



Sevenoaks District Council
Local Impact Report
Gatwick Airport Northern Runway

PINS Scheme Reference: TR020005

7 March 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Local Impact Report (LIR) has been prepared by Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) in accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act 2008 ('the 2008 Act') as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The LIR also takes into account the advice set out in the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) Advice Note One: Local Impact Reports, republished in April 2012 (version 2).
- 1.2 A LIR is defined as 'a report in writing giving details of the likely impact of the proposed development on the authority's area (or any part of that area)' (Planning Act 2008 Section 60(3)), drawing upon local knowledge and experience to inform the Examining Authority (ExA).
- 1.3 The ExA and the Secretary of State (SoS) must have regard to LIRs in the examination process and in the decision to grant a Development Consent Order (DCO).
- 1.4 The LIR is distinct from any other representation made by SDC during the examination; it does not consider the merits of the Gatwick Airport Northern Runway project or provide the Council's detailed views. It sets out the potential impacts of the project on the authority's area.
- 1.5 In accordance with the PINS guidance on LIRs this report seeks to identify if local impacts are positive, neutral or negative, but it does not contain a balancing exercise as this will be undertaken by the ExA.

2. Sevenoaks District Council Authority Area

- 2.1 Sevenoaks District is located in West Kent in the South East of England, covers an area of 143 square miles and has a population of 120,500 (2021 Census). There are a total of 56 settlements in the District, the largest of which is the principal town of Sevenoaks, followed by the towns of Swanley, Edenbridge and Westerham, and many smaller settlements.
- 2.2 The District has a high quality landscape with a mostly rural character. 60% of land within the administrative boundary lies within the Kent Downs or High Weald National Landscapes and is 93% of land is designated as Green Belt.
- 2.3 There are many historic settlements in the District and it boasts many nationally recognised heritage assets including the historic estates of Knole, Chartwell, Hever Castle, Penshurst Place and Lullingstone Castle.
- 2.4 Sevenoaks District is a popular place to live, partly because of its proximity to London and accessibility to Europe. Strong road connections are provided by the strategic road network providing good links to the wider network. There are

14 train stations within the District, as well as others located just beyond the administrative boundary, many of which provide services in Central London in under one hour. The District is also well located for Gatwick and Heathrow Airports, as well as the Channel Ports, Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations.

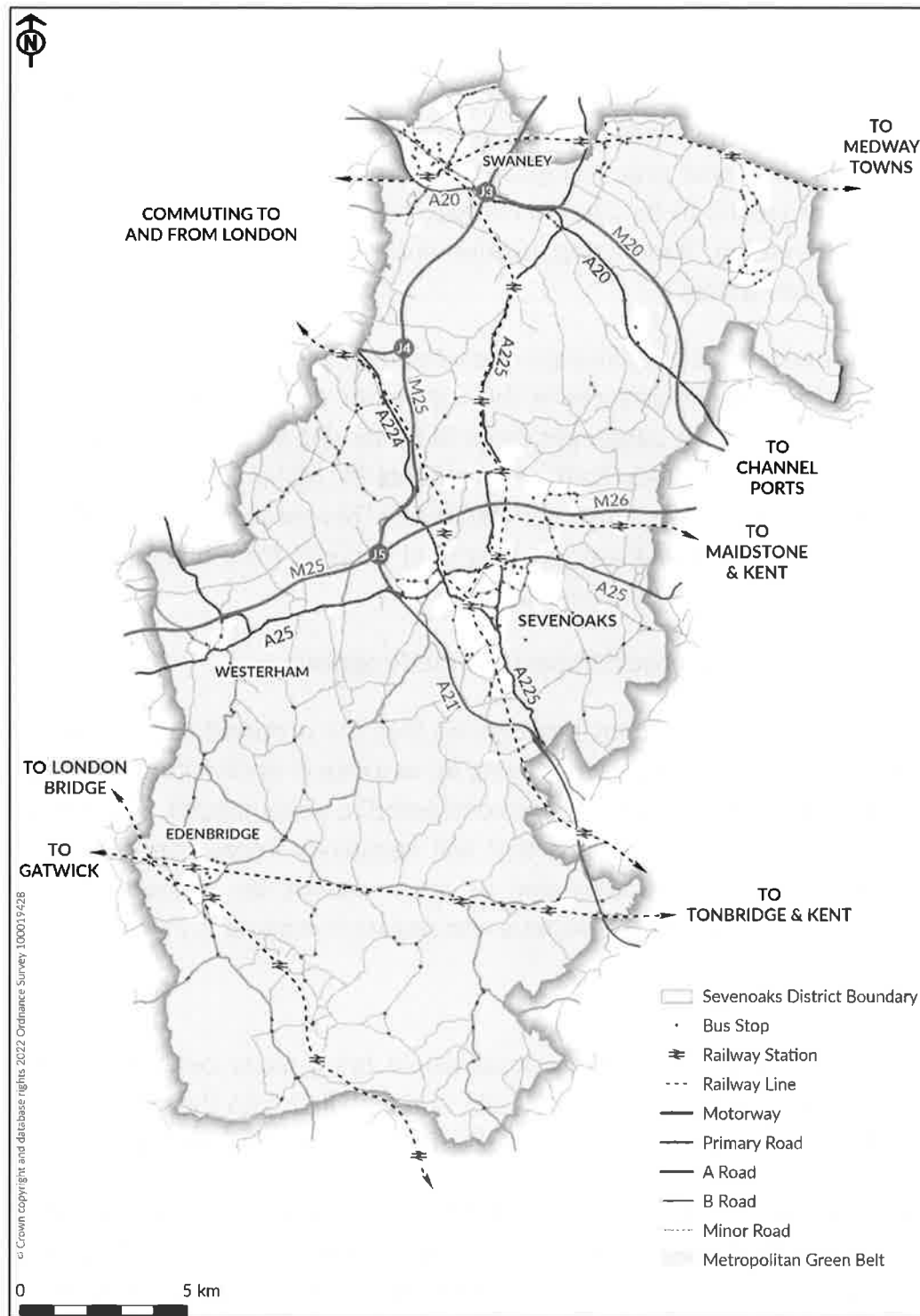


Figure 1: Map showing the main towns and connectivity within Sevenoaks District

3. The Proposal

- 3.1 The project proposes to bring the northern runway at London Gatwick Airport into routine use alongside the main (southern) runway. The northern runway is currently limited to acting as a taxiway, only available when the main runway is out of use. Bringing the northern runway into routine use would unlock new capacity and allow for a more efficient and resilient operation.
- 3.2 The project includes the development of a range of infrastructure and facilities to allow the increased airport passenger numbers and aircraft operations, through additional processing capability and improved airport access. Further, land is proposed to be used to mitigate environmental effects (for example for habitat creation, flood compensation and provision of recreational routes and public open space).
- 3.3 If approved, the £2.2 billion privately financed plan would be one of the largest capital investment projects in the region for decades, and it would help the airport meet future passenger demand by serving around 76 million passengers a year and 382,000 Air Traffic Movements (ATMs) in 2038, growing to around 80 million passengers a year and 386,000 ATMs per year in 2047. Many of these additional slots would support long haul services from high-spending markets such as the USA, Middle East and Asia.

4. Assessment of the Local Impacts of the Proposal

- 4.1 Sevenoaks District Council recognises that the proposal has both positive and negative impacts for all those living in, working in and visiting the District. The long term economic benefits are considered to be significant, however there are also environmental concerns that will negatively impact the quality of life of some of our communities and as such, cannot be ignored. The following paragraphs set out these positive and negative impacts in more detail.

Positive Local Impacts

- 4.2 It is considered that the proposal would bring many benefits to the region, including the creation of 14,000 jobs and £1 billion into the economy each year, and there is no doubt that Sevenoaks District would benefit from this.
- 4.3 With inbound visitors to the UK forecast to reach 37.5 million this year with a significant proportion of these travelling to London and the South East, it is clear the significant contribution London Gatwick Airport plays in supporting the thriving tourism industry in Sevenoaks District, alongside local, regional and national economies.

- 4.4 The development proposed in the District's emerging Local Plan (public consultation on the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan has recently closed) has the potential to attract overseas visitors, as it sets out an ambition to create a world class cluster of sporting facilities in the north of the District with key hotel developments providing the draw. Furthermore, existing establishments such as Sevenoaks School (70 nationalities represented) attract Visiting, Friends and Relatives (VFR) travellers with many arriving from overseas markets. Evidence of this strong trend was published by Visit Britain in 2023 (data obtained from International Passenger Survey by ONS) as they announced the VFR market reached 1.3m visits in August 2023, up 3% vs August 2019, just shy of the 1.34m record in August 2017. VFR visits accounted for 34% of total inbound visits in the latest month and reached new records for the last 3 months and year-to-date.
- 4.5 London Gatwick Airport's multi-million-pound rail infrastructure project was completed in November 2023, upgrading the airport's railway station to provide greater capacity. Rail services from Edenbridge to London Gatwick Airport can be undertaken in just 34 minutes, increasing across the various departure points throughout the District.

Neutral Local Impacts

- 4.6 It is considered that some elements of the project are positive but will have little benefit to Sevenoaks District directly, and as such can be recorded as neutral local impacts. The road improvements, car parking and active travel routes for example, are all localised and will help in relieving pressure for this infrastructure in and around the airport, but do not assist in improving accessibility between the District and London Gatwick Airport.

Negative Local Impacts

- 4.7 Our communities living in the southern part of Sevenoaks District (Edenbridge, Cowden, Hever, Penshurst etc) already experience adverse disturbance from aircraft noise. If the proposal is implemented as per the application, the situation for them would be made much worse. Whilst there may be wider advantages to not increasing the number of flight paths, unfortunately this will severely impact those communities already experiencing noise disturbance, as aircraft movements are expected to increase by 35%. Furthermore, these areas are predominantly rural, and as such benefit from a quieter baseline noise which makes aircraft noise more intrusive.
- 4.8 Increased noise pollution is also a concern of our national and regional tourist attractions operating in the rural southern part of Sevenoaks District, including

but not limited to Hever Castle, Penshurst Place, Chartwell and Knole Park. Notwithstanding the comments made in paragraph 4.3 regarding the significant contribution London Gatwick Airport makes in supporting the thriving tourism industry in Sevenoaks District overall, these nationally important heritage assets and tourist attractions currently benefit from tranquil settings, which are a vital aspect of their appeal to the public and consequently their ability to contribute to the local economy and to local employment. The increased occurrence of aircraft movements by 35% will exacerbate noise disturbance and negatively impact the tranquil settings they currently enjoy, which may adversely affect the visitor experience.

- 4.9 It is understood that London Gatwick Airport will commit to a legally binding noise footprint, which over time will reduce even though there will be more flights, owing to the introduction of new, quieter aircraft technology which has already made a significant difference, with the airport's noise footprint reducing by 41% over the past 20 years. However, there is little clarity on how the airport will directly achieve this. The modelling undertaken makes assumptions about future fleet replacement in order to reduce noise, but we question whether this is genuinely achievable given that decisions about fleet replacement lie outside of the airport's control.
- 4.10 The airport will also introduce an enhanced noise insulation scheme for those properties most affected by noise. This is welcomed but lacks clarity on the geographical areas to benefit from this. We would request that our communities living in the southern part of Sevenoaks District are included in the scheme.
- 4.11 The proposal would also impact the District's transport network, and it is anticipated that the proposal would result in an increase in passengers driving to London Gatwick Airport of 40%, resulting in additional traffic on the M25, M26, A21 and A25, particularly during peak hours. The proposed transport provisions do not assist in improving accessibility between the District and London Gatwick Airport and therefore our strategic road network will be further strained without any mitigating transport improvements. This will also have a significant negative impact on the District's carbon emissions as we already know that the transport sector accounts for 61% of our overall carbon emissions, making the District's work on tackling the challenge of climate change much more difficult, particularly given that there is no mitigation proposed by the airport.
- 4.12 Whilst we recognise the positive impacts of the recent railway station upgrade works at London Gatwick Airport, particularly in relation to increasing capacity, we are concerned about the lack of wider rail infrastructure proposed to support the airport's expansion, given the expected increase in airport passengers

associated with the project. It is understood that there is a clear strategic case for improving and extending rail services from London Gatwick Airport to West Kent, but that, disappointingly, barriers to funding prevent these improvements from being delivered. Improved rail services between the airport and West Kent would bring significant benefits to our communities and businesses within Sevenoaks District, as well as the airport, including shorter and more frequent journey times, the provision of genuine travel choice, reducing pressure on the District's strategic road network and helping to reduce carbon emissions. Given that no mitigation is currently proposed in respect of the impact that the project will have on the District's road network and on carbon emissions (see paragraph 4.11), it is our view that London Gatwick Airport should be contributing significantly more to enable the delivery of improved and extended rail services to better connect the airport with West Kent. It is therefore essential that a comprehensive and sustainable transport strategy is committed to and developed, working with wider national and regional transport partners to address this issue.

- 4.13 It is understood that London Gatwick Airport is committed to a global low carbon future for aviation, aligning with the wider UK aviation sector's ambitions to achieve net zero aircraft emissions, supporting the government's policy to be net zero by 2050. However, there is little clarity on how the airport will directly achieve this, nor is there clarity that new propulsion methods will be in place to remove carbon emissions in the timeframe envisaged. Aviation is recognised as both one of the most carbon-intensive forms of transport and one of the most difficult to decarbonise and so understanding how the airport will achieve its staged targets forms a crucial consideration of the project.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Overall, Sevenoaks District Council recognises that the proposal has both positive and negative impacts for our communities, and has taken a balanced approach in representing these views via our responses to previous public consultations in Autumn 2021 and Summer 2022, and will continue to do so through the examination.
- 5.2 The District Council is supportive of the project in principle, particularly in relation to the significant economic benefits the expansion will bring to our thriving tourism industry. However, we remain concerned about the negative social and environmental impacts that our communities living in the south of the District will have to endure. We consider that these negative impacts need to be mitigated properly to ensure that our communities' health, wellbeing and quality of life is not adversely affected in the longer term. We also seek clarity on the deliverability of the airport's stated net zero ambitions and, linked to this,

request further consideration be given to the wider infrastructure needs generated by the proposed development (in particular road and rail) and the impact they will have on Sevenoaks District.