

PAPER A

THE LONDON HELIPORT CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of The London Heliport Consultative Group held at Wandsworth Town Hall (Room 123), on Monday, 27th April 2009 at 7 p.m.

PRESENT

Chairman

Mr. Roger Bird

Residents' representatives

Mr. Alan Fairleigh
Mr. Jonathan Harris
Sir Peter Jennings
Ms. Eryl Wrage

Local Authority representatives

Councillor Tony Belton
Councillor Maighred Condon-Simmonds
Councillor John Hallmark
Councillor Jane Law

Users' representatives

Capt Ian Rose
Capt Paul Watts
Mr Peter Norton (deputising for Capt Robin Renton)

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. Bob Leuty (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 Capt Robin Renton and Capt Ian Field.

Minutes (17.11.08). On item 1 (Paper A), the minutes of the last meeting of the Consultative Group held on 17th November 2008 were approved and were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Chairman then invited member of the Consultative Group to raise any matters arising from the minutes they wished to raise.

On the matter of Noise complaints (page 6), Ms Wrage sought clarification on the reference to “.... complaint set out by Ms Wrage in her paper” as she was not aware of any report she had asked to be tabled. Mr de Lima explained that, on the afternoon of the meeting (which Ms Wrage was unable to attend) she had sent him an email message setting out her observations regarding helicopter movements and noise nuisance over her neighbourhood. He had converted this into a report which he then tabled at the meeting.

Monitoring of helicopter movements. On item 2, Mr Stanbury reported on the action that had been taken since the last meeting to implement the programme of monitoring of helicopter movements using CCTV cameras.

He reminded the Consultative Group that this programme had been agreed at the last meeting in response to a request by the residents’ representatives that the Council investigate the possibility of undertaking CCTV observations along the Thames as a way of checking on the flight paths of helicopters as they arrive at, and depart from, the Heliport.

Mr Stanbury explained that with the help of colleagues in the Council’s Community Safety Section it had been possible to establish a potential network of up to four existing CCTV cameras that could be targeted on the relevant section of the Thames. The optional deployment of mobile cameras had been examined but is not proposed to be pursued as it is felt that this would not provide a robust form of monitoring.

In response to a query by the Chairman as to how long the monitoring was to be carried out for, Mr Stanbury suggested that an initial period of up to two weeks during the summer would make a useful trial exercise. He explained that the cameras would also be coupled to VCRs in order to provide a permanent record of each day’s events. He advised the Consultative Group that, on completion of the monitoring period, the tapes would be reviewed jointly by himself and a representative of the Heliport. He also stated that it was his intention to submit a short report of the findings of this trial exercise to the Consultative Group, at their next meeting.

Mr Stanbury then indicated the proposed locations of the cameras on a plan, which, in summary were:-

- (a) Sudbury House - to give an indication of altitude;
- (b) the south bank of Wandsworth Bridge to give context a shot - to assist with determining route and altitude;
- (c) the north bank of Battersea Bridge looking south-west towards the Heliport (to compliment the view from the camera on Wandsworth Bridge; and
- (d) the south bank of Putney Bridge - this view to assist in determining the rate and direction of ascent in the area between Wandsworth Bridge and Putney Bridge.

In reply to a question by Sir Peter Jennings about the possibility of having a camera located at the Battersea side of the river in order to monitor movements on the Chelsea side, Mr Stanbury explained that this could well be done if the Consultative Group so wished for this to happen but that what was being proposed was a way of starting the exercise and then developing on it. Sir Peter commented that what was being proposed was an excellent start.

Capt Forrest advised the Consultative Group that the Heliport also proposed to install its own cameras to record helicopter arrivals and departures.

Mr Harris commented that residents remain of the view that some helicopter pilots do not follow the correct route into and from the Heliport and allegedly fly too close to residential apartments on both sides of the river.

Councillor Condon-Simmonds commented that it was unfair that Wandsworth Council should singularly be responsible for the cost of the exercise and suggested that the other two Councils ought to be asked to make a contribution towards the cost.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chairman commented that the proposed pilot exercise that Mr Stanbury had outlined represented a good start and suggested that the Consultative Group, at their next meeting, with the benefit of the results of this exercise, ought to consider how to take this monitoring further.

Information on helicopter movements. On item 3 (Paper B), in presenting the report, Capt Forrest commented that the figures reflected the current state of the economy.

In response to a suggestion by the Chairman, which was supported by Ms Wrage, Capt Forrest undertook to provide an indication of the Heliport's 'busy days' in future reports on helicopter movements. Capt Forrest advised the Consultative Group that this information was already provided in the 'stop press' section of the Home Page of the Heliport's website.

The Chairman then commented that there may be other relevant information, perhaps indicating peaks, that might ideally be useful to include in future such reports. He suggested that the matter should be left to Capt Forrest, Mr Hutchins and Mr de Lima to consider, in consultation with others, as appropriate. Capt Forrest replied that it might be possible, for instance, to provide a breakdown for weekday and weekend flights and then provide the figures on a monthly basis.

Noise complaints. On item 4 (Paper C), the Chairman noted that fewer complaints than previously had been recorded on the list before the Consultative Group. Capt Forrest informed the Consultative Group that, in addition to the complaints recorded in the report, two other incidents, which could have resulted in complaints received, had been addressed directly with the air crew and settled properly.

Capt Forrest reiterated that, in making complaints about noise and helicopter behaviour, it was imperative that complainants provided the Heliport with as much information as possible, e.g. date, time, location, colour of helicopter, any distinctive markings on it, etc.

Helicopter activity at Battersea Power Station site. On item 5, Mr Leuty confirmed that the Council's Borough Planner's Service was aware that there had been helicopter landings at the Battersea Power Station site for some time and that its enforcement team had been looking into this matter carefully, taking into account the purpose of the flights, precedence and the relevant planning law. The team were taking legal advice, and would be reporting the matter to the Planning Applications Committee. Mr Leuty advised the Consultative Group that this Committee has general responsibility for breaches of planning control, in addition to deciding on planning applications. He explained that planning officers would need to establish whether or not planning permission was required for the activity and, accordingly, were looking at case law, comparable examples and were seeking legal advice prior to reporting the matter to the Committee.

In relation to the reference to the 28 days referred to in Capt Forrest's agenda item, Mr. Leuty explained that he assumed this to be a reference to a blanket planning permission granted by statute for certain categories of development that did not require planning permission from Councils, generally known as 'permitted development'. One of these categories was for the use of land for up to 28 days for temporary uses (14 days for certain specified uses such as motor racing, clay pigeon shooting, etc).

Mr. Leuty then responded to a number of supplementary questions from the Consultative Group on the nature, extent and intensity of activity permitted under the 28 day rule but explained that this provision did not apply to the Power Station site, because land within the curtilage of a building does not benefit from this blanket permission and the Council had taken the view in relation to events held there from time to time that they needed express permission from the Council for this very reason. Accordingly, he advised, if the helicopter activity did involve a material change in the use of the land in town planning terms, planning permission would be required. In determining this, the Council would take account of the nature, purpose and intensity of the activity.

Mr. Leuty expressed his gratitude to the Heliport for providing useful detail of the Power Station movements from their ATC records. Councillor Belton then asked if it was the current owners, Treasury Holdings, which was conducting the flights. Mr. Leuty replied that, generally, it was not the case, but the Company were allowing the landings to happen and indeed the previous owners of the site had also allowed helicopter movements to and from the site, apparently for personal use.

The Chairman stated that he supposed that a landing at a site for a site specific meeting would not require planning permission in the same way as arriving by taxi - just a different transport mode. Mr. Leuty confirmed that that would ordinarily be the case, and explained that the enforcement team had also been in contact with the site owners and the party responsible for the activity to gather further details and that the information from that contact was that the activity was not commercial. Mr. Harris questioned whether it was believable that flights were not commercial and Mr. Leuty said that people do own helicopters for private use but that the Borough Planner's Service would certainly be looking at that aspect too in more detail. Mr. Hutchins suggested that several helicopters were involved and they were a mixture of private and commercial helicopters.

In reply to another question by Councillor Belton about which party any enforcement action would be directed against if it was appropriate to take action, Mr. Leuty said that such action would be directed principally against the owners of the site for permitting its use for helicopter activity, but that action could also be directed against the operator(s).

The Chairman then acceded to a request by Councillor Law that Mr de Lima should provide a copy of the report to members of the Consultative Group, when it was submitted to the Planning Applications Committee.

London in a spin – a review of helicopter noise. On item 6 (Papers D and E), the Chairman enquired about what progress was being made on the London Assembly's Environment Committee's recommendations on helicopter noise.

Mr Dixon acknowledged that progress on many of the recommendations had been slower than desirable. He informed the Consultative Group that following a review by the Environment Committee, the Committee's Chair and the Mayor of London had written to the Aviation Minister to pursue the outstanding recommendations. Accordingly, a meeting was to take place with Department for Transport (DfT) officials, and representatives of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the National Air Traffic Service (NATS), the parties with key powers and resources to take forward the outstanding recommendations.

Mr Dixon added that the special expertise of the Consultative Group and of Wandsworth Council was recognised, and the participation of its officers in discussions with DfT, CAA and NATS was welcomed. In answer to a question from Sir Peter Jennings, Mr Dixon confirmed that the Mayor's London Plan included a policy to consider the need and practicality of a heliport in east London, and that this would be included in the discussions with DfT. However, no full commercial proposal had yet come forward. Mr Stanbury mentioned that London City Airport had considered the scope for a new heliport (not on the existing airport site) and an update would be obtained for the next meeting. Capt Watts informed the meeting that there had been heliport at London City Airport but that it had not survived for long.

Mr Mayner commented that the Consultative Group had now built up a significant body of expertise in the area of helicopter activity and noise and, accordingly, he agreed that it would be prudent for it to be represented on any working group set up to carry through the recommendations. Mr Mayner, whilst noting that the Consultative Group's participation had been denied on the basis that it was "too small", undertook nevertheless to pursue the matter. The Chairman commented that, at the very least, the Consultative Group ought to be involved as observers.

Any other business. On item 7, at the end of the business set out in the agenda, the Chairman enquired whether members of the Consultative Group wished to raise any other matters. The following additional items of business were raised:-

(a) The role of Airport Consultative Committees. The Chairman drew attention to this paper – tabled by Mr Mayner – which had been published on the website of the Liaison Group of UK Airport Consultative Committees.

This paper was noted by the Consultative Group.

(b) Residents' representation on the Consultative Group. Councillor Belton stated that, as he had done previously, he was again raising the issue of tenants and leaseholders in public sector housing being involved in the work of the Consultative Group. Mr Mayner advised the Consultative Group that he had written to the relevant residents' groups and that he would pass on to Mr Harris any responses he received indicating a wish to be involved in representing Wandsworth residents on the Consultative Group. Councillor Belton agreed that it was best that residents' groups were able to determine their representation through their own organisation.

Councillor Condon-Simmonds advised the Group that she had striven to generate more interest and participation among residents in Kensington and Chelsea but had found little interest in the subject among residents.

The Chairman commented that, in addition to the formal representation of local residents on the Consultative Group, greater interest and participation by residents may be generated through allowing residents the facility of attending the Consultative Group meetings to speak on matters of concern to them, in the same way as the Council's committees hear depositions. Mr Harris endorsed this suggestion which he believed would enhance public participation in the work of the Consultative Group in a way that had not happened. The Chairman then asked Mr Mayner and Mr de Lima to work on a framework to allow for this greater public participation.

(c) Mr de Lima – retirement. The Chairman then informed the Consultative Group that this was the last meeting that Mr de Lima would be attending as he was to retire from the Council's service at the end of October. On behalf of the Consultative Group, he paid tribute to Mr de Lima's contribution towards its establishment and its work. Members of the Consultative Group then added their own tributes to Mr de Lima.

Date of next meeting. On item 8, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Consultative Group should be held on Monday, 23rd November 2009 at 7.00 p.m.

The meeting ended at 8.47 p.m.