



Fact Sheet 6 Development Plans and Their Importance For GA Airfields

PFS1 provides a very brief overview of the planning system. It explains the interrelationship between the local authority's development plan and planning applications. It also explains the key principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which must be taken into account in the preparation of development plans and in planning decisions.

The development plan is at the heart of the planning system and is the main factor taken into account in deciding planning applications.

Many GA airfields have found it difficult to navigate through the planning system with planning applications being refused, facing, frequently, a lack of understanding amongst local planners (officers and elected Councillors) of what GA is all about and what goes on at a GA airfield. Some decisions seem maverick, especially if the airfield is small and not causing noise or other problems. This situation may be improved by the new NPPF.

At the present time, few GA airfields have formal recognition or designation by their local planning authority. In contrast, small industrial estates, for example, are frequently recognised by the planning authority and in the authority's development plan are shown on the 'Local Plan Map' and protected by a policy in the 'Local Plan' (other similar terms may be used). And yet many GA airfields have a diversity of businesses and number of jobs equivalent to a small industrial estate.

Now, the new NPPF, at paragraph 104 (f) requires a planning authority to

'...recognise the importance of maintaining a national network of general aviation airfields, and their need to adapt and change over time – taking into account their economic value in serving business, leisure, training and emergency service needs, and the Government's General Aviation Strategy...'

This is the first time the national planning guidance has specifically recognised GA airfields and it raises the profile of GA. This is now a factor to be taken into account in consideration of any planning applications. But it also increases the opportunity to get an airfield recognised or designated in the Local Plan.

Recognising the importance of GA airfields, points strongly towards there being an obligation for local planning authorities to designate airfields in their local plans – in the same way as small industrial estates. The scale and diversity of activity and the location of the airfield may determine the acceptability of this, and larger GA airfields are more likely to achieve this.

Airfields should keep abreast of the preparation or updating of local plans and make representations that set out the importance of the airfield and how it may need to adapt and change to justify the inclusion of a policy in the Local Plan.



The type of policy it would be desirable to see included in a local plan would be:

'Within the area of _____ Airfield as defined on the Policies Map, development will be permitted which:

- a. is required for the operational use of the airfield;*
- b. is for aviation use or ancillary to an existing aviation use*
- c. enhances and supports the core aviation use of the airfield*

Development in the vicinity of _____ Airfield which could conflict with the safety requirements of existing activities at the airfield will not be permitted.'

Other policies of the NPPF can help airfields too. There is strong support for sports facilities. Sport England recognises a range of 'Air Sports' and the NPPF provisions promoting sport are therefore relevant to GA airfields. Therefore meeting paragraph 92 of the NPPF, which states that '*...planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision of...sports venues...*' provides further weight to GA airfields being identified and protected in local plans.

However, it is not easy to get the Council's agreement to put a policy in its development plan. To do this it is important to:

- monitor the stages of local plan preparation or review (the Local Plan should be reviewed regularly – at least every 5 years).
- engage at each stage – making representations which support, object to or seek changes
- make sure the airfield's range of activities and long term goals are understood by users, neighbours and the Council. Draw on the support in the NPPF, the GA Strategy and other Government support for GA
- get other businesses and interested parties at the airfield to also make representations. The GAAC, other aviation organisations and Sport England may be able to assist.
- be as positive and helpful to the Council as possible
- tie the airfield's representations to the Council's goals for its local plan – such as supporting the economy / protecting and promoting jobs / providing leisure facilities.

It is important for any planning application for an airfield to draw as much as possible from the provisions of the local plan and planning guidance, particularly the NPPF.

The local plan will also set out the council's policies covering, for example, protected landscapes and any application should address any such policies of relevance to the airfield and explain and demonstrate why such policies can be met or do not need to be met.

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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