

THE LONDON HELIPORT CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of The London Heliport Consultative Group held at Wandsworth Town Hall (Room 123), on Monday, 30th April 2007 at 7 p.m.

PRESENT

Chairman

Mr. Roger Bird

Users' representatives

Capt. Richard Poppe (PremiAir Aviation Services Ltd)

Capt. Robin Renton (Air Harrods Ltd)

Capt. Paul Watts (Metropolitan Police Service Air Support Unit)

Residents' representatives

Mr. Kenneth Fergusson

Mr. Jonathan Harris (deputising for Mr. Dennis Rooke)

Local Authority representatives

Councillor Tony Belton

Councillor John Hallmark

Councillor Jeanette Bentley

Councillor Maighread Condon-Simmonds

Observers, advisers and officers

Capt. Christopher Forrest (Operations Director, PremiAir Aviation Services Limited)

Mr. Simon Hutchins (The London Heliport)

Mr. Steve Mayner (Wandsworth Borough Council)

Mr. Colin Stanbury (Wandsworth Borough Council)

Mr. Francis de Lima (Wandsworth Borough Council)

Mr. Max Dixon (Greater London Authority)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Mr. Dennis Rooke, Mrs. Eryl Wragge and Sir Peter Jennings.

Minutes (5.12.06). On item 1 (Paper A), the minutes of the last meeting of the Consultative Group were approved and were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Change of ownership of the Heliport. On item 2 (Paper B), Capt. Forrest informed the Consultative Group that, on 9th February 2007, the Heliport had been sold to von Essen Hotels, who intended to open a hotel on the site, whilst also operating the

Heliport. PremiAir Aviation Services Limited had been contracted to operate the Heliport and would provide the overall oversight to ensure that it operates as safely as practical.

Capt Forrest explained that von Essen Hotels had plans to improve and tidy up the entire site, which, with the luxury hotel would provide facilities to world-class standards. He said that, as the operators of the site, PremiAir wished to be “good neighbours” and would, accordingly, consult through the Consultative Group and would seek to address all the issues raised with them.

In reply to a question by Councillor Hallmark on whether an hotel co co-exist comfortably with the Heliport next door, Capt Forrest commented that, as he was not an hotelier, he was unable to comment definitively, but felt that the two facilities would complement each other in a number of ways and that, with adequate sound-proofing, guests at the hotel would not be inconvenienced by their proximity to the Heliport.

In reply to a question by Councillor Belton about the timescale for the hotel development, Capt Forrest informed the Consultative Group that the ground works for the hotel had commenced already and that completion was planned for sometime in 2009.

In reply to a question by Mr. Harris on whether the new owners had any plans to increase helicopter movements, Capt Forrest explained that there were no immediate plans and that movement was constrained by the size of the Heliport. All operations were being contained closely within existing boundaries.

In reply to a further question by Mr. Harris, Capt Forrest said that he thought it was very unlikely that the site would be redeveloped and that the Heliport would then be re-sited at the top of a high building.

Best practice for helicopter movements. On item 3, (Paper C), Capt Renton circulated a leaflet by the British Helicopter Advisory Board (BHAB) entitled ‘Promoting the safe and responsible operation of helicopters’. The leaflet, which explains the purpose and objectives of the BHAB and issues relating to helicopter noise, sets out a pilot’s code of practice. He stressed that it was in the interests of pilots as users of the Heliport to operate in an acceptable manner at all times.

Capt Renton explained that the newer helicopters were quieter and, with reference to the issue of rooftop landings, he explained that, from a safety point of view, there were no problems involved. Indeed, he had landed a helicopter on the roof of Harrods store in Knightsbridge. He commented that, as there was now a great deal more residential development in Battersea from the time the Heliport first commenced operations, it was inevitable that the number of complaints would rise in consequence.

Mr. Harris advised the Consultative Group that he had done a great deal of thinking about the operation of the Heliport and on the best practice that could be adopted to accord with residents’ wishes. He explained that, perhaps, he would wish to distil his thoughts into a documents which could be distributed to local residents to advise them on when and how they could complain.

Mr. Harris advised the Consultative Group that he would propose the following four sections to the document:-

- (a) General background – helicopter routes to and from the Heliport; the operating times of the Heliport; helicopter movements, etc;
- (b) Routes for approaching and leaving the Heliport – 15 degrees from the River wall/shoreline (as illustrated in the diagram he circulated round the table – which would require helicopters to take-off into the middle of the River and then follow the dotted line, again along the middle of the River);
- (c) Minimum angles of ascent and descent, which could be illustrated with reference to buildings along the riverside. As an example, Mr. Harris suggested that climbing helicopters should always be higher than a particular building when leaving the Heliport; and
- (d) Rotor running times. Mr. Harris suggested that a maximum time in minutes ought to be stipulated and that helicopters standing at the Heliport ought not to be allowed to have their rotors running.

In reply, Capt Forrest commented that, in an ideal world, it might be possible to comply with the flight pattern that Mr. Harris had suggested. However, safety considerations would require variance from that pattern on occasions, including those when there were other flights involved at the same time. In reply to a question by Councillor Hallmark, Capt Forrest said that he was unable to suggest what proportion of flights would not be able to comply with the proposed flight pattern.

Capt Forrest also advised the Consultative Group that helicopter operations were influenced by the weather and that translational lift and the speed at which a helicopter climbed would reduce when the aircraft was heavy. The same was true when arriving at the Heliport and even when flying a shallow profile, pilots were flying their craft in a way that ensured safe flying, whilst mindful of the need to minimise noise nuisance.

As regards rotors left running whilst helicopters are still standing, Capt Forrest explained that the main controller of helicopter movements was located at Heathrow and that helicopters could not be released until clearance was received from the controller. Capt Forrest assured the Consultative Group that the Heliport endeavoured, at all times, to get the helicopters to leave as quickly as possible.

Mr. Harris responded that he had observed helicopters flying over his balcony even when there were no other flights at the time. On other occasions, he had observed helicopters take off and fly straight over the railway bridge to the right. Mr. Harris then sought an assurance that helicopters would be required to turn off their rotors, in order to reduce noise nuisance from helicopters whilst they were on the ground.

Capt Forrest advised the Consultative Group that this would not be possible because the helicopters were required to take-off as soon as clearance was obtained. Any delay in take-off would require them to apply again for clearance.

The Chairman commented that, the sort of document suggested by Mr. Harris – one that explained clearly what constituted normal behaviour for a helicopter – would be beneficial and could be made available in brochure form and published on websites. He suggested that, if it was not possible to write a precise procedure setting out what pilots were required to do, it would be possible to prepare guidance on good practice when using the Heliport.

Mr. Mayner stated that the matters being discussed were related to item 6 on the agenda (Reporting and monitoring complaints). He said that he would follow through the issues raised in discussion with Capt Forrest and would link them to the issues regarding the setting up of a new, more accessible complaints system. Information on this system would then be set out in a leaflet and publicised on websites. Capt Forrest welcomed this approach.

In reply to comments by Councillor Belton, Mr. Mayner explained that Council officers had held early basic level discussions with PremiAir and would now work on the preparation of more technical guidance, which would take a little time to produce.

The Chairman welcomed this initiative. He observed that a percentage of the 12,000 annual movements would fail to comply with accepted patterns of flying and that it was necessary to recognise that it was this percentage – which had to be minimised – that would cause a nuisance to residents.

It was then agreed that Mr. Mayner, Capt Forrest and Mr. Harris would meet with a view to taking forward the preparation of the information relating to the issues discussed.

Information on helicopter movements. On item 4 (Paper D), Mr. Mayner informed the Consultative Group that provisional figures for 2006 indicate that the number of movements at the Heliport over-ran the 12,000 movements limit. There were 12,460 non-exempt movements recorded by the end of the year. He said that officers from the Borough Planner's Service would meet with PremiAir to examine the figures and that there would be a report back to the Consultative Group, at the next meeting. A planning officer would attend the next meeting.

Capt Forrest assured the Consultative Group that it was not intended that the ceiling on movements should be breached and said that the Heliport would endeavour to limit the number of movements to within the set limit.

During discussion, Capt Forrest confirmed that the total number of movements in the first quarter of 2007 amounted to 3,130 (including military flights) of which, there had been 2,886 non-exempt flights.

The Chairman asked that, in future, the information ought to indicate how many of the total number of units counted towards the 12,000 limit.

In reply to comments by Councillor Belton, who suggested that the first quarter may not be the busiest period of the year and sought information on seasonal variations, Capt Forrest advised that the first and fourth quarters of the year were, indeed, less busy than the summer period and again assured the Consultative Group that the Heliport would remain within the limit it had been set.

In reply to a question by Mr. Harris on whether daily records of the numbers of movements were maintained, Capt Forrest said that this information was maintained and could be made available but that it would amount to large volumes of paper.

Noise complaints. On item 5 (Paper E), Capt Forrest reported on an incident on the morning of 19th April 2007, when a large military transport helicopter on a continuation training flight approached the Heliport on a trial run. The pilot brought his craft in at a much lower level than might be considered appropriate.

Capt Forrest informed the Consultative Group that he had lodged a complaint with the Ministry of Defence, who, following enquiries, got back to him. They advised that the pilot was on maternity leave at the time of the incident.

Capt Forrest expressed his deep regret at that incident, over which the Heliport had no control but for which, it was often held responsible.

In reply to a question by Councillor Hallmark on whether such complaints has been received, Mr. Mayner advised that there had not been any such complaints recorded in the first quarter but that complaints about this particular incident had, indeed, been received and would show up in the figures for April 2007.

During further discussion, Capt Forrest advised the Consultative Group that he and Council officers had visited Luton Airport to see their system for recording complaints. He advised that the Heliport already had a telephone system in place for receiving complaints and assured the Consultative Group that the Heliport would co-operate fully in devising an improved system for recording complaints.

Reporting and monitoring complaints. On item 6, Mr. Mayner explained that the information provided at the meeting was merely the starting point and that a good deal more work was required in order to establish a system appropriate to the Heliport. He observed that the officers were not wedded to the Luton Airport model but considered it prudent to study some existing systems. Mr. Mayner explained further that it was hoped to have a dedicated website and to have the system based at the Heliport at which reports such as those discussed earlier e.g. of pilots straying from acceptable behaviour etc. may be recorded and addressed.

Project into helicopter noise. On item 7 (Paper F), Mr. Mayner commented that this report was intended to illustrate that the Consultative Group were not on their own in their concerns regarding helicopter operations in London. A great deal of work was taking place at central Government level as well as London-wide, and also at the European Union level. He promised to report back to the Consultative Group on the research project, at future meetings.

Mr. Fergusson remarked that in the light of global warming it would be appropriate to measure helicopter emissions particularly of particulates, nitrogen oxide, etc. Councillor Belton supported Mr. Fergusson's suggestion.

Mr. Stanbury undertook to refer the suggestion to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with the possibility of adding the study of helicopter emissions to the remit of the research project.

Residents' items. On item 8, the Chairman noted that item (a) had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

As regards item (b) too, the Chairman noted that the areas highlighted by the residents' items had been covered in earlier discussion. He acknowledged that a great deal of work would be required to set up the necessary systems etc., and noted that further reports on progress would be submitted to the Consultative Group, at future meetings.

Mr. Fergusson stated that he was very satisfied with the way in which the agenda had covered all the points that the residents' representatives wished to have discussed. He enquired, and was advised by the Chairman, that the draft minutes of meetings of the Consultative Group may be made public as soon as they were released to members of the Consultative Group, at which point, they are also sent to the residents' associations at the major developments in Battersea and are posted on the Council's website.

In reply to a question by Councillor Condon-Simmonds, Capt Forrest advised the Consultative Group that the Heliport operated from 7.00 am to 11.00 pm, with the last departure for the day by 10.45 pm.

In reply to a question by the Chairman, Capt Forrest confirmed that the emergency services are able to operate outside these hours and advised that discussions were taking place with the Metropolitan Police about access to the Heliport at night, in cases of Category A (terrorist) emergencies.

In reply to comments by Mr Harris about requiring helicopters to maintain as much height as possible, Capt Forrest assured the Consultative Group that that was consistent with the aims of the Heliport's operators. However, he reiterated the advice he had given earlier, that a number of factors, including weather conditions, made it difficult at times to achieve this aim. He assured the Consultative Group that every effort would be made to ensure as friendly helicopter behaviour as possible.

Date of next meeting. On item 9, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Consultative Group should be held on Monday, 24th September 2007 at 7.00 p.m.

The meeting ended at 7.58 p.m.