

CONSULTATION UPDATE AND RESPONSES ABOUT THE PUBLISHED REPORT

Following the March Council meetings, the Council received correspondence, with a range of issues or questions being raised which the report has identified. In total, it is estimated that over the summer period, the Council received around 1000 items of correspondence, with the vast majority mistakenly believing that a decision had been taken, with the writers against this 'decision' and urging the Council to reject the application in any case.

The correspondence revealed that some mistakenly believed that new operating hours had already commenced and associated early morning plane movements with Biggin Hill Airport. On investigation, these movements proved to be long haul Heathrow bound flights rather than a breach of the lease or the start of new operating hours.

Many of the correspondents stated that they were repeating their previously expressed views but there were also a small number of new respondents who had not been aware of the original consultation in spite of the borough wide door-to-door distribution of consultation materials.

Some correspondents expressed concerns about the Council's consultation, questioning the wording of the consultation for instance. It is important to note that the Council does not routinely need to consult from a legal perspective on landlord and tenant matters but has a longstanding commitment to consult on matters about Biggin Hill Airport. The consultation was primarily designed to enable respondents to easily express their views, with the question being a simple "yes" or "no" answer and directly related to the full range of proposals submitted by Biggin Hill Airport.

More recently, following the release of survey data (minus personal data) in response to a FOI request, FlightpathWatch have raised concerns about the consultation results with the Council. The data released as part of the FOI response shows that there were 16 IP addresses which had been used to record large numbers of 'yes' responses and very few 'no' responses, leading FlightpathWatch to question how valid the consultation was. In total, the 16 IP addresses included 22,111 'yes' responses and just 63 'no' responses. If all of the online consultation responses were excluded, it should be noted that there were 12167 paper responses, with 6626 (54.5%) stating 'yes', with 5541(45.5%) stating 'no'.

The consultation analysis included in the report on 25th March noted that "the response rates have been influenced by 'canvassing', with supporters 'for' and 'against' actively encouraging others to respond. Whilst it is probably not possible to definitely confirm exactly what has happened, it is known that as part of the canvassing, responses were gathered using 'ipads', with Airport canvassers recording 'yes' responses via their ipads. This would potentially explain the three

examples listed but also would demonstrate how 'yes' canvassing used technology to record support.

Canvassing, to an extent, often takes place in consultations and other opinion forming exercises and the canvassing in this consultation is part of the reason the original March analysis stated that "a degree of caution should be exercised".

It should be noted that as part of the original consultation, a sample of respondents were 'checked', with council staff knocking on a respondent's door and checking that they had responded and whether they had responded "yes" or "no". These checks confirmed that canvassing had taken place but also confirmed that individuals had given the response shown on the consultation returns. Council tax records were also checked and whilst there are limitations to this data, no evidence of 'fraud' could be found.

Whilst the outcome of the consultation remains valid, with unprecedented response levels, individuals may choose to place different emphasis or weight on different aspects of the consultation, with canvassing clearly influencing response rates, both 'yes' and 'no'. The outcome of the consultation is clear but nevertheless, should be treated cautiously as the original March reported advised. The March report stressed that the consultation was not a binding vote or referendum and was one of several factors to be taken into account.

Comments received about the report being considered

In recognition of the special interest about the proposals, an early draft report was published, with publicity also being issued, advising that any comments about the report would be summarised and circulated so that they could be considered alongside the report itself. A further update of comments about the report will be circulated at the Council meeting, thereby summarising comments received after the publication of this report.

It is difficult to know whether some respondents were aware of the report as it was not referred to in the vast majority of responses. For clarity, this summary therefore includes anyone addressing comments to the Council's Airport Consultation Group after the publication of this report on 16 October.

Since publication of the draft, the Council has received 300 e-mails or letters up to but not including Monday 16 November. All but three of the comments in the emails or letters are effectively against the extension of operating hours, with a few asking questions or clarification. Also included in the 300 figure are 87 pro-forma letters, published by Flightpath Watch, which start with the wording "Please listen Mr Patterson. We do not want to lose our sleep resulting from extended hours at the airport."

Whilst the amount of correspondence received is a relatively small number in the context of previous Biggin Hill Airport- related correspondence, it should be noted that the Council received an estimated 1000 letters or e-mails since the March meeting up and until the publication of the October report. Much of this

correspondence contains duplicate copies and therefore, the 'real' figure is much lower but nevertheless, the vast majority of correspondents stated that they were against an increase in the operating hours.

Most of the 300 comments that have been made are very similar to comments received in the Council's original consultation and many respondents referred to their previously expressed views which have not changed.

Issues of increased traffic, air and noise pollution were raised, including that there was already too much noise, not just from Biggin Hill Airport but also from Heathrow and Gatwick airports too. Sleep deprivation concerns were mentioned, for adults and for children, including sleep and disturbance concerns for patients at the Princess Royal Hospital.

The potential for a plane crash was raised and historic examples were cited as well as 'low flying'. Other respondents urged the Council to say "no" and cited previous applications and mentioned the Olympics application. Many were concerned about the principle of change, saying "once you give way to one change we feel this would open the door for the next."

Whilst very few responses received since the publication of the report refer to the published report, virtually all of the responses express opposition to any proposal to increase operating hours at Biggin Hill Airport.

In addition to these more generic 'in principle' objections to an increase in operating hours, the following comments relate more particularly to the detail contained in the proposals. The Flightpath Watch pro-forma letter states that "None of the content contained in the report published 16th October from Bromley Council can mitigate against this loss of quality of life."

Specific comments received in other correspondence include points such as "reduced noise contours will only benefit those living in the fields next to the airport and measurement of average noise over 16 hours is totally ineffective", with others also concerned by average noise measurements. Some were also concerned that the new proposed operating hours would lead to a concentration of movements at the beginning and end of the operating periods, causing noise to be concentrated at these times. Whilst others dismissed the noise monitoring and track keeping system and were not confident that other proposals such as additional jobs and the aviation college would actually happen or indeed, were needed.

In addition to individual comments received, the Council has already received comments from the following Resident Association Groups who have stated that they are against the proposals

- Keston Ave Residents Association (KARA)
- Downe Residents' Association

