

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Borough

Just 12 miles to the west of London, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) covers some 76 square miles and has a population of around 144,000, with approximately 5% from an ethnic minority. Situated due west of Heathrow Airport many of the communities lie under the two parallel runways and are affected by aircraft both taking off and landing.

A significant part of the RBWM is open countryside which is noted for its natural beauty, its wildlife and its historical and cultural associations as well as for the land uses it supports. Windsor is bordered by the Crown estate (95000 acres) which includes Windsor forest and the Great Park. To the north the National Trust holds more than 100,000 acres of land. 83% of the land designated as Green Belt.

RBWM has two urban centres of Windsor (c28,000) and Maidenhead (c52,000) as well as 14 outlying villages. There are 15 Parish and Town Councils. In addition to the indigenous population the RBWM receives approximately 7 million tourists per year. Central to the Borough's attractions are the historic town of Windsor, Windsor Castle, Windsor Great Park and Forest and the River Thames, which are the focus of numerous leisure and recreational activities.

Background

The Borough is extremely mindful of both the beneficial and adverse roles aviation has within the international, national and local contexts.

The Borough does not therefore adopt a position opposing the presence of Heathrow. RBWM's principle objectives relating to aviation issues at Heathrow Airport focus upon:

- Opposition to night flights operations.
- Opposition to a third runway & any further unsustainable expansion.
- Supporting the abolishment of the Cranford Agreement (so that easterly alternation can be enabled).
- Advocating the need for better noise mitigation (for day & night-time) in line with WHO standards and for credible research to establish acceptability criteria for UK community noise thresholds.

The Borough has always adopted a robust position against the more negative aspects arising from local operations at Heathrow Airport and takes up strong community advocacy and leadership roles in representing community interests on the issues above.

ISSUES ARISING WITHIN THE CONSULTATION

Schematics

The current proposal put forward within Heathrow Airport Limited's (HAL) current consultation details the construction of an additional third runway to the north west of the existing airport. This runway would terminate at Sipson (east terminus) and just north of Colnbrook (west terminus). An indicative map shows the approximate location of the runway below (Figure 1 - below).

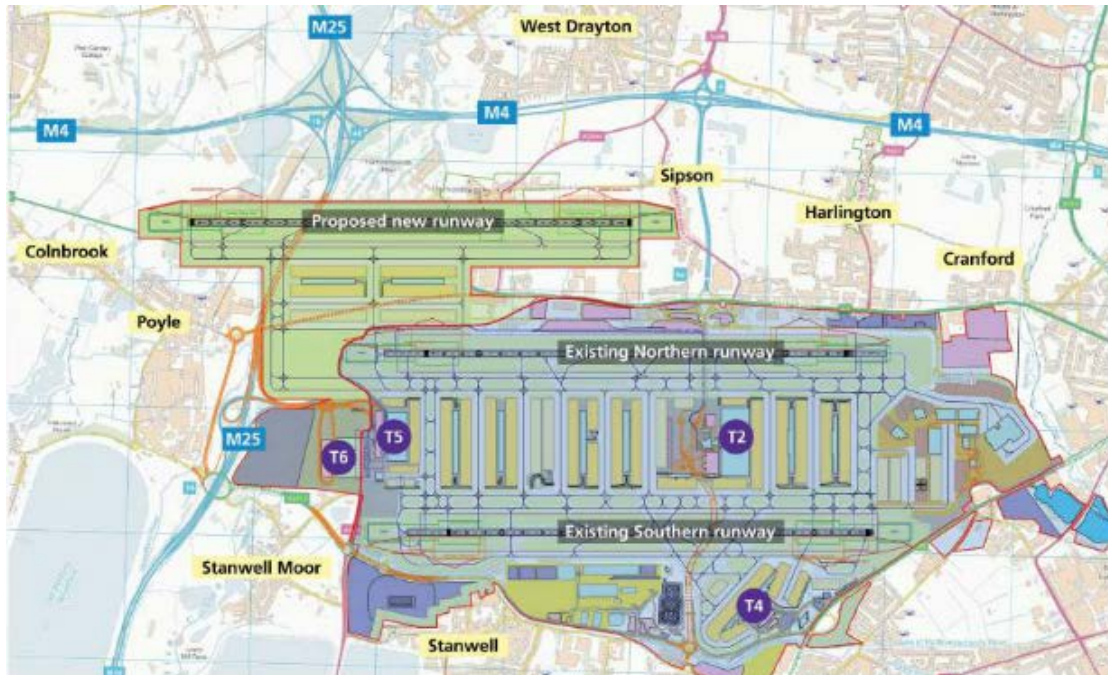


Figure 1: HAL illustration detailing the location of the north-west runway option at Heathrow.

Unfortunately it is not possible to determine the exact impact of this additional 3rd runway at this stage, due to the fact that HAL have supplied extremely limited information regarding: the exact location/parameters of the runway, noise footprint/contours, surface access details and mitigation measures proposed.

Noise

The western terminus of the proposed runway will be around 3.5km from Datchet and 6.5km from Eton. This is likely to have a large impact on residents in these locations and those already affected in villages such as Wraysbury, Old Windsor and Windsor itself. To put these distances into context – 3.5km is the current distance between the existing western terminus of the north runway and the village of Wraysbury.

It is essential at this stage that HAL should provide details and map: the predicted cumulative noise impact of all runways (including the proposed third runway) at Heathrow. This impact assessment should include noise contours for those communities to the west (not depicted in the HAL consultation booklet), thus enabling noise disturbance to be analysed by the neighbouring local authorities and the communities they represent.

Respite / Mixed-Mode / Housing / Surface Access

In addition to a complete lack of noise impact information; the consultation booklet provided to residents omits to mention several other key impacts, namely:

- A new runway (R3) has the ability to increase flights from 480,000 per year to 740,000. This represents a substantial increase in frequency of disturbance by flights and the associated issues these present.
- R3 would result in an increase in overflights: resulting in a loss of respite and the introduction of a 'partial mixed mode operation' (with simultaneous landing at one end and taking off at other end of the same runway). This is a method of operation long opposed by RBWM.
- R3 would result in a decrease in noise respite, currently achieved through flight alternation; such that the new runway proposal will increase anticipated overflying, thus reducing respite for residents at ends of both runways - compared to existing operations.
- R3 has the ability to increase jobs to about 256,500 overall. These additional employees would require housing provision in already congested areas surrounded by Green Belt. These areas are also often affected by flooding and existing commuter congestion.
- The R3 booklet fails to address how it will be served in terms of surface access. The existing road network is already congested and suffers from poor air quality. R3 would exacerbate these problems unless HAL detail how such extra infrastructure capacity would be provided.

Due to the many and varied reasons highlighted above, the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead consider the current HAL consultation to be significantly lacking in information. The consultation booklet produced should therefore be considered completely inadequate to enable the surrounding communities to properly consider all the likely impacts of the scheme proposed.