

Wokingham Borough Council Response to the Consultation on the Draft Airports National Policy Statement

The consultation Draft Airports National Policy Statement (Draft NPS) sets out Government's policy on the need for a Northwest runway at Heathrow Airport to provide additional airport capacity in the south of England by 2030.

The draft NPS explores and develops the rationale regarding the evidence base for progressing a Development Consent Order (DCO), needed to grant permission for Heathrow to progress with construction. At present the time line for securing a DCO is unclear although DfT has suggested that this might be achieved in the early 2020's, possibly 2022, leading to a runway be delivered by 2030.

The Draft NPS asks nine consultation questions, not all of which are applicable to Wokingham Borough Council. Consultation responses are to be with DfT by May 25th 2017.

Below is the Council's response to questions posed in draft NPS:

Question 1 – The need for additional airport capacity.

Wokingham Borough Council considers that the need for additional runway capacity in South East England was clearly illustrated by the reports of the Airports Commission.

The economic wellbeing of residents and businesses located in Wokingham Borough is, in part, dependent on its proximity to Heathrow. This has led to clusters of multi-national businesses establishing themselves in the Borough's various business parks. The Council recognises that Heathrow is operating near capacity and this needs to be addressed for economic reasons as per the Airports Commission's findings. Additional capacity at Heathrow will secure and improve economic prospects for residents and businesses in Wokingham Borough.

There is undoubtedly a need for further airport capacity (close to London itself) and this is recognised in all the previous reports, and is attempted to be addressed by this proposed expansion.

However, the extended timescale in making the decision, and the very long timescale in the proposed development up to live operation, is such that it may be too late in the game to compete effectively with its larger European competitors – who are already well advanced in their offerings. Could our overall timescale be speeded up, to better match our existing competitors' airports?

Do we have the right timescale to compete effectively, and how confident are we of the estimate of our future share of the air travel. If the numeric estimates of future business or our timescales are wrong (too slow) then that can affect future development plans and future funding. This aspect is particularly important if there were to be any delays (in decisions or construction) or lack of full funding when needed. We are concerned what happens if there are major delays for any

construction/funding reasons, or any other unplanned situation; do we get left with a part completed airport and uncoordinated surface level – Is there a Plan B?

Question 2 – How best to address the need for additional airport capacity in the South East of England by 2030. This could be through the Heathrow Northwest Runway scheme (the Government’s preferred scheme), the Gatwick Second Runway scheme, the Heathrow Extended Northern Runway scheme, or any other scheme.

Wokingham Borough Council considers the economic case for expansion of Heathrow to be clear as per the Airports Commission report.

There were 2 schemes submitted for Heathrow; the extended northern runway proposed by Heathrow Hub (together with a hub interchange station on the Great Western Main Line) and the Northwest runway proposed by Heathrow Airport Limited.

The Council, in line with the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, supports the choice of Heathrow Airport Limited’s Northwest runway as the preferred option as it offers the greatest additional capacity together with less operational risk.

Question 3 – The Secretary of State will use a range of assessment principles when considering any application for a Northwest Runway at Heathrow Airport. Please tell us your views.

Wokingham Borough Council considers the list of criteria in section 5, ‘Assessment Principles’ to be relevant to the completion of the DCO process. However we suggest that the list would benefit from including clarity around traffic impact assessments on major and local corridors in regards of impact on pollution control and other environmental protection regimes.

Wokingham Borough Council suggests the necessary transport assessments, with the resultant impacts on air quality and congestions are extended to cover major and local corridors and junctions, so that the full impact of an expanded and more economically attractive airport are fully represented and considered as part of the DCO process.

Question 4 – The Government has set out its approach to surface access for a Heathrow Northwest Runway scheme. Please tell us your views.

Improved surface access to Heathrow is one of Wokingham Borough Council’s aspirations and we are supportive of the DfT’s targets for public transport use of at least 50% by 2030 and at least 55% by 2040. We are conscious that many single flights require a return car journey simply to drop off or meet an air traveller and that these car journeys contribute to capacity problems on the M4, add to traffic noise, cause congestion on the M4 and at Heathrow and adversely affect the air quality throughout their journeys.

Wokingham Borough Council supports the Berkshire Thames Valley Berkshire LEP’s wish to see the Western Rail Link to Heathrow fully operational by December 2024.

This will require the present gap in funding to be bridged to allow this project to proceed on time. We wish to see the potential use of Western Rail Link maximised.

The link was conceived as a shuttle between Reading and Heathrow but the remodelled Reading Station has been designed as a through station and we wish to see high train utilisation and efficient use of platforms by through running of services beyond Reading to the west to enhance connectivity. Plans exist to extend 2 out of the 4 trains per hour to Oxford or beyond. We wish to see the other 2 trains each hour extended to Basingstoke. This will require the 'deferred' electrification of the Reading – Basingstoke as we expect that only electric trains will be permitted to operate into the bored tunnels to Heathrow. We are also concerned that Western Rail Link may terminate at Terminal 5 and not run to Terminal 2/3.

But we consider that it is essential that DfT specifies:

- Exactly what is considered 'public transport' – we can all agree that use of trains is public transport, but the interface between mini-buses and people mover type taxis will need careful definition if the number of return car trips with single passengers is to be reduced significantly.
- How the percentage using public transport is to be measured.
- What actions will be required of the promoter, Heathrow Airport Limited, if the numbers using public transport fails to achieve the prescribed target? These actions could include the introduction of a Congestion Charge on vehicles accessing the terminal buildings at Heathrow as suggested by the promoter.

Southern Rail Access. We are aware of the numerous schemes and aspirations for some form of rail access to Heathrow from the south. The Council values any additional surface connectivity to the airport and should this option be developed it would give residents living in Earley, Winnersh and the town of Wokingham a choice of routes from Wokingham station, via either Reading or Staines.

Question 5.1 – Air Quality Measures. We agree that all practical measures need to be specified and implemented to maintain air quality. This includes achieving the targets and the identification of strategies to promote for public transport usage to and from the airport. Greater use of existing park and rides should be considered as part of the evidence base development to facilitate achieving the target of 50% trips to arrive by public transport.

Question 5.2 – Noise Supporting Measures. Although the nearest part of Wokingham Borough to Heathrow is some 14 miles away and no part of the Borough is near the 57dB noise contour line, a significant number of residents within the Borough find aircraft noise intrusive, particularly from easterly operations.

The Council recognises the effort that Heathrow Airport Limited is making to reduce the impact of aircraft noise and that the newer commercial aircraft are less noisy than even their immediate predecessors. Heathrow Airport should continue to encourage the use of modern aircraft by the use of landing charges.

The Council supports current work to assess steeper approaches and departures as a way of further reducing the impact of aircraft noise. Early morning arrivals cause

disproportionate annoyance and we welcome the proposal for a ban on night flights from an expanded Heathrow.

We note the concurrent consultation on UK Airspace and understand that this seeks to update navigation to maximise airspace by the use of more accurate GPS based navigation methods. While this will allow flight paths to avoid, to an extent, overflying towns it may also concentrate noise on other dwellings and the respite measures being explored may not completely satisfy those affected.

Question 5.3 – Carbon Emissions. We accept the conclusion in the NPS that the Northwest Runway at Heathrow can be delivered within the UK’s carbon obligations. Nevertheless, we would wish to see all efforts made to minimise carbon emissions, for example by the use of electric vehicles for surface access and for airside ground vehicles. The public have become very aware of the problems caused to health by pollution and noise, and major projects such as this will be accused of adding to those risks. The major expansion of Heathrow Airport will be an example of such a risk but is an essential development in order to help the UK to remain competitive.

Question 5.4 - Compensation for Local Communities. No comment from Wokingham Borough Council required.

Question 6 – The Government has set out a number of planning requirements that a Heathrow Northwest Runway scheme must meet in order to operate. Please tell us your views. Are there any other requirements the Government should set out?

No comment from Wokingham Borough Council required.

Question 7 – The Appraisal of Sustainability sets out the Government’s assessment of the Heathrow Northwest Runway scheme, and considers alternatives. Please tell us your views.

No comment from Wokingham Borough Council required.

Question 8 – Do you have any additional comments on the draft Airports National Policy Statement or other supporting documents?

No comment from Wokingham Borough Council required.

Question 9 – The Government has a public sector equality duty to ensure protected groups have the opportunity to respond to consultations. Please tell us your views on how this consultation has achieved this.

No comment from Wokingham Borough Council required.

10 - Additional comments from Wokingham Borough Council’s lead member for highways

Our lead member for highways is in favour of the proposed expansion of Heathrow Airport for many reasons, including employment, competitiveness in air transport, and local growth/income. Over and above the question asked in the Draft NPS our

lead member expects further assurance work and consultation on the following points:

1. A sound plan to make the airport expansion decision on time.
2. To plan the layout and construction development such that it minimises the expanded surface area & time taken.
3. Steps are demonstrably shown to minimise the inevitable traffic impacts it will cause to local traffic routes.
4. That related transport projects (eg. rail and road and tube) are all done [for sustainability], and timed to benefit the airport project.
5. That the projected facts & figures and benefits are soundly based.
6. That the funding is “guaranteed” to project completion.

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