

**CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO AIRSPACE AFFECTING THE  
BRAINTREE DISTRICT**

**Agenda Item**

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**Background Papers:-** NATS Terminal Control North Consultation document on proposed changes to airspace  
**Financial Implications:-** None  
**Equalities Implications:-** None  
**Legal Implications:-** None  
**Options:** To influence the spreading or concentrating of flight paths within specific corridors.  
**Risks:** Impact on the number and frequency with which residents may be affected.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

NATS Ltd has been contracted to redesign airspace in the region over the Braintree District to accommodate predicted increases in air traffic. The proposal identifies preferred routes and amends flight paths from six airports in the southeast. Generally the result is to increase the height of aircraft across the district and move holding stacks away from the Braintree area although any changes will enable a greater number of aircraft to overfly the district. The proposals are not part of any specific airport expansion programme but to ensure safety in the skies, provide sufficient capacity to support the growth in air traffic and where possible mitigate against environmental impact of air traffic.

**DECISION**

To determine a preferred option for the spread of proposed flight paths as specified in the report. Local Committees are being invited to submit views to the Cabinet Member who will then pull together a response on behalf of the Council.

## **REPORT ON NATS PROPOSED CHANGES TO AIRSPACE**

NATS is contracted by the Civil Aviation Authority(CAA) to provide air traffic control in the airspace known as Terminal Control North. This covers the southern half of East Anglia and north of the River Thames. The current airspace design is not sufficient to deal with the Government's projected increase in air traffic over South East England and is causing delays, which leads to inefficiencies and poor environmental performance.

The CAA has tasked NATS with redesigning the airspace with criteria to ensure:-

1. Safety is of paramount importance
2. Delays are minimised
3. Avoiding over flying populated areas wherever possible
4. Mitigating the impact on the environment

Airports affected by the proposal include Stansted, Luton, London City, Northolt, Heathrow and Cambridge. The redesign is part of the overall scheme of redesigning the whole of the UK airspace and does not relate to any proposals at a specific airport.

### **IMPACT ON BRAINTREE DISTRICT**

Virtually all parts of the Braintree District are overflown during any one day but the greatest impact is from flights to and from Luton and Stansted. Flights into and out of the other airports affected are at such altitude as to have little effect on the district.

Currently, arrivals for Luton and Stansted from the east at busy times are 'stacked' in a holding position between 7,000ft and 14,000ft above the Sudbury area. The proposal provides a separate stack for Luton bound aircraft near Cambridge and relocates the existing stack over to the north-east between Ipswich and Stowmarket for aircraft arriving from the east. An additional holding stack is introduced for aircraft arrivals from the west, between Haverhill and Cambridge. As a result no aircraft would be stacked in a holding position above the Braintree District. There is a new holding stack for City airport over the Dengie peninsular. Routes into the airport do not overfly the district although departures to the east and north do at a significant height.

Aircraft arriving into Stansted from the east will be able to use a continuous decent approach – a quieter and more fuel-efficient process than the traditional stepped approach. The proposed changes will also allow aircraft to maintain their height for longer during the westerly approach thus further limiting the impact on the District.

The CAA requires changing routes to use a modern navigation system called Precision Area Navigation (P-RNAV). It allows aircraft to follow a given route more accurately but this has the effect of concentrating aircraft over this route, although it may be prudent in many circumstances to deviate from this route, as directed by the air traffic controller.

The consultation asks whether it is preferable to spread the number of flights over the given corridor causing potential disturbance to more people or to concentrate the flights over the P-RNAV routes, thus reducing the number of people overflown but increasing their potential for disturbance. Departures from Stansted to the east and south remain unchanged.

## **NOISE**

The proposals show the height of incoming aircraft to Stansted over the district is maintained for longer and Luton arrivals overfly the district at a greater height. The noise incidence from each aircraft is therefore reduced, but the change in the system will enable a larger number of aircraft to overfly. The degree of overfly will depend on the capacity/efficiency of the airport but this consultation has no influence or control on demand for airspace. The noise contours from aircraft using Stansted airport are little changed as a result of the NATS proposal.

## **AIR QUALITY**

The air quality of the district is unlikely to be affected as a result of the proposed changes as the altitude of the aircraft enables sufficient dispersal of any pollutants long before they reach ground level. Continued technological improvements to aero-engines may offset some of the air quality impact from the expected increase in aircraft movements over the district. The proposed changes will also prevent delay and ease air traffic movement thus reducing the environmental impact. The full consultation can be found on the website at [www.nats.co.uk/TCNconsultation](http://www.nats.co.uk/TCNconsultation)

The proposed changes are independent of any plans for individual airports but an effect will be to enable Stansted (or any other airport in the southeast) to expand. The biggest impact on the district would be if the quota of night flights (midnight to 6am) was allowed to increase. However, that is independent of this consultation.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is therefore recommended that the proposals outlined in the consultation document are acknowledged and that Members indicate a preference for either: -

1. A distinct preferred navigation route through a narrower corridor of air space affecting fewer people more of the time
2. A dispersed route through a wider defined corridor affecting more people less frequently.

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14<sup>th</sup> April 2008