

RBWM SUBMISSION TO LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON

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Subject:	RBWM Response to Planning Application 41573/APP/2013/1288 – Runway Alterations		

Executive Summary

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) lies 12 miles to the west of London and covers some 76 square miles and has a population of around 144,000. Situated due west of Heathrow Airport many of the communities lie directly in line with the two parallel runways (with some ≈2 miles from a runway terminus) and are affected by aircraft both taking off and landing.

The current planning application received by the London Borough of Hillingdon sets out the practical measures (principally the creation of aircraft taxiways), required at the airport in order to fulfil the decision made at national government level to abolish the Cranford Agreement.

The abandonment of the Cranford Agreement has stood as a long term objective for the RBWM. The measures proposed by the applicant would allow for the existing noise burden to be shared more equitably between different communities. It is for this reason the Royal Borough supports application for the early abandonment of the Cranford Agreement, subject to conditions regarding substantial noise mitigation and the introduction of easterly alternation.

Background

The original intention of the Cranford Agreement was to provide a measure of protection to the residents of Cranford given their proximity to the end of the northern runway. This was at a time when takeoff noise was the dominant source of noise as the aircraft climbed very slowly and the numbers of over-flights were considerably less than they are present day.

The development and technological advancement of aviation has changed the 'character' of the noise around Heathrow such that with the improvements to aviation performance and the significant growth and increase in the number of movements, landing noise near defined flight paths has increasingly become the dominant factor.

This is further exacerbated by there being no system of runway alternation on easterly operations as compared with the eastern side of the airport. On such days this results in around 650 low flying landing aircraft directly over-flying one swathe across the Borough. During sustained periods of anti-cyclonic conditions this unrelenting level of disturbance is both wholly intolerable and inequitable.

The Borough is acutely aware it is-probably unique amongst those local authorities around Heathrow Airport in that it is supportive of the early abandonment of the Cranford Agreement given the current lack of respite during intolerable easterly operations and the positive benefits that abandonment of the Cranford Agreement would bring in terms of sharing the 'existing' burden of excessive noise around the airport more equitably. In the latter regard some London communities would also get some benefit from the introduction of departure alternation.

Implications

Should the application submitted be approved, the Royal Borough is also mindful of the implications and threats that would arise from the resultant removal of the Cranford Agreement, in that it could pose a threat or pressure for the introduction of 'mixed mode' operations. Such operations could be seen by the airport as a relatively easy short term capacity 'fix' allowing aircraft to both land and take off on both runways – thus negating any potential benefits that would otherwise be derived from the half-day respite currently experienced under separated mode arrangements which are vital for the surrounding communities.

Whilst allowing mixed mode would potentially allow for increased movements (i.e. enhanced runway capacity and / or greater operational flexibility), it is likely to evoke a likely strong public reaction in those communities where the pattern of noise exposure changes and/or increases and the quality of life is dramatically worsened.

The derived community benefits of 'easterly alternation' through the abandonment of the Cranford Agreement is a subject close to the hearts of both this Council and also thousands of local residents currently affected by easterly operations. The abandonment of the Cranford Agreement must bring with it the long awaited respite to the severe and intolerable nuisance caused to these many thousands of local residents in Windsor and nearby villages during easterly operations.

It is worth noting that the Royal Borough tacitly supports this application. However, the abandonment of the Cranford Agreement does present a number of serious dilemmas for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, namely:

- Whilst abolishing the Agreement would 'share' the excessive noise burden around the airport more equitably, thereby allow runway alternation to be introduced (affording much needed respite to local residents), it would also inevitably 'shift' ~50% of the noise burden to other communities such as Old Windsor, Wraysbury and other parts of Windsor that are more aligned with the southern runway (09R). These types of operational changes always stimulate strong public reactions.

- The existence of the Agreement currently constrains the airport from introducing the aforementioned 'Mixed Mode' operations. It is accepted that such operations would be one way of optimising existing runway capacity. However, such a move would be strongly opposed due to the resulting intensification of operations and could lead to an increase in flight numbers over the current capped limit (480k atm).

- This 'Mixed Mode' intensification would be exacerbated particularly due to the resultant denial of alternation. This would prevent any respite afforded to residential communities from incessant flights and the associated consequential adverse environmental & infrastructure impact

- Furthermore, it must be noted that whilst Mixed Mode is operated at many other airports, the huge volume and far closer greater frequency of landings and departures at Heathrow sets it aside from other airports due to the complexity and potential risks of such an operation.

There is no single acceptable solution, with 'winners and losers'. On balance, there are a greater number of 'winners' resulting from the abandonment of the Cranford Agreement and results in sharing the noise burden more equally amongst all communities around Heathrow Airport.

Previous Analysis

Previous analysis confirmed the following outcomes if the Cranford Agreement was abolished:

- There would be an overall improvement in the noise climate for Windsor at most times of the day of around 2-3 dB

- For Old Windsor and Wraysbury, there would be an increase of up to 8dB during easterly operations, with a worsening in the early morning and evening period of around 2dB.

- The introduction of Mixed Mode operations would have a radically adverse impact upon the communities of Old Windsor and Wraysbury (in particular) which does not exist at the current time.
- The introduction of Mixed Mode operations would result in a disproportionate deterioration in Old Windsor and Wraysbury relative to the improvement in Windsor. This is one of the major reasons for RBWM's policy of being totally opposed to the introduction of Mixed Mode operations at Heathrow Airport.

Conclusion

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead has considered the above factors and considers the abandonment of the Cranford Agreement to be an ideal situation from a local community perspective and as such supports the application in question.

However, the Borough would seek Conditions to be included in the granting of any permission for the applicant to install or significantly contribute toward improved noise mitigation and insulation packages for those communities such as Wraysbury and Old Windsor which will be adversely affected by the abandonment of the Cranford Agreement.

Furthermore, the scheme specification and eligibility criteria to be adopted should relate to complying with the WHO Night noise standards.

The Borough will continue to advocate the retention of a movement cap, the maintenance of segregated mode, and the introduction of easterly alternation to provide some respite to all communities around Heathrow Airport.

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