



Chief Executive's Office

Timothy Wheadon
Chief Executive
Bracknell Forest Council
Easthampstead House
Town Square
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 1AQ

23 October 2014

Dear Mr Wheadon,

Heathrow Departure Trials

Thank you for your letter dated 29 September concerning the motion by Bracknell Forest Council in respect of the recent Heathrow departure trials.

When approving such trials, we rely on the Secretary of State for Transport's "Guidance to the Civil Aviation Authority on environmental objectives relating to the discharge of its air navigation functions". The Guidance is available from the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/air-navigation-guidance>

In respect of airspace trials, the Guidance suggests:

Approved operational airspace trials

- 9.8** *In addition to formal temporary airspace changes, there are operational trials which need the approval of the CAA. These trials are designed to validate proposals for new routes, the use of new technologies or operating procedures, as well as to develop the evidence base of their impact on the environment. As a consequence, they make a valuable contribution to the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK airspace network, and they will also form a key component of the successful implementation of the Future Airspace Strategy and the Single European Sky.*
- 9.9** *The Government therefore considers that operational trials should be encouraged by the CAA. In all cases, the trials should be approved by the CAA and have a confirmed start and end date, although the CAA may extend the period of the trial if it considers this appropriate. The relevant consultation arrangements are set out in Chapters 9.10 and 9.11 of this Guidance.*

In this case, the trials were aimed at validating national standards associated with the transition to Performance Based Navigation (PBN), whereby obsolete, ground-based navigation technology is replaced by satellite-based systems that utilise the full capability of modern aircraft. The move to PBN will allow the UK's airspace infrastructure to be redesigned to provide significant operational and environmental improvements as the routes being flown will no longer be dependent on fixed ground aids.

In respect of consultation/engagement requirements for airspace trials, the Guidance states:

***Consultation arrangements for temporary airspace arrangements and operational
airspace trials***

- 9.10** *Due to the short term nature of temporary airspace changes and airspace trials, it will usually not be necessary or appropriate for the airspace change sponsor to consult on their proposals or to undertake the airspace change approval process. However, the likely impact of the proposed change on the environment should be considered by the sponsor prior to implementation and this information used to help the CAA to determine whether a proportionate consultation is required.*
- 9.11** *If a permanent or long-term arrangement for the temporary or operational trial airspace was to subsequently become necessary, the full airspace change process will need to be completed by the airspace change sponsor. Normally, the airspace should revert back to its original state until such time as the full airspace change process can be completed. However, it is not always practical or prudent to disestablish a temporary airspace change whilst steps are being taken to make it permanent. In such instances, the CAA may consider extending temporary arrangements whilst the airspace change process is being undertaken. Any extension to the temporary airspace arrangement or operational trial should be closely monitored by the CAA, and action taken to swiftly revert the airspace concerned to its original state if the airspace change process requirements cannot be met.*

In approving the Heathrow trials, we considered the level of engagement undertaken by the Airport and concluded that it was appropriate given the predicted impact of the trial. It is important to note that trials such as these rely to a great extent on the willingness of the aviation industry to invest in them based on a perceived benefit for the future. If we were to impose the same consultation burden on temporary airspace trials as we do with permanent changes to airspace structure, it is unlikely that the aviation industry would be willing to invest in such trials, thereby jeopardising future operational and environmental improvements. That said, I will ask my colleagues to take into account your request for improved engagement. I cannot however, agree to enforce a formal consultation exercise associated with any future trial activity.

You will be aware that an announcement was made by Heathrow Airport about the planned suspension of the current and future departure route trials at the airport. The current trial package will cease on 13 November 2014; this date corresponds with one of the international Aeronautical Information Regulation and Control (AIRAC) dates used to promulgate changes to airspace procedures in a safe manner. The data that was gathered was considered extremely useful and will help inform future design criteria.

I have received a full read out of the Ascot meeting on 13 October and it was certainly very helpful for Mark Swan, who leads our regulatory process in this area, to get such direct feedback from such a wide range of residents, politicians and officials.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Haines
CHIEF EXECUTIVE