

AVIATION FORUM

THURSDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2021

PRESENT: Councillors John Bowden (Chairman) and Karen Davies

Also in attendance: Nigel Davies, Andrew Hall and Geoff Paxton

Officers: Andy Carswell

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Hilton and Chris Joyce, who were both required to attend a meeting of the Leaders Board.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Geoff Paxton stated he was a pension recipient, shareholder and former employee of British Airways.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on February 11th 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

HEATHROW UPDATE

The Forum clerk, Andy Carswell, read out the contents of an email sent by Vic Chetty, Senior Stakeholder Engagement Manager at Heathrow, to Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth, as neither were available to attend the meeting. The message stated that Heathrow would soon be contacting the Royal Borough regarding the current Airspace Modernisation proposal, in particular the level of detail of the current activity of engagement on design principles for the proposed airspace change. It was hoped that RBWM would respond to the email message and be able to take part in the next engagement workshop, on a date to be confirmed.

The email from Vic Chetty also included a business update on operations at Heathrow. It stated that the Covid 19 pandemic was continuing to have a very large impact on the aviation industry. Passenger numbers remained at just under 40 per cent of pre-pandemic levels in September, whilst EU rivals enjoyed stronger resurgence over the summer. North American traffic was only 25 per cent of 2019 levels. Cargo, which was carried in the hold of passenger planes, was close to eight per cent down by volume on 2019, which reflected the way in which travel restrictions had been damaging UK exports and supply chains. Heathrow had welcomed the easing of testing requirements and red-list reduction, which it stated would make international travel simpler, cheaper, and less stressful for all passengers.

The message went on to say that the removal of PCR tests for vaccinated travellers in October and the opening up in the US should mean that passengers can book with confidence for Half Term and Christmas travel, and put Heathrow on track for recover. However Heathrow had three issues it had raised with the government. The airport was still waiting for the date for when the move from PCR to Lateral Flow tests would commence; it had hoped for this to be done before the October half term. It was also hoped there would be an eventual move away from costs of tests altogether, as some European countries did not require payment for Lateral Flow tests. Additionally it was hoped the reopening of US borders to vaccinated passengers could take place before Thanksgiving. Discussions were still ongoing regarding Business Rates, with lobbying for Heathrow as a business to receive appropriate remuneration of costs,

in proportion to the financial losses incurred. The Bill legislating out of MCC claims was currently progressing through the House of Lords.

Nigel Davies told the Forum that Councillor Hilton had attended a Zoom workshop on October 1st on the airspace modernisation proposals, which impacted on Windsor due to the north runway being used for take offs. He suggested an update from Councillor Hilton would be useful. Councillor Bowden said he had been critical of Heathrow as he considered the appropriate work had been done on taxi ways and for using the north runway for departures during Covid lockdowns. Nigel Davies said the airspace consultation focused on a redesign of the Compton departure route, an easterly alternative route for take offs, and a parallel approach to landings; however all three of these proposals would impact negatively on Windsor. He stated that Heathrow had acknowledged they would require planning permission for the proposals from Hillingdon Council. Councillor Bowden said he had attempted to raise this point in the past but had not been able to speak to anyone at Heathrow with the appropriate level of knowledge on aircraft operations.

NOISE CONSULTATION

Andrew Hall told the Forum that the Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise was in the process of being wound down. It had been useful in preparing reports and recommendations relating to aircraft noise, including recommending the implementation of an additional recording metric. Councillor Bowden said noise issues were not currently being considered as widely as previously as Heathrow was operating at a reduced capacity. Councillor Davies said RBWM residents had been encouraged to take part in the noise consultation, with information being circulated on social media to inform residents how Heathrow operations impacted on the Borough.

PLANE SEWAGE DISCHARGE

Councillor Davies introduced the item as she had been contacted by a Windsor resident whose garden had had sewage from a plane discharged into it. This had been followed up with the Council's environmental health team and Heathrow, who were able to put them in contact with the relevant airline and Civil Aviation Authority. A summary of the exchange between the parties involved had been circulated to members via email. Councillor Davies asked the Forum if members were aware of anything similar happening before. She stated she was aware of reports of frozen sewage being discharged from planes but not of raw sewage such as this situation. Geoff Paxton said modern toilets on planes were vacuum secured and were very reliable as they relied on pressure suction to work, so a situation such as this could only result from aircraft failure or a failure to adequately service it. Councillor Bowden noted the incident happened in July and suggested warmer weather could have been a contributory factor. Members recalled rare instances of when similar incidents involving frozen waste had been discharged onto properties.

Andrew Hall stated that utility companies could be fined if they discharged sewage into water supplies and asked if airlines could also be fined for failing to properly discharge of waste. Councillor Bowden said this would come from a statutory instrument from the Civil Aviation Authority or from an MP proposing a bill; however it was likely that the proposal would be argued down due to the isolated nature of such events. Councillor Davies said an air safety list had recently been established to govern British airspace. She added that the resident had been advised to contact their home insurance broker in relation to the incident but they had decided not to pursue this as it would increase their insurance premium. It was suggested that raising it with the press would be a more suitable avenue.

PARTNERSHIP BODIES

Councillor Bowden informed the Forum that the Heathrow Community Engagement Board was being wound down. The chairman had indicated their intention to stand down and in any

case no meetings had taken place during the previous 18 months. The Board was funded by Heathrow itself, and the airport was looking to reduce its costs. News releases were published in other formats and members were informed of examples of the news that was being released. The Local Authorities Aircraft Noise Council was still in existence but was currently mothballed as meetings could not take place face to face.

Regarding the Heathrow Community Noise Forum, Nigel Davies told the Forum that a meeting was scheduled for the following week. The agenda had not yet been published and this was due to happen on Monday. Nigel Davies was critical of the short timeframe between the agenda publication and the meeting itself, as it did not allow attendees much time to provide their responses at the meeting. He stated he was unable to give an update on the most recent meeting as he had not attended, but reiterated his earlier point that Councillor Hilton had attended and contributed to the discussions.

MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Bowden informed members that Network Rail would not be progressing plans to connect the Great Western line to Terminal 5 through a tunnel, due to post-Covid financial constraints.

Members noted that more freight traffic was using Heathrow, which meant more elderly aircraft were being used and therefore more noise was being generated. Nigel Davies noted a DHL flight had recently taken off at around midnight using a plane that was 32 years old.

Nigel Davies told the Forum that as part of the airspace change, pilots were being requested to use a faster and steeper take off in order to reduce noise. However research suggested that when offset against the greater carbon dioxide emissions there was minimal overall benefit in terms of noise reduction.

It was suggested that the next Forum meeting could take place in February. Nigel Davies said a workshop programme that Councillor Hilton was planning to attend was scheduled for January, and he suggested the next Aviation Forum should take place after this. Councillor Bowden agreed, although he said if any major issues emerged in the meantime then another Forum could be arranged.

The meeting, which began at 7.05 pm, finished at 7.58 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....