

Flightpath consultation must come before runway decision

The Prime Minister has been warned that signalling Government support for a third Heathrow runway would be unlawful unless the new flightpaths needed to operate the landing strip are first subject to public consultation.

The warning comes from the leaders of Hillingdon, Richmond and Wandsworth councils who have written to Mr Cameron to highlight a series of flaws and omissions in the Airports Commission's final report on aviation capacity. They point out that by law, changes to London's airspace require open consultation so a decision to expand Heathrow would preempt this statutory process. Approving a runway clearly infers the associated flightpaths will also be approved.

David Cameron is now considering the commission's dossier which recommends expanding Heathrow. Despite scrutinising the new runway proposal for over two years the commissioners failed to identify the location of its new flightpaths, nor carry out the necessary consultation.

Instead, the final report, which costs taxpayers in the region of £25m, asks ministers to approve a third runway at Heathrow without telling them where the planes will fly over London and the south east.

The local councils have now pointed out that the commission's recommendation is pointing the Government down a legal cul-de-sac and has urged the PM to dismiss the report.

The letter concludes that the local authorities "reserve their rights to take whatever action is in their power to protect their residents and communities from the devastating impacts of a new runway at Heathrow."

Leader of Hillingdon Council Ray Puddifoot said: "Even the airports commission has to agree that runways need flightpaths. If you approve one you have to approve the other.

"It will be unlawful for any Government to approve a new runway without publishing detailed flightpath data so the communities affected can exercise their legal right to scrutinise the plans. This is a major obstacle that can't be put off much longer."

Leader of Wandsworth Council Ravi Govindia said: "The law is very clear. Communities have to be consulted on air space changes and once those maps are finally published the backlash will completely change the course of this debate.

"It's very hard to justify why a two year aviation investigation failed to unearth this key piece of information. We've made it very clear to the prime minister that the commission's recommendation can't be followed until it is out in the open for all to see."

