



Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG)

Agenda

Wednesday, 25 February 2026
10.00 am

Online via Zoom

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86580624301>

Meeting ID: 865 8062 4301

Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG)
Wednesday, 25 February 2026

There will be a meeting of the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) at **10.00 am on Wednesday, 25 February 2026** Online via Zoom.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86580624301>

Meeting ID: 865 8062 4301

Agenda

Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG)

Wednesday, 25 February 2026

10.00 am

Online via Zoom

Item	Page	Time
1. Chairman's welcome, new attendees and apologies from the floor.		10.00
2. Review and actions from previous CAG/SASIG meetings:	1 - 2	10.05
a) Review and actions from previous full SASIG meeting: 15 October 2025	3 - 10	
b) Review and actions from previous CAG meeting: 20 January 2026	11 - 18	
Summary of Actions from latest CAG - SASIG		
3. Guest speaker: Tim Johnson, CAA	21 - 22	10.15
4. SASIG Administration & Finances: updates from Chairman/Policy Director	23 - 24	10.45
a) Financial position		
b) Membership/sponsors		
c) CAA Finances		
5. Summary of recent external meetings held, planned and invitations received	25 - 28	11.00
6. Major Policy Developments/Key Issues since last meeting:	29 - 42	11.15

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Recent, current and forthcoming consultations/inquiries of interest to include UK ETS (regional air connectivity) and Business Rates b) Brief round-up of other important developments c) Update on Review of ANPS and Heathrow expansion and its implication for the rest of the UK d) Review of EAC response and recommended SASIG positioning 		
7.	NPPF and SDS Consultations: Papers Setting out Implications for Airports - Secretariat Commentary and Recommendations:	11.45
a)	National Planning Policy Framework	43 - 52
b)	Spatial Development Strategies	53 - 62
8.	Updates from Policy Director on ITC report and discussion on new aviation technologies	63 - 68 12.15
9.	Discussion on the need for an Air Freight strategy	69 - 74 12.30
10.	Future dates in 2026 for SASIG/CAG and any additional meetings	75 - 76 12.45
11.	AOB	77 - 78 12.50
	Meeting Close	13.00

Annex A: (papers sent via separate email)

See below list of supporting documents for Items 4, 5 and 6:

Item 4(a): CAA Finance Forum DOCUMENT B
Item 4(b): CAA Finance Forum DOCUMENT D

Item 5(a): Draft minutes from CAA EIF meeting of 4.11.26
Item 5(b): Slide presentation from CAA EIF meeting of 4.11.26

Item 6(a): CAP1616 consultation: SASIG response
Item 6(b): UK ETS Aviation consultation: SASIG response
Item 6(c): Air Navigation Directions & Guidance: SASIG response
Item 6(d): CAA's Airspace Modernisation Team slide presentation: 12 January 2026
Item 6(e): Q & A from AND + ANG webinar held on 12 January 2026





**SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 2**

Item 2: Review and actions from previous CAG/SASIG meetings:

- (a) Review and actions from previous full SASIG meeting of 15 October 2025**
- (b) Review and actions from previous Chairman's Advisory Group (CAG) meeting of 20 January 2026**

Recommendation: that members note the minutes from these meetings (see attached)

**SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 2(a)**

Item 2(a): Minutes of last Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group meeting (SASIG)

Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG)

15 October 2025

Online via Zoom

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A**

Minute		Decisions
SASIG25	1	<p>Chairman's welcome, new attendees and apologies from the floor</p> <p>Chairman Keith Artus welcomed colleagues to the meeting and also new attendee Matthew Kiely (Southend City Cncl).</p> <p>Apologies were received from Cllr Phil Geisler (LB Richmond & Wandsworth), Cllr Glyn Jones (Doncaster Council) and Cllr John Evans (Uttlesford District Council).</p>
SASIG25	2	<p>Review and actions from previous CAG/SASIG meetings:</p> <p>Members noted the summary of actions arising from the previous SASIG and CAG meetings.</p> <p>SASIG Policy Director Chris Cain, provided a brief update on developments in Whitehall including the recent appointment of a new Aviation Minister, Keir Mather (who also covers Maritime and Decarbonisation). Members were informed that access to the Minister was expected to be difficult for the next few months but a letter with a detailed profile of SASIG and its policy area priorities, would be sent to him [Since actioned].</p> <p>An update was also given on the progress of the work with ITC. It was at first proof stage and includes many recommendations about best use of technology including drones. Sustainable aircraft fuel (SAF) and new aircraft design were also included. This report upon completion will be made available to several Government departments and the UK Press [Now Published].</p>

	<p>Members' comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members requested further clarification on the processes around planning and development. • Parliamentary Under Secretary for Aviation (Keir Mather) reports to the Secretary of State. (Heidi Alexander) • Quite a few airports are updating their Masterplans whilst a pro-aviation Secretary of State is in place. <p>Decisions: By consensus, the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approved the minutes of the SASIG meeting held on 25 June 2025 as a correct record. 2. Approved the minutes of the CAG meeting held on 18 September 2025 as a correct record.
SASIG25 3	<p>SASIG Administration & Finances:</p> <p>a) Financial position including: subscription update / payments The Chairman outlined SASIG's current financial situation which remains largely positive although budget constraints continue. Restructuring the fee basis would be looked at as a possible way forward.</p> <p>b) Membership/sponsors update The Policy Director asked members to help the Secretariat engage with non-member local authorities who had an interest in and/or were affected by aviation policies. Members were encouraged to pursue opportunities to liaise with neighbouring councils/authorities and talk about the benefits of joining SASIG. It was appreciated, however, that financial constraints continue to dominate decision-making within all authorities.</p> <p>Members' comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members welcomed the update regarding the current financial position and noted that it remains positive. <p>Decisions: By consensus, the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the updates on SASIG's administration arrangements and current financial situation.

SASIG25 4	<p>Major Policy Developments/Key Issues since last meeting:</p> <p>a) Recent, current and forthcoming consultations and inquiries of interest.</p> <p>The Chairman provided a brief update as per the agenda papers.</p> <p>b) Brief round-up of other important developments in the sector There was a brief discussion led by the Policy Director, around issues such as noise, decarbonisation of the sector and airspace modernisation design including, terminal manoeuvring areas (TMA). The Airspace Change Organising Group (ACOG) was originally tasked with coordinating the redesign of the UK's airspace and bringing all the different proposed changes together into 4 coherent regional masterplans. The London and South East work has now been given to the UK Design Entity.</p> <p>The Policy Director highlighted a key problem that has been, and can be expected to continue to, delay progress of the modernisation mission. There are actually only a few people within the UK (around 20) who are deemed competent to undertake airspace design to the standards CAA expect. Airspace change would be at it most controversial once the UK Design entity changes had kicked in, and areas outside the London system struggle to access expertise; issues such as noise may also be raised by objectors. This would then be a good time to implement a SASIG roundtable on aviation-related noise issues.</p> <p>The Policy Director also outlined the progress of noise action plans (NAPs) and the results now lie with Defra. DfT had also recently issued a questionnaire to all local authorities regarding noise.</p> <p>c) Summary of external meetings held, planned and invitations received</p> <p>These were noted as per the Agenda papers. The Policy Director and Chairman would also be contacting the LGA to get their perspective on the effect of drones on local authorities, from both a regulatory and procedural point of view.</p> <p>Members' comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members asked about the work of ACOG and the SASIG Chairman may look to meet with ACOG's Chairman once more. • Concerns were raised about the time taken to implement changes in policies. • Members recognised that noise action plans were difficult for local authorities to enforce.
-----------	--

		<p>Decisions: By consensus, the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the updates on major policy developments and key issues since the last meeting.
SASIG25	5	<p>Review of priority Policy Areas for SASIG before meeting with new Aviation Minister</p> <p>The Policy Director gave a presentation ‘Reviewing Priority Policy Areas’ and spoke about the need for greater resources to mitigate the financial impact of aviation and airports on local authorities.</p> <p>The presentation provided a suggested scope of SASIG’s priority issues, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise • Connectivity • Airport Capacity • Economic benefits • Constraints, ownership and funding • UK air freight and other policies • Advanced air mobility • Impact on Local Authorities <p>The presentation would be provided to members who were asked to consider the topics listed and to provide feedback on their top five priorities – some of which may not be on this list.</p> <p>Members’ comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues around capacity were highlighted and clarity on the purpose of any developments would be key to any decision. • Many references were made to Heathrow expansion and specific functions given that a lot of the aircraft would no longer be in service. • Concerns were raised about regional connectivity and advanced mobility with a focus on integrating aviation with rail options or other direct links. • Consideration needed to be given around financial redress for the impact and consequences on neighbouring authorities. • It was noted that local airports were improving accessibility however, despite this, focus always seemed to remain on Gatwick and Heathrow. Members agreed that SASIG should take forward

		<p>engagement with central government to promote greater use of local airports as an alternative to the mainstream ones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was acknowledged there were issues around high parking fees which were a significant area of financial gain by the airports. It was understood that there were complex issues in addressing the need for more effective regulation. • Concerns were raised about the significant increase on electrical demand and the need for additional infrastructure to address this. <p>Action: The Secretariat to make the presentation available to members.</p> <p>Decisions: By consensus, the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the discussion and agreed the key priorities.
<p>SASIG25 6</p>		<p>Proposed scope and arrangements for an online Aviation Noise and Land Use Planning Roundtable</p> <p>The Policy Director told members that the issue of noise was becoming more significant and is therefore a key policy area for the industry to address. Research and current data proved the impact of noise on health. Government approach to decarbonisation is pretty much set now therefore noise issues are probably now more important to airports.</p> <p>SASIG’s continuing participation with the Airspace & Noise Engagement Group (ANEG) ensures that major areas of interest specific to SASIG members would continue to be flagged up.</p> <p>Members’ comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proposal to run an online noise event in 2026 (open to non-members) with a range of external speakers was proposed. The outcome would hope to reach a consensus amongst attendees that could be fed back to government and relevant transport authorities. • Look at running this event in partnership with the LGA. • Raise local concerns related to the effect on noise on communities and building and planning restrictions. • Compensatory measures i.e. who manages these, who is eligible to apply, what are the limits, etc. • Discussions around the impact of freight should be included. • Timing of the event was important as there were rumours that consultation documents were to be released around the same time.

	<p>Members were invited to submit comments to the Secretariat that could be used to build an effective agenda so that the noise issues are properly reflected and covered. The Chairman agreed that participation of non-members was also an opportunity to raise awareness of SASIG.</p> <p>Decisions:</p> <p>By consensus, the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed the proposal to arrange an Aviation Noise and Land Use Planning Roundtable.
<p>SASIG25 7</p>	<p>Policy Discussion: SASIG position on Future UK Airport Capacity - Constraints, options, approach and engagement</p> <p>The Policy Director outlined the government’s support for airport growth and increase in capacity. Most of the larger airports are now above pre-pandemic levels and there has been a surge in preparation of airport masterplans and applications. Making ‘best use’ policy had been used to support recent planning approvals for expansion at airports such as Stansted, Bristol and London City and DCOs are in place for Luton, Gatwick and Manston.</p> <p>Fundamental issues such as how the question of how other areas would benefit, as a result of the Heathrow expansion and a third runway, remain. Problems also exist around freight and the future of freight transport. The UK is the only place in Europe with a Freight policy and SASIG has raised this issue on more than one occasion.</p> <p>The Policy Director projected a view of growth up until 2060 with possible different scenarios for London airports in comparison with other regional airport systems. It was unclear whether this is compatible with current Net Zero targets.</p> <p>Members were invited to consider key policy questions and whether they felt that SASIG should take forward this agenda at a time when there was a policy statement imminent.</p> <p>Members’ comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members agreed that the issue of freight was a real challenge – there are concerns about capacity and complacency around air freight strategies. • Members felt that the key areas should be broken down into manageable parts for consideration by both members and government.

		<p>The Chairman said that members are welcome to contact the Secretariat directly to further discuss any of the items from this agenda.</p> <p>Actions: Secretariat to make the presentation available to members.</p> <p>Decisions:</p> <p>By consensus, the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed to take forward the proposed work regarding future UK airport capacity.
SASIG25	8	<p>Future meeting dates for SASIG/CAG in 2025/26</p> <p>The dates of the next meetings would be circulated in due course.</p>
SASIG25	9	<p>AOB</p> <p>There was no other business.</p>
		<p>Close of meeting The meeting ended at 12.30pm</p>



Appendix A – Attendance:

<u>Position/ Role</u>	<u>Councillor / Officer</u>	<u>Authority</u>
Chairman & Hon. President	Keith Artus	
Member	Paul Donovan	Hertfordshire County Council
Member	Michael Thornton	HSPG
Member	Matthew Kiely	Southend City Council
Member	Cllr Lee Scott	Essex County Council
Member	Zhanine Smith	Essex County Council
Member	Kay Mead	East Herts District Council
Member	Cllr Sean Beatty	Spelthorne Borough Council
Policy Director, SASIG	Chris Cain	Northpoint Aviation Services
SASIG Secretariat	Lesley Smith	Northpoint Aviation Services

Apologies:

<u>Position/ Role</u>	<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Authority</u>
Member	Cllr Phil Geisler	LB Richmond & Wandsworth
Member	Cllr Glyn Jones	Doncaster Council
Member	Cllr John Evans	Uttlesford District Council

Also present

<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>
Fatima de Abreu	LGA Member Services Assistant



**SASIG Meeting 25 February 2026
Item 2(b)**

**Item 2(b): MINUTES OF THE CHAIRMAN'S ADVISORY GROUP (CAG)
MEETING: Tuesday: 20 January 2026**

Date: Tuesday: 20 January 2026

Time: 10:00 – 12:00 hrs

Venue: Online (via Zoom)

Attendees:

Keith Artus	Chairman & Honorary President, SASIG
Jackie Cheetham	Honorary Vice President, SASIG
Zhanine Smith	Essex County Council
Chris Cain	Policy Director, SASIG
Lesley Smith	Policy Executive, SASIG

Apologies Received:

Jamie Macrae	Honorary Vice President, SASIG
Cllr Lee Scott	Essex County Council
Christian Foster	Doncaster Council

(NB: invite and agenda papers also extended to Pat Hayes, Slough BC).

Item 2: Review and Actions from previous CAG/SASIG meetings:

a) Minutes of previous CAG meeting: 18 September 2025:

The following actions (in bold italics) were recorded as still outstanding:

- **Northpoint A/C dept. to prepare and issue 2025-26 SASIG subscription invoices.**
***Action:** Ongoing - Most of the SASIG 2025-26 subscription invoices have been sent out with only a few still outstanding. (To be covered under Agenda Item 3 of today's meeting)*
- **Contact to be made with LGA about future promotion of SASIG activities.**
***Action:** Ongoing - Policy Director has spoken with Kamal Panchal (LGA) who is broadly supportive of assisting. Chairman/Policy Director to hold face-to-face meeting with KP in London at LGA to discuss further. Also to have a meeting with the relevant portfolio holder.*



There were no other outstanding actions and the minutes of the CAG meeting of 18 September 2025 were approved.

(b) Review and actions from previous SASIG full meeting: 15 October 2025

The following actions (shown in bold) were recorded as still outstanding:

- Policy Director's presentation: 'Reviewing SASIG Priority Policy Areas' to be made available to members.
***Actioned:** this is in the members' area on the SASIG website.*
- Policy Director's presentation: 'SASIG position on Future UK Airport Capacity' to be made available to members.
***Actioned:** this is in the members' area on the SASIG website.*

It was also agreed to look at ways in which presentations could be highlighted more to members and ensure they are aware that items such as these are actually available to them on the website.

There were no other outstanding actions and the minutes of the SASIG meeting of 15 October 2025 were approved.

Item 3: SASIG Administration and Finances

- (a) Financial position:** The Policy Director gave a summary of the status of 2025-26 invoices issued and was happy to report that of those issued only one payment was still outstanding. He also briefed the Group on those which were outstanding from 2024-25.

This highlighted that in many cases, SASIG contacts in Member authorities change – this meant that with invoicing it was difficult to track down those now responsible for approving payment. Purchase orders were also nearly always required which causes a certain amount of delay.

However, draft letters were in preparation and would be sent out once the correct person was identified. Each 'case' took about 1-2 hours work to be sorted so a degree of patience was called for but it is hoped to have a comprehensive update for members at the next meeting in February.

There was currently about £4,500 in the account with about £18,000 outstanding. This would cover any residual owings to Northpoint with a small balance to be rolled over.



The Chairman mentioned the possibility of invoice factoring i.e. using an outside company to facilitate invoicing and who would also follow up late payments, etc. This would come at a cost of course.

The Secretariat was also tasked with looking into any possible grant or funding from DfT that SASIG could apply for.

Action: Secretariat to investigate possibly Dft Community Grants or similar

(b) Membership: Attracting potential new membership, it was noted this remains difficult during the current economic climate and the process could be slow and time-consuming. The immediate future may lie with more emphasis on associate membership rather than full membership.

The Group discussed ways of increasing SASIG's profile including:

- more collaborative work with the LGA;
- introductions to other councils from current members;
- possibility of bi-monthly webinars on relevant topics such as Noise Action Plans (the Policy Director also suggested getting something on NAPs to Martin Hau at DfT before 10 March when the consultation on proposed updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) ends).

Action: Secretariat to provide Policy Director with recruitment plan and note on the NPPF consultation.

Item 4: Summary of external meetings held and planned/invitations received

The Group reviewed and noted a list of meetings held since the previous CAG meeting in September of last year and to which SASIG was invited. These included:

The last **Airspace & Noise Engagement Group (ANEG)** meeting of 2025, held on 21 October, which the Policy Director attended. The next ANEG meeting is scheduled to be held on 25 February – straight after the SASIG members' meeting which will be held in the morning – and the one after that will be held in June. SASIG have two places – should try to fill the other one.

4 November saw the **CAA's Community Information Focus Forum (CIIF) meeting**. The SASIG Policy Director attended and updated the Group who were also provided with a slide presentation and draft minutes from that meeting.



SASIG was invited, but unable, to attend an online webinar held on 12 January and hosted by the CAA's Airspace Modernisation Team. The webinar was about proposed changes to the Air Navigations Directions and Air Navigation Guidance. The Group was provided with slides from this event and SASIG has submitted a response to this consultation.

The Group discussed the need to organize a **meeting with the current Aviation Minister, Keir Mather**. The Policy Director was asked by the Chairman to provide him with a list of the key issues SASIG are interested in so that they could be included in a letter to the Minister. A letter had previously been drafted to be sent to him but this will now be revised and updated before submission.

The Group also agreed that it might be beneficial to seek meetings with other ministers including the **Shadow Aviation and Transport Ministers** plus Kemi Badenoch, Shadow Leader.

Action: Policy Director to provide list of SASIG priority issues to Chairman and Chairman/Policy Director to revise letter to be sent to Aviation Minister.

Item 5: Discussion on proposed Workshops/SASIG meetings for 2026

This item was mainly for information and therefore taken as read. It was, however, decided to

- have the AGM online as usual on a date in the summer;
- it was also decided to hold the next SASIG meeting face-to-face in a room at the LGA on a date to be decided but possibly in late September.

It would likely be the 'normal' meeting in the morning followed by some kind of workshop/discussion panel in the afternoon.

Action: The Chairman and Policy Director to discuss both events outside the meeting.

Item 6: Policy developments since last CAG meeting:

(a) Brief round-up of consultations/inquiries of interest

This item was largely for information purposes and therefore was also noted as read.

The Policy Director did however update the Group a little more on the DfT consultation regarding proposed changes to the Air Navigation Directions and Air Navigation Guidance and to which SASIG had submitted a response.



Both of these documents are crucial in formulating the framework and environmental guidance for the CAA on how to carry out its air navigation functions in line with Government policy.

The Group were also provided with slides from a webinar held by the CAA's Airspace Modernisation Team on 12 January 2026. Members will be updated more fully at the February meeting.

(b) Brief round-up of other important developments since the last CAG meeting:

This item is important as it highlights a lot of the more salient issues that can be seen in the monthly SASIG Bulletin and regular Newsflashes that are sent round by the Secretariat. These included the following:

- the EU's new entry/exit system which got off to a shaky start in September;
- the legal challenge over the expansion of Gatwick Airport;
- the launch of the review of the Airports National Policy Statement (to be covered in Item 8);
- latest news on the re-opening of Doncaster Airport;
- the Government's decision to approve by the Heathrow plan for expansion.

Item 7: Update on the UK ETS Authority consultation: regional air connectivity

The Policy Director outlined the consultation launched to assess the impacts on regional air connectivity following the removal of UK ETS free allocation from the aviation sector. SASIG had attended an associated webinar and had briefed its concerns about the impact on domestic aviation. SASIG had also submitted a response which the Group were provided with.

Item 8: Update on Review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) and Heathrow expansion

This item was mainly for information purposes but the Policy Director gave a brief update. The Review had been launched by the Transport Secretary on 22 October last year and will be published for consultation by the summer of this year. On 25 November, the Transport Secretary had approved Heathrow Airport Ltd's (HAL's) plan as the chosen proposal to progress the airport's expansion. This proposal would shape the review of the ANPS.



Item 9: Update from Chairman/Policy Director on the Independent Transport Commission report

SASIG had co-sponsored in conjunction with the CAA and led by the ITC, an important report looking at major challenges the aviation sector currently faces and what new technologies could contribute to dealing with them. The report is now available on the ITC website as well as the SASIG website. Members were not only notified of its publication via Mailchimp along with a link to the ITC website but each member was also sent a copy of the report itself along with accompanying appendices and documentation.

The Policy Director had been interviewed on radio about the report and general feedback from the industry was good.

The Chairman suggested that the Secretariat make up a list of documents produced throughout the previous year, along with relevant links and which could be made available to members.

Action: Secretariat to produce list of 2025 documents with relevant links.

Item 10: Arrangements for full SASIG meeting on Wednesday: 25 February 2026 (Virtual via Zoom)

(a) Agenda: The Group noted the draft agenda provided and this would be decided post-CAG.

(b) Guest speaker: No decision was made at CAG for a guest speaker.

Item 11: Future dates in 2026 for SASIG/CAG and any additional meetings

As previously mentioned, the SASIG AGM would be held at a date to be decided in the summer – possibly June. That date would be confirmed post-meeting. It was also decided to look at the possibility of the following SASIG meeting along with a workshop of some kind, to be held face-to-face at a room at the LGA, in perhaps September. Again, this would be decided post-meeting by the Chairman and the Policy Director.

It was suggested that meeting invites and possibly even ‘save the date’ notices should be sent out via Outlook so that members had dates in their diaries. The Secretariat would investigate with colleague Debbie Airey.



Item 12: A.O.B.

There was no AOB and the Chairman thanked the Group and closed the meeting.



Summary of actions from CAG meeting: 20 January 2026

No.	Action	Responsible person(s)	Progress to date (Outstanding actions in bold)
1	Chairman/Policy Director to speak offline about financial administration and member recruitment initiatives	Chairman/Policy Director	Actioned – but ongoing requirement for regular updates
2	Policy Director to review outstanding invoices with DA and LS and action all before end of January	Policy Director/ Secretariat	Part-actioned – five addressed, five not yet complete
3	Chairman to review VAT position – claims vs new payments and prospective impact on funds; also to pay next Northpoint invoice by end of the month	Chairman	Actioned – and completed
4	SASIG to secure meeting with Kamal Panchal's line manager (LGA) and the relevant portfolio holder (i.e. Cllr) for transport/economy at LGA, to discuss matters from collaborations to effect of LG reorganization on SIGs	Chairman/Policy Director	To be actioned
5	Two presentations (No 1. SASIG Priority Policy areas and No 2. SASIG position on future UK Airport capacity) from last SASIG meeting to go on SASIG website	Secretariat	Actioned: Both presentations are in the members' area on the website under 'SASIG Publications' and 'Meeting Papers'
6	Chairman and Policy Director to revisit letter to be sent to new Aviation Minister requesting a meeting. Christian Foster to be looped in to see if he can help facilitate a meeting through his contacts	Chairman/Policy Director	Actioned: Chairman submitted letter requesting a meeting and separately in relation to NQY-London PSO.
7	Policy Director to provide Chairman with briefing on aviation/key SASIG issues to be used in an approach by him seeking a meeting with the Shadow Transport team.	Policy Director	Actioned: Briefing provided and approach made
8	Investigate community funding/grants from DfT for SASIG	Secretariat	Actioned: List sent to PD on 20.1.26
9	Details of NPPF consultation to be forwarded to Policy Director for perusal	Secretariat	Actioned: Information sent to PD on 20.1.26
10	List of documents along with any relevant link, issued by Secretariat in 2025, to be made available to members	Secretariat	To be actioned



Summary of actions from SASIG meeting: 15 October 2025

No.	Action	Responsible person(s)	Progress to date (Outstanding actions in bold)
1.	Policy Director's presentation "Reviewing Priority Policy Areas' to be made available to members.	Secretariat	Actioned: is in members' area on website.
2.	Policy Director's presentation "SASIG position on Future UK Airport Capacity" to be made available to members.	Policy Director/ Secretariat	Actioned: Available on website



**SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 3**

Item 3: Guest speaker: Tim Johnson, CAA

We are delighted to welcome as our guest speaker, Tim Johnson, Director for Communication, Strategy and Policy (CSP) at the Civil Aviation Authority, who will be updating members on the CAA's current priorities and their approach to engaging with non-industry stakeholders.

As of March 2024, in addition to his duties as Director of CSP, Tim also serves as Chief of Staff, overseeing the function of the Chair and Chief Executive's Office. He is responsible for driving forward the regulator's approach to major policy issues, including innovation, airspace modernisation, environmental sustainability and consumer policy.

Tim joined the CAA in January 2014, having previously worked at NATS as Head of Strategy and subsequently Head of Regulation.

Earlier in his career, Tim held roles in Government, including at HM Treasury, the Shareholder Executive, and the Ministry of Defence.

Tim also attends the Civil Aviation Authority Board.



**SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 4**

Item 4: SASIG Administration and Finances: update from Chairman and Policy Director

Recommendation: that members note content of the update

a) SASIG: financial position inc: subscription invoices and payments.

The Policy Director will update members on any outstanding subscriptions/payments for 2024-25 and also give a status report on subscriptions/payments for 2025-26.

b) Update on Membership and sponsors.

This month, the Policy Director and Chairman met with a councillor from NW Leicestershire DC (who is also on Kegworth Parish Council) to discuss SASIG membership and whether there was also an opportunity to discuss the same with neighbouring councils such as South Derbyshire and Rushcliffe as these are areas that would be affected by noise issues. The Policy Director will update members on the outcome.

The Secretariat will continue to promote the benefits of membership and we remain committed to exploring different avenues down which any or all interested parties can join the SASIG family. During a period of financial stringency for all local authorities collaboration, innovative approaches, a clear and compelling offer and persistent effort are, we believe, the key to success.

Added to this is the ongoing speculation and uncertainty about which authorities may be lost or combined with others during the local government reorganization process which was announced in December 2024 – see updated information [here](#).

c) CAA Finances

And finally, staying within the area of Finance, the Policy Director would like to draw members' attention to some information from the CAA's Finance Forum which can be seen at **Annex A: Item 4(a): CAA Finance DOCUMENT B** and **Item 4(b): CAA Finance Document D**. He will be able to update the meeting more fully as to the implications of their contents.



SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 5

Item 5: Short summary of external meetings held, planned and invitations received.

Recommendation: that members note content of the summary

Below is a short summary of some of the meetings that SASIG – in particular, the Chairman and Policy Director - have attended since the previous SASIG meeting held on 15 October 2025.

October:

21st: The last ANEG meeting of 2025 was held and the Policy Director will update members at the meeting. The next ANEG meeting is actually **scheduled for immediately after this SASIG meeting**. The following ANEG meeting will be held on 25 June.

November:

4th: CAA Environmental Information Forum: the Policy Director attended and can update members. A presentation along with the draft minutes from this meeting, is attached to these papers at **Annex A (see Items 5(a): CAA EIF Draft Minutes and 5(b): CAA EIF slide presentation)**.

January 2026:

Also, this month, the Policy Director met with officials from DfT to discuss the topic of **air freight policy** and will be able to update members on this.

Forthcoming meetings:

4 March 2026: The Chairman and the Policy Director are meeting with Amanda Lane, Airports Policy team lead at the Aviation Directorate, DfT. It is hoped that Amanda will be able to attend one of future meetings as guest speaker.

25 June 2026: Airspace & Noise Engagement Group (ANEG)



It is hoped to schedule a visit with the current Aviation Minister, Keir Mather, at some point in the near future as SASIG has a few issues we would like to discuss with him. A letter has been sent to him from our Chairman requesting a meeting and the letter can be seen below (shown in italics):

Keir Mather MP

Minister for Aviation, Maritime and Decarbonisation

Department for Transport

Great Minster House

33 Horseferry Road

London SW1P 4DR

United Kingdom

5th February 2026

Dear Minister,

LOCAL AUTHORITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE AVIATION SECTOR

On behalf of SASIG and its membership of local authorities, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment last year as Minister for Aviation, Maritime and Decarbonisation in the Department for Transport (DfT) and hope you are enjoying your new role.

By way of introduction, SASIG is the Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association that focuses on aviation policy and regulation and industry developments as they affect Local Authorities. Now in our 26th year, we service our membership through an experienced Secretariat that provides a deep well of aviation knowledge, participation in a wide range of stakeholder groups across Whitehall (including within the CAA), research collaborations with academics and industry stakeholders, and by hosting roundtable events and expert speakers at our quarterly membership meetings.

We are supportive of the Government's commitment to aviation because of the contribution it can make to productivity and growth by facilitating access to global markets for trade and tourism, encouraging innovation and inward investment, underpinning local supply chains and employment clusters, whilst recognising the need for decarbonisation of the sector as part of the UK's Net Zero aspirations.

However, there are aspects of aviation-related policy that we believe merit more attention and, critically, more structured engagement with Local Authorities than they have received hitherto. These include:

- a. Properly and fully recognising aviation's role in helping to connect the regions and nations of the UK — our concern is that new capacity (and therefore growth)*

- should not just be concentrated in London and the South East, but rather should be felt across all parts of the UK;*
- b. The absence of a coherent strategy for addressing the future capacity needs of the UK's air freight sector, which is currently resulting in approximately 20% of UK tonnage being diverted to and from near-European airports, adding time and expense for UK shippers;*
 - c. The inadvertent problems the current drive to streamline the planning system and deliver airspace modernisation could have on the sector if they override the need for industry to secure local political consent and maintain its social licence, especially amongst communities that are most impacted by its presence;*
 - d. The Government's apparent reluctance to engage with Local Authorities on Advanced Air Mobility (AAM), not just on planning matters but across the full spectrum of policy development, regulation, infrastructure planning, and community engagement. The sector appears to be left largely to its own devices despite the Future of Flight initiative, which we believe lacks the necessary depth and coordination to address the complex challenges ahead;*
 - e. The need for more robust aviation forecasting that takes proper account of regional variations and local economic development plans, and clearer definition of the CAA's role in engaging with Local Authorities as they navigate the increasingly complex regulatory and policy landscape.*

Noise impacts, the interface between housing pressures and airport safeguarding, surface access congestion, maximising wider economic benefit, securing support for new technologies such as SAF and AAM, and engaging local stakeholders constructively in all aspects of airport planning are key areas of policy in which Local Authorities have an important role to play. SASIG's long experience has taught us that failure to engage properly is likely to result in bottlenecks and unnecessary constraints disrupting the Government's ambitions. We firmly believe such problems can be avoided and progress achieved more quickly if Local Authorities are properly engaged and resourced to work with industry and wider stakeholder communities to deliver well-designed, environmentally sustainable, and above all economically beneficial airport growth.

There is considerable scope for Local Authorities who own airports, or who are able to work in partnership with privately owned airports in their constituency, to help deliver the Government's growth, regional prosperity, sustainability, and future aviation technology agendas. We regard the reopening of Doncaster Airport near your own constituency (the Council is one of our members), and the way in which Cornwall Council (another member) has worked with your officials to save the PSO link between Newquay and London following the collapse of Eastern Airways, as good examples of this in action — and there are many, many more.

How SASIG Can Help



With the recent announcement of the preferred third runway option for Heathrow and work on an updated Airport National Policy Statement underway, structured engagement with Local Authorities seems urgently required. We would like to discuss with you how SASIG can support the Department's objectives, including:

Immediate opportunities:

- Establishing a formal DfT-Local Authority aviation forum to ensure systematic engagement on policy development;*
- Incorporating Local Authority perspectives into the updated Airport National Policy Statement consultation process;*
- Sharing best practice examples from SASIG members on successful airport-community partnerships.*

Longer-term initiatives:

- Developing a comprehensive Local Authority engagement strategy for AAM deployment, covering regulation, infrastructure, and community acceptance;*
- Establishing clearer guidance on the CAA's role in supporting Local Authorities and improving aviation forecasting methodologies to better reflect regional priorities;*
- Creating a framework for Local Authority involvement in air freight strategy development and regional connectivity planning.*

We appreciate that with an important policy portfolio to manage, the demands on your time will be significant. However, we hope you will appreciate both the importance of the issues we have raised and our willingness to engage constructively to develop policy that will see the Government's ambitions for the sector realised in a way that will maintain the industry's political and social licence for many years to come.

With that in mind, we would very much like to meet with you as soon as your diary allows.

Yours sincerely

Keith Artus
Chairman

Tel: 01732 220256
kartus@sasig.org.uk
secretariat@sasig.org.uk

SASIG: Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association



SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 6

Item 6: Policy Developments since previous SASIG meeting

Recommendation: that members note content of the update and comments are invited

(a) Brief round-up of consultations/inquiries of interest

Consultations Concluded:

CAP1616: UK airspace Change Process consultation

On 25 September, the CAA launched their UK Airspace change process consultation. This document (CAP1616) was a formal consultation setting out the CAA's proposals to modify the airspace change process.

The consultation ran until 18 December 2025 and SASIG's response is attached to these papers – **see Annex A: Item 7(a)**.

UK ETS: Regional Aviation Connectivity

On 28 October 2025, the UK ETS Authority launched a [consultation](#) to assess the impacts on regional air connectivity following the removal of UK ETS free allocation (FA) from the aviation sector. This could have material impacts on many regional and smaller airports and for that reason.

The consultation sought views on whether intervention is needed to protect regional air connectivity specifically in light of the end of FA for aircraft operators, and if so, what form this should take. Details on this consultation and how to respond could be seen [here](#) and the full consultation document can also be seen [here](#). The *SASIG submission can be seen at **Annex A: Item 7(b) ***.

** To note: The Policy Director has been exploring to what extent and why, discretion and differentiated charging can be used in aviation as both DfT and CAA often use it as an excuse for maintaining the status quo even where such an approach would be fairer or produce other benefits. Our intention is to underpin some of the issues we raised in the original submission by way of exploring how and why differentiated pricing and a better relationship with ability to pay can be justified in the development of government regulation and charging. There appears to be legal provision that allows them to do so.*

UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services (CAP3158 and CAP3159) – 17 November 2025 – 12 January 2026.

On 17 November 2025 the CAA published:

- [Consultation on draft guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services \(CAP 3158\)](#); and
- [Consultation on the requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance \(CAP 3159\)](#).

These services are central to the Government's approach to modernising UK airspace and will be provided by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL).

The CAA have updated their background document [Modernising the way we do airspace design \(CAP 3156\)](#), which supports these consultations, and they asked for responses by 12 January 2026.

CAA consultation: Policy framework for new types of Vertical-Take Off and Landing aircraft (6 Nov 2025 - 29 Jan 2026)

The CAA is aiming to implement the regulatory framework and operational systems needed for commercial passenger flights by new types of vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) aircraft by the end of 2028. As such, it is in the process of identifying the regulatory changes needed to accommodate the safe use of these new types of VTOL aircraft in the UK, whilst supporting sector growth, innovation, decarbonisation and international alignment.

On 6 November 2025, the CAA launched [a consultation](#) seeking views from the public and VTOL industry stakeholders on their proposed legislative changes.

This consultation closed on **29 Jan 2026**.

Proposed changes to the Air Navigation Directions and Air Navigation Guidance (25 November - 20 January 2026)

On 25 November, the DfT published [a consultation](#) on proposed changes to the Air Navigation Directions and Air Navigation Guidance. These two documents provide the framework and environmental guidance for the CAA on how to carry out its air navigation functions in line with Government policy.

These documents require updating to reflect the latest Government policies, priorities and climate obligations, and their revision is critical to the delivery of Airspace Modernisation. The proposed changes are intended to help futureproof UK skies in a sustainable manner, whilst supporting economic growth, including airport expansion.

The consultation and supporting documents may be seen [here](#) and the consultation ran until **26 January 2026**. SASIG's response to this consultation may be seen attached at **Annex A Item (7c)**. A slide presentation given at a webinar held by the CAA's Airspace Modernisation Team to discuss the proposed changes to the Air Navigation Directions and Air Navigation Guidance which was held on 12 January, may be seen at **Annex A: Item 7(d)** attached to these papers. **Also attached at Annex A: Item 7(e)** is a Q & A which sets out questions that were asked during the webinar. The CAA have included all questions that were asked but where similar questions were asked in some cases they



have aggregated these to provide a single answer.

Consultations Ongoing

Business Rates and Investment: Call for Evidence (26 November 2025 – 18 February 2026)

At [Budget 2025](#) (26 November 2025), the Government published a Call for Evidence: [Business Rates and Investment: Call for Evidence](#). (Also see [here](#)). This builds on the findings of the Transforming Business Rates: Discussion Paper and asked stakeholders for more detailed evidence on how the business rates system influences investment decisions.

Following the [Transforming Business Rates Interim Report](#), the government committed to exploring how moving to a marginal tax rate, where successive bands are taxed at increasing rates, may be beneficial for investment. This Call for Evidence sought stakeholder input on these elements of the system, as well as the overall role business rates plays in investment.

In addition to this, it became clear that a number of infrastructure ratepayers with large capital expenditure **and this includes airports**, were worried about the barriers the business rates system – and in particular their valuations on receipts and expenditure – has presented for their long-term investment decisions. The Call for Evidence sought stakeholder input on these and options to address them.

The Government said it was committed to ensuring that these sectors have the long-term predictability and stability they need to invest, providing confidence to investors and enabling capital-intensive sectors to drive sustainable economic growth across the UK. And they also said they were clear that providing more certainty for those businesses who rely on this methodology is a priority.

Several industry stakeholders including Manchester Airports Group (MAG), the UK's largest regional airports operator and also Airlines UK, condemned the increases in airports' businesses rates and warned that a doubling of business rates for the sector will mean higher travel costs and a rethink in investment. It was also counter to the government's backing for airport expansion.

The Government was interested in hearing from a wide range of stakeholders to support further policy development and the Call for Evidence was open until 18 February 2026.

National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system (16 December 2025 – 10 March 2026)

This consultation launched by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) seeks views on a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other changes to the Planning System.



A draft NPPF has been published alongside this consultation and both documents should be read together. (Click on the link above to access these documents).

MHCLG are also seeking views on:

- data centres and onsite energy generation
- standardised inputs in viability assessments
- reforming site thresholds

The consultation closes on **10 March 2026**. **There is a paper on this consultation in Item 7(a)**

[Areas for producing spatial development strategies \(12 February – 26 March 2026\)](#)

On 12 February, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published a consultation on proposed geographies for Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs).

This consultation will close on **26 March 2026** and details can be [seen here](#).

The Policy Director has produced a briefing note on this consultation which can be found in Item 7(b).

(b) Brief round-up of other important developments since previous SASIG

Below is a round-up of some of the other more important developments/key issues since the last SASIG meeting on 15 October 2025:

October:

15th: Communities Against Gatwick Noise Emissions ([CAGNE](#)) [launched a legal challenge over the expansion of Gatwick Airport](#) arguing that the government's decision to approve the construction of a second operating runway at the West Sussex airport was flawed.

22nd: The Transport Secretary launched a [review of Airports National Policy Statement](#) and confirmed the reviewed draft ANPS will be published for consultation by summer 2026. This is covered under Item 8.

24th: A [report from the cross-party Environmental Audit Committee](#) said planned airport expansion that would result in hundreds of thousands of extra flights a year could risk the government's own net zero goals. They added that government had "not demonstrated" that negative climate impact of airport expansion would be outweighed by the economic growth created.

27th: [Eastern Airlines, which flew to Humberside, Teesside International, Gatwick, and Newquay](#), lodged a notice of intention to appoint an administrator. This action provided



a temporary 10-day reprieve, preventing creditors from initiating legal proceedings against the company.

29th: A new council report revealed that a [fully reopened Doncaster Sheffield Airport is expected to operate at an £81 million loss for its first nine years](#) but that it would be a catalyst for jobs and skills, better transport links, new housing and economic growth.

November:

3rd: Australian investment giant [Macquarie reached final close on its acquisitions of stakes in Bristol and Birmingham airports](#). Under the deal, the infrastructure investor acquired a 55% stake in Bristol Airport and a 26.5% stake in Birmingham Airport, both from Canada's Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP).

5th: [Latest approvals to support the full reopening of Doncaster Sheffield Airport](#) were supported by City of Doncaster Council Cabinet. They agreed for CDC to receive the funding from South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA).

7th: Flights between Cornwall Newquay Airport and London Gatwick, previously operated by Eastern Airways which collapsed on 27 October left the route, which is subsidised by the government, unserved. To reinstate the route, an expedited tender process was activated with Cornwall Council selecting [Scilly Isles-based Skybus, to resume the route from 23 November 2025](#).

17th: The CAA and DfT published two consultations on the future of UK Airspace – [CAP3158](#) and [CAP3159](#). This has been covered in part (a) of this item.

23rd: The [first Skybus Cornwall Newquay to Gatwick flight took off](#). The airline had agreed a short-term deal to run service following the collapse of Eastern Airways last month. More [here](#).

25th: [Heathrow's plan for a longer third runway was announced as chosen by government](#). See the Government press release [here](#) and the written statement to Parliament [here](#).

25th: The [Government sent a letter to the Climate Change Committee](#) setting out how DfT would like to engage with the CCC during the review of the Airports National Policy Statement. More on this in Item 8 of these agenda papers.

December:

8th: A [High Court challenge over the decision to expand Luton Airport](#) was dismissed by a judge who found that the greenhouse gas emissions from inbound flights were not unlawfully excluded as claimed by campaign group Ladacan.

9th: The [UK Government needs to do more to reduce costs and burden on airports](#) said Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith in her speech opening AirportsUK Annual Conference.



She said that if not, actions will not match ministers' rhetoric about the role they see airports, and wider aviation, playing in driving UK economic growth.

15th: [London Stansted's planning application to increase passenger numbers up to 51 million a year](#) over next two decades was [backed by a number of leading airlines](#) who have all submitted letters of support. They include Emirates, Ryanair, Jet2.com, Pegasus, Ajet and Turkish Airlines. And the [plans to increase the passenger limit at Stansted were given the green light by Uttlesford District Council](#). On 17th December

January 2026:

11th: The [CE of Heathrow urged Government to move faster](#) if the airport is to meet a 2029 deadline to start building a 3rd runway. Thomas Woldbye called on ministers to introduce new rules to speed up planning approval, as the airport confirmed that it had begun work on a formal application for the £33 billion project.

February 2026:

2nd: It was reported that [Heathrow would receive £900 million business rates discount](#) which equals around one fifth of total £4.3bn fund. Without government intervention, Heathrow's business rates bill would have jumped to £512 m in the upcoming fiscal year, rising to £514 m and £523 m in subsequent years, totalling £1.5 bn over three years.

9th: [Newquay Cornwall daily flights to London faced being axed over the cost](#) of subsidising them. Air connectivity between Cornwall/London has been sustained via Public Service Obligation (PSO) arrangements for over a decade but Cornwall Council's ruling cabinet was expected to agree to drop the daily flights as the service would likely necessitate a taxpayer subsidy of approximately £14m to £16m over the coming four years if continued.

10th: [Manston Airport was reported to have finalised £750m deal to reopen](#) focusing on cargo and budget travel.

To note:

You might like to take a quick look at the [UK Research & Innovation \(UKRI\) gateway](#) to publicly funded research and innovation which lists information on the latest innovative research in the UK, who was awarded funding, when and how much. All you do is type in your area of interest and hit the 'Search' button. These lists show, for example, the UKRI Phase 4 awards for [Air Mobility](#) and [Drones](#).

(c) Update on Review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS), Heathrow expansion and their implications for the rest of the UK



Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS): A Summary Update

On **22 October 2025**, the *Transport Secretary launched the promised review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS), which was designated in 2018 and will provide the framework within which any future proposals for airport expansion will be considered. Under the Government's framework, any expansion must meet the four ANPS tests: climate impact, air quality, noise reduction and national economic benefit.

A revised draft ANPS will be published by summer 2026, to be followed by a public consultation and after consideration of responses, ministers will submit the final policy document to Parliament for affirmative resolution. Once approved, Heathrow may then proceed to submit a Development Consent Order, provided it is in conformity with the updated ANPS.

On **25 November 2025**, the Transport Secretary confirmed that Heathrow Airport Limited's (HAL's) proposal for a third runway was chosen as the preferred option to progress the airport's expansion – see [here](#). The proposal will shape the review of the Airports National Policy Statement.

On the same day, the Secretary of State for Transport wrote to the Climate Change Committee outlining how the DfT would like to engage with the Committee during the review of the ANPS. The letter can be seen [here](#) and more details on this can be seen [here](#).

In **January of this year** the airport formally began the process of compiling the planning application for the project with the CE Thomas Woldbye saying that the Government needs to move faster if the airport is to meet the 2029 deadline for R3.

*All the details on the Secretary's statement can be seen [here](#).

Background to Heathrow Expansion

Following a period of reflection post-COVID about whether it should remain at two-runway airport, Heathrow, with Government encouragement, again turned its attention to expansion based on R3. At the start of this year, the [Chancellor and government backed the project](#), citing its potential to boost trade and economic growth.

Two rival plans were put on the table: firstly, there were plans by billionaire businessman Surinder Arora's company, (Mr Arora is one of the largest landowners at Heathrow) the Arora Group, which revealed cheaper plans – it had a price tag of around £25 billion -with a shorter new runway. Arora Group said the new runway could be up and running by 2035, while the terminal hub would open in two phases – in 2036 and 2040.

Heathrow then submitted its own plan for the 3rd runway, which would be full length and take a chunk out of the M25 nearby. Heathrow said its plan would boost passenger numbers from 84 million to 150 million, is 'shovel-ready' and that flights could take off within a decade. It also said the ballooned estimated costs from an initial £14 billion in 2018 to £21 billion for the third runway alone, are due to 'construction inflation.'



As outlined above on **25 November 2025**, the Transport Secretary confirmed that Heathrow Airport Limited's (HAL's) proposal would be used as the scheme to progress the 3rd runway project. More details on this decision may be seen [here](#) and the written statement to Parliament may be seen [here](#).

16 December 2025, the CAA issued [CAP3201: Proposals on the regulatory treatment of early costs of capacity expansion at Heathrow airport](#). This consultation sets out the CAA's proposals for the recovery of early costs associated with capacity expansion.

These are costs incurred by potential promoters before the Government takes a decision on whether to grant a Development Consent Order for capacity expansion at Heathrow. These proposals aim to provide an appropriate level of clarity and certainty for HAL on the recovery of early costs incurred in 2025 and 2026.

It also further clarifies the CAA's position on other potential promoters that provided credible and appropriately mature proposals in response to the Government's July 2025 deadline. HAL require these provisions to be put in place before starting the DCO process and members were advised.

Discussion on the Implications of revised ANPS for the rest of the UK:

Members are invited to comment on whether they believe a revised ANPS will affect their own areas and airports to any great degree and, if so, how. By way of information purposes, below is an update on the status of some of the UK airports who have recently undergone some form of expansion or are currently in the process of expansion. We have split them into Appendix A (London area airports) and Appendix B (other regional UK airports):

Appendix A: Key Airports in the London System (excepting Heathrow – see above for update on its progress)

London Gatwick Airport:

At the end of February 2025, the Transport Secretary gave a conditional go-ahead for a 2nd runway at Gatwick by issuing a "minded to approve" letter for the Northern Runway Development Consent Order (DCO) providing measures to reduce noise are put in place. The key outstanding issues about which the SoS had sought further views related to noise, airspace change, climate emissions and surface access. The proposal is to transform the airport's northern emergency runway into permanent use in a bid to boost capacity.

In September 2025, Gatwick did indeed have its second runway plan approved. It's expected to add over 100,000 more flights a year for the airport and flights could be taking off from the 2nd runway by 2029. The project, which will be entirely privately funded, will see the northern runway moved around 39 feet to cater for more arriving and outgoing flights. Both Gatwick terminals would also be revamped and existing taxiways remodelled. Expansion costs are calculated at around £2.2 billion and will be funded through private investment.

In January of this year, lawyers for campaigners fighting against expansion told the High Court that the climate impact of a second runway at Gatwick Airport was not properly assessed when the government approved plans. The hearing was told the government did not assess emissions that make up "roughly two-thirds of aviation's historical climate impacts" and had only considered carbon dioxide.

The High Court hearing took place between 20-23 January 20-26 in front of Mr Justice Mould. His judgement has, at the time of writing, yet to be handed down.

London Luton Airport:

Last December, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that it was necessary to extend the deadline for a decision on London Luton Airport expansion under the Development Consent Order process introduced by the Planning Act 2008. The deadline was extended to 3 April 2025—an extension of three months on the original date. The reason given for the extension was to allow the then newly appointed Secretary of State *'appropriate time to fully consider this complex application before making a final determination. The Department will however endeavour to issue a decision ahead of the deadline above where possible'*.

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration by Luton on 27 February 2023 and accepted for examination on 27 March 2023.

On 3 April 2025, [Government approved the expansion](#). The application asked for an increase on the current permitted cap of 18 million passengers per annum up to 32 million including: new terminal capacity; additional taxiways and other transport infrastructure; the construction of landside support buildings; surface access adjustments; mitigation works and other associated development.

In May of that year, the airport appointed Lord John Hutton as Chair of the board to oversee the next phase of the airport's development and it was made known that the campaign group, LADACAN, were threatening the Transport Secretary with legal action over the airport expansion by signalling for a judicial review.

Moving on to this year, in January an information meeting about proposals to expand Luton Airport scheduled for February, had to be postponed. Luton Council said: "Due to the high level of interest in this event, we've decided to postpone the session while we secure a more suitable venue".

London Stansted Airport:

In Summer 2023 London Stansted Airport announced its intention to submit a planning application for an expansion of its terminal building. The airport also wished to change its existing planning permission, which allows for 43 million passengers each year, to enable a new limit of 51 million per year.

In October 2024 the Chancellor and the Transport Secretary, welcomed a £1.1 billion investment to expand the Airport saying that more than 5,000 jobs would be created.



In February 2025 Stansted launched a consultation on its long-term plan for sustainable growth at the airport over the next 20 years. The Sustainable Development Plan set out how Stansted intends to make best use of the airport's existing single runway and what it will do to maximise the social and economic benefits the airport brings to people and businesses locally.

A month later in March 2025 it was reported that Hertfordshire County Council was warning that plans to expand Stansted would lead to an increase in noise and air pollution for local residents. They called for proposals detailing how access to the airport can be managed effectively.

June 2025 saw the airport submit an expansion plan. Owners MAG said there was no plan to build a 2nd runway or exceed its limit of 274,000 annual flights although importantly dedicated cargo movements would be lost to passenger flights. Better use would be made of the existing runway plus rail and road access would be improved.

In December 2025 Stansted's planning application (backed by a number of leading airlines), was approved by Uttlesford District Council. This means it could potentially become the UK's second busiest airport – at present it is the fourth and was used by nearly 30 million passengers in the year to September 2024.

London City Airport:

In August 2024, the Government approved London City Airport's plans to increase its annual passenger cap from 6.5 million to 9 million passengers and to fly three extra flights in the first half hour of operations during the week. However, its proposals to extend its Saturday afternoon operating hours were not accepted. More details and background from the airport are [here](#).

June 2025 saw the Australian financial giant and Infrastructure investment specialist Macquarie confirm an agreement to acquire ownership stakes in Bristol, Birmingham and London City Airports.

Last month (January) the airport introduced a drop-off fee, ending its status as the last London airport without such a charge. The fee is £8 for up to five minutes, then £1 per additional minute, with a maximum stay of 10 minutes.

Appendix B: Some of the UK's regional airports

Doncaster Sheffield Airport:

The airport was closed in 2022 after owners Peel Group deemed it financially "unviable", citing various factors including plateauing passenger numbers. However, strong efforts have been made since then (with our own Policy Director involved!) to reopen it. Doncaster Council signed a 125-year lease to take over the Doncaster Sheffield Airport site in March 2024 and back in September last year the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority formally approved a £160million funding package, built on earlier commitments, to reopen the airport which is expected to be up and running again in summer 2027, with the potential for freight and GA flights even sooner.



Newcastle International Airport:

Last month (January), Newcastle International Airport sealed a fresh £364m finance deal to back its growth plans. The airport, which brings £1bn GVA and 3,500 direct jobs to the North East secured the huge bank finance package with AIB. The transaction refinances its existing facilities and will support its long-term growth ambitions and sustainability targets. The package includes a £20m Green Loan dedicated to projects aimed at achieving Net Zero Carbon status by 2035.

Exeter Airport/Norwich/Bournemouth Airports:

In August of last year, Exeter, Bournemouth and Norwich Airports were sold for £200m. Investment firm ICG confirmed it had agreed a deal with Rigby Group to purchase the airports. ICG said that Exeter Airport's passenger and cargo operations would be expanded. The airport's MD said Exeter could handle up to 1.2m passengers annually, about 400,000 more than current levels, before requiring major infrastructure upgrades.

For Norwich Airport, the deal also includes the 115-acre development site to the north of the airport, named Imperial Park Norwich, which has planning permission for more than 120,000sqm (143,500 sq yds) of workspace. And for Bournemouth: in August last year, it secured planning approval in principle from BCP Council for a future terminal expansion and surface transport enhancements, which will be delivered in phases in line with passenger growth over the coming years.

Already last year, the £17m investment programme had already delivered a new immigration and arrivals hall, (opened in October 2025); a phased expansion of the main car park, providing more than 800 extra spaces; new behind-the-scenes outbound baggage facility (operational since June 2025); a dedicated check-in area for Jet2.com and Jet2holidays, (opened in February 2025) and an expanded in-flight catering unit (opened in February 2025).

Leeds Bradford Airport:

In June last year, an extension to the airport's terminal building was opened to passengers. The £100m project was the largest investment yet in facilities at the airport and increased space in customer areas by about 40% said the airport. The second phase of the development is the refurbishment of the current terminal, scheduled for completion by winter of this year.

Teesside International Airport:

October 2025 brought a deal to support multi-million-pound expansion of aircraft maintenance operations at Teesside International Airport. Global aviation leader Willis Aviation Services Ltd signed a 250-year lease agreement for 50 acres of airport land to drive significant growth in its base at Teesside. The deal paved the way for the development of up to six new narrow and wide-body hangars across the airport estate, including five at a new Aviation Village on land west of the airport.

(d) Government response to EAC Airport expansion and climate and nature targets report

Background:

The Environmental Audit Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2024–26, Airport expansion and climate and nature targets (HC 831), on 24 October 2025. The Government Response to the Committee’s recommendations was received on 18 December 2025 and is set out in the document which can be seen in the link below.

[Airport expansion and climate and nature targets: Government Response](#)

SASIG summary of response document:

The response appears to be heavily Heathrow-centric (as we have previously seen, so are a lot of Government responses) and this could create clear risks of policy spillover and disproportionate burden on smaller and regional airports. Several overarching themes occur including the following:

1. Heathrow dominance of the ANPS review

Almost every recommendation response defaults to Heathrow and the ANPS. There is no clear national airports system strategy that distinguishes Hub vs regional vs GA/business vs emerging vertiport infrastructure. This creates a risk that standards designed for Heathrow are indirectly applied elsewhere via planning, CAA policy or judicial precedent.

2. Shift from outcome-based to process-heavy regulation

There is an emphasis on assessments, DCO compliance, carbon pricing and ETS mandates. Smaller airports lack the scale, margins and staffing to absorb this without incurring higher per-passenger costs, reduced connectivity and suppressed investment.

3. Climate policy instruments are largely scale-blind

UK ETS, SAF mandates, airspace change requirements and noise metrics do not differentiate adequately by:

- i. passenger volume,
- ii. essential connectivity role,
- iii. lack of modal alternatives.

4. Risk of cumulative impacts being interpreted cumulatively across airports

The Government response to Recommendation 7 explicitly references cumulative impacts “across a wide area”. Without safeguards, small airports could be penalised for system-wide impacts they do not materially drive.

SASIG: Implications and Recommended Positions



It is important to remember a core SASIG framing or principle and that is: “Local government airports and future vertiports are enablers of decarbonisation, not barriers to it.”

1. Key implication: ANPS review may become a de facto national standard

Even though the ANPS is legally Heathrow-specific, inspectors, councils and courts often treat it as best practice guidance. This means therefore there is a risk that local authority airport developments (even modest ones) face Heathrow-level climate, noise and air quality scrutiny. They also face expanded cumulative impact assessments and disproportionate mitigation costs.

Recommended SASIG position:

To demand an explicit statement that ANPS thresholds, tests and metrics are not automatically transferable to non-NSIP airports or vertiports and that Local planning authorities retain proportionality discretion.

2. Key implication: Vertiports and UAS are invisible in the Government Response

There is no reference within the document to the following:

- eVTOL;
- zero-emission flight;
- urban/regional air mobility or;
- the local authority role in enabling them.

All of the above are critical to regional decarbonisation, medical logistics and surface transport substitution.

Recommended SASIG policy action:

We should push for explicit inclusion of vertiports and zero-emission aviation in the refreshed ANPS or parallel policy. We should also push for recognition that early-stage vertiports should be fast-tracked and exempted from legacy aviation noise and emissions assumptions.

3. Key implication: Airspace modernisation governance risks marginalising local authorities

The UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) centralises design. Airports are sponsors but local authorities bear political and community impacts and this needs to be highlighted as there is currently no commitment to an enhanced LA role.

Recommended SASIG action:



We should advocate for the following:

- **Statutory LA consultation rights in CAP1616 and UKADS processes;**
- **Funding for LA technical capacity to assess airspace/noise impacts;**
- **Requirement that airspace change assessments include local economic and public service impacts.**

4. Key implication: “Polluter pays” instruments risk penalising early adopters

It is a known fact that SAF, ETS and carbon pricing may raise operating costs at LA-owned airports and reduce viability of PSO-style routes and public service flights.

Recommended SASIG policy position:

We should call for exemptions or rebates for:

- **zero-emission aircraft;**
- **emergency services,**
- **training and innovation flights.**

Local authority airports should be recognised as testbeds, not taxed like hubs.

Summary of SASIG priority actions:

1. *Secure formal proportionality language in ANPS refresh.*
2. *Insert vertiports and zero-emission aviation explicitly into national policy.*
3. *Strengthen local authority role in airspace modernisation.*
4. *Push for carbon policy exemptions for public service and innovation activity.*

The Government Response is procedurally comprehensive but structurally unbalanced. If left unchallenged, it risks embedding:

- *Heathrow-centric standards;*
- *scale-blind climate instruments;*
- *and cumulative assessment logic.*

These could systematically disadvantage smaller, regional and publicly owned airports. SASIG should now shift from reactive defence to proactive reframing and reinforce our view that regional aviation is essential, is proportionate and is a delivery vehicle for net zero rather than an obstacle to it.

SASIG members are invited to comment.



SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 7

Item 7(a): Proposed Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - Implications for Local Authorities and Airports

Recommendations: That members note contents of the update and comments are invited.

1. Introduction

The December 2024 revision to the NPPF introduces several updates aimed at boosting housing delivery, promoting sustainable development, and modernizing land use policies. Key changes include a strengthened presumption in favour of development on brownfield sites, the introduction of 'grey belt' land within the Green Belt for potential release, enhanced focus on urban densification, and greater emphasis on climate mitigation and environmental protections. While the NPPF does not contain aviation-specific policies beyond those for general aviation (GA) airfields, these revisions could indirectly impact airports and related infrastructure.

This agenda item reviews aspects relevant to SASIG member local authorities (LAs) in their roles as either airport owners, statutory planning authorities, environmental health regulators, transport authorities, and local economic development agencies. It highlights implications for engagement with airports on key issues such as aerodrome safeguarding, brownfield/grey belt status, operational impacts, airspace change, capacity growth, airport-related development, and surface transport infrastructure.

2. Aspects of the NPPF Revisions Relevant to Member LAs

The revisions to the NPPF that are being consulted upon retain existing references to aviation, with no proposed changes to core sections on GA airfields, safeguarding, or aviation safety. However, new policies on land use and environmental protections could create tensions in the vicinity of airports, because of housing pressures and sustainability goals.

(a) Retained Sections Relating to Airports (No Proposed Changes)

- **General Aviation Airfields (Chapter 9: Promoting Sustainable Transport, Paragraph 111f):** The NPPF continues to recognize the importance of maintaining a national network of GA airfields, noting their economic value in supporting business, leisure, training, and emergency services. It references the 2015 General Aviation Strategy and allows for adaptation over time. This is unchanged from the December 2023 version. LAs should note this as a basis for protecting smaller airfields from redevelopment, but the lack of a defined list of protected sites leaves ambiguity, potentially weakening safeguards against housing or commercial pressures.

- **Safeguarding Zones (Chapter 10: Supporting High Quality Communications, Paragraph 122a; Annex 2: Glossary):** Policies require consultation with relevant bodies (e.g., CAA) for electronic communications developments near aerodromes or within statutory safeguarding zones. This protects against interference with air traffic services or instrumentation. No changes are proposed, maintaining existing protections for airport operations.
- **Aviation Safety in Minerals Extraction (Chapter 17: Facilitating the Sustainable Use of Minerals, Paragraphs 223h and 224b):** Plans must account for aviation safety in reclaiming worked land and assessing adverse impacts from mineral operations. These provisions remain unchanged, supporting LAs in their attempts to mitigate risks from nearby developments.

These unchanged sections provide continuity for LAs engaging with airports on operational impacts, airspace changes, and capacity growth. However, they do not explicitly address larger commercial airports, which fall under separate frameworks like the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS).

(b) New or Strengthened Aspects to Highlight

(i) Grey Belt Land Designation – Exemptions Needed for Airfields?

The NPPF introduces 'grey belt' as a subset of Green Belt land to facilitate development where housing needs are unmet, provided it meets sustainability criteria and 'golden rules' for design, infrastructure, and biodiversity net gain (Chapter 13, Paragraphs 148, 155; Annex 2). Grey belt is defined as previously developed land or other underperforming Green Belt areas that do not strongly contribute to purposes such as preventing urban sprawl (Paragraph 143a), merging neighbouring towns (143b), or assisting urban regeneration (143d), excluding high-value environmental assets listed in Footnote 7 (e.g., habitats sites, SSSIs, National Parks). Notably, airfields and airports are not explicitly mentioned or exempted in these provisions, creating potential vulnerabilities.

Many UK airfields, including general aviation (GA) sites and larger airports, are situated in or adjacent to Green Belt land, often on previously developed sites (e.g., former military bases) with extensive open areas that could qualify as grey belt due to low contribution to the excluded purposes. For instance, airfields like Biggin Hill or Farnborough feature large grassland expanses that might be deemed underperforming, despite their operational necessity for safety buffers, bird strike management, and future expansions. Without exemptions, this could lead to piecemeal redevelopment pressures, such as housing encroachments that compromise safeguarding zones (e.g., public safety zones or obstacle limitation surfaces under CAA regulations).

Implications for LAs:

- **Safeguarding and Operational Impacts:** Grey belt releases could erode aerodrome safeguarding, allowing developments that interfere with radar, navigation aids, or flight paths, increasing risks like bird strikes or airspace congestion.



- **Clash with Housing Pressures:** Airfields' brownfield-like status (Chapter 11) amplifies tensions, as LAs face mandates to prioritize housing on such land, potentially at the expense of aviation's economic role (e.g., GA airfields support 2,500 jobs and £200m GVA annually across the UK).
- **Airport-Related Development and Capacity Growth:** Redevelopment could limit space for hangars, terminals, or surface access upgrades, hindering growth plans aligned with national aviation strategies.
- **Environmental Health:** While grey belt excludes some protected areas, it may overlook aviation-specific impacts like noise contours or CO2 emissions, requiring LAs to integrate stricter assessments in local plans.

To mitigate, LAs should advocate for explicit exemptions in future NPPF revisions, classifying airfields as 'assets of particular importance' akin to Footnote 7 protections, or designating them in local plans as exempt from grey belt criteria to preserve their strategic value.

(ii) Strengthened Brownfield Emphasis

Policies in Chapter 11: Making Effective Use of Land, Paragraphs 124-129) now give substantial weight to brownfield redevelopment for housing, with a presumption in favour unless adverse impacts outweigh benefits. Airports often qualify as brownfield due to prior infrastructure,

Implications:

- **Housing Pressure vs. Aviation Role:** LAs may face competing demands, e.g., repurposing underused airfield land for homes while preserving economic benefits from aviation (e.g., jobs in logistics or training).
- **Surface Transport Infrastructure:** Brownfield policies encourage integration with transport hubs but could strain existing airport-related networks if housing displaces expansion space.

(iii) Environmental Protections

Chapter 15 on Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment (Paragraphs 187e, 198-199), give enhanced focus on mitigating pollution, including noise, air quality, and emissions. Plans must prevent unacceptable risks from development, identify tranquil areas, and comply with air quality objectives. No aviation-specific changes, but:

Implications for LAs:

- **Noise, Air Quality, Ecosystems, and CO2:** Stronger requirements to assess cumulative impacts from airport operations or expansions, aiding LAs in negotiations on airspace changes or capacity growth. However, this could limit approvals if emissions (e.g., from increased flights) conflict with net-zero goals.
- **Operational Impacts and Capacity Growth:** LAs can use these to demand better mitigation, e.g., low-emission surface access or biodiversity net gains around airports.

(iv) Sustainable Transport and Emissions



Chapter 9 on Promoting Sustainable Transport (Paragraph 110) places emphasis on reducing emissions and improving air quality through mode shifts remains, with no changes. This supports LAs in requiring sustainable surface access for airports but may challenge capacity growth if not aligned with public transport upgrades.

Summary of Implications for LAs Engaging with Airports

- ***Safeguarding:*** Retained policies provide a foundation, but grey belt risks could erode protections. LAs should prioritize aviation safety in consultations, potentially designating airfields as exempt from grey belt.
- ***Brownfield/Grey Belt Status and Housing Clash:*** Airports' land could be targeted for housing, reducing space for operational needs. LAs need to balance this in economic strategies, advocating for aviation's GDP contributions (up to 4.5%).
- ***Operational Impacts and Airspace Change:*** Environmental enhancements allow LAs to scrutinize noise/air quality from changes, but unchanged safeguarding may not fully address modern drone/eVTOL integrations.
- ***Capacity Growth and Airport-Related Development:*** Grey belt could facilitate or hinder expansions; LAs should ensure plans align growth with sustainability.
- ***Surface Transport Infrastructure:*** Policies promote integration, but housing pressures might divert resources from airport access improvements.

Overall, while direct aviation policies are unchanged, the grey belt and brownfield pushes could indirectly threaten airfields, especially GA ones (22 closures since 2021, per sector reports). LAs should monitor for conflicts in local plans, particularly where airports contribute to economic development but face housing demands.

3. Consistency with the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) and Priority Considerations

The NPPF explicitly states it does not contain policies for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), such as major airport expansions, which are governed by the Planning Act 2008 and relevant National Policy Statements (NPS) (Paragraph 5). The current ANPS, designated in 2018, focuses on southeast England capacity, particularly Heathrow's third runway, emphasizing economic benefits balanced against environmental impacts. However, a review was launched in October 2025 to update it for new climate obligations, with a draft expected by summer 2026 and final designation targeted for autumn 2026. This review includes tests on climate change, noise, air quality, and national economic growth, aligning with net-zero goals.

Consistency between NPPF and ANPS is essential, as the NPPF must be considered in preparing local plans and decisions (Paragraph 2), while ANPS forms part of the national planning framework (Paragraph 5). Where conflicts arise, the ANPS takes priority for NSIPs, as it provides the primary decision-making framework under the 2008 Act. For non-NSIP airport developments (e.g., GA airfield upgrades or smaller expansions), the NPPF prevails, but LAs should ensure local policies reflect ANPS principles for coherence.



- **Current ANPS Priority:** Until the new ANPS is designated, the 2018 version guides major projects, potentially conflicting with NPPF's grey belt or environmental enhancements if expansions encroach on Green Belt.
- **New ANPS Integration:** The updated ANPS will likely emphasize sustainability, requiring LAs to align local plans with it to avoid delays in airport-related applications.
- **Engagement with Airports:** LAs should reference both in consultations on capacity growth or airspace changes, prioritizing ANPS for NSIPs while using NPPF for local impacts like noise or transport.

SASIG members should monitor the ANPS review closely, advocating for stronger alignment with NPPF on Green Belt protections and climate mitigation.

4. Recommendations

For SASIG as an Organization:

- Submit a collective response to any ongoing or future NPPF consultations, emphasizing the need for explicit protections for GA airfields and commercial airports (e.g., excluding them from grey belt definitions or requiring a national airfield network review in collaboration with DfT/CAA).
- Advocate for updated guidance clarifying airfields' status, highlighting their role in STEM, emergency services, and emerging tech like eVTOL.
- Coordinate with bodies like the RABA, BBGA, Royal Aeronautical Society to amplify concerns about closures and economic losses.

For Constituent Members:

- In local plan reviews, assess airport land against grey belt criteria and seek designations that prioritize aviation over housing where justified.
- Engage proactively with airport operators on safeguarding and development proposals, using NPPF environmental policies to negotiate mitigation for noise, emissions, and transport.
- Monitor applications near airfields for conflicts, and collaborate with neighboring LAs on cross-boundary issues like airspace or surface access.

5. Emerging Issues Not Under Consultation but Critical Before Next Review

While the NPPF consultation focuses on housing and land use, several aviation-related challenges are poised to escalate, necessitating proactive planning by LAs. These are not currently addressed but could influence future revisions.

(a) Shortage of Power Supplies Around Large Airports

Recent incidents, such as the March 2025 Heathrow substation fire causing an 18-hour shutdown and disrupting 1,000+ flights, underscore vulnerabilities in airport power infrastructure. Airports require resilient grid connections for safety-critical systems



(e.g., lighting, radar), but growing demands from electrification (e.g., electric aircraft, charging hubs) and nearby developments (housing, B1 offices, B2 manufacturing, B8 logistics) strain supplies. Warnings about cable thefts and substation risks were ignored pre-incident, highlighting contingency gaps.

Implications: LAs must integrate power resilience into plans, prioritizing airport needs in energy allocations and coordinating with National Grid to avoid conflicts with housing pressures. This affects operational impacts, capacity growth, and surface infrastructure (e.g., EV charging for airport access).

(b) Impact of Airspace Changes and ICAO Balanced Approach

The ICAO Balanced Approach—endorsed in UK policy (e.g., Aviation Policy Framework)—requires addressing noise through source reduction, land-use planning, abatement procedures, and restrictions. Airspace modernization (e.g., via CAA's Airspace Modernisation Strategy) will alter flight paths, necessitating integration into development plans and applications to mitigate health impacts.

Implications: LAs should mandate Balanced Approach assessments in planning, ensuring airspace changes inform housing placements and noise contours. This clashes with grey belt if developments encroach on affected areas, impacting environmental health and community well-being.

(c) Status and Enforceability of Airport Noise Action Plans (NAPs)

NAPs, required every five years under EU-derived regulations (e.g., Environmental Noise Regulations 2006), outline noise mitigation but lack strong enforcement unless tied to planning conditions or operating restrictions. Aviation noise's health effects (e.g., sleep disturbance, cardiovascular risks) are recognized in government guidance, but NAPs often rely on voluntary compliance.

Implications: LAs can strengthen enforceability by incorporating NAPs into local plans, using them in applications for expansions or related developments. This supports environmental health roles, particularly amid growing operations.

(d) Planning for Future Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Infrastructure

AAM (e.g., eVTOLs, drones) requires vertiports, drone ports, flight corridors, and restricted zones. The CAA's Future of Flight plan aims for commercial eVTOL by 2028, with infrastructure planning campaigns urging local adaptations. UK market assessment projects 1,200 jobs and £73m revenue by 2021 levels, scaling up.

Implications: LAs must plan for integration, avoiding conflicts with existing airspace or Green Belt. This supports innovation but demands updates to safeguarding and transport policies.

(e) Airports as Nuclei of Innovation and Employment Clusters

Airports drive clusters through accessibility and supply chains, e.g., Heathrow supports 120,000 jobs and tech/pharma hubs; Gatwick fosters digital and green tech,



contributing £4.1bn GVA and 56,000 jobs. Regional examples like East Midlands Freeport attract investment in advanced manufacturing.

Implications: LAs should designate airports as economic anchors in plans, balancing with housing to leverage clusters for jobs and innovation, enhancing resilience against grey belt pressures.



6. Recommendations

For SASIG as an Organization:

- Lobby for grey belt exemptions for airfields in ANPS review submissions, emphasizing consistency with NPPF.
- Advocate integrating emerging issues (e.g., power resilience, AAM) into future NPPF consultations via joint statements with CAA/DfT.
- Host workshops on ICAO Balanced Approach and NAP enforceability to build member capacity.

For Constituent Members:

- Assess local airfields against grey belt criteria in plan reviews, seeking protective designations.
- Incorporate ANPS priorities into airport engagements, prioritizing it for NSIPs.
- Proactively address emerging issues: e.g., collaborate with utilities on power plans; require Balanced Approach in applications; enforce NAPs via conditions; plan AAM infrastructure; promote airports as clusters in economic strategies.

7. Application of the ANPS to Regional Airports

The ANPS (designated 2018, under review as of 2025-2026) primarily governs nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) for airport capacity, defined under the Planning Act 2008 as expansions increasing passenger throughput by at least 10 million per year or air transport movements by 10,000 for cargo. It is the "primary basis" for decisions on Heathrow's Northwest Runway but is "important and relevant" for other NSIPs in London and the South East, such as new runways or terminals. The ongoing review (draft expected summer 2026) incorporates net-zero tests, air quality, noise, and economic growth, with Heathrow's scheme informing updates.

For regional airports (e.g., Manchester, Birmingham, or smaller GA sites):

- **NSIP Threshold:** If expansions meet the 10m passenger/10k movement criteria, they are NSIPs, and the ANPS applies as important/relevant, though not primary unless in the South East. Smaller upgrades fall under local planning via the NPPF.
- **Relevance:** The ANPS anticipates "strong growth" at regional airports by 2050, even with Heathrow expansion, and supports intensive use of existing infrastructure. It can inform local decisions, but conflicts with other NPSs are resolved in favor of the most recent.



- **Implications:** For non-NSIP regional developments, NPPF prevails, but ANPS principles (e.g., balancing growth with environmental impacts) should guide LAs. This aids capacity growth but requires alignment with net-zero goals in the refreshed ANPS. LAs should reference ANPS in consultations for expansions, advocating for regional-specific guidance in the review.

8. NPPF Guidance Relevant to Airports on Planning for/Building Resilience to Climate Change

Chapter 14 (Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change, Paragraphs 161-186) provides general guidance on transitioning to net zero by 2050, mitigating emissions, and adapting to impacts like overheating, flooding, drought, and coastal change. No airport-specific mentions, but policies apply to infrastructure, including airports.

- **Mitigation (Paragraphs 161-169):** Plans and decisions must reduce greenhouse gas emissions through location, design, and renewable energy. LAs should identify areas for low-carbon sources (e.g., solar, wind) and support repowering existing sites. For airports, this implies integrating renewables (e.g., solar farms on airfield land) and low-carbon designs in expansions, aligning with aviation's net-zero commitments (e.g., sustainable fuels, electrification).
- **Adaptation (Paragraphs 162-163):** Proactive measures for resilience, including space for protection or relocation of vulnerable infrastructure. Airports must assess long-term risks (e.g., overheating affecting operations, drought impacting water supplies).
- **Flooding and Coastal Change (Paragraphs 170-186):** Sequential test to avoid high-risk areas; exception test for essential infrastructure if unavoidable. Airports in flood-prone or coastal zones (e.g., East Midlands, Southampton) should incorporate sustainable drainage, flood resistance, and relocation plans if risks increase.
- **Implications for Airports:** As critical infrastructure, airports benefit from policies supporting resilience (e.g., green infrastructure for flood management) but face scrutiny on emissions from growth. LAs can demand climate assessments in applications, linking to operational impacts (e.g., runway flooding) and capacity plans. Emerging issues like power shortages (as noted previously) tie into low-carbon energy strategies.

9. Recommendations

For SASIG as an Organization:

- Advocate in ANPS review consultations for clearer application to regional airports, emphasizing consistency with NPPF on grey belt and climate resilience.
- Push for airport exemptions in grey belt definitions and specific climate guidance for aviation in future NPPF updates.

For Constituent Members:



- In local plans, classify airport land to prioritize aviation over housing where brownfield/grey belt pressures arise, integrating climate adaptation (e.g., flood defenses).
- Use ANPS as a reference for regional NSIPs, ensuring climate resilience in engagements on expansions and infrastructure.



SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 7

Item 7(b): Areas for Producing Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) Consultation

Recommendation: that members note content of the update and comments are invited

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has published a consultation on proposed geographies for Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs), closing on **26 March 2026**. SDSs will become statutory sub-regional strategic plans that local plans must be in general conformity with. This briefing identifies potential implications for airports, aviation infrastructure, and associated development that merit consideration in your response.

KEY ISSUES FOR AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Strategic Infrastructure Recognition

SDSs must '*identify key infrastructure requirements*' and '*identify strategic locations for development*'. However, the consultation is **silent on aviation infrastructure**. The draft NPPF (currently under consultation until 10 March) requires planning policies to "recognise the importance of maintaining a national network of general aviation facilities" and provide for large-scale facilities including airports. There is a risk that SDSs may not adequately address:

- Airport operational safeguarding zones and obstacle limitation surfaces
- Airspace change programmes and their surface implications
- Protection of aerodrome sites from inappropriate development
- Supporting infrastructure for airport operation and growth (not just surface access)

2. Cross-Boundary Coordination Challenges

The consultation acknowledges that "*there will always be some issues, development needs, infrastructure or specific projects which cross [SDS boundaries]*". For airports, this is particularly important:

- **Aerodrome safeguarding:** Protected surfaces extend up to 15km radius, regularly crossing multiple local planning authority boundaries and potentially multiple SDS areas
- **Noise contours:** Aircraft noise exposure affects communities across SDS boundaries; Noise Action Plans and environmental mitigation strategies require coordinated strategic planning
- **Surface access corridors:** Road and rail infrastructure serving airports spans multiple authorities and SDS areas
- **Airspace:** Flight paths and airspace modernisation programmes have no regard for administrative boundaries

The consultation states SDSs "*will be essential*" for cross-boundary engagement but provides *no mechanism or requirement* to ensure this happens effectively for aviation infrastructure.

3. Housing Pressure vs Airport Operations

SDSs will '*apportion and distribute housing need to the most appropriate locations*'. The draft NPPF's new *presumption in favour of development* within settlements creates significant risk:

- **Agent of Change principle:** Whilst extended to aviation, protection is inadequate where housing pressures drive development into areas already experiencing aircraft noise
- **Noise exposure:** Planning precedents (e.g. Gatwick North East Sector) have permitted residential development at 66dB LAeq, which subsequently constrains airport operations
- **Future operational flexibility:** Housing allocations in SDSs could sterilise land safeguarded for runway extensions, terminal expansion, or airspace change

4. Economic Development and Employment Clusters

SDSs must support economic growth, yet the consultation does not address **airport economic zones**:

- **Employment clusters:** Airports catalyse 'aerotropolis' development – logistics, warehousing, business parks, hotels. SDSs should identify and support these strategic employment locations
- **Enterprise Zones and Freeports:** Several airports host or adjoin EZs/Freeports requiring coordinated infrastructure investment and planning framework
- **Innovation clusters:** Aviation-related R&D, training facilities (STEM), and advanced manufacturing require strategic land allocation

5. Financial Viability of Smaller Airports

Many smaller airports depend on *property portfolios for financial viability*. Aviation operations alone may not generate sufficient revenue; commercial development (retail, logistics, business parks) on airport-owned land is essential. SDSs that fail to recognise this commercial imperative could:

- Prevent airports from **maximising economic value** of their landholdings
- **Threaten the financial sustainability** of regional connectivity



- **Undermine emergency services provision** and business aviation capability

6. Environmental and Climate Considerations

SDSs must contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. For aviation this creates tensions:

- **Decarbonisation pathways:** Aviation is a slow-decarbonising sector; SDSs should recognise sustainable aviation fuel infrastructure, electric aircraft charging, and hydrogen facilities as strategic infrastructure
- **Biodiversity Net Gain:** Airport operations (particularly bird strike risk) are incompatible with certain ecological enhancements; SDSs must recognise aerodrome safeguarding requirements
- **Modal shift:** Surface access strategies requiring sustainable transport can conflict with dispersed catchment areas typical of regional airports

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE ACTIONS

Your response should address the following (consultation questions 1-5):

For Question 2 (Agreement with proposed SDS areas):

- **Conditionally support** proposed geographies **only if** they include mandatory provisions for cross-boundary coordination on aviation infrastructure, safeguarding, and noise impact

For Question 3 (Issues/challenges):

- Highlight that aerodrome safeguarding zones extend beyond SDS boundaries
- Note aircraft noise contours cross multiple SDS areas requiring coordinated planning
- Emphasise risk of housing allocations sterilising airport development/operations
- Identify lack of recognition for airport economic zones and employment clusters

For Question 4 (Alternatives/improvements):

Request specific SDS content requirements:

- Mapping and protection of aerodrome safeguarding zones
- Strategic policies on noise exposure and residential development exclusion zones
- Identification of airport economic zones and associated employment land
- Mandatory consultation with aerodrome operators on housing sites within 15km
- Recognition of aviation infrastructure in strategic infrastructure assessments

For Question 5 (No proposed SDS area):

- If your airport is in a 'grey' area (Group 4), propose a geography that **keeps the entire aerodrome safeguarding zone within a single SDS** where possible



CONCLUSION

This consultation represents a **critical intervention point**. Once SDS geographies are confirmed and SDSs are prepared, opportunities to address aviation infrastructure requirements will be limited. The absence of aviation-specific provisions in the consultation document should not be interpreted as airports being unaffected – rather, **explicit inclusion is essential** to prevent SDSs from inadvertently constraining airport operations, sterilising development potential, or failing to support the strategic infrastructure role airports play.

The planned geographies of the SDS are set out in Annex A and Annex B.

Action required: Submit response by 26 March 2026 via online survey at <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/planning/consultation-on-sds-geographies> or email to strategicplanning@communities.gov.uk

CRITICAL TIMELINE

10 March 2026	Draft NPPF consultation closes (includes SDS content requirements)
26 March 2026	SDS Geographies consultation closes – RESPONSE DEADLINE
Summer 2026	Strategic Planning Boards established; SDS duty commences; authorities can formally begin SDS preparation
2027-2029	SDSs prepared, consulted, examined, and adopted; local plans must conform

Annex A: Proposed SDS areas

Group 1: Proposed SDS geographies based on existing devolution footprints

SDS Area	Strategic Planning Authorities	SPB required?
Greater London	Greater London Authority	No
North East	North East Combined Authority	No
Tees Valley	Tees Valley Combined Authority	No
Lancashire	Lancashire Combined County Authority	No
York and North Yorkshire	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority	No
Liverpool City Region	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority	No
Greater Manchester	Greater Manchester Combined Authority	No
West Yorkshire	West Yorkshire Combined Authority	No
South Yorkshire	South Yorkshire Combined Authority	No
Hull and East Yorkshire	Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority	No
East Midlands	East Midlands Combined County Authority	No
Greater Lincolnshire	Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority	No

SDS Area	Strategic Planning Authorities	SPB required?
West Midlands	West Midlands Combined Authority	No
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority	No

Group 2: Proposed SDS geographies based on Devolution Priority Programme footprints

SDS Area	Strategic Planning Authorities	SPB required?
Cumbria	Cumbria Combined Authority	No
Cheshire and Warrington	Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority	No
Norfolk and Suffolk	Norfolk and Suffolk Combined County Authority	No
Greater Essex	Greater Essex Combined County Authority	No
Hampshire and the Solent	Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority	No
Sussex and Brighton	Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority	No

Group 3: Proposed SDS geographies not based on existing devolution footprints

SDS Area	Strategic Planning Authorities	SPB required?
Bracknell Forest, (Buckinghamshire), Oxfordshire, Reading,	Bracknell Forest Council Buckinghamshire Council Oxfordshire County Council	Yes

SDS Area	Strategic Planning Authorities	SPB required?
Slough, Swindon, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham	Reading Borough Council Slough Borough Council Swindon Borough Council West Berkshire Council Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Wokingham Borough Council	
Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes	Bedford Borough Council Central Bedfordshire Council Luton Borough Council Milton Keynes City Council	Yes
Hertfordshire	Hertfordshire County Council	No[footnote 1]
Wessex	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council Dorset Council Somerset Council Wiltshire Council	Yes
Surrey	Surrey County Council	No[footnote 1]
Kent and Medway	Kent County Council Medway Council	Yes
Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland	Leicestershire County Council Leicester City Rutland County Council	Yes
Stoke and Staffordshire	Staffordshire County Council Stoke on Trent City Council	Yes
West of England and North Somerset	West of England Combined Authority North Somerset Council	Yes



Group 4: Remaining areas where we want to hear proposals for appropriate SDS geographies

SDS Area	Strategic Planning Authorities	SPB required?
<p>No proposed SDS area</p>	<p>North Northamptonshire Council West Northamptonshire Council Warwickshire County Council Worcestershire County Council Gloucestershire County Council Shropshire Council Herefordshire Council Telford and Wrekin Co-operative Council Cornwall Council Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority Plymouth City Council</p>	<p>To be confirmed</p>

References:

- *MHCLG (2026) Areas for producing spatial development strategies*
- *MHCLG (2025) Draft National Planning Policy Framework*
- *Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025*
- *CAA CAP 738: Safeguarding of Aerodromes*







SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 8

Item 8: Update from Chairman/Policy Director on Independent Transport Commission report plus discussion on new aviation technologies

Recommendation: that members note content of update, read ITC report, note discussion on new technologies and consider attending the event planned by ITC on 3rd March.

Independent Transport Commission report

You will, by now, be aware that SASIG has co-sponsored, in conjunction with the CAA and led by the Independent Transport Commission, an important report looking at the major challenges the aviation sector currently faces and what new technologies can contribute to dealing with them. That report, which was authored by our Policy Director Chris Cain from Northpoint Aviation, was published on 17 November 2025 and Chris will be able to update members with any further information. Feedback from the general industry so far is good and promotion of the report included an appearance on morning radio (LBC and GB News) by Chris.

To summarise: the report focuses on three of the main challenges to the industry (see below), although there are obviously many others:

- A. Environmental sustainability: the urgent – but extremely difficult – need to cut emissions;
- B. Congestion and capacity: the need for more efficient use of capacity in the air and on the ground;
- C. Advanced Air Modalities: the new opportunities offered by drones and other emerging aviation technologies.

The report seeks to highlight the wide range of potentially transformational technologies becoming available to meet those challenges and others that the sector faces today.

The report - **'The Policy and Regulatory challenges arising from New Aviation Technologies'** - is available on the ITC's website – see below:



<http://www.theitc.org.uk/our-research/research-reports-2/>

The direct link for the report on the ITC website, is as follows:

<http://www.theitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ITC-CAA-New-Aviation-Tech-report-Nov-25.pdf>

A copy has also been placed on the SASIG website and each member should have received a copy of the report itself along with accompanying appendices/documentation.

New aviation technologies

The aviation industry is having to adapt to a world that needs to deal with sustainability on a level never experienced before. We are therefore, seeing a shift towards transformation with the introduction of new technologies that promise to enhance in the main, safety, efficiency and sustainability. These include electric and hydrogen powered aircraft, Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and, of course, drones.

SASIG has long been in favour of promoting new technology within aviation as this is the only way forward. (We have, of course, also set up our own Drone Bureau with a view to helping our members and associates, navigate their way through the minefield of drone policy, procedure, necessary restrictions, etc. etc!) But what are these new technologies and their potential and is there any help available out there towards funding their research and development? Below is a brief update and members are free to add comments:

Electric Aviation:

The electric aviation sector is evolving quickly, with several groundbreaking developments and partnerships in this field that will help shape the future of sustainable air travel. For example, at the end of last year, it was reported that electric flying taxis with speeds of up to 150mph could be available to UK passengers as early as 2028, with plans to gain approval for commercial flights by that date. British company Vertical Aerospace are hoping that its electric Valo aircraft, which will carry up to 6 people, can obtain the regulatory green light it needs to introduce the first commercial routes within 3 years. It says the flying taxi has the potential to provide a service to passengers at "a similar cost" to hiring an Uber. And last month (January) Doncaster Sheffield Airport said that electric aircraft described as "sky taxis" could fly from when it reopens. The lightweight vehicles, which travel at up to 150mph, can carry about 5 passengers and are said to be part of the airport's proposed growth strategy.

Again, only last month it was reported that the UK's Bristow Group had placed an order with electric short-take-off-and-landing (eSTOL) manufacturer Electra.aero, securing the first 5 delivery slots of the hybrid-electric EL9 Ultra Short aircraft. The EL9 is



expected to carry 9 passengers or 3,000 pounds of cargo for 330 nautical miles (611 kilometres), with take-off and landing capability on runways as short as 150 feet.

Autonomous Flight Systems: (Unmanned)

Autonomous flight technologies are revolutionising aviation by enhancing safety, operational efficiency and enabling new transportation concepts like Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). In January of this year, British aviation history was made with the [UK's first truly autonomous full-size helicopter completing its maiden flight](#), operating from Predannack airfield in Cornwall. The helicopter was designed and built by Leonardo as a demonstrator for the Royal Navy, to unlock the potential of uncrewed aerial systems, operating them side-by-side with crewed aircraft in a future 'hybrid air wing', and potentially at the heart of future anti-submarine operations.

In December 2025, it was reported that [Spaceport Cornwall has begun work on a major new collaboration with the National Drone Hub](#) to create a unique testing environment for uncrewed aerial systems in the UK. The project brings together civilian and military airspace to support the development and certification of next generation autonomous aircraft, ranging from small drones to high speed and supersonic uncrewed vehicles.

Sustainable Aviation Fuel:

To build demand for sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) in the UK, the Government introduced a [SAF Mandate scheme](#) beginning on 1 January 2025. The scheme sets annually increasing targets for fuel suppliers to ensure a proportion of their jet fuel is SAF, starting at 2% in 2025, reaching 10% by 2030 and 22% by 2040. The government also announced support for the UK SAF industry through a grant funding scheme, the [Advanced Fuels Fund, for which £63m of funding](#) was available in 2025/26.

AI and Automation:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) cannot go without a mention. Like it or not, it is here to stay and used properly across the aviation sector, should go towards helping transform the industry by enhancing safety, efficiency and customer experience. For example, it can help detect foreign object debris (FOD) on the runway, unlawful unmanned aircraft (like drones) in the areas surrounding airports as well as support in the prevention of bird strikes. It can also help support in creating more effective and robust systems to prevent cyberattacks – something we are likely to see more of in the future.

One of the greatest powers of AI is the ability to process vast amounts of data and learn from it. As such, this can be used for detecting weather patterns, develop ways of better maintenance of aircraft and look at emission rates of aircraft for example.

Potential funding for R&D of new aviation technology:

Below are just some of the recent UK Government support schemes:



20 January 2026: The DfT announced up to £43 million of funding available for green aviation projects. Businesses, researchers and universities across the UK will be invited to bid for their share, with competitions launching from February to allocate the funding. This funding will go towards research and development projects that help to deliver net zero aviation by 2050. You can find more details about this [here](#).

Local Transport Grant allocations: Allocations for the Local Transport Grant (LTG) by local authority – see information on this [here](#).

29 September 2025: Over £4 million in funding was awarded to pioneering British businesses developing next-generation aviation technology – [see here](#). Invested as part of the government’s Future Flight programme, delivered by Innovate UK, the funding was designed to secure the UK’s global leadership in the future of aviation and the fast-growing field of drones and unmanned aircraft systems.

22 July 2025: the Aviation Minister announced the [17 cutting-edge UK companies that would share £63 million to accelerate sustainable aviation fuel \(SAF\) production](#). The boost would help secure Britain’s position as the global leader in the green aviation market. These winners would share the money used to accelerate SAF production and support 1,400 jobs in the UK. The official press release can be seen [here](#).

May-June 2025: [Transport Research and Innovation Grants \(TRIG\) 2025](#) supported early stage, high-risk research and development projects with up to £45,000 in grant funding. There does not seem to be the same available for this year:

Finally, following the release of the ITC report as detailed above, an invitation is extended to you to join a **high-level webinar to be held on: Tuesday 3rd March 17:00 – 18:30** titled ‘**What will be the policy and regulatory impacts of new aviation technologies?**’ and which will be exploring the future of sustainable aviation in the UK. (Please also see information on this sent to all members on 17 February).

The discussion will be chaired by ITC Commissioner and Chair of the report working group Dr Stephen Hickey, and a highly distinguished expert panel including: Professor Anna Smallwood (Cranfield University), Dr Mark Bentall (Head of R&T, Airbus) and Sophie Lane (Aviation Technology Institute).

Webinar discussion themes will include:

- Can aviation growth align with UK climate targets?
- What will it take to scale SAF commercially?
- How should regulation adapt to drones and new air modalities?
- What kind of long-term strategy does the UK need?

We do hope you will be able to attend. Registration details can be found [here](#) and below:



Link to register: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_b3Gk-UOHTAKhvanjHgntA



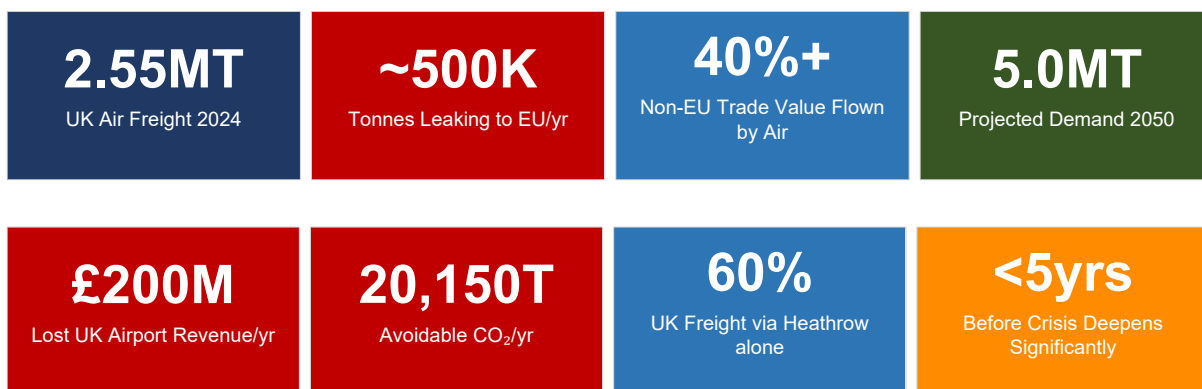
SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 9

Item 9: The Need for a UK Air Freight Strategy

This item provides a summary of the case for pressing Government to produce a dedicated Air Freight Strategy – and why this should matter to every local authority in the UK

Recommendation:

That SASIG agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Transport pressing for a dedicated Air Freight Strategy to be produced as part of the forthcoming Freight Plan, developed in parallel with the Airports National Policy Statement review



The Leakage Crisis

An estimated 384,000–500,000 tonnes of UK air freight - 15–20% of total demand - is trucked overland to Amsterdam, Liège, Brussels, Frankfurt and Luxembourg each year because UK airports lack capacity to accommodate it.

This happens because passenger services yield 3–5 times more revenue per slot than freighters. At Heathrow — handling 60% of UK air cargo — only around 6,000 movements remain before the legal cap of 480,000/year is hit. Freight loses out. The result is structural leakage that costs the UK economy hundreds of millions annually.

Cost	Est. Annual Impact
Extra shipper transport costs	£24–33m
Lost UK airport revenues	£150–200m
Avoidable CO ₂ (trucking)	11,800–20,150 tonnes
Unnecessary HGV movements	Thousands per year

Demand vs. Capacity: The Emerging Gap



Scenario	2025 Demand	2025 Capacity	2050 Demand	2050 Cap. (No R3)	2050 Cap. (With R3)
UK Total (MT)	3.0	2.5	4.5–5.0	~3.4	~5.2
Heathrow (MT)	1.54	1.75	—	1.875	3.0
EMA (MT)	0.34	0.40	—	0.625	0.625
Leakage (MT)	0.50	—	1.5+ (no action)	—	0.25–0.5

Sources: CAA Airport Statistics 2024; SASIG/Northpoint analysis; Boeing World Air Cargo Forecast 2024–2043

Heathrow's approved third runway (announced November 2025, opening targeted 2035, cost £49bn) will eventually close the gap. But a critical 10-year window exists during which leakage will worsen substantially without interim policy action.

The Policy Gap

The Government has produced strategies for road, rail and maritime freight. Air freight has none. The 2022 Future of Freight plan touched on aviation but set no specific objectives. In April 2025, the Transport Secretary signalled a new Freight Plan is coming — but made no substantive commitment to aviation cargo.

Two developments now create a unique window:

- The Airports National Policy Statement review (launched October 2025, draft expected Summer 2026)
- The forthcoming DfT Freight Plan, which the Secretary of State has described as 'vision-led'

Government has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a forward-looking plan for airfreight. Failure to act will consign the UK to worsening capacity shortfalls and strategic dependency on EU airports for the movement of its most valuable goods.

Why This Matters to Local Authorities

1. Your Local Airport

Regional airports — including Prestwick, Bournemouth, Doncaster Sheffield, Manston, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast — collectively have capacity for 500,000+ additional tonnes. Without strategic direction from Government, they cannot attract the investment to realise it. A National Air Freight Strategy provides the policy backing airports need

2. Exporters in Your Economy

Businesses in your area exporting pharmaceuticals, precision engineering, food and drink, fashion and technology depend on reliable air freight. Capacity constraints add cost and time, reduce international competitiveness, and can ultimately push production towards better-served locations. The Government's June 2025 Trade Strategy targets £5bn in new export opportunities — that ambition requires an efficient air freight system.



3. JIT Manufacturing

Automotive, electronics, aerospace and pharmaceutical plants across the UK depend on just-in-time air imports to keep production lines running. Capacity constraints and delays create production disruptions, directly threatening manufacturing employment.

4. E-Commerce and Consumers

Consumer expectations for rapid delivery of international goods are only met through efficient air freight. UK e-commerce is projected to grow at 5–7% CAGR to 2040. Without UK capacity, this growth is served via EU airports at higher cost and with greater delay to consumers in your area.

5. Supply Chain Resilience

The UK's concentration of 60% of air freight through a single airport system is a critical resilience vulnerability. A diversified, networked approach protects against disruption. As councils responsible for emergency planning, SASIG members have a direct interest in resilience.

6. Logistics Sector Investment

Logistics companies create large numbers of jobs across the skills spectrum and generate significant business rates revenue. Airports with strong freight operations attract warehousing, distribution and supply chain investment. A strategy promoting regional freight airports brings logistics investment to areas outside the South East.

7. North–South Rebalancing

Currently, UK air freight is overwhelmingly concentrated in the South East. Businesses in the North and Midlands face longer supply chains and higher freight costs than southern competitors.

Airport	Region	2024 (T)	Potential 2050
Heathrow	South East	1,454,000	3,000,000
East Midlands	E. Midlands	343,000	625,000
Manchester	North West	88,395	225,000
Prestwick	Scotland	9,514	60,000
DSA*	Yorkshire	0	175,000

**Subject to reopening*

8. Eliminating Long-Distance HGV Runs

Companies outside the South East are forced to truck goods to Heathrow or EMA — adding 200+ miles, 4–5 hours and significant cost and emissions to every air consignment. This is a structural competitive disadvantage. Developing regional freight airports eliminates it.

A manufacturer in Leeds trucks goods to Heathrow for air export. A competitor in Lyon drives to Lyon Airport. This cost and time penalty, compounded across thousands of consignments per year, makes UK regional businesses systematically less competitive than their European counterparts.

9. Better Freighter/Bellyhold Balance

Dedicated freighters carry hazardous materials, outsized goods, live animals and express freight that bellyhold cannot. Growing the freighter share of UK air cargo — supported by regional airports with 24/7 operations — strengthens the UK's overall freight capability and resilience.

What a National Air Freight Strategy Should Cover

a. Network Development

Move beyond the single-hub model. Designate a Regional Air Cargo Network (RACAN) — analogous to Germany's three-hub system (Frankfurt, Leipzig/Halle, Cologne) — with Heathrow as the global hub, EMA as the integrators' hub, and a network of regional airports absorbing growth and leakage.

b. Capacity Protection

- Maintain Traffic Distribution Rules at Heathrow and Gatwick to protect freighter slot access alongside passenger growth
- Introduce TDR protections at Stansted and Luton when they reach 90% utilisation
- Prioritise night-time slots for freighters at regional airports

c. Infrastructure Investment

- Capital investment in cargo handling, cold chain and customs infrastructure at regional airports
- Improved road and rail links between regional freight airports and freight-generating centres
- Freeport or differentiated customs designations for identified air freight airports
- Funding support for Doncaster Sheffield reopening and Manston development

d. Integrators and Traffic Rights

- Extend fifth and sixth freedom rights to all-cargo aircraft at regional airports
- Active engagement with DHL, FedEx, UPS and Amazon Air to encourage UK regional hub investment

5. Sustainability

- Accelerate SAF mandate delivery — only 1.6% achieved against a 2% target in 2025
- Develop green freight corridor framework linking air with zero-emission ground transport
- Report annually on CO₂ savings from leakage reduction

6. Resilience

- Designate a minimum network of airports with year-round freighter capability as critical national infrastructure



- Develop sector-specific resilience protocols for pharmaceuticals, food, defence and humanitarian freight

7. Innovation

- Regulatory framework for drone integration with air freight hubs
- UK Air Freight Innovation Fund to co-invest in next-generation cargo and handling technology

International evidence is compelling. Germany, the Benelux countries, the US and Australia all operate planned, networked air freight systems. The UK's ad hoc, single-hub approach is an outlier — and businesses are paying the price.

SASIG's Policy Recommendations

Timescale	Action	Lead
Immediate (2026)	Commit to a standalone National Air Freight Strategy within the Freight Plan	DfT
Immediate (2026)	Include air freight capacity as a central ANPS consideration	DfT
Immediate (2026)	Commission independent review of leakage volumes and economic impact	DfT / DBT
Immediate (2026)	Convene an Air Freight Advisory Council including LA representatives	DfT
Medium-term (2027–30)	Publish Strategy with measurable leakage-reduction targets	DfT
Medium-term (2027–30)	Designate Regional Air Cargo Network (RACAN)	DfT
Medium-term (2027–30)	Fifth/sixth freedom rights at regional airports; freeport designations	DfT / HMT
Long-term (2030–40)	Reduce leakage to below 5% of UK O&D demand (from ~20% today)	DfT
Long-term (2030–40)	Achieve 22% SAF blending; UK as leading European air freight hub	DfT / DBT

Draft Letter to the Secretary of State

Dear Secretary of State,

National Air Freight Strategy

The Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG), representing local authorities across the UK, writes to urge the Government to include a comprehensive Air Freight Strategy within the forthcoming Freight Plan, to be developed in parallel with the review of the Airports National Policy Statement.

We note with concern that an estimated 384,000–500,000 tonnes of UK air freight — approximately 15–20% of total UK air cargo demand — is trucked overland to airports in near-Europe each year because UK airports lack the capacity to accommodate it. This market failure costs UK businesses and airports hundreds of millions of pounds annually, generates thousands of tonnes of avoidable CO₂, and leaves UK exporters and importers at a structural competitive disadvantage.

Government has produced strategies for road, rail and maritime freight. The forthcoming Freight Plan and ANPS review provide the ideal vehicle for aviation to receive equivalent strategic attention. Our member councils represent businesses and communities whose prosperity depends on an efficient, reliable, and strategically planned air freight network. We urge you to act on this opportunity before it passes.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further.

Yours sincerely, The Chair, SASIG

Key Performance Indicators Proposed

- Leakage as % of UK O&D demand — reduce from ~20% to <5% by 2035
- Total UK air freight capacity — reach 5.0MT by 2050
- % freight handled outside London system — increase from ~20% to 35%+ by 2035
- CO₂ per tonne-km — 30% reduction by 2035
- Regional airports with 24/7 freighter ops — 6+ by 2030
- Logistics jobs at regional air freight airports — 50,000 additional by 2035

Sources and Evidence Base

- CAA Airport Statistics 2024
- Boeing World Air Cargo Forecast 2024–2043
- DfT Future of Freight (2022)
- DBT New Trade Strategy (June 2025)
- SASIG/Northpoint leakage analysis and white paper (Jan 2026)
- Journal of Air Transport Management (Budd et al. 2017; Matsumoto & Domae 2018)
- Transport Policy (Almofeez et al. 2024)

Full supporting paper and technical annexes available on request from the SASIG secretariat.

The UK has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a world-class, network-based air freight system that reduces leakage, strengthens regional economies, creates tens of thousands of jobs, and positions the country as a leading global logistics hub. SASIG urges Government to seize it.



**SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 10**

Item 10: Future dates for SASIG/CAG meetings in 2026

Recommendation: that members note all dates for their diaries

SASIG Full Members Meetings:

Additional dates for SASIG meetings for 2026 to be discussed and determined.

- Late June/early July is the target period for the next meeting
- Early/mid-October for an autumn meeting

Please note that when choosing a date for the AGM in June or July, the **LGA Conference is being held 7 – 9 July**. Members may be unable to attend both.

Chairman's Advisory Group (CAG):

Additional dates for CAG meetings for 2026 to be discussed and determined.

- Late May/early June is the target period for the next meeting
- Early/mid-September is the target for the post-summer meeting



**SASIG Meeting: 25 February 2026
Item 11**

Item 11: A.O.B.

Implications of the Local Government elections decision and the need for SASIG to consider how best it can transition the Local Government re-organisation process.

The proposal is to set up a separate discussion Group to bring back advice to the AGM in June/July.

