

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

07 March 2017

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENT ON AIRPORTS

Summary

This report advises the Board on the publication of the Government's National Policy Statement (NPS) on Airports, drawing on key issues of interest to the Borough.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The last time this subject was reported to the Board, in November of last year, following the announcement that a third runway to the northeast of the current airport at Heathrow was the Government's preferred option in addressing airport capacity. Members will recall that this announcement had been made following the recommendations of the Airports Commission led by Sir Howard Davis.
- 1.1.2 The Governments position overall has not shifted and it was a conclusion that the Borough Council had positively supported, both because of the national and regional economic benefit of the preferred option and in recognition of the environmental harm that alternative expansion at Gatwick would bring to communities within the south of the Borough and elsewhere in west Kent.
- 1.1.3 The draft NPS reaffirms the Government's view that there is a need for additional airport capacity by 2030 and that the proposed Heathrow Northwest Runway is the preferred option. It sets out some analysis that compares the benefits of the preferred option with the other short-listed alternatives which include a second runway at Gatwick. In this respect the NPS recognises that the Gatwick option has less overall adverse environmental impact than Heathrow and impacts on fewer people. However, the wider economic boost, the benefit to passengers and better connectivity all weigh heavily in favour of the Heathrow Northwest Runway option, despite the environmental drawbacks.
- 1.1.4 The remainder of the NPS goes into more detail of the planning and environmental issues and mitigation that will need to be addressed through the submission of a Development Consent Order (DCO) application. The annexes to the NPS set out stringent measures that will need to be satisfactorily dealt with.

These cover a wide range of issues such as air quality, surface access, noise, carbon emissions and other environmental matters to do with habitats, flood risk, heritage light impact and so forth. Of course conventional planning considerations such as green belt and landscape impact will also need to be dealt with by the DCO. There will also be the question of the very considerable compensation that will be due and has been pledged in respect of local communities. Should Members wish to examine the documents in more detail the following link may be used:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/588764/draft-airports-nps-web-version.pdf

1.2 Observations

- 1.2.1 Some broad questions are asked in the NPS consultation about the need to identify capacity and the preferred alternative. It is recommended that the Borough Council should reaffirm its general position on these strategic considerations.
- 1.2.2 In respect of the planning and environmental issues for the DCO application to address, these seem to be comprehensive. They will, of course, generally be matters that are of greatest concern to communities and local authorities in the areas local to Heathrow.
- 1.2.3 The NPS makes it clear that the DCO application must deliver on all the matters identified and gives particular emphasis to certain issues, such as air quality levels and the assumptions made about surface access journeys made by public transport. All these environmental mitigation and compensatory measures are currently being evaluated by those putting together the DCO application. There is no doubt that will be very challenging and the standards to be achieved are very high and it remains to be seen what evidence will be presented to satisfy and monitor the aspirations of the NPS regarding mitigation.
- 1.2.4 One overall concern is that the measures to be taken could be unrealistic or unachievable without further intervention by Government, either financially or otherwise. It will be important to keep a close watch on how this situation develops through the DCO process. It is possible that opponents of Heathrow may well seize on these issues (as they have begun to do already in terms of challenging air quality matters) and seek to reintroduce other alternatives on this basis. For now it is recommended that every encouragement is given to promoting the successful delivery of the Governments preferred option.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 There are none arising from this report.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 The risk for some communities in the south of the Borough has always been the prospect of expansion at Gatwick. Whilst this seems to have reduced, the NPS still recognises the apparent environmental advantage of Gatwick over Heathrow (notwithstanding the other key issues in favour of Heathrow). There remains some risk therefore that challenges to the NPS and the subsequent DCO process in respect of the Heathrow Northwest runway may well be made.

1.6 Recommendations

In responding to the NPS consultation it is recommended that:

- 1.6.1 The Council's support for meeting need for additional airport capacity at Heathrow and the Government's preferred option of the northwest runway be reaffirmed,
- 1.6.2 The Council support the overall approach towards environmental mitigation measures in respect of the preferred option, but the risks to deliverability be noted as referred to in this report.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and policy Framework.

Background papers:

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