

Airport update for Berkswell Parish Council, March 2021

1. Airport Consultative Committee

There was a virtual meeting of the Committee on 4 March. The first item related to the UKACC Liaison Group, which is chaired by the Birmingham ACC Chairman, Colin Flack. The role of ACCs at the local level is becoming better-recognised by the DfT, and a national body for aviation noise is not thought to be a good way forward.

Nick Barton, the CEO, gave a presentation on Airport operations, dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Activity has been reduced even further during the 3rd lock-down. Travel within the UK is permitted for specific reasons, such as work. International travel to countries which are not on the Red List is possible, but requires 4 PCR tests adding up to £400. For countries on the Red List, quarantine in the Holiday Inn is required, costing £1750. Half the 81 current guests at the hotel have passed through the Airport.

Passengers in February totalled 10900, which is similar to the number in 1969, and which is 98.8% below expectations. The Airport is reducing the hours of operation, to limit the losses of £¼M a day.

The Airport thinks the quarantine arrangements are unworkable, and is hoping that bilateral agreements will be reached for easier travel with countries such as Spain and Greece, probably starting on 17 May. Pre-departure Covid testing could be the key.

The travel industry is hopeful that - once restrictions are eased - there will be a strong recovery. Emirates is a vital airline for the Airport, and they are planning 2 services per day from June. There is a lot of pressure to get Dubai off the Red List.

The rebate on business rates will save the Airport a total of about £10M.

Despite the lack of traffic, noise remains an issue. There were 3 noise violations at night and one in the day, all by Antonov cargo aircraft carrying freight to avoid post-Brexit transport delays. It seems these aircraft cause significant disturbance in Marston Green whilst on the ground.

With the securing of £95M, outside the HS2 budget, to change the car parking at the Bickenhill station back to the original multi-storey design, there will be a further change to the People Mover. Station building is expected to run from the end of 2024 to early 2030.

The Airport is responding to a number of planning applications for high-rise buildings in Solihull and Birmingham, and has asked Solihull to include a specific policy in the Local Plan to make the safeguarding requirements clearer.

2. Noise subgroup

There were virtual meetings of the Noise subgroup on 16 July, 21 October, 25 November, and 20 January. The ACC has endorsed our proposal to keep the Night Flying Policy unchanged, with an annual review, because of the abnormal activity levels at present, and because the Policy is generally effective. This decision will be fed back to the Solihull Airport Working Party and will become effective on 31 October. When resources are available, the Airport will gather data on a possible night limit of 81 dB, which will be considered in the 2024 review.

Richard Lloyd, 6 March 2021