

Report and Recommendations on night flying from PCs airports consultative committee representative

The situation regarding the Night Flying Policy review is complicated. I was at the Airport yesterday for 6½ hours for an informal meeting with local representatives, then the Night Flying Policy Review Working Party, followed by the Airport Consultative Committee. This was the 3rd meeting of the NFP WP, making a total of 6 hours of negotiation. Our counterparts from the Airport are reporting directly to the Board and the 2 major shareholders.

The outcome from yesterday was that the ACC will write to SMBC requesting a further 6 month deferment of the review. It has already been delayed by 12 months. The ACC as a whole will be expected to approve any recommendation from the WP. The representative from the Knowle Society proposed a motion of confidence in the delegates on the WP, which was adopted by the ACC.

The overall position for those affected by aircraft noise is not encouraging. I would caution that it's not a case of residents "winning" in the present negotiation: it's more a question of how badly we lose. The Airport has made a few concessions that would constrain future growth, but the WP continues to explore every possibility of mitigating the disturbance to residents.

There has been substantial growth in passenger numbers at the Airport (19% year-on-year), and flights in the Night period (23:30 - 06:00) are permitted up to 5% of the (growing) total. The Section 106 Agreement for the runway extension stipulated this reduced to 4%, but the Airport now says this isn't possible. The origin of this is that proportion of short-haul flights has risen, and these aircraft are required to do three rotations a day. The first Day period 06:00 to 07:00 can't accommodate further growth because of the capacity of the Terminal, so the pressure is on getting further departures in the last hour of Night, 05:00 to 06:00. Remember that apart from the aircraft flyover noise, there is related disturbance much earlier in the night due to travel to the Airport by staff and passengers, and by movement of aircraft on the ground prior to departure.

My view is that noise is particularly disturbing in the second half of the night, but of course everyone differs in their response. Undeniably, this is a health issue. While we may be successful in limiting the noise level of movements, it is highly unlikely that Solihull MBC would place a (serious) limit on the growth in flight numbers.

The current offer is to limit the total of arrivals and departures in the Night period to 5%; to cap the number of departures (not arrivals) in the period 23:30 to 05:00 to the current level; to exclude a number of the noisier aircraft from the 05:00 to 06:00 period; and to reduce the Night flyover noise violation limit from 85 dB to 83 dB. I believe we can make further gains, possibly phased over a period. The aim would be to encourage the use of more modern and quieter aircraft, and that is probably the best that can be done in the circumstances without Solihull being prepared to stop further expansion at the Airport.