

BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

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1. Summary

1.01 The Biggin Hill Airport Consultative Committee is a statutory body set up in accordance with Section 35 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, as amended. Its membership is constituted from representatives of users of Biggin Hill Airport (LBHA), local authorities and residents' associations.

1.02 The Committee is a consultative forum only and has no executive powers. Nevertheless, the management of Biggin Hill Airport Ltd (BHAL) takes its views very seriously. Its aims are:-

- (a) to consult with and inform the local community of developments and plans for the Airport;
- (b) to allow the efficient functioning and economic development of the Airport, its airport business community, its resident workforce, while moderating its impact upon local communities and the environment;
- (c) to ensure that the Airport plays an active role in supporting the economic activities and objectives of the local and regional communities (business and residential).

1.03 The Committee normally meets at the Airport four times a year. The meetings are held in January (when the business meeting is preceded by the Annual General Meeting at which the Annual Report is presented), April, July and October. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only the January meeting was held at the Airport. The last three meetings were held remotely using the Zoom on-line video conference facility.

1.04 The level of attendance at meetings over the years has been good and this continued to be the case in 2020. Discussions are well-informed and illuminating. We are grateful to David Winstanley, the Airport's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), for his comprehensive reports and advice to the Committee.

2. Membership

2.01 I, the Chairman of the Committee, am suffering from ill-health and I was unable to attend the January and October meetings. The Committee asked that their best wishes for my speedy and complete recovery be recorded and those good wishes have been passed on to me, for which I am grateful. I would also like to record my thanks to Nick Kemp, the Deputy Chairman, for taking the January and October meetings in my absence.

2.02 At the January meeting it was noted that:

- Councillor Graham Arthur was replacing Councillor Peter Morgan as a London Borough of Bromley (LBB) representative from the April meeting;
- Councillor Cameron McIntosh had been replaced by Councillor Becky Rush as the Surrey County Council representative.

2.03 In addition to the changes to the membership, at the July meeting it was noted that:

- Matthew Amer had been appointed as the Airport Monitoring Officer at LBB;
- Rohan Ranaweera, the officer who looks after the aviation policy in the London Plan at the Greater London Authority (GLA) had advised that he would be doing his best to attend the Committee's future meetings.

2.03 In last year's Annual Report it was mentioned that, since the retirement of Richard Parry from Kent County Council it does not currently have a representative on the Committee and efforts continued with a view to one being appointed. This continues to be the case despite it being reported to the Committee in January that the Leader of that Council had undertaken to appoint a representative to serve on the Committee.

2.04 Substitutes for members are permitted to attend meetings and a number attended in place of appointed members who were unable to attend meetings during the year.

3. Complaints and movements

3.01 The Noise and Safety Sub-Committee meets prior to meetings of the Committee and, despite the proximity of the meetings, the Sub-Committee's Chairman, Richard Parry, presents full and clear written reports of the results of its discussions of incidents to our meetings. We are grateful to him and his fellow Sub-Committee members for their work.

3.02 From the start of October 2019 to 30 September 2020 there were 383 incidents that related to aircraft movements that were operating to and/or from Biggin Hill Airport. There were 202 such in the same period in 2018/19. Many of these incidents were automatically identified by the Airport's Noise Monitoring and Track Keeping System (Webtrak).

3.03 A small number of individuals have made multiple complaints. Often, very few or none of these complaints involved movements that contravened the Airport's very stringent noise and tracking regulations. The Committee is concerned that dealing with so many unsubstantiated complaints wastes valuable time for members of staff of the Airport and distracts them from their other important work, including dealing with genuine incidents and complaints. At the October meeting the Sub-Committee had decided to arrange for one such complainant to be requested to be more reasonable in submitting complaints and warned that, if the situation does not improve, any further complaints from that person would be regarded as vexatious and would merely be noted. The Committee concurs with that decision.

3.04 The number of genuine complaints, particularly substantiated ones, continues to be extremely low relative to the number of movements at the Airport which, in the year up to the end of September 2020, totalled 36,710. This total number of movements was down from 40,308 in the same period of 2017/2018. This was, of course, largely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.05 Webtrak allows the Sub-Committee to have accurate information about whether pilots contravene the Airport's regulations and only 53 of the 383 movements complained about involved actual infringements, the majority of these being of a minor nature for which minor infringement warnings are issued, often with reminders to pilots that a repeat infringement could lead to them being banned from operating from the Airport.

3.06 The Committee is provided with a map at each meeting showing from where complaints emanate. This enables members to identify whether there are any consistent patterns of which it should be aware. It also enables members to ask for information about any complaints in areas that they represent or in which they live. The Committee now also receives a table setting out each complaint and whether the movements complained about were compliant and, if not, the sanctions imposed.

3.07 We continue to receive reports by Bickerdike Allen Partners LLP which provide noise contours for the operations at the Airport. These reports show that the actual noise created is always significantly lower relative to the agreed permitted levels.

3.08 Richard Parry consistently reports that the complaints have been handled even-handedly and expeditiously by the Chief Executive Officer.

4. 16 January 2020 meeting

4.01 As mentioned in paragraph 1.03 above, the first meeting of the calendar year is preceded by the Annual General Meeting at which the Annual Report is received. It was not discussed. The most significant issues dealt with at the Committee's business meeting are referred to below.

4.02 *Northolt Airport* - In previous Annual Reports there have been references to Biggin Hill Airport's argument that Northolt Airport is unsuitable for the use of business aviation and, although this issue continues to be unresolved, some progress had been made during 2020. At this meeting it was noted that Biggin Hill Airport Ltd (BHAL) had completed and disseminated its independently commissioned report into the potential safety or compliance issues for civilian aircraft operations at RAF Northolt. The report had been sent to both the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and Department for Transport. There was a local campaign attempting to have a cap on the number of commercial flights at Northolt restricting them to 12,000 a year.

4.03 *Tenants and businesses at Biggin Hill* - The Light Aviation Steering Group had been introduced and the Committee was pleased to hear that engagement from the community had been very enthusiastic.

4.04 *College Update* - The Committee heard that the Airport continued to support the London South East Colleges (LSEC) in the implementation of the proposed London Aerospace and Technology College (LATC) and that landlord's consent had been granted by LBB. In partnership with LSEC, the Airport was working towards the signing of Heads of Terms and an agreement on shared costs between the LATC and the proposed Airport hotel.

4.05 At the October meeting it was noted that the proposed development had been affected by the impact of Covid-19 and that LSEC was about to carry out an assessment of progress of the plans for the project.

4.06 *Environment* - The Committee was pleased to learn that electric vehicles were being introduced at the Airport. The Airport was also working towards the elimination of

single use plastic. It was noted that, nationally, two electric passenger aircraft were being tested.

5. 16 April 2020 meeting

5.01 As mentioned in paragraph 1.03 above, this was the first meeting held remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic meant that there had been little or no progress on issues such as the Northolt Airport (paragraph 4.02 above) and the proposed College (paragraph 4.05 above).

5.02 *Covid-19 pandemic* - Unsurprisingly, discussions at this meeting mainly revolved around the arrangements for the Airport to remain open during the pandemic. The Airport fully supported the Government's decision to restrict movement to only essential travel. It was operating as part of the national transport infrastructure in line with Government guidelines, even though it was trading at a loss. The Airport's priority throughout the pandemic period had been to place people before profit and *'Protect the Business, Protect Jobs and Protect each other'*.

5.03 The Government's definition of essential movements fell into the following categories:

- Repatriation of both incoming and departing passengers and the crews that operate the aircraft.
- Delivery of medical and other essential supplies.
- Essential Business Flights.
- Licence currency flights to enable professional pilots to revalidate their licences as required under regulations.
- Aircraft used for commercial operations undertaking a flight required to renew the Certificate of Airworthiness.

5.04 Members of the Committee who represented organisations operating at the Airport confirmed that they were pleased that World Health Organisation and Government guidance was being taken seriously.

5.05 The Committee noted that there had been an emphasis on keeping members of the Airport's staff safe and 25% of them had been furloughed. The sickness record was currently 2% and there was only one member of staff who was absent for a Covid-19 related reason. There was a Facebook page for staff and extensive risk assessments had been implemented.

5.06 Reference was made to publicity about a flight that was turned back by French police as it was not an essential flight. It took off from a nearby airport and it was mentioned that the aircraft involved had sometimes flown from Biggin Hill during March. The Committee was glad to hear that the Airport had checked the aircraft's two Biggin Hill flights and they had both been essential. Both involved a small number of passengers and one was a necessary business trip whilst the other involved a repatriation.

5.07 *Proposed new hangar* - At the January meeting we heard that landlords' consent had been granted for the proposed hangar development. Some minor amendments had been made to the proposed building. As a result of LBHA, LBB and public feedback and the client's demands the hangar size had been reduced by 30% but the overall site area remained unchanged.

5.08 At this meeting the Committee noted that the hangar development will be the European home for Bombardier. Despite potential concerns about supply lines, the development was progressing in accordance with the programme for the development and expected to meet its targeted completion date of April 2022.

5.09 *Webtrak Noise and Tracking Monitoring System* - A problem with the Airport's Webtrak system had been identified in that several tracks were not being displayed. The cause of the problem was noted as was the fact that the Airport had not been informed of the problem. The Airport had asked Webtrak to deal with the issue. Given that the Airport was dealing with only essential flights during the Covid-19 crisis, this was a complication the Airport could have done without. At the July meeting it was noted that the problem had been resolved.

6. 16 July 2020 meeting

6.01 The discussions at this meeting largely related to updates to issues discussed at the previous meetings, particularly the Covid-19 pandemic.

6.02 *Covid-19* – Members were advised that the decision to keep the Airport open had proved to have been the correct one. The role of airports in importing and exporting vital goods, medical equipment and supplies and the movement of key personnel and repatriation flights continued to be considered essential in the current crisis.

6.03 Business aviation had been resilient and the Airport had been able to maintain its position as the primary business aviation airport serving London. It had been noted that businesses were increasingly tending to use business aviation rather than scheduled services. Throughout the Covid-19 crisis the Airport had followed Government guidance and amended its Covid-19 Health Action Plan in reaction to changing policies, procedures and practices. The Airport had launched two key initiatives, the first being *Return to the Skies* which allowed engineering companies and pilots to get their airworthiness certificates and pilot licences. The second initiative was *Contactless Travel*.

6.04 Prudent cost control measures had been imposed but the Airport had been operating at a loss. Nevertheless, furloughed staff had been receiving full pay and no jobs had been made redundant. Additionally, it had supported business across the Airport community.

6.05 Biggin Hill had a different business model from airports that operate scheduled flights which are dependent on passengers using their non-aero-related activities such as shops and car parking and which provide up to 65% of their income.

6.06 One of the reasons that the decision to keep the Airport open is thought to have been correct is the fact that, despite continuing to trade at a loss, its performance for the April to June quarter overall was better than the original forecast and the recovery had started earlier than predicted. 2019 had been a successful year for the Airport's accounts and it had entered the Covid-19 crisis in a strong position.

6.07 It was noted that, because movements at the larger London airports had reduced due to the Covid-19 lockdown, some Biggin Hill movements had received direct routing from Thames Radar. This was good for the environment as it led to lower CO2 emissions levels but it also meant that occasionally residents that do not usually experience overflights have been affected by them.

6.08 Interestingly, at the subsequent October meeting, the Committee was informed that there had been further signs of recovery at the Airport with traffic levels picking up throughout the three months. Unsurprisingly, overall movement levels in the quarter were well down on the same period in 2019 but surprisingly, this included the Airport's best August performance of all time. In total, to the end of September 2020, movements at the Airport were down to approximately 22k against around 32k in 2019, which represents a 32% reduction in all movement types. However, in terms of market share of business jet traffic in London, there was a reduction of 13% whereas the rest of the London market was down 37%.

6.09 Also at the October meeting the Committee noted that no members of staff had been made redundant and staff members were no longer being furloughed. 40% approximately of the Airport's staff complement had been furloughed.

7. 15 October 2020 meeting

7.01 The longest discussion at this meeting was about Airport noise abatement initiatives and the Tatsfield NSA (see paragraphs 7.09 – 7.11 below).

7.02 *London Airspace Management Programme (LAMP)* – At each meeting held this year the Committee received updates on this programme. At the July meeting the Committee heard that progress had largely been deferred during the Covid-19 crisis. At this one, it was informed that this situation continued but activity was still being undertaken by personnel directly employed on essential Covid-19 support activities.

7.03 *Northolt Airport* - This topic was discussed at each meeting this year (see paragraph 4.02 (above) and in previous years. At the July meeting, we heard that there had been a success in that the CAA had formally agreed that Northolt Airport should be de-notified from the Aeronautical Information Publication which meant that pilots would have to consider different parameters in which to operate.

7.04 At this meeting, the Committee was told that Northolt would be appointing a third party to run the civilian flights operation. The de-notification referred to in the previous paragraph would make it more difficult for civilian pilots to plan to operate from Northolt. This is because it does not meet the same safety regulations with which Biggin Hill has to comply, for instance, reducing its unfair advantage over private airports. BHAL is assessing the impact it will have on Northolt's market share. What has not been addressed is the amount of public money that has been invested at Northolt. It was also noted that some military exemptions had previously been withdrawn but Northolt still has several. Whilst these were acceptable for military aircraft, civilian aircraft using a military base should operate under CAA regulations.

7.05 *03 GPS approach* – Throughout the year we received reports updating us on progress on the revised approach. At the January meeting it was noted that, the Airport's safety case for the development and introduction of the 03 GPS approach had been submitted. It was hoped that the new approach would be implemented in the autumn of 2020.

7.06 At this meeting it was noted that, having completed all necessary safety case assessments and submitted all required documentation, the Airport was awaiting formal approval from the CAA. The implementation date referred to in the preceding paragraph had not been met largely due to resourcing problems arising from the Covi-19 epidemic.

Commented [JB1]: This is what the CAA call LAMP.

Bearing in mind these problems, the implementation of the revised approach was dependent upon the CAA's ability to provide sufficient resources. Furthermore, the Government had decided that the CAA's priority should be given to light general aviation airports that do not have any form of instrument approach. Because the revised approach was a sensitive issue in areas such as Petts Wood, Woldingham and Farnborough the Airport was doing everything it could to expedite its implementation.

7.07 *Airport Hotel* – As mentioned in last year's Annual Report, for a considerable amount of time, BHAL has been pursuing a proposal for the provision of a hotel at the Airport and the Committee has been kept informed of progress throughout this year. It was learnt at this meeting that the development of the Hotel was proceeding at pace and it was hoped that work would be starting on site around the end of this year or in the first of next. This would allow its completion to be aligned with the opening of the Bombardier hangar (see paragraphs 5.07 and 5.08 above) in April 2022.

7.08 *Environment* - The Committee heard about the Airport's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme. A new website was to be launched which would separate the programme into the Airport's business, people, environment and community issues. Included in the environmental category was the endeavour to make progress with environmental impact initiatives. These would include the Airport becoming plastic-free, maximising recycling and alternative means of power, especially solar. Tentative talks had begun with Air BP about using sustainable fuels. Tangible targets were being developed to be included on the website.

7.09 *Noise abatement initiatives and Tatsfield NSA* - Allegations of movements overflying the Tatsfield NSA were referred to in last year's Annual Report and a recurring issue at this year's meetings. At the April meeting, it was particularly noted that it had been re-emphasised to pilots that their instructions require them to avoid NSAs unless it would be unsafe to do so. At the July meeting the Committee learnt that the notes explaining NSAs were being expanded to clarify the situations that would allow pilots to fly into them. There had been some success in the observation by pilots of the Biggin Hill and Tatsfield NSAs.

7.10 During this meeting, the CEO reported on initiatives designed to minimise noise issues. Included among them was a trial that was shortly to be carried out to measure the error between observations on the ground compared with the Webtrak measurement and to see if residents can understand it. The Airport would be working with Tatsfield on that because it had been proactive on this subject. If it is successful it would be used in other areas around the Airport. At least three tracks had been identified that were not being picked up by Webtrak, probably because they are at the extreme limit of the radar source it uses. Reference was made to the difference between pilots entering an NSA and merely skimming its margin.

7.11 During the ensuing discussion, the allegations were made that no progress had been made on the issue and that Webtrak, was not picking up all infringements. It was suggested that the report to the Committee on infringements should contain additional information and the CEO undertook to include this data if that was legally possible.

John Bowden

Chairman