

Annual Review 2017



Night Flights

No sooner had the year begun than the Government launched a consultation (12 January) on its new proposals for regulating the number of night flights and night noise limits at Stansted for the next five year period (Oct 2017 - Oct 2022) and invited comments. SSE's main focus over the following few weeks was therefore to assemble evidence and arguments aimed at constraining the number of permitted night flights at Stansted and preventing the noisiest aircraft from flying at night. As always, the aviation industry lobbied for more night flights and less stringent controls. The end result largely maintained the status quo but introduced new controls on the number of night flights by previously exempt 'quieter' aircraft. This was welcomed by SSE but was a modest achievement compared to our long term aim of phasing out all night flights at Stansted.

Flight Paths

SSE's attention then turned once again to the contentious issue of the flight path changes which had been introduced by NATS in February 2016. The changes had been opposed by 82% of those who responded to the public consultation held beforehand but were nevertheless approved by the CAA because there were judged to be of benefit to airlines. NATS and the CAA agreed to carry out a Post-Implementation Review ('PIR') after 12 months in operation and SSE used this opportunity to highlight the severe impact which the flight path changes had on local communities to the east of Stansted, and to call for the changes to be reversed. As at the end of 2017, the CAA had still not published the results of the PIR. Largely as a result of the growing impact of the flight path changes, there were 8,411 aircraft noise complaints in 2017 compared to 4,160 complaints in the previous year, although the number of individual complainants remained broadly the same year on year.

Arrivals Building

In April 2017, Uttlesford District Council ('UDC') granted planning consent, with conditions, for a new arrivals building at Stansted located between the main terminal and the Radisson Hotel. This was approved on the basis that it was an alternative proposal to a planning consent already in place for an extension to the existing terminal. Having reviewed the application, SSE decided not to object in principle, but to seek assurances relating to the cancellation of the earlier consent, the transfer of planning conditions, visual impact and convenience of access to public transport.

Lobbying

Also in April 2017, the Prime Minister called a 'snap' general election for 8 June and, in the course of the election campaign (22 May), SSE, alongside representatives of communities around other major UK airports including Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton, delivered a joint statement to 10 Downing Street demanding that the next government takes action to reduce aviation noise. This also marked the start of a new body, the Aviation Communities Forum ('ACF'), to help deliver a united message to the government that aircraft noise is highly damaging to communities up and down the country and must be tackled through far tougher government policy and regulation.

Proposed Expansion

In June 2017, Manchester Airports Group ('MAG') submitted proposals to UDC on behalf of Stansted Airport Limited ('STAL') for a lifting of the current planning cap of 35 million passengers per annum ('mppa') to "approximately 44.5mppa". This marked the first (pre-

application) stage in the formal process for seeking planning permission for the proposed expansion plans. SSE immediately branded the proposals "premature and opportunistic" and provided UDC with a 25-page submission which identified 109 separate issues which would need to be addressed by MAG in the Environmental Statement alongside its formal planning application.

A high-level meeting between SSE and UDC took place at the end of July 2017 primarily to discuss the forthcoming airport planning application. Prior to the meeting, SSE had called for the application to be dealt with at national level rather locally by UDC and, by the end of the meeting, SSE was even more convinced of the need for national determination. It became very clear during the meeting that UDC was working on the assumption that the application would be approved and UDC was intent on securing local benefits from MAG in return for granting planning approval.

MAG had originally intended to submit its planning application by October 2017 but this did not happen. Instead MAG trimmed its ambitions from seeking an uplift in the cap to "approximately 44.5mppa" to seeking an uplift to 43.0mppa. This amendment by MAG may have been prompted by the fact that SSE was preparing for a legal challenge on the question of national versus local determination and so MAG wanted to move to safer ground. As at the end of 2017 the application has still not been submitted and so there are not yet any grounds for a legal challenge by SSE.

Also in October 2017, the Department for Transport ('DfT') published its revised forecasts for UK Aviation, the first such revision to its forecasts since January 2013. Significantly, the DfT projects that Stansted will not reach its present cap of 35mppa until 2033 and even later if a third Heathrow runway is operational before then. Tellingly, both MAG and UDC dismissed the DfT forecasts as being inaccurate and of no relevance to the proposed planning application.

Airport-Owned Houses

Throughout 2017 STAL continued to sell the housing stock which it purchased in connection with its plans for a second Stansted runway. At one time this stood at almost 300 properties. By the start of 2017 it was barely half that number and by the end of 2017 it was estimated that only about 70 homes remained under airport ownership.

Airport Growth

In 2017 Stansted Airport handled a record 25.9m passengers, an increase of 6.6% on 2016. The number of flights increased by a lower percentage (4.6%) reflecting the ongoing long term growth in the average number of passengers per aircraft. Accordingly, the average number of passengers per aircraft increased to 161 in 2017, compared to 159 in the previous year (and just 131 in 2007).

Stop Stansted Expansion
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