

Noise insulation scheme

It was helpful to see that Gatwick Airport has published an updated noise insulation scheme, including adjustments for inflation and acknowledging the need to publicise the scheme. However, having read the updated scheme note "ES Appendix 14.9.10 Noise Insulation Scheme Update Note", I would make the following points:

1. In paragraph 4.1.1, GAL states, "the acoustic insulation works are intended to improve acoustic insulation to noise-sensitive rooms, not to otherwise improve the property," which I accept. However, where work is undertaken by GAL's contractors, there appears to be no consideration for how damage caused during installation of noise prevention measures to the interior or exterior of properties will be remediated (i.e. so as to put properties back to a state as if the new runway was not going ahead). Without the runway going ahead, redecoration would otherwise not be required; this would therefore appear to be a reasonable cost GAL should be expected to bear. My experience of the current scheme was that the exterior cladding on the house was damaged, and I have had to redecorate an entire room at my own time and cost!

2. In paragraph 6.1.7, GAL states that "there may be a number of reasons why particular forms of insulation would not be practicable or desirable." This implies rooms and spaces within a property may become unusable with no mitigation possible (for example, I have a loft conversion bedroom). In this case, what does GAL suggest? Will some form of compensation (based on property values) be offered for any part of a property that is affected in this way?

3. In Paragraph 4.1.1, The scheme states that "only works to noise-sensitive rooms will be paid for". On what basis will GAL determine whether a room is noise sensitive? I would suggest all rooms in my house are noise sensitive. For example, I regularly have my dinner in my kitchen and greet guests there - but this doesn't appear in GAL's list of noise-sensitive rooms.

4. In paragraph 6.1.2, a reference has been inserted stating that "double glazing to noise sensitive rooms, with acoustic performance of at least $R_w + C_{tr} \geq 35$ dB". How has GAL arrived at 35dB? The World Health Organisation states that for the prevention of adverse health effects, you should not be exposed to outside noise pollution of 40 dB. In the inner zone, if aircraft are generating noise levels of c. 80 dB when taking off (which they frequently do), then the noise in all affected rooms will be far in excess of 40dB. Therefore, how has GAL convinced itself that the acoustic insulation offered will provide effective mitigation against the expected increase in noise such that residents are not exposed to adverse health effects from the increased flight operations, particularly at night?

5. In paragraph 2.1.3, GAL states they “will launch the inner scheme within 6 months”. My question is how long will it take until properties have been insulated? How will GAL guarantee this, and what will GAL do if timelines are not met by their contractors? My experience of the current scheme was that it took over 3 years from applying for the scheme (on 26/3/2018) until the windows could be installed (on 23/07/2021). When the scheme commences, it is likely there will be a strong day one demand; therefore, what capacity is there to ensure mitigation measures are implemented on a timely basis for all residents, so they aren’t exposed to severe delays and excessive noise disturbances for a prolonged period?

6. My experience of the current scheme was horrendous, where after hearing nothing for almost 2 years, I had to resort to sending daily email chasers to the regional managers of GAL’s chosen contractor. The scheme’s contractors were not interested in me as a customer or in providing any level of customer service, probably because of the thin margins they were operating to. How will GAL ensure the new scheme doesn’t suffer the same levels of delays and apathy from its contractors?

7. The scheme states in paragraph 4.1.1 that it will “not replace acoustic insulation installed under the previous NIS scheme unless its performance has significantly reduced.” On the face of it, this would appear a reasonable premise; however, it isn’t clear what would constitute a “significantly reduced” performance or whether an assessment is being made against a specific set of criteria. For example, a lot of homes will have some form of double glazing quite possibly installed under the old scheme, but what is the threshold for improved insulation. The lack of clear criteria and references to relatively subjective statements like “significantly reduced” makes it completely impossible for the scheme to be properly evaluated.

8. In paragraph 7.1.1, with respect to the home relocation scheme, GAL states that “GAL will launch the scheme upon commencement of routine operations”. In the intervening period from building work commencing until the scheme starts, what consideration has been given by GAL to any fall in property values and the reduced marketability of properties, and therefore a subsequent homeowner’s ability to relocate if they wish to ahead of the scheme being introduced.

9. Paragraph 7.1.4 states “using suppliers and contractors approved by GAL”. It would be helpful for GAL to explain what support will be provided. For example, will this cover estate agent fees, stamp duty on a new property etc? This appears to prohibit the use of other suppliers who may offer a far superior service and prohibit competition. For instance, if suppliers are providing very competitive pricing to GAL, this will undoubtedly be at a cost somewhere (e.g., in

service as evidenced by the current scheme). As such, how will Gatwick ensure the quality of service of its contractors is maintained at levels provided across the market and that individuals don't lose out?

10. A number of points in the scheme require authorisation and approval from GAL. Fundamentally, how will Gatwick ensure the scheme operates in the best interest of residents? For example, will there be independent oversight of the scheme (e.g., an independent board)? Will there be an appeals process where residents dispute GAL's decisions?

11. Paragraph 7.1.2 states that "home relocation assistance scheme will be based on standard mode noise contours reported each year". This appears quite vague. Given the small number of homes GAL expects to utilise the scheme, combined with the potential lack of accuracy because readings are based on the locations of noise monitoring stations not the level of noise incurred at a particular property), please could GAL outline why noise levels cannot be measured at an individual property?

12. Finally, I think it is important for GAL to realise the human effect that their development is going to have on people living in close proximity to the airport, and particularly those in the inner scheme. As far as I can understand, if the development of the airport is permitted, this WILL have a material impact on their health, well-being, and wealth. There appears a complete lack of real consideration for this from GAL, as evidenced by the noise insulation and home relocation schemes which are full of ifs, buts and caveats. It is imperative that the financial and health concerns of individuals arising from this project being given the go ahead are not underestimated by GAL.