

I speak to you now on the issue of aircraft noise disturbance, to give direct evidence firstly as a long term 30-year resident of St Albans, and secondly as a founding member of the working group that manages Heartwood forest Woodland Trust site some miles south east of the airport. I support the cases put forward expertly by LADACAN and CPRE, and am hereby highlighting and adding evidence on noise. The details of noise measurements, contours and averages will be better addressed by others, I want to contribute by expressing the perceived harm, which the numbers aim to represent, but can never succeed.

The perceived harm of aircraft noise is most acute at times when we expect and need quiet. For most of us that is firstly night time, and secondly when we seek escape in nature, e.g dog walking, running, bike riding, outdoor yoga, bird watching and so on. Regarding night time, I have slept in the same room in the same house for 30 years. I never used to be woken up by aircraft before 6.30. Now I am. Sometimes I notice two or more noisy aircraft followed by a long gap. Oddly the uncertainty of the gap waiting for the next one wakes one up more, increasing the level of disturbance. I doubt that will be represented in any of the noise numbers you will be presented with.

Also unrepresented in the noise numbers will be how human noise tolerance depends on whether the source represents a public good or a source of avoidable pollution. If the source was non-polluting or a flight for essential purposes, e.g. humanitarian or medical, it would be much less disturbing. But now we know that most flying is not essential, and is highly polluting in terms of global warming and of local urban air quality, and so should be discouraged, not incentivised. This inevitably means the noise problem is felt more strongly than can be represented in numbers alone. There is well established precedent for interpreting numbers to give effect to what the numbers are intended to represent, in this case the actual harm felt. Hence I urge you to take account that the numbers tend to under represent the level of harm felt.

The second type of evidence I would like to present relates to my earlier mention of needing and expecting quiet, that is when we escape to nature. Thirteen years ago I started volunteering at Heartwood forest, and have continued ever since. There are 800 acres of native species woodland and meadows created and run by the woodland trust with public access. I used to think of it as a haven of quiet, a valuable escape for the thousands who visit for peaceful walks. It is a place where they and I expect and need quiet. There is nowhere else of comparable scale nearby. So that is where almost any aircraft noise is most noticeable and most harmful, and where no physical barrier can be added in mitigation. I have given public talks there to small groups for a number of years, and occasionally have to interrupt them as I can't compete with the noisier aircraft. I have been in the audience for other talks and experienced the interruptions. I used to attend an outdoor yoga class there, it never used to be interrupted, now it is. I recently received a message from a friend saying her husband, a frequent visitor to heartwood, had just seen so many noisy aircraft almost continuously that he described it as "ludicrous". These are examples of the loss of tranquillity referred to by CPRE. The harm felt will be seriously under -represented in noise measurements. But there are in the region of one hundred thousand visitors per year seeking tranquillity at Heartwood alone. They are now losing it. I seek to represent to you their loss. Please weigh it even without numbers.

To finish, one of the public talks at Heartwood describes the landscape history, and asks the audience what single event had most impact on the landscape. The answer given is the 1947 planning acts, because that saved the last remnants of the rural landscape here from inevitable ribbon development. So we at Heartwood acknowledge that it owes its existence to the far-sightedness of the originators of the UK planning system, your predecessors. Our forest and all of us now need protection again. We need you to match that far sightedness of your predecessors.

Thank you.

Peter Cutforth

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