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Member of Parliament for Huntingdon
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

LLA and NATS Airspace Change Consultation
London Luton Airport
Airport Way
Luton
LU2 9LY

1 February 2021

Dear Sirs

Re: Airspace Change Consultation

Thank you for inviting me to respond to the LLA and NATS Airspace Change consultation, which proposes to create a new stacking hold and associated flight paths for arrivals into London Luton Airport. I appreciate the time you provided for our meeting and for your open and frank responses to my questions.

As I am sure you will appreciate, with the proposed new stack above Grafham Water, this consultation has generated a great deal of interest across my constituency. The responses I have received from both constituents and the Town and Parish Councils are universally against this proposal. To be more specific, I have received comments on the consultation from 18 Town and Parish Councils and more than 80 constituents.

Generally speaking, I share residents' concerns about these proposals and the impact the stacking hold and the arrival flight paths will have upon local communities, particularly those rural villages where the resulting noise is likely to be more detrimental.

Consultation

The consultation provides only two options and no apparent assessment of whether the Airspace Change Consultation should go ahead at all. Many constituents have advised me that they feel that this is a fait accompli, and the structure of the consultation, with no option to object altogether, rather reinforces this view.

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Few would disagree that the coronavirus pandemic has significantly impacted the way we live our lives and how business is conducted. It is too early to assess whether, and to what extent, these changes will be incorporated into the new 'normal'. The Airspace Change Consultation is based upon air travel reaching and exceeding pre-pandemic levels, but I would suggest that there is insufficient evidence, at this time, to make this assumption.

With uncertainty about international travel and the increased focus on the environmental agenda, I believe that, if not scrapped, the consultation should at least be put on hold for five years.

Location of holding stack

Both options propose a holding stack located above Grafham Water. Whilst I accept that there are arguments as to why this location has been selected, this does not preclude the stack being moved further to the north or indeed slightly to the west, as proposed by Waresley cum Tetworth Parish Council.

Questions have been raised about why the two current shared holds – the Lorel and Abbot – cannot be separated and one dedicated for Luton arrivals and the other for Stansted.

Environmental Impact

There can be little doubt about the environmental impact of these proposals on my constituency, particularly in relation to noise pollution. This is the primary concern of the many constituents that have contacted me. My constituency consists of just four towns but, in excess of thirty villages, many of whom enjoy a typical rural existence and the cost cannot be underestimated.

Communities such as Alconbury, Buckden, Brampton, Hilton and Fenstanton already experience noise pollution in varying degrees as a result of the A1 and A14 trunk roads. Residents are understandably concerned, therefore, that the implementation of these proposals will further impact the enjoyment of their homes and amenities.

Some constituents have also expressed concern that Luton Borough Council will continue to reap the financial benefits of Luton Airport, whilst my constituents bear the cost through increased air and noise pollution.

Airspace Modernisation Strategy

The Airspace Change consultation appears at odds with the Airspace Modernisation Strategy, which includes consideration of linear holds replacing more traditional stacks. Linear holds enable aircraft to be held much higher, thereby reducing the noise impact on the ground and enabling better fuel efficiency.

An assumption is made within the consultation that it will take several years before air travel reaches pre-pandemic levels. It would, therefore, seem sensible that, given the hold is not required in the short-term, the consultation should include an assessment of the Airspace Modernisation Strategy and other Government initiatives.

In conclusion, as you can see, there are a significant number of concerns about the proposals throughout my constituency, and I can only reiterate that I did not receive a single positive response to an issue, where there seems to be only negative implications for my constituents' environment and wellbeing. Given that this simply cannot have the priority that existed pre-Covid, I hope this whole issue can be scrapped or deferred for a five year period.

Yours Faithfully



cc: Town and Parish Councils
Constituents