

RE: BIGGIN HILL CONSULTATION ON CHANGE IN OPERATIONAL HOURS

Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Biggin Hill proposals, regarding the changes in operational hours for the development of the Airport.

SDC have made representations for previous consultations regarding the development of Biggin Hill, and have been broadly supportive of the Airport's ambitions for expansion. The Council is supportive in particular of the creation of 2,300 jobs by diversifying the Airport with the creation of an aviation college, offices and hotels. This development would not just be beneficial to the immediate local economy, but the advantages might also be felt across the wider economic area as Biggin Hill is recognised as a regional employment asset for outer London.

As SDC have stated before, the development has the potential to be complementary to the Council's own economic ambitions, in particular the aspirations for an employment-led redevelopment of Fort Halstead when DSTL vacate the site in 2018. In February 2015, SDC adopted its Allocations and Development Management Plan (ADMP) which outlines the allocations that are required for housing as well as major employment sites within the District. Fort Halstead is a Major Employment Site allocation, whereby the policy for development is to be employment-led. The Council perceives that the expansion of Biggin Hill could boost economic activity within the District, with businesses seeking close proximity to such high quality infrastructure. There is potential scope for businesses to use Biggin Hill as part of a supply chain, for complementary businesses to be attracted to the area and for it to attract successful business people, both in the immediate and wider areas.

Change in Operational Hours

SDC notes that the changes in operational hours are significant as the proposal is to extend the operational hours to 11pm every day, including Sundays and public holidays. At present, Biggin Hill Airport is currently operating 99.5hrs a week. The proposal for the extension in operational hours results in a 14.5 hour increase across the week (114 hours a week), with the greatest change occurring during Sunday operations and the specific inclusion of public holidays. The extension of hours would support the expansion and redevelopment of the airport to allow greater economic development for both the local and wider economic area. This would help Biggin Hill Airport Limited (BHAL) to recognise their development ambitions, and could be complimentary to the development at Fort Halstead. However, there is a concern for an increased number of aircraft to be overflying the northern and western parts of the Sevenoaks District, leading to an increase in noise levels.

Further to this, the increased operational hours for the airport could put strain on surface access. The A233 is the primary access road for the airport and it runs south through Biggin Hill to Westerham and north to Farnborough, where the A21 provides access to the M25 at junction 4. If the operational hours were approved, there could be increased pressure on Sevenoaks District's road network, in particular the A25 between Sevenoaks, Westerham and Oxted, A21/A25 junction near Riverhead, and the M25 Junction 4 near Knockholt/Polhill. Although the development may not significantly increase peak time congestion, due to typical shift-work that employees may undertake, SDC would stress that an objective travel assessment into the effects of extended operational hours have upon surface transport, would be required to develop the proposals further, and to ensure that there is no significant impact on the existing road network.

Noise Action Plan

In its previous response, SDC recommended that the Noise Action Plan should be published as part of any further consultation, and is pleased that this point has been taken on-board. SDC is broadly supportive of the Plan, as it seeks to establish the preventative measures for noise reduction which include the regular noise monitoring and reporting for the local community, imposing limitations on types of aircraft that are permitted to use the airport, firmer controls on flying training, working with partners and organisations to change the heights of departing and arriving aircraft and restricting noise sensitive development to mitigate further aviation-related noise. SDC recommends that it would be good practice for BHAL to provide updates, relating to the successful implementation of the measures proposed, and making them publicly available to ensure there is transparency with local communities and the wider area.

SDC welcomes the publication of noise contour maps as part of the Plan, yet notices that the Sevenoaks District has not been taken into account, despite its close proximity. Further to this, there has been no publication of current flight paths as part of the submission. The Council wishes to reaffirm that it would be beneficial to publish detailed flight path maps alongside future consultation documents to show that there are no plans to increase the number of flights over parts of its area at heights that are likely to cause annoyance. The Council notes that the VOR beacon which is used for holding (or “stacking”) aircraft for arrivals for London Airports is due to be relocated. The Noise Action Plan states that the holding of aircraft over Biggin Hill contributes to the overall ambient noise, rather than operational noise at the airport. The Council would seek further clarification on the relocation of the beacon and how this would affect the holding of aircraft over Biggin Hill, and the surrounding areas, including the west and north-west of the Sevenoaks District.

Future Engagement

As noted, the Council is broadly supportive of the redevelopment of Biggin Hill Airport and the economic benefits that this could bring to wider economic area. SDC looks forward to continuing to work with the operator to help it bring forward high quality proposals for noise mitigation, and to maximise the opportunities for the airport and Fort Halstead to develop in complementary ways.