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Policy paper

Overarching aviation noise policy

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In [Flightpath to the future: a strategic framework for the aviation sector](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flightpath-to-the-future-a-strategic-framework-for-the-aviation-sector) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flightpath-to-the-future-a-strategic-framework-for-the-aviation-sector>) published last year, the government stated that it would set out next steps on noise policy in 2022 to 2023. It is our intention to publish a noise policy paper later this year.

In advance of this, to frame the night-time noise abatement objective consultation and to provide clarity for airports and their stakeholders preparing or responding to noise action plan consultations, we are publishing the government's revised overarching aviation noise policy statement:

- “ The government's overall policy on aviation noise is to balance the economic and consumer benefits of aviation against their social and health implications in line with the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management. This should take into account the local and national context of both passenger and freight operations, and recognise the additional health impacts of night flights.
- “ The impact of aviation noise must be mitigated as much as is practicable and realistic to do so, limiting, and where possible reducing, the total adverse impacts on health and quality of life from aviation noise.”

The bases for this change are the [Aviation 2050 Green Paper](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/769695/aviation-2050-web.pdf) (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/769695/aviation-2050-web.pdf), the [2020 consultation on night flight restrictions](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/night-flight-restrictions-at-heathrow-gatwick-and-stansted-airports-between-2022-and-2024-plus-future-night-flight-policy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/night-flight-restrictions-at-heathrow-gatwick-and-stansted-airports-between-2022-and-2024-plus-future-night-flight-policy>) and the [UK air navigation guidance 2017](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-air-navigation-guidance-2017) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-air-navigation-guidance-2017>).

In Aviation 2050 we consulted on setting a new objective “to limit, and where possible, reduce total adverse effects on health and quality of life from aviation noise.” This was to bring national aviation noise policy in line with airspace policy updated in 2017.

Consultation responses had general support for focus on the total adverse effects, although some respondents highlighted the potential ambiguity of “limit, and where possible, reduce”, with some suggestions that policy should be to reduce aviation noise.

We consider that “limit, and where possible reduce” remains appropriate wording. An overall reduction in total adverse effects is desirable, but in the context of sustainable growth an increase in total adverse effects may be offset by an increase in economic and consumer benefits. In circumstances where there is an increase in total adverse effects, “limit” would mean to mitigate and minimise adverse effects, in line with the Noise Policy Statement for England.

In the [2020 night flight restrictions consultation](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/night-flight-restrictions-at-heathrow-gatwick-and-stansted-airports-between-2022-and-2024-plus-future-night-flight-policy/night-flight-restrictions#our-national-night-flight-policy-1) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/night-flight-restrictions-at-heathrow-gatwick-and-stansted-airports-between-2022-and-2024-plus-future-night-flight-policy/night-flight-restrictions#our-national-night-flight-policy-1>), we consulted on including a night noise reference in our noise objective, suggesting that the following additional statement could be included:

“ There should be a balance between the local and national economic and consumer benefits of night flights, both in terms of passenger and freight operations, against their social and health implications, in line with ICAO’s Balanced Approach.”

On balance, responses supported the introduction of this statement, although some respondents argued that policy should be to ban or progressively reduce night flights.

Balancing the benefits that aviation brings against its negative impacts has long been implicit in aviation noise policy. Therefore it is reasonable to expand scope of the proposed text for night flights to include all flights, as we have done in our revised policy.

However, as there is clear evidence of additional health impacts of night flights, it is also right that this should be recognised within overarching noise policy.

One of the overall objectives underpinning the Air Navigation Guidance 2017 is to “emphasise that the environmental impact of aviation must be mitigated as much as is practicable and realistic to do so.” Consultation responses suggested that including this in our overall policy would be beneficial. This complements the aim of limiting and where possible reducing the total adverse impacts, and we consider helps clarify that noise mitigation as well as noise reduction can contribute to reducing total adverse effects of noise. We have therefore introduced this phrase into our overarching policy.

We intend to publish a noise policy paper later this year which will set out our plan to monitor our progress against this objective and what specific actions we are taking in this respect and how the government will evaluate whether the policy aims are being met.

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