

Gatwick Airport held another Community Engagement Event on Tuesday 26th April

Representatives from the Airport as well as NATS, the CAA and EasyJet gave progress reports on plans to implement the recommendations in the Arrivals Review report.

The Noise Management Board will need to work hard to achieve real improvements, it was clear from the meeting that they face a number of challenges which include:

- Although easyJet are making progress with modifying their A320 series aircraft to remove the distinctive whine and plan to give ‘disproportionate preference’ to the modified aircraft using Gatwick, only 40% (100 out of 248) of their fleet will be modified by July. Although their A320s are the largest proportion of these aircraft using Gatwick they are by no means the only ones. At least easyJet are communicating this, apparently British Airways have a similar programme but leave it to Graham Lake to tell us. The issue has not yet been discussed with other airlines. We think that there will be progress this summer, but it will be disappointing. We see no reason to be content with half a cake, this problem has been around and unaddressed for too long.
- Although there is a recommendation for a ‘sunset date’ of December 2017 for unmodified A320 series aircraft using Gatwick after which penalties should be imposed, it seems that it may well not be possible to do this. Aircraft are categorised according to their noise characteristics and operational rules are based on these categories. The noise metrics used are not sensitive to the whine so its removal does not change the noise category of an aircraft. As a result, any attempt to impose any kind of penalty would be open to legal challenge.
- Although we welcome the proposal to begin Continuous Descent Approaches (CDAs) higher, it is clear that they are being flown to an unacceptably low standard which is why aircraft are lower than they should be over our heads. If this issue is not addressed we will see little benefit from this change. We will be publishing the results of some work we have done on this shortly. We feel that NATS are not recognising the problem. The definition of CDAs need to be refined and we think that the angle of descent should be included to ensure Low Power Low Drag (LPLD = low noise) operation as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI).
- The issue of Night Flights continues to concern a large number of people and it is still not being adequately addressed. NATS consider the solution to lie with CDAs, but we are not convinced, both because of the quality of CDA flying and because of the dogged adherence to the 10 nautical mile joining point which can force operations over more populated areas, even if the proposed move to 8nm for daytime operations is accepted.

The new Noise Management Board is being set up, various organisations including TWAANG have been invited to nominate representatives and issues are arising. As matters stand and given the practicalities of Air Traffic Control we now accept that, at present, the solutions that will benefit the wider countryside will also benefit Tunbridge Wells.

Nonetheless, the Tunbridge Wells conurbation (including those populations contiguous with the central town) has a unique concentration of population, schools and other sensitive locations, and there will be times when this must not be ignored. We therefore think that there must be **urban**

as well as **rural** representation at the NMB - our professional airspace advisor tell us that this is the **normal practice in Europe**, so we are suggesting nothing unusual.

Without assured representation the town could suffer consequences in future, not least when the complex issue of the design of PRNAV systems, due for implementation in 2022 and involving more accurate and therefore more closely defined flight approach tracks, is being hammered out.

Communities are having difficulties in agreeing on representation and the coverage of the work of the Board. We think that Communities need additional places to accommodate the range of views and to balance better between Aviation representatives and Communities, and that the Board should concentrate initially on implementing the Review's recommendations for approaches, but with appropriate regard to Departures.

Our thanks go to the **Kent and Sussex Courier**, 29th April edition, and **Times of Tunbridge Wells**, 4th May edition, for their articles.

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The Noise Management Board will need to work hard to achieve real improvements, it was clear from the meeting that they face a number of challenges which include:

- The proportion of modified A320 series aircraft using Gatwick will be lower than we would like as easyJet and British Airways fleets will only be partially processed by July, and other airlines concerned have not yet been approached. This is disappointing. At least easyJet have said that they will prioritise Gatwick for their modified aircraft, so thanks for that.
- It seems that it may be impossible to implement the proposed ‘sunset date’ of December 2017 for unmodified aircraft using Gatwick for legal reasons.
- We think that CDAs are being flown at too shallow an angle of descent, even if continuous, which is why aircraft are lower than we expect. Consequently it is difficult for us to have confidence that the intended benefit from raising the start of CDA descent will be realised.
- Night Flights remain an issue which is not being addressed to the satisfaction any of the Community representatives.

The membership and other arrangements for the NMB are being very actively discussed.

We wish Bo Redeborn as Chair, with Graham Lake’s help, all the best with tackling these issues.

Our full comments on these points can be downloaded **here**

