

Mr John Holland-Kaye
Chief Executive
Heathrow Airport Ltd
The Compass Centre
Nelson Road
Hounslow
Middlesex
TW6 2GW

19 October 2015

Dear Mr Holland-Kaye,

HEATHROW COMMUNITY NOISE FORUM

The Community Noise Forum (CNF) was formed in March 2015, following a huge rise in noise complaints. Much of its focus to date has been to obtain data to explain the experience of various local communities, for whom, noise from Heathrow's flight paths has become intolerable. However, there has been widespread scepticism amongst CNF members about the repeated claims by Heathrow, NATS and the CAA that they do not know what is behind this increase in noise.

Heathrow refers to its Noise Action Plan at every available opportunity but progress against this is measured using highly selective data and contested bases of measurement (which conceal the true impacts) to support the message that Heathrow wants to portray. CNF members have been outraged by Heathrow's claims that its Noise Action Plan and its case for expansion have been developed in consultation with residents. The recent press release issued by Heathrow concerning the 2014 noise analysis (which was never discussed with the CNF) claiming that its noise impact has reduced, was yet another example of a failure to meaningfully engage with communities with the inevitable result that people do not trust what Heathrow says.

We appreciate that it will not be possible to eradicate aircraft noise completely from the airport's operations, but for Heathrow and the CAA to have any credibility there needs to be: 1) a public acknowledgement that the noise problem has got significantly worse, not better, as is evidenced by the 1600% increase in noise complaints over the past three years and the establishment of many new community groups; 2) a determination to explain the causes; and 3) an action plan to return conditions to an acceptable level.

While Heathrow may do its utmost to dismiss the current level of over 100,000 complaints a year as insignificant, the airport and the government cannot continue to ignore widely accepted evidence of the impact of aviation noise on health.

The report "Aircraft noise effects on health" published by the Airports Commission on 1 July, pointed to very worrying evidence about the impact that a third runway will have, but also raises questions about the harmful effects on health and education that Heathrow is already causing. Arising from this, the communities around the airport believe it is essential that there should be a fully independent inquiry to investigate these issues.

The current VW scandal demonstrates that public health should not be put at risk by commercial practices which support the profits of big business. As communities suffering the harmful effects of Heathrow, in addition to a fully independent and impartial investigation, we demand that an action plan is put in place by the airport as a matter of urgency to minimise these impacts. We have outlined below a number of measures that should be taken, which are informed by the findings of the Airports Commission’s health report.

ISSUE	ACTION	COMMENTS
<p>Aircraft noise exposure is associated with increases in risk for high blood pressure, heart attacks and stroke as well cardiovascular hospital admissions and mortality. While this risk is considered to be moderate, it is important if a large population is exposed to aircraft noise.</p>	<p>Heathrow should work with local councils and NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups to agree a plan to prioritise minimisation of noise over residential communities, having regard to the latest WHO advice and guidance. This should include a reversal of changes to flight paths, which have become lower and more concentrated.</p> <p>While the first priority must be noise minimisation, for those living very near the airport where an impact is inevitable, a programme of investment will be required to support prevention of conditions such as high blood pressure, heart attacks, stroke and mental illness. There should also be funding for an enhanced home insulation scheme and compensation packages for all communities experiencing noise above WHO recommended levels.</p>	<p>We believe that up to date WHO guidance (together with a much greater emphasis on individual noise events) should be used rather than the current Heathrow and CAA practice of using average noise contours across the year, which masks the noise impacts.</p> <p>There is no recent research or evidence supporting the current metrics and thresholds, whilst WHO guidance is referred to by Dr Charlotte Clark, author of the report “Aircraft noise effects on health” when assessing the point at which aviation noise can be damaging.</p>
<p>Night time noise is associated with sleep disturbance and changes in sleep structure. Exposure outside of the typical 2300 to 0700 night time noise metric can also impact on health and sleep quality, particularly for children and the physically-ill.</p>	<p>There needs to be a permanent ban on all flights between the hours of 2300 and 0700 to be implemented no later than 2017.</p> <p>In addition, there should be an immediate review of the airport’s scheduling so that current persistent failures to prevent flights departing after the evening watershed stop with immediate effect.</p> <p>Finally, there should be restrictions imposed on the noisiest types of aircraft departing in the very early morning, late in the evening and into the night.</p>	<p>We do not accept that this can only be achieved with a third runway. To not act now would be inexcusable in the face of clear health evidence on the impact of loss of sleep.</p>
<p>Based on current evidence, aircraft noise is associated with decreased quality of life.</p>	<p>A comprehensive and independent public investigation should be commissioned to understand the degree to which Heathrow operations have negatively impacted on the quality of life in local communities. Given</p>	

	Heathrow will not be able to eradicate aircraft noise completely, it should take all practical measures to minimise its noise footprint with immediate effect and agree with local councils how it will invest in measures to increase the quality of life in local communities.	
Many studies have found effects of aircraft noise exposure at school or home on children's reading comprehension or memory skills, pointing to a link between increased noise exposure and decreased reading performance. The development of cognitive skills such as reading and memory is important, not only in terms of education but also subsequent life chances and adult health.	Heathrow should confirm how many schools currently experiencing noise in excess of the WHO recommended levels have not been insulated. Funding should be identified to insulate all remaining schools over a reasonable time period (to be agreed). In advance of this, Heathrow should agree with local councils funding for additional learning/reading support in all affected schools until they are insulated.	

We hope Heathrow is willing to engage with communities on the issues outlined above. Without this co-operation, we fear it will confirm many members' views that the CNF is little more than a talking shop and essentially a PR exercise for Heathrow to claim community consultation while taking minimal action. Community representatives who attend the meetings do so to protect the public's health and wellbeing and expect Heathrow to fully appreciate the urgent need to reduce noise. For any trust to exist between local communities and the aviation industry, we ask Heathrow, NATS, the CAA and the Department for Transport to address our concerns without further delay.

This letter has been copied to all interested parties.

Yours sincerely,

AIRCRAFT NOISE 3 VILLAGES (LIGHTWATER, BAGSHOT & WINDLESHAM)

EALING AIRCRAFT NOISE ACTION GROUP

ENGLEFIELD GREEN ACTION GROUP

HARMONDSWORTH AND SIPSON RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

PLANE DAFT - ASCOT

RICHINGS PARK RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

TEDDINGTON ACTION GROUP