

# **Sustainable Aviation /SASIG**

## **Aircraft Noise & Land Use Planning**

### **Discussion Paper Only**

**April 2016**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to initiate and develop a dialogue and a discussion between Sustainable Aviation and SASIG to share knowledge and information in relation to aircraft noise and land-use planning in areas near to airports. This follows some initial conversations in 2014 and 2015.

#### **Background**

In 2013, Sustainable Aviation published a Noise Road-Map<sup>1</sup> showing how aviation can manage the impact of growth from aircraft operations up to 2050. The overall objective of the Noise Road-Map is to limit and where possible reduce the number of people affected by aircraft noise. This is consistent with the national policy approach set out in the Aviation Policy Framework.<sup>2</sup>

The Sustainable Aviation Noise Road-Map followed the four principles of the ICAO Balanced Approach<sup>3</sup> to aircraft noise. These are:

- Reduction of noise at source
- Land-use planning and management
- Noise abatement and operational procedures
- Operating restrictions

Sustainable Aviation, in the Noise Road-Map added an additional element covering noise communication and community engagement.

This paper is for discussion only and it is intended to contribute a sharing of views between Sustainable Aviation and SASIG members. It intentionally focusses on the land-use planning element of the Noise Road-Map and the opportunities for the UK planning system to contribute to the objective to limit and where possible reduce the number of people affected by aircraft noise. In particular it considers (from an airport perspective) the role of planning guidance in policy and development decisions taken in areas around UK airports.

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Aviation Noise Road-Map – Sustainable Aviation 2013

<sup>2</sup> Aviation Policy Framework – Department for Transport 2013

<sup>3</sup> Guidance on the Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management – ICAO 2008

## Planning in the UK

The UK planning system seeks to balance economic development and environmental quality and to then contribute to achievement of sustainable development. The key elements of planning where airports input are:

- Policy formulation
- Responding to planning applications
- Development management and statutory consultee (Aerodrome Safeguarding)

Planning in the UK is plan-led and the overall approach is set in national planning policy (Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012). Local planning authorities are responsible for the preparation of local plans that are then the statutory starting point for decision-making on development. Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise.

The NPPF provides a clear and a much simplified statement of national planning policy and it fulfils the Government's ambition to simplify the planning system and to speed up decision-making on proposed development. However it can be viewed that the streamlining of planning policy and the deletion of a large quantity of planning guidance resulted in some useful elements of planning guidance being lost.

### Policy and Noise

PPG24 (Planning and Noise) is one of the guidance documents that was deleted following the adoption of the NPPF. Annex 1 of PPG24 included a series of Noise Exposure Categories (and associated noise levels) against which proposed noise-sensitive development could be judged. This was to ensure that the noise-sensitive development was compatible with existing transport noise (including airports). It also provided a consistent approach for land-use allocation and development control around airports, particularly for the control of residential development in areas subject to high levels of aircraft noise.

There are limited references to planning and noise in the NPPF. These include:

- '...local planning authorities should focus on whether the development itself is an acceptable use of the land and the impact of the use ...' (Paragraph 122)
- 'Planning policies and decisions should aim to
  - avoid noise from giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life as a result of new development;
  - mitigate and reduce to a minimum other adverse impacts on health and quality of life arising from noise from new development, including through the use of conditions;

- recognise that development will often cause some noise and existing businesses wanting to develop in continuance of their business should not have unreasonable restrictions put on them because of changes in nearby land uses since they were established; and
- identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason.’ (Paragraph 123).

The NPPF does continue to recognise noise as a material consideration in the planning process and as one of the elements of sustainable development.

The NPPF (in the above paragraphs) includes references to the Noise Policy Statement for England (2010)<sup>4</sup>. This sets out a series of principles for the effective management of noise. It does not provide detailed guidance or any advice on the significance of particular noise levels. The Noise Policy Statement does include some established World Health Organisation concepts. These are:

- No Observed Effect Level (NOEL) – below which no effect can be detected
- Lowest Observed Adverse Effect Level (LOEL) – above which adverse effects on health and quality of life can be detected
- Significant Observed Adverse Effect Level (SOAEL) –above which significant adverse effects on health and quality of life occur

The Noise Policy Statement does include any SOAEL levels. Whilst this provides policy flexibility, it is also entirely open to interpretation depending on particular circumstances.

Neither the NPPF nor the Noise Policy Statement for England provide detailed guidance (for policy or development control) to replace that lost through the deletion of PPG24. There is therefore a question of whether there is a need to consider a replacement approach to planning guidance relating to transport noise.

Elsewhere, there is some policy guidance on planning and aircraft noise contained in the Aviation Policy Framework. This sets out the Government’s overall policy that is to:

- ‘limit and, where possible, reduce the number of people in the UK significantly affected by aircraft noise’

This policy is considered by Government to be consistent with the approach in the Noise Policy Statement for England that is to avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life (SOAEL). There is little detailed guidance in the Aviation Policy Framework but it does include:

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<sup>4</sup> Noise Policy for England (NPSE) – DEFRA - 2010

- ‘We will continue to treat the 57dB  $L_{Aeq}$  16 hour contour as the average level of daytime aircraft noise marking the onset of significant community annoyance. However, this does not mean that all people within this contour will experience significant adverse effects from aircraft noise. Nor does it mean that no-one outside of this contour will consider themselves annoyed by aircraft noise.’
- The continuation of the requirement for airport operators to offer a relocation scheme for households exposed to noise levels in excess of 69 dB  $L_{Aeq}$  (day-time)
- Airports should provide acoustic insulation for noise sensitive buildings (including residential) in areas exposed to noise levels in excess of 63 dB  $L_{Aeq}$  (day-time)

The Aviation Policy Framework goes on to recognise that average noise exposure contours are a well-established measure of annoyance and are important to show the historic trends in noise around airports, but that the  $L_{Aeq}$  measure does not necessarily reflect the full perception of aircraft noise. The Aviation Policy Framework goes on to encourage airport operators to seek alternative measures that better reflect how aircraft noise is experienced in different areas. This approach moves away from that set out in the Noise Exposure Categories in the previous PPG 24.

In relation to land-use planning, the Aviation Policy Framework describes the noise policy set out in the NPPF and the Noise Policy Statement for England. However the Aviation Policy Statement is a statement of national policy and may also be used as a material consideration in planning decisions depending on the circumstances of a particular application.

Some discussions have taken place between acoustic practitioners and some local planning authorities. This has resulted in a draft professional planning guidance on planning and noise.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Lack of Clear Guidance - Discussion**

The NPPF identifies the need to consider noise sensitive development in plan-making and in development decisions, but neither the NPPF nor the Noise Policy Statement for England set out clear metrics that provide guidance on acceptable / unacceptable levels of noise. This is a shift away from the Noise Exposure Categories in PPG24. This can then be open to interpretation considering particular applications for planning permission.

The Aviation Policy Framework provides some noise metrics and some requirements relating to the noise mitigation requirements, but it is not specific and it also does not fully identify the important role of local authorities in plan-making and in development-management decisions. It can therefore be viewed that there is an absence of guidance and a potential lack of consistency in policy, particularly between the NPPF and the Aviation

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<sup>5</sup> Professional Practice Guidance on Planning & Noise Consultation Draft January 2016 – Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Association of Noise Consultants, and the Institute of Acoustics

Policy Framework. The result of this could result in noise-sensitive development in noisy areas and a differential approach being taken around UK airports (and at some airports a different approach being taken by different local planning authorities around the same airport).

### **Collective Working**

Airports seek to engage and work with a wide range of stakeholders in their local area, particularly with local planning authorities. This is an important and valuable relationship in balancing aviation growth, environmental and community impact and other developments in the local area. A local authority's need to balance a range of policy and development control decision (particularly in relation to housing targets) is recognised and understood. A number of airports contribute directly to the preparation of non-statutory local planning guidance in relation to aircraft noise and development management.

Airports provide information about local noise impact to regulators, local authorities, developers and the community. This is in a range of publications and different forums including:

- Airport Master Plans
- Noise Action Plans
- Sustainability Reports
- Reports on compliance with planning conditions and legal agreements
- Consultative Committee
- Community Publications
- Community enquiries and outreach events

This provides a wide range of data and information on the noise climate around an airport, but does not carry the same weight as planning guidance when used to input into local authority plan-making or development management processes.

There has been a significant reduction in population affected by aircraft noise, and it is important to maintain that trend into the future. It is also important to where possible prevent population encroachment into noisy areas. This needs to be achieved whilst striking a balance with other development pressures in the areas around airports.

The publication of the NPPF provided a clear and much simplified statement on how the UK planning system is expected to deliver sustainable development. However in simplifying the planning guidance, some of the advice to local authorities on planning and noise has been lost. A consistent approach on planning and noise (at a national and local level) would be helpful to inform policy-making and development management decisions.