

TWAANG REPORT FROM THE CHAIR - 3 NOVEMBER 2021

Our last AGM took place on 9 September 2019 at the Royal Wells Hotel. Within 6 months the Covid pandemic hit us, we were facing our first lockdown and aviation came near to closing down completely. Until recently there was little happening, I apologise for the delay in holding our AGM but it was difficult to know what to do and, in any case, there was little to report.

Gatwick was hit particularly hard, any short haul flights of the kind on which Gatwick depends were flying mainly from Heathrow and a number of airlines, including British Airways and Virgin Atlantic, withdrew their services from the airport. The Northern terminal was closed and the workforce shrank by 40% through furlough and unemployment. Crawley paid the price for being deeply dependent economically on the airport.

This left TWAANG with little to do but wait on events and for the vaccines to redress the situation. The Noise Management Board has now resumed its meetings and Gatwick is submitting its Standby Runway development scheme for Planning permission so there is work to be done.

Noise Management Board (NMB)

The reconstituted NMB had no sooner held its first Committee meeting, the Community Forum on 26 February 2020, when we faced the first lockdown and such meetings came to a halt. Nonetheless, work continued on the work plan and terms of reference so that the NMB was able to set up investigations into Fair and Equitable Distribution (FED) and the night-time joining point onto the ILS with Steering Group meetings starting in October.

Both of these issues are of importance to Tunbridge Wells. FED concerns the sharing of disturbance between communities (some would like to see more overflying of the town and away from the countryside); while the ILS joining point issue arises because, at night, arriving aircraft are required to align themselves with Gatwick's runway at 10 nautical miles rather than 8 during the day, forcing them over the populated Western edge of the town.

The good news is that Tunbridge Wells now has a Borough representative member of the NMB Communities Forum, where Councils as well as activist groups such as TWAANG can express their opinions and concerns. We are most grateful to Councillor Alan McDermott for taking up this role in the town's interest

Gatwick's Expansion Plans

Gatwick published a Master Plan for expansion in 2018 and is now in the process of applying for Planning Permission for its Standby Runway development. If these plans were to succeed then Tunbridge Wells would be overflowed as never before, both in intensity and throughout the day, and with an increased risk of delayed flights being forced into the sensitive night period. The Borough has unanimously passed a motion opposing Gatwick's expansion, but needs to follow through with continuing action to resist Gatwick's proposals.

TWAANG is currently embarking on a leafleting campaign in the town to raise

awareness, while the sky is so quiet, of the threats that lie ahead.

Airspace Redesign

Gatwick's plans are not the only threat to the town's tranquillity. There is a Civil Aviation Authority project in hand to redesign the airspace over the South East, known as FASI-South, and this has the worthy aim of bringing the allocation of airspace up-to-date and removing historic anomalies. Unfortunately, with this will come the introduction of precision-based navigation (PBN) which will result in arrivals, in particular, flying down narrow aerial corridors - 'motorways in the sky'. If one of these was to be routed over the town it would result in constant disturbance over a concentrated area. True, there will be some mitigation measures such as rotation between multiple PBN routes - three perhaps - but when operating the disturbance will be relentless. Tunbridge Wells needs to ensure that the public health issue for its substantial population is properly considered and no PBN route is located over the town.

TWAANG - THE WAY AHEAD

The present Chair (myself) and Secretary have decided to stand down for reasons of age and health after serving for over five years. The AGM will have to consider what to do if, as at present, there are no candidates to replace them. This should have been resolved by the time I formally present this Report at the AGM on 3rd November.

IAF/30 October 2021