

I write to place on record my response to the Department for Transport's (DfT) public consultation on night flight restrictions at Gatwick, Heathrow and Stansted.

Residents across the London Borough of Bromley, including in my own constituency of Bromley and Chislehurst, continue to be affected by Heathrow arrivals, particularly as they stack in the Biggin Hill holding point, which is located in the airspace above Bromley. As one of the local Members of Parliament, I have historically always received fairly regular correspondence from residents about noise pollution from Heathrow flights, including during the designated night period, but this has noticeably increased in recent years, and especially over the last eighteen months.

While for a variety of reasons I oppose the Government's decision to support a third runway at Heathrow, I welcome the proposed timeframe of the restrictions currently being consulted upon. Setting this for five years until 2022 is a practical step, and one that will mean local residents, businesses and campaign groups have ample opportunity to feed in their thoughts before a new runway at Heathrow is operational. This will be vital if the Government, the Civil Aviation Authority and Heathrow are to ensure adequate safeguards are put in place to mitigate the potential for disruption and sleep deprivation caused by a third runway.

I acknowledge that from a regulatory perspective, night time flights are a legitimate activity, and I believe most residents will appreciate that there is a balance to be sought between the benefits the aviation industry provides – of which night flights play a role – and the amenity and wellbeing of households in the immediate vicinity of the airport, as well as those further afield. On that basis, I support the overall thrust of the new regime being consulted upon, in particular the commitment to maintain a strict cap on the number of night flights, set at existing levels.

I also welcome proposals to reduce Heathrow's total noise quota by at least 43% in the winter (from 4,080 to 2,340) and 50% in the summer (5,100 to 2,540). This will effectively incentivise the use of quieter aircraft, where currently there are none, and must be complimented by efforts, from the Government and Heathrow, to encourage better use of noise mitigating technology in the industry. Where retrofits are feasible, steps should be taken to ensure they are installed.

As part of this process, it would be useful for all involved to have a clear cost-benefit analysis of the different suggestions that have been made in an attempt to address the problems night time flights pose. This would allow stakeholders to come to an evidence based judgement on what future restrictions are appropriate.

Although passing reference was made to opportunities to reduce noise through the modernisation of airspace, it is disappointing this was not built upon further in the consultation. Better use of more accurate satellite technology should play an important part in alleviating noise pollution, particularly in terms of avoiding populated areas and descending at steeper angles to ensure residents are exposed to less aircraft noise.