

Gatwick Airport Master Plan Portfolio Holder Report

Summary

The operator of Gatwick Airport has published a draft master plan for consultation, which looks forward to 2020. The plan proposes that passenger throughput at the airport will increase to 40 million passengers per annum by 2020. The draft response to the consultation notes that the airport plays a key role in the South East economy but raises concerns about access to the airport and the noise impacts of any increases in the number of flights. The draft response also suggests that the need for increased capacity for international travel in the South East should be assessed by Government and that any proposals for a second runway at Gatwick prior to this would be unwelcome.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the proposed response is sent to the Gatwick Airport Operators as SDC's views on the proposed growth in passenger numbers and flights.

Introduction

The Draft Gatwick Master Plan 2011 is the first master plan to be produced for the airport since it was sold by BAA to the consortium led by Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) in 2009. The primary purpose of the master plan is to look forward to 2020. It does not propose that a second runway is constructed in this time. The plan also considers the development of the airport in the period to 2030. The section on development post 2020 briefly considers capacities and issues at the airport both if a new runway is constructed and if one is not constructed. It is expected that a final version of the plan will be published in early 2012. A draft of the proposed response was considered by the Council's Environment Select Committee on 17 January 2012 and was recommended for approval by the Portfolio Holder.

Gatwick Airport Development to 2020

Gatwick handled 31.6 million passengers in 2010/11, with 242,558 aircraft movements. This is lower than the peak of 35.6 million passengers in 2007. The operator believes that the airport can grow to a throughput of 40 million passengers per annum, with 286,000 aircraft movements, by 2020. This is based on making more efficient use of the existing infrastructure. There are no proposals to expand Gatwick's footprint or construct a second runway in this period. The operator is currently undertaking a £1 billion investment programme to improve the efficiency of the airport and to expand the north terminal.

It is suggested that small increases in peak time travel might be possible but it is likely that the most significant growth will occur in the current off-peak periods. However, the forecasts are not based on any assumption of an increase in night movements above the current restrictions, which are set by the DfT at 11,200 flights during the summer and 3,250 during the winter.

The key issues for Sevenoaks District are considered to be:

- access to the airport;
- noise; and

- the economy and jobs.

Access to Gatwick

The master plan notes that 6.3% of passengers using Gatwick have their origins or destinations in Kent (p27). With the exception of London, this is the joint highest percentage of local counties (the figure for Surrey is also 6.3%). Gatwick's operator is keen to encourage more use of public transport and one of its targets is that the percentage of passengers from Kent using public transport to access Gatwick will increase from 11.1% to 15% (7.1.6).

The airport operator states that they are working in partnership with stakeholders and operators for the re-instatement of rail services between Gatwick and Kent (7.2.3). In addition to this, the master plan suggests that a new coach service from Kent will be introduced in the next few years (7.4.5). However, there are no details provided on which areas this might serve.

The plan proposes the development of approximately 7,000 additional parking spaces by 2020. This will meet a forecast shortfall at the airport of 4,000 spaces and provide capacity to meet some of the shortfall that would occur if some of the local unauthorised off-airport car parking (estimated at 5,000 spaces) was to close (6.5.18).

Significant increases in the number of passengers using Gatwick could have an adverse impact on congestion on the M25 in particular. The operator carried out a Transport Assessment on the implications of the airport's throughput reaching 40 million passengers per annum when preparing its planning application in 2009. It suggests that the road network around Gatwick will be able to accommodate the traffic that the growth in passenger numbers is anticipated to create but that improvements would be required to key junctions, including M23 j9A (7.3.16).

The draft response notes that the majority of people in Kent travelling to Gatwick would currently use the M25 and the M20 or M26, which are designated Air Quality Management Areas as they pass through Sevenoaks District. Any growth in passenger numbers at Gatwick should be supported by improved public transport links between the airport and Kent to reduce the negative impact that growth will have on congestion on the motorway network and the risk of increasing numbers of people using unsuitable local roads.

SDC support the reinstatement of direct services between Tonbridge and Gatwick (via Edenbridge). The airport operator's support for this is welcomed. The reinstated service should be more frequent than that previously operated and should be more effectively promoted by the train operator and Gatwick Airport. The master plan notes that, under the terms of the Airport's legal agreement, £1 million annually should be spent on public transport initiatives. No information is presented on where this money is currently being spent or on which projects. A proportion of this money should be put towards supporting or promoting this reinstated train service.

Noise

The master plan sets out a number of the different noise related issues that are controlled by Government regulation and policy. This includes the location of Noise

Preferential Routes for aircraft departures, departure noise limits and the night movements and noise quotas limits for Gatwick (9.5.9). Restrictions on the number of night flights, and the noise that they can emit, are to be reviewed by the DfT in 2012 and will be subject to public consultation. The operator believes that the impact of the proposed passenger growth will be within an acceptable range and that the statutory requirements would be met (S16).

Information in the master plan on noise is based on environmental assessment work undertaken in 2009 to support the Gatwick expansion planning application. This work considered the impact of an increase in throughput to the 40 million passengers per annum forecast by the master plan. The air noise contours in figures A.5 and A.10 of the master plan show a slight increase in the area of Sevenoaks District that will be affected by noise of between 54 and 57db from 2009 to 2020. The operator suggests that this will largely be a return to the situation that existed before the recession (9.5.19). However, these noise levels are an average over the period of many hours. This does not provide an indicator of the annoyance that may be caused by particularly noisy flights or the frequency of flights.

The master plan sets out a number of actions to mitigate the impact of noise, such as offering subsidies for insulation (9.5.7), but includes little in the way of measures to reduce noise levels other than relying on the phasing out of noisier planes by airlines to compensate for increased frequency.

SDC recently wrote to Edenbridge Town Council to express its support for a number of the points raised in the Town Council's response to the 'Sustainable Framework for UK Aviation: Scoping Document'. This supported the town council's view that minimum height restrictions for aircraft approaching Gatwick should be set to reduce noise and that it is not equitable for Gatwick to have many more night flights than other airports in the South East. These points are reiterated in SDC's draft response to the draft master plan. The issue of height restrictions for arrivals is, disappointingly, not considered by the master plan. In addition, the section on night flights simply identifies this as an issue for Government regulation, which will be consulted on again in 2012. The Council's draft response suggests that these points should be considered in a much more thorough assessment of how noise from flights to and from Gatwick can be reduced.

Economic Impacts

The operator predicts that an additional 1,700 jobs will be created at the airport by increasing the throughput to 40 million passengers per annum. This is in addition to the 23,000 currently employed.

The operator also predicts that once throughput reaches 40 million passengers per annum, the airport will contribute approximately £2.3 billion Gross Value Added to the economies of London and the South East. This represents approximately 0.5% of total GVA for London and the South East.

However, there is concern that the proposed plans, which involves significant increases in CO₂ emissions (as identified in figure 9.3), can not be considered as sustainable economic growth. Carbon emissions would be likely to increase significantly again if a second runway were to be built at Gatwick.

Development at Gatwick Airport Between 2020 and 2030

The master plan also considers the development of the airport in the period to 2030. It is suggested that the airport would be able to handle around 45 million passengers in 2030 without a second runway and perhaps more if there were to be a second runway built. The operator suggests that land for a second runway should continue to be safeguarded for the long-term but state that they do not currently have any plans to develop this.

It is likely that any second runway would be built approximately 1km to the south of the existing runway. The operator's noise forecasting suggests that a second runway would see a larger area to the south of Edenbridge experiencing noise levels of between 54 and 57db. The area experiencing this level of noise would extend further into Sevenoaks District (see figures A5, A10 and A14).

Whilst the operator notes that there may be a need for further improvements to public transport access by 2030 if a second runway is to be developed, there are no details provided on specific schemes.

The Council's draft response suggests that a full assessment of all options to increase capacity for international travel in the South East should be undertaken by Government to ensure that the most socially and environmentally acceptable option is progressed. It states that the development of any proposals for a second runway at Gatwick prior to this would be unwelcome.

SDC's Proposed Response

Sevenoaks District Council is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the draft master plan for the development of Gatwick Airport. The Council's primary concerns are the impact that growth of passenger throughput to 40 million passengers per annum will have on noise levels and annoyance in the southern part of Sevenoaks District, near Cowden, Hever and Edenbridge, and the impact of more passengers travelling by car to the airport from Kent. Many of the points raised in this response on noise mirror those submitted by Edenbridge Town Council. In particular, SDC supports the suggestion that the Master Plan should be considering measures to reduce noise levels and impacts, for example, by setting minimum approach heights for landing planes and by reducing the number of night flights to a number that is equitable with other airports.

SDC's responses to the consultation questions are set out below.

1. Do you think our strategy and plans for Gatwick Airport, as described in Chapter 2, will benefit the local community, the south-east region and the UK as a whole? If not, in what areas should our strategy and plans change?

SDC acknowledges that Gatwick plays an important role in the south-east economy and that it is a significant local employer. The Council are keen that Gatwick's economic benefits are maximised, whilst sustainable access to the airport is improved and aircraft noise levels and disturbance are reduced. These issues are the main focus of the remainder of the Council's response.

2. Do you have any comments to make on the air transport forecasts presented in Chapter 4?

The Council have no comments to make on the air transport forecasts.

3. Do you believe the Development Principles outlined in Chapter 5 support our ambition for Gatwick Airport?

The Council have no comments to make on the development principles at Gatwick.

4. Do you have any comments on the infrastructure developments in Chapter 6 to support growth to 40 million passengers by 2020?

The Council have no comments to make on the development of infrastructure at Gatwick.

5. Do you believe that the surface access improvements outlined in Chapter 7 are adequate to support Gatwick's growth? Do you think any further improvements are needed?

The majority of people in Kent travelling to Gatwick would currently use the M25 and the M20 or M26. All of these roads pass through Sevenoaks District and are designated Air Quality Management Areas, as a result of pollution caused by traffic levels and congestion. It is vital that any growth in passenger numbers at Gatwick is supported by improved public transport links between the airport and Kent to reduce the negative impact that growth will have on congestion on the motorway network and the risk of increasing numbers of motorists using unsuitable local roads.

The airport operator states that they are working in partnership with stakeholders and operators for the re-instatement of rail services between Gatwick and Kent. The operator's support for this is welcomed. SDC supports the reinstatement of direct services between Tonbridge and Gatwick (via Edenbridge). The reinstated service should be more frequent than that previously operated and should be more effectively promoted by the train operator and Gatwick Airport. The master plan notes that, under the terms of the Airport's legal agreement, £1 million annually should be spent on public transport initiatives. A proportion of this money should be put towards supporting or promoting this reinstated train service. In addition to this opportunity, the master plan suggests that a new coach service from Kent will be introduced in the next few years (7.4.5). This is welcomed.

6. Are there any other factors that should be taken into consideration in our analysis of the economic benefits generated by the growth of Gatwick, presented in Chapter 8?

Gatwick Airport is a strong contributor to the UK economy and plays a core role in boosting economic growth in the South-East and creating private sector jobs. The report states that *'Our sector is unique in the UK transport industry in having developed a robust and proactive sustainability initiative that is bearing results'*. Gatwick should be congratulated for endeavouring to improve their environmental policies. However, the long term emissions effect of this development shows a large increase in CO₂ emissions. Figure 9.3 (p.75) shows a large increase in Co₂ emissions for the current airport and this excludes the possible expansion of a new runway in the future. Development of this type has to be sustainable in the long term and the total emissions in Figure 9.3 is not consistent with sustainable economic growth.

7. Do you consider our strategies to manage carbon emissions at Gatwick as outlined in Chapter 9, to be appropriate? Please give your reasons.

See response to question 6.

8. Do you consider our strategies to manage aircraft noise at Gatwick, as outlined in Chapter 9, to be appropriate? Please give your reasons.

The sections on noise in Chapter 9 of the master plan clearly seek to set out the regulatory and policy framework for noise levels and noise related issues in which Gatwick Airport operates. The master plan indicates that the operator's view is that if operations are in compliance with these regulatory and policy criteria then there is little that needs to be done about the actual noise levels. Instead, the chapter's proposals focus on noise mitigation, such as providing noise information to homebuyers and funding a noise insulation scheme. Whilst these measures will be welcome by those that can benefit, it is considered that the master plan represents a missed opportunity to provide strategies to actually reduce noise levels.

The noise levels presented in the document, including those in the contour maps in appendices A.5, A.10 and A.14, are assessed using a metric which averages the noise energy over a period of many hours. Whilst this can be used as an indicator of annoyance, many individuals will react not to an average level but to the number of flights and those individual flights that stand out as being more noisy, perhaps due being lower than normal, an older aircraft type being used, or weather effects on sound propagation. Thus any increase in flight numbers will be highly undesirable to those in the south-west of Sevenoaks District.

Para 9.5.9 states that 'the DfT determines the location of Noise Preferential Routes (NPR) for aircraft departures and sets departure noise limits and the night movements and noise quotas limits for Gatwick'. It is noted that the master plan does not refer to any Government regulation of arrival noise. SDC support many of the suggestions made in Edenbridge Town Council's recent responses to the 'Master Plan' and to the 'Sustainable Framework for UK Aviation: Scoping Document', including that minimum height restrictions for aircraft approaching Gatwick should be set to reduce noise. It is disappointing that the master plan fails to deal with this issue, given that it appears to be one of the few noise related issues that are not regulated by Government.

It is suggested in the plan that the noise rise resulting from increased flights may be off set by newer quieter aircraft being used in future years. Aircraft are expensive and in a time of global financial pressures airlines may be slower to buy new planes and the older types may remain in service longer than the plan expects, thus negating some of the noise gains being used to offset increased flights.

Whilst it is recognised that the operator considers that the proposals will keep noise within regulated limits, SDC considers that the plan provides insufficient consideration of how actual noise levels and the nuisance caused by particularly noisy flights could be reduced. Proposals to reduce the impact of arrivals by establishing a minimum height at which aircraft should be approaching Gatwick should be developed.

SDC also support Edenbridge Town Council's view that it is not equitable to allow more night landings at Gatwick than other airports in the South East, as is currently the case. The Council will argue this point during the proposed DfT consultation on night flights in 2012, with a view to seeking a reduction in the number. It would object strongly to any proposal to increase the number of night flights, which could allow further increases in passenger throughput at the airport.

9. Do you consider our strategies to manage other environmental impacts at Gatwick, as outlined in Chapter 9, to be appropriate? Please give your reasons.

The Council have no comments to make on other environmental impacts at Gatwick airport.

10. Do you have any comments to make on our options for Gatwick beyond 2020 as described in Chapter 10?

It is noted that the operator does not currently propose the development of a second runway at Gatwick. Should such a proposal be put forward in the future, SDC would be concerned that the forecasts suggest that this would result in a wider area of Sevenoaks District being subjected to noise levels between 54 and 57 db. It is considered that a full assessment of all options to increase capacity for international travel in the South East should be undertaken to ensure that the most socially and environmentally acceptable option is progressed. This assessment needs to be undertaken by Government and should inform a National Planning Statement, following consultation. The development of any proposals for a second runway at Gatwick prior to this would be unwelcome.

11. Do you have any other comments to make on our master plan?

The Council have no further comments to make.