst present for up to eight years, would not remain in the long-term as a result of this proposal.

We respectfully suggest that 8 years would be considered by many to be long term.

With the Secretaries of State decision, we have a situation where again the balance between growth and mitigations can be reset – and the promised noise reductions pushed further into the future.

But even before this decision was made, Luton Borough Council, through Luton Rising, are proposing within the DCO application to rewrite the rules yet again.

We hope that the Inspectors appreciate the reasons behind the lack of trust that exists between “the airport” in its wider sense combining Owner, Operator and Planning Authority - and surrounding communities, through the repeated increases in noise and the deferment of noise reduction target dates.

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31st October 2023