



Fact Sheet 10

Planning Environmental Issues at GA Airfields

A wide range of environmental issues may affect an airfield –directly arising from the activities taking place and impacting on development proposals. In many cases the location of an airfield in open countryside may increase environmental sensitivity. The following does not deal with the operational issues but provides a brief summary of the main matters which may be relevant in relation to proposed development and a planning application.

Noise

Noise is often key issue with planning applications. It is likely to require a detailed assessment of current and predicted noise by an expert. The definition of acceptable noise levels is now less precise (the Noise Policy Statement for England – NPSE has replaced the old PPG24) . NPSE refers to ‘Significant Observed Adverse Effect Level (SOAEL) but does not define a noise based measure of this. The NPSE aims to ‘...avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life from environmental noise...’. This is making the discussion of noise at inquiries more complex. Planning conditions may be imposed to make the proposal acceptable.

Ecology

Many airfields are havens for protected species - bats, Great Crested Newts, Reptiles, Badgers, Birds, Dormice, Toads, Water Voles, Otters and other wildlife as well as trees and other vegetation.

Any proposals for new buildings or structures will normally require an initial ‘Phase 1 Habitat Survey’ and an initial Botanical Survey (and a tree survey if trees could be affected). This initial work will identify the need for more detailed surveys. Detailed surveys must take place at defined times of the year – and for example for bats different types of survey are needed at different times of the year. It is important to build this into any programme for submission of a planning application.

The surveys may identify the need for mitigation measures to ensure no adverse impact on the ecology.

Failure to follow the procedures and thereby harming a protected species, a breeding or resting place is breaking the law.

Protected Areas

Protected areas include national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar wetlands, and sites in the process of attaining such designations. In these areas there is greater protection and more rigorous tests to be applied. This may make the preparation for a planning application more complicated and onerous. The European designations (SAC / SPA / Ramsar) have particularly rigorous tests and procedures).

Landscape

Some of the Protected Areas relate to the landscape – but other landscape designations such as ‘Areas of Great Landscape Value’ may exist. Any landscape designation needs to be considered and any proposed development should not intrude on the views and the quality of the landscape.



Water

Development may impact on the quality of water in streams or the ground water and this may therefore need to be assessed as a part of the planning application preparation process. Special measures may be needed to prevent run-off from, for example fuelling areas or fire training grounds.

In addition, the impact of development on drainage and flooding (for example if more hard standing is proposed) will need to be evaluated and a scheme may need modification in order to manage additional run-off.

Air Quality

Air quality is unlikely to be a major issue at most GA airfields although is of increasing concern at major airports. Impacts on human health and plants are the most significant matters. If needed, air quality baseline surveys must be taken over a long period of time to ensure all weather conditions are taken into account.

Heritage

Listed Buildings and Archaeology may be affected by proposed development. There are generally very good records of the location of heritage features. In areas where there are a lot of known heritage features, any excavation may need to be proceeded with on-site surveys - such as geophysical assessment. Normally any intrusive work can be managed through a planning condition (see GAAC Fact Sheet 8; Planning 4).

Traffic

Traffic impacts are usually required to be assessed with most development proposals at airfields – to understand any specific impacts on particular road junctions or road lengths as well as consideration of highway safety.

Mitigation

Any potential environmental impacts could affect the success of a planning application but appropriate mitigation measures to replacing habitats for example, may enable the development to proceed.

Environmental Impact Assessment

A major proposed scheme may require an EIA to be prepared. If this is the case, permitted development rights (see GAAC Fact Sheet 9; Planning 5) may not be used. EIA may make the planning application process longer and more complex. However, the 'scope' of the EIA can be agreed with the local planning authority in advance and if there is no justification for a particular topic to be assessed then the Authority should agree to this, on the grounds of reasonableness.

Positive measures

Environmental issues – particularly ecology do not always need to be seen as a negative. Many airfields may have areas where wildlife can be encouraged without adverse impact on aviation activities.

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This is one of a series of Fact Sheets available from the GAAC.

The planning system is not straightforward. Local policies and concerns vary across the country and as each airfield is unique, interaction with the planning system needs to be tailored to fit. If your airfield has a particular issue or if you would like further information, please contact the above address or see our website at www.gaac.org.uk.