

13 MAY 2008

Ms Carole Barbone
Campaign Director
Stop Stansted Expansion
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12 May 2008

Dear Ms Barbone,

Thank you for your letter of May 8 to Paul Barron, who has asked me to respond on his behalf.

In direct response to the first of your two requests, I apologise that your letter of April 18 to the consultation team has not been acknowledged. Having checked with the team, I understand that the list of very detailed questions which you sent following NATS' meeting with the Stansted Consultative Committee, has required similarly detailed response which has taken considerable work and is now nearing completion.

Equally, I understand your impatience to receive answers in order to be able to consider your formal response to the consultation; I have been assured that a response will be sent to you within the next 24 hours.

In response to your second request, the consultation period has been extended to June 19.

Regarding the further points you raise in your letter to Paul, I hope the following helps.

The consultation website experienced problems for less than two hours on launch day, due to the fact that people were accessing it via our main website, rather than the dedicated consultation website which had been specifically set up to deal with large volumes of traffic. We recognised and resolved that difficulty very quickly and have experienced no recurring problem; please let me know examples if your experience is to the contrary. This includes the postcode search facility, which is tested regularly and has not been malfunctioning so far as we are aware.

Printed copies of the document have been made available to more than 100 district, borough and county councils, unitary authorities and regional assemblies, and to more than 140 MPs. Copies have been placed in almost 700 libraries across the region. DVDs which include the full document and an introductory, explanatory video, were sent to all 1500 parish councils across the region so there should be no need for any onward distribution – although I accept that as a campaign group, you have wanted to draw people's attention to specific aspects of the proposals.

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The document itself has been divided into geographic areas so that people do not feel they have to download the entire document. More than 250,000 sections have been downloaded so far. An active decision was made that we could not justify the environmental cost of producing many millions of copies of a 420-page document when we had at our disposal both traditional and well-trusted distribution (libraries) and modern technology (web and DVD) to do so, and we invested heavily in the modern media to help people understand the very complex concepts in the consultation.

We have acknowledged and corrected very quickly the small number of errors in labelling which have been notified to us and have apologised that these happened.

The consultation programme for TC North complies with the Civil Aviation Publication (CAP) 725 and the further guidance provided by the CAA. This CAA guidance follows government policy relating to the development of airspace.

We have offered meetings with more than 100 county, borough and district councils and regional assemblies, and with more than 140 MPs, the key environmental groups and stakeholders from the aviation industry itself (including Airport Consultative Committees). That is a sizeable undertaking for a small expert team. We have already held a significant number of meetings; it has been a matter for each council to decide who should attend and it is usually a mix of officials and elected representatives. We have asked only that they be kept reasonably small so as to ensure constructive and dispassionate dialogue.

It is not possible to offer public meetings over such a wide region with a population of some 12.6 million people. This is precisely why NATS has invested heavily in other consultation media to help the public understand the complex nature of what is being proposed. We are answering questions from members of the public; however with a small expert team which has spent considerable time on the road talking to local authorities during the consultation, these are having to be prioritised.

Finally, I have been asked by our Legal team to respond on their behalf to your letter of April 14. They confirm that they did not request you to remove from your website all information on the TCN consultation, or indeed the flight path proposals, instead thanking you for having directed people to our website. NATS' concern has always been your presentation of a selection of maps in the context of the expansion of Stansted Airport (rather than the TCN airspace change proposal as fully explained by the consultation material). As SSE's position is now established there seems little to be gained from continuing to ask you to withdraw the maps; however, I would ask that you at least consider adding explanatory wording to place the maps in proper context. Given that we have maintained a consistent policy regarding the use of maps by third parties, NATS cannot condone or consent to your use of the maps and accept no liability in respect of any infringement of third party intellectual property rights.

Kind regards

Jane Johnston
Head of External Communications

cc Paul Barron