

THE LONDON HELIPORT CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of The London Heliport Consultative Group held at Wandsworth Town Hall (Room 123), on Monday, 21st January 2008 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 Maighred Condon-Simmonds
Councillor John Hallmark
Councillor Jane Law

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 Councillor Tony Belton and Capt Paul Watts.

Minutes (24.9.07). On item 1 (Paper A), the minutes of the last meeting of the Consultative Group held on 24th September 2007 were approved and were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Bridges Wharf site. On item 2 (Paper B), the Chairman observed that works at this location were already in progress.

Mr. Leuty informed the Consultative Group that, on 10th January 2008, the Council's Planning Applications Committee had considered a revised planning application for the Bridges Wharf site. The Committee adopted the recommendation set out in the Borough Planner's report (Paper B) and decided to grant conditional planning permission for the scheme, subject to the completion of a legal agreement which, amongst other matters, would require the completion of the current restrictions on helicopter operations.

Mr. Leuty also informed the Consultative Group that the application proposed a new riverside walk linking the scheme to a new footpath which would run in front of the new residential block and would involve the use of part of the Heliport land to the east and north side of the Heliport to join the riverside walk to the north of the Heliport site. The riverside walk, which would be embodied in a Section 106 agreement, would be designated as public highway and would be for use by pedestrians, cyclists and emergency vehicles only.

Guidance leaflet. On item 3 (Paper C), Mr Mayner informed the Consultative Group that publicity for the publication of this leaflet had been given through a press release and the Council's website. An article in the Council's newspaper, *BrightSide*, would follow shortly. Mr Mayner said that a supply of the leaflets had been sent to Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea Councils, for distribution to their residents and copies will be distributed to each of the riverside developments in Wandsworth.

In reply to a question by Councillor Condon-Simmonds on whether there would be a limit on flights on days that coincide with major sporting events such as the Henley Regatta and Cheltenham, Mr. Mayner mentioned that the leaflet states that: "..... there are five days when the limit is raised to 160. The heliport can accept up to 130 movements on other days provided that the total for all these 'busy days' does not exceed 1,000. These busy days normally coincide with major events such as Cheltenham, The Derby, Royal Ascot and the Formula 1 Grand Prix".

Capt. Forrest explained that Henley is not a busy day for helicopters.

Information on helicopter movements. On item 4 (Paper D), the Chairman noted that the figures provided were for a four month period and that the number of movements were contained within the number that would allow for the overall number to be contained within the annual limit for non-exempt flights.

Noise complaints. On item 5 (Paper E), Capt. Forrest confirmed that the report provided a full account of the number of complaints received during the September to December 2007 quarter.

Mr. Harris commented that the reduced number of complaints received could be accounted for by the lack of faith that residents have in the present complaints procedure. He expected that a better gauge of the number of complaints may be possible after the guidance leaflet reaches local residents.

Mr. Harris then commented on complaint reference 07/038 dated 4th October 2007, which involved an RAF aircraft. He observed that, given the low overall number of RAF helicopters that use the Heliport, this complaint represented a high proportion of complaints.

In reply, Capt. Forrest reiterated that the Heliport constantly sought to encourage pilots using the Heliport to fly their helicopters in a neighbourly manner. He explained that a number of helicopters fly through London and that their journeys do not involve stops at the Heliport. The military flights through London are usually justified on the basis of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Capt. Forrest advised that it would be more effective if complainants were to direct complaints involving military aircraft to the Ministry of Defence's complaints line. He explained further that the Heliport has sought to dissuade military helicopters from flying through London.

The Chairman asked for any complaints involving military helicopters to continue to be logged by the Heliport, as this would provide the Consultative Group with information regarding helicopter flights by military aircraft.

In answer to Councillor Condon-Simmonds' comment that she did not receive complaints (regarding helicopter noise) presumably because people did not know whom to complain to, the Chairman said that the guidance leaflet would advise local residents on how to make complaints. Councillor Condon-Simmonds then reported that her main complaint regarding helicopter noise related to Police helicopters at night, which, she argued, were often brought out with little justification. Mr. Harris then produced an article from the *Evening Standard* about a helicopter that was used to chase a 17 year old bicycle thief.

Helicopter noise update. On item 6 (Paper F), in reply to a question by the Chairman on whether the meeting with key stakeholders, proposed in paragraph 3.5 was being progressed by the London Assembly, Mr. Dixon informed the Consultative Group that the recommendations in the report were being worked on and that a working group, which had not yet been established, would be set up. The Chairman requested Mr. Dixon to keep Mr. de Lima advised of any progress being made on the setting up of this group.

In response to comments by Mr. Harris about the absence of residents' representatives on committees dealing with helicopter matters, including the informal meeting proposed in paragraph 1.2 of the report, Mr. Dixon informed the Consultative Group that the London Assembly's Environment Committee had taken evidence from wide-ranging groups which would have reflected, among others, the views of residents. He added that if a substantial working party were to be created, undoubtedly it would include residents' representatives.

Mr. Mayner commented that he expected that the Council would be invited to such a meeting, as being a key stakeholder, as would the Consultative Group with its residents' representatives. He observed that the Consultative Group had now built up a body of knowledge and experience which would be a valuable resource to any stakeholders' meeting. In this way he expected that residents' representatives would be involved.

In reply to a question by Councillor Hallmark about the deadlines for the implementation of the recommendations in the report, Mr. Dixon advised that, whilst some recommendations had been implemented, there were no firm deadlines for the implementation of the other recommendations, though it was intended that the meeting with key holders was a priority, though, here too, there was no set deadline for implementation.

DfT Consultation on Heathrow expansion. On item 7, Capt. Forrest agreed with the Chairman that, regrettably, the implications of helicopter movements were not being

considered as part of this consultation by the Department for Transport (DfT). Accordingly, any comments submitted regarding helicopter movements, would need to be submitted separately and directly to the DfT.

DEFRA project on helicopter noise. Mr. Stanbury informed the Consultative Group that, on 18th December 2007, he and Mr. Mayner had had an interesting and useful meeting with the successful contractors appointed to carry out this project funded by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). They had discovered that the project was primarily intended to conduct research and that the first tranche of the project would involve fact finding through a literature review. Some two or three studies would be carried out during the time allotted for the project. Following their meeting, the contractors then met with Mr. Harris.

Mr. Harris reported that his 45 minutes meeting with the project contractors involved a discussion of residents' concerns and raised at meetings of the Consultative Group.

Capt. Forrest commented that the DEFRA project would have a national – rather than a London – focus.

Residents' items. On item 9, the Consultative Group then considered the matters placed on the agenda by the residents' representatives.

As regards item (a) – the incident in April 2007 involving a military helicopter – Capt. Forrest informed the Consultative Group that he was unable to provide an update as the Ministry of Defence (MOD) had indicated that the matter was now closed.

Mr. Harris commented that, as long as the MOD and the Heliport “blame each other”, it would not be possible to get to the bottom of the matter. He said that he had been advised by a pilot that the incident could have been catastrophic.

Capt. Forrest replied that immediately following the incident, which he had informed the Consultative Group about at the first opportunity, the Heliport had lodged a complaint with the MOD and had pursued the matter with the Ministry. There was no further action that the Heliport was able to take in the matter but had the option of excluding that particular pilot from using the Heliport in future. Capt. Forrest commented that if Mr Harris' advice had been received from a pilot of a fixed wing aircraft, it ought to be treated with some caution.

The Chairman then stated that the Heliport were clearly not in a position to pursue the matter any further and that the Consultative Group was unable to reach a verdict on the incident.

As regards (b) – an explanation of ‘corner cutting’ as discussed at the last meeting – Mr. Hutchins informed the Consultative Group that, following the last meeting, he had examined the three complaints that referred to helicopters “cutting corners”. They were all individual complaints, by residents of Valiant House, and referred to the same incident.

Mr. Harris said that residents' concerns centred around pilots cutting corners which the Heliport operators were aware of and ought not to allow to happen, but were obviously doing nothing to stop.

In reply, Capt. Forrest said that he did not understand the reference to “cutting corners” or what corners it was being suggested that pilots were cutting. Mr. Harris suggested that it might be assumed that the residents were suggesting that the helicopters involved had not followed the correct route. Accordingly, it was entirely reasonable for residents to expect the practice to stop.

The Chairman then read the text of the recorded complaint number 07/019, dated 13th May 2007, along with the other two identical complaints, as follows:-

“Brief details of complaint – Helicopter not flying along the river and flying low.

Brief description of investigation – P4HEC had just landed. No other a/c in circuit so should have been flying along the centre of the river. Pilots reported required height around that area, but were coming in to land. No mention of centre navigation, but that area is well known for ‘cutting’ the corner.”

Capt. Forrest then advised that, when helicopters were approaching from the north east, they perhaps give the impression that they are making a sharp turn. He said that he would investigate the matter further and, as requested by the Chairman, would report back on his findings to the Consultative Group at the next meeting.

Ms. Wrage commented that it would be useful to know whether this practice was being adopted in order to save time.

As regards (c) – the request that Wandsworth Council should randomly monitor pilot routes to highlight any variation from the guidance set out in the leaflet – the Chairman asked the residents’ representatives to explain what they had in mind.

Mr. Harris replied that, given the variance in reports between local residents and the Heliport, it would be helpful to have some independent monitoring carried out by means of video cameras or CCTV of the routes that helicopters take en route to and from the Heliport. He suggested that the evidence gained from such monitoring would be educational for all.

Councillor Law questioned how such an exercise would be funded as it would be unfair for Wandsworth Council to have to bear the entire cost of this exercise.

Mr. Hutchins reiterated that the large majority of flights to and from the Heliport were legal and well within the flying rules.

Mr. Stanbury advised that the only practical approved method was by means of CCTV cameras, as the cost of having to place someone on the bridge for periods of time would be prohibitive. A check would need to be made to ascertain whether the Council had cameras that could be diverted temporarily for this purpose. There were also issues about how the recorded material was to be examined and evaluated. Besides, the three to four days that would be required to review the recorded material would have resource implications.

The Chairman suggested that perhaps, at least two cameras would be required for this exercise.

Capt. Forrest advised that one would need to be clear about what operation was to be filmed. Helicopters over Chelsea, for instance, would be expected to be some 1,500 feet above ground level because of the restrictions imposed, whilst those over the river would be at least 1,000 feet above the surface of the river.

Ms. Wrage, in supporting the monitoring proposed by Mr. Harris, suggested that it might be appropriate to record helicopter arrivals. Mr. Harris added that the monitoring could be done by having one camera placed on Wandsworth Bridge and pointing down river.

The Chairman then suggested that the technical aspects of such an exercise were perhaps paramount, more so than the resource implications. He suggested that before a decision could be taken, the various key issues needed to be addressed, namely, the precise equipment that would be required, whether such equipment would be available for the purpose, the methodology to be employed, what footage would be required, and how the costs of this exercise would be met.

Mr. Mayner undertook to consider the feasibility of such an exercise, in conjunction with Mr. Stanbury and in consultation, as necessary, with Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea Councils, and to report back to the Consultative Group.

Councillor Hallmark suggested that the GLA also had a responsibility in this regard and that the proposal fitted in well with recommendation 1 set out in the Annexe to Paper F.

The Chairman then asked the officers to take into account an approach to the GLA, as suggested by Councillor Hallmark, and to DEFRA, as suggested by Councillor Law.

Date of next meeting. On item 10, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Consultative Group should be held on Monday, 16th June 2008 at 7.00 p.m.

Any other business. 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) CAA information on London-wide helicopter movements. Mr. Mayner informed the Consultative Group that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) publishes a great deal of information including on helicopter movements across London on its website. He undertook to prepare and submit to the Consultative Group at the next meeting, an analysis of these movements.

(b) Work programme. With the approval of the Chairman, Mr. Ken Fergusson of the residents' representatives group, raised issues regarding the Consultative Group's work programme, on behalf of the residents' representatives.

Mr. Fergusson referred to a briefing note that Mr. Stanbury had prepared and made available to the residents' representatives when they met with Council officers on 17th November 2006, just prior to the establishment of the Consultative Group.

Mr. Fergusson made reference to the paragraph in the briefing note entitled 'Battersea Heliport – Environmental Impact' which read: "Battersea operations are known to adversely impact on the local environment in respect of noise." He then read an extract from the

paragraph entitled 'Battersea Heliport – Environmental Controls': All civilian helicopters are required to pass international noise certification (ICAO) tests. The certification process for helicopters is similar to that adopted for fixed wing aircraft. At Battersea, helicopters that are not able to meet a local noise standard of 81dB(A) at a distance of 150 metres from the take off position are restricted to a maximum of 1,500 movements within the annual 12, 000 quota. Most commercial helicopters using Battersea, however, fall within an automatic "A" list which was drawn up by the former Greater London Council. In practice this control now does little to encourage the introduction of newer and less noisy types of helicopter."

Mr. Fergusson pointed out further that the briefing note had stated that "it is hoped that as well as being consulted and informed about helicopter operations at Battersea, the new group might have a role in contributing to the emerging debate on helicopter strategy in London.

He then explained that there were two pieces of work that had been promised in the briefing note, following the preamble:-

"In terms of items specific to Battersea Heliport, Wandsworth Council will be pressing for the following issues to be included in the workplan of the consultative group for the next 12 months:-

- In line with its robust stance on aircraft noise, Wandsworth will also want to see progress made towards the establishment of a proper system of noise monitoring in the Battersea area. It is hoped that this will involve undertaking a comprehensive noise study (paid for by the Heliport operator) in order that the effect of helicopter operations on the local noise climate on both sides of the river can be objectively assessed for the first time. Currently, there are no decibel or "contour" limits that apply to Battersea (unlike Heathrow). A comprehensive noise study may reveal future options for noise reduction and/ or mitigation (for example by the use of modified departure and arrival profiles). If the study were to include a social survey it may also be possible to identify particular elements of the Battersea operation which are currently most annoying. A noise study would also enable objective data to be collected on the relative noise emission of different helicopter types."

Mr. Fergusson said that this measurement of the noise levels associated with different types of helicopters was precisely the sort of ranking table residents had hoped to have access to. He referred to Paper F considered by the Consultative Group on 30th April 2007 and commented that the residents' representatives had hoped that a register of noise levels would emerge from the research project being funded by DEFRA. Accordingly, the residents hoped that this work would be amongst the early tasks that the project would set itself.

Mr. Stanbury replied that, whilst he was happy to contact the project to enquire from them the extent to which they would apply themselves to the production of such a register, he did not believe that the researchers were programmed to undertake this work. He said that he would contact the researchers in order to avoid any duplication of effort that might otherwise result.

Capt. Forrest advised the Consultative Group that such a list had been prepared some years ago, a little after the Heliport was opened, but that, apart from military ones, helicopters had become less noisy.

(c) Ceiling on helicopter flights. Sir Peter Jennings enquired about what measures are in place to ensure that the annual maximum of flight movements involving the Heliport are not breached. He suggested that, despite the downturn in the economy in 2007, the total number of movements affecting the Heliport was merely 140 short of the maximum. Accordingly, any upturn in the economy could be expected to increase the number of movements to and from the Heliport.

Capt. Forrest explained that, following the breach in the ceiling in the previous year, a rationing procedure has been put in place. The number of movements currently is well within acceptable limits and the ceiling would not be breached this year. He said that, though unpopular with users of the Heliport, the rationing system would continue to be enforced rigorously.

The Chairman acknowledged that the procedure introduced last year had been successful so far.

(d) Users' representatives' attendance. Councillor Law expressed regret that no representatives of the users of the Heliport were present at the meeting. Capt. Forrest said that he would speak with them to ensure that they attended meetings of the Consultative Group.

The meeting ended at 8.05 p.m.