

Written evidence submitted by the London Boroughs of Hillingdon, Richmond and Wandsworth and by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (“the Boroughs”) (IAQ0149)

1 Executive Summary

- Current operations at Heathrow contribute to air pollution which exceeds lawful limits.
- The only action proposed or relied upon by Government in relation to reducing the impact of their aviation transport policy around London is independent of and does not consider the impact of operations at Heathrow;
- The assumptions in the 2017 Air Quality Plan are over optimistic.
- Even on the basis of the Government’s assumptions, if Heathrow is expanded, air quality in London will continue to exceed legal limits and contribute thousands of premature deaths up to 2030 and beyond. The earlier an expanded Heathrow airport is operational the more serious will be the health effects;
- If the effects of air pollution caused by the construction of a third runway are taken into account (which they are not currently) then the effect on health and mortality of expanding Heathrow is even worse.

2 Introduction

2.1 This joint submission is made by the London Boroughs of Hillingdon, Richmond and Wandsworth and by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (“the Boroughs”). All the Boroughs have a duty to improve air quality for their communities.

2.2 We are deeply concerned about the impact of operations at Heathrow airport and the Government aviation policy in regard to the unhealthy levels of air pollution suffered by residents and workers in their boroughs, and in London and the surrounding area as a whole.

2.3 The inevitable effects on air pollution of the operation of Heathrow airport are already suffered by the Boroughs and their residents. At the moment our residents suffer illegal and unhealthy levels of air pollution, which for some lead to a reduced quality of life and early death.

2.4 If Government policy were fully to take into account the effect on air quality of the operations at Heathrow then that policy would be to take action to reduce activity at the airport now. If airport operations, including the airport related transport, were reduced then London could become compliant with legal limits of air pollutants and thousands of early deaths would be prevented.

2.5 Unfortunately, current Government policy favours expansion at Heathrow. That policy is contained in the draft Airports National Policy Statement (NPS). The draft NPS must go through a process of public consultation and parliamentary scrutiny and approval before it can be formally adopted. We wish to draw the Committees' attention to this policy and its incompatibility with legal and healthy levels of air quality hence its relevance to this Inquiry.

2.6 The Boroughs hope that Parliament thoroughly scrutinises plans for a third runway from the point of view of the environmental and health effects of poor health quality on London and the surrounding area. The Boroughs believe, on expert advice, that the plans for a third runway are incompatible with meeting standards for lawful and healthy air quality in London. This submission focuses on one Inquiry question. Please see the details below.

3 Inquiry questions

- ***How effectively do Government policies take into account the health and environmental impacts of poor air quality?***

3.1 In 2009 the then Government favoured expansion at Heathrow. This policy was challenged through the courts on the basis of its adverse environmental impact and the challenge succeeded. In 2010 the Government promised there would be no expansion at Heathrow.

3.2 Later, in July 2015, the Airports Commission recommended expansion at Heathrow, but on the basis of the wrong test for legal compliance with air quality levels.

3.3 In October 2016, the Government announced its preference for a 3rd runway at Heathrow. In February 2017 the first version of a draft National Policy Statement (NPS) for aviation was produced for consultation. The leaflet which accompanied the draft NPS told the public that “...*expansion can be delivered within existing air quality requirements...*” In fact there was no evidence that it could, and that remains the case.

3.4 For example, the Appraisal of Sustainability which accompanied the first consultation, did not support the conclusion that a 3rd runway could be expanded in line with lawful air quality limits. The consultation did say that the 2017 Air Quality Plan would be made available to consultees before the consultation closed. That did not happen. The Boroughs complained to the Government, and to Sir Jeremy Sullivan who had been appointed as an independent scrutineer of the consultation, that the consultation was, for that reason, flawed.

3.5 Sir Jeremy recommended that the Government consult again and the Government was effectively forced to do so. Air quality is thus a main reason (together with new aviation passenger demand forecasts) for the current re-consultation on the Heathrow proposal. Its stated purpose is to allow consultees i.e. the general public, to consider “the impact of the publication of the 2017 Air Quality Plan” (consultation on revised draft NPS document para 1.1).

3.6 The impact of the 2017 Air Quality Plan is impossible to derive since it does not even mention, or take into account, expansion at Heathrow. This, in itself, is an instance of the failure of different Government departments to consider the effect of their policies on each other. It makes it very difficult for the public to see and understand what is going on. The Department of Transport runs a consultation without properly considering plans to reduce air pollution. Defra produces a plan to deal with air pollution without including or considering the effect on air pollution of expansion at Heathrow.

3.7 The latest Government consultation on the draft revised Airports NPS does provide a new analysis of the projected impact of expansion at Heathrow, taking into account the 2017 Air Quality Plan. However, it should be noted that the 2017 Air Quality Plan itself is based on over-optimistic assumptions and we understand that it is to be subject to further legal challenge because it is inadequate.

3.8 In any event, in its new Air Quality Re-Analysis (2017 Plan Update to Air Quality Re-Analysis, October 2017), the Department for Transport either relies upon, or passes responsibility for action to, local authorities or, in London, the Mayor by assuming action is taken by the Mayor to introduce low emission zones and clean air zones. It then uses that action as a justification for expanding Heathrow, without taking into account the fact that that would negate the health improvements which local authorities and the Mayor are addressing.

3.9 This is to misunderstand the purpose underlying the Air Quality Directives and legislation to empower public bodies, including local authorities, to improve air quality for their populations and to maintain that improvement. If an expanded Heathrow is imposed then the measures taken to improve air quality in London for its people will not have that result.

3.10 In any event, the Department of Transport's new Air Quality Re-Analysis shows that, even with the over-optimistic analysis included in the 2017 Air Quality Plan, the operation of a third runway at Heathrow risks breaching AQ levels to 2030 and beyond.

"with the proposed opening of the scheme between 2026 and 2030 it is unlikely that concentrations in central London will have fallen sufficiently to remove the risk of the airport expansion on EU limit value compliance" (para 6.4.12 2017 Plan Update to Air Quality Re-Analysis, DfT, October 2017)

3.11 In addition, no detailed assessment has been provided of the effects of construction of Heathrow on air quality which would make the air pollution even worse.

3.12 The Health Impact Analysis accompanying the draft revised Airport NPS describes the health effects of the poor air quality resulting from the expansion of Heathrow as:

"would affect several thousand local residents as well as sensitive receptors being affected by poorer air quality, resulting in a reversal of the baseline air quality improvements. The shortlisted scheme could potentially have major adverse health effects on selected 'children and young people' and 'people with living in areas with poor health status' and moderately adverse health impacts upon all other groups" (para 6.3.26, revised Airports NPS, Health Impact Analysis, DfT, October 2017)

Conclusion

3.13 Government's 2017 Air Quality Plan takes no account of the Department for Transport's proposal to expand Heathrow. The proposal for expansion at Heathrow is inconsistent with a policy which promotes healthy air and legal limits on air pollution in London. The expansion, which does not include the impacts of a prolonged construction period, is predicted to bring increases in air pollution to over 121,000 people.

3.14 The evidence shows that current operations at Heathrow contribute to the air pollution levels which exceed lawful limits and cause thousands of early deaths. The only action proposed, or relied upon by Government, in relation to reducing the impact of their aviation transport policy is independent of operations at Heathrow.

3.15 The assumptions in the 2017 Air Quality Plan are over optimistic, open to challenge and do not include the impact of expansion at Heathrow. Even on the basis of those assumptions, if Heathrow is expanded, air quality in London will exceed legal limits and contribute to the bringing forward of thousands of deaths up to 2030 and beyond. The earlier the airport is operational the more serious its health effects. If the effects of a prolonged construction period are also taken into account then the effect on health and mortality of expanding Heathrow is even worse.

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