



Department for Transport

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From the Parliamentary
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Dear Léonie,

Thank you for your letter of 4 December to the Secretary of State following the London Assembly Environment Committee's meeting on 16 October 2025 about the environmental impacts of a third runway at Heathrow airport. I am replying as the Minister responsible for aviation.

The Government supports expansion at Heathrow Airport through a third runway and is determined to end years of uncertainty and delay. Better connections and a third runway have the potential to boost the UK economy and support over 100,000 jobs in the local area. However, the Government has also been clear that alongside economic growth, airport expansion proposals must demonstrate that they can be delivered in line with the UK's legally binding climate change commitments and meet strict environmental requirements on air quality and noise pollution. Therefore, I welcome your Committee's consideration of the environmental impacts of a third runway at Heathrow. I am also grateful to all those who provided evidence at the meeting. I will address each of the recommendations in your letter in turn.

Recommendation 1

Ahead of publishing the Airports National Policy Statement, the government should set out how its four tests for Heathrow will be measured and ensure these are reviewed by independent experts.

As you note, on 22 October the Secretary of State announced that the Government has formally commenced the review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) which will reflect any changes in legislation, policy, and data since it was designated in 2018. As part of the review the Government is considering how its four tests on economic growth, climate, air quality, and noise will be set and whether any metrics are needed to measure if these tests are being met.

We are currently reviewing, and where necessary updating, our analysis of the economic and environmental impacts of expansion at Heathrow, which will inform the four tests. We expect to publicly consult on any draft amendments to the ANPS by summer 2026, alongside parliamentary scrutiny, both of which must take place before any final revised ANPS is published. Independent experts will therefore have the opportunity to comment on how the four tests are set.

Recommendation 2

The Airports National Policy Statement should include targets for no additional air quality impacts from airports and include progressively tighter standards to lower emissions over time.

Recommendation 3

The government should ensure that the role of Ultrafine Particles (UFPs) from aircraft is properly assessed and included as part of the government's tests for its Airports National Policy Statement and ensure that there is a systematic process for measuring around Heathrow and other London airports.

With regards to recommendations 2 and 3, as noted above as part of the ANPS review, the Government is considering how the Government's four tests for Heathrow expansion, including air quality, should be set. The review will consider all key air quality pollutants, such as nitrogen oxides and particulate matter. We are also aware of growing concern around the role of ultrafine particles from aircraft and will consider how these are addressed in the ANPS.

The mitigations for air quality impacts will be determined as part of the review process, and if any amendments are made to the existing ANPS, they will be subject to consultation and parliamentary scrutiny in summer 2026.

Recommendation 4

As part of its updated Airports National Policy Statement, the government should take a national perspective on airport capacity and consider caps on overall flight numbers that keep emissions within the overall limits for emissions set by the Climate Change Committee.

The Government is committed to meeting our climate obligations and set out detail on plans for meeting legislated carbon budgets 4-6 on 29 October 2025, including for aviation.

Department for Transport analysis shows that the aviation sector can achieve net zero without the government capping overall flight numbers by focusing on the development of new fuels and technologies.

We are already making significant progress on the transition to greener aviation. The Government has introduced the Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) Mandate and the SAF Bill to provide revenue certainty for UK SAF producers, is delivering airspace modernisation, which will see cleaner, quicker and quieter journeys, and is providing funding to support the development of low and zero emission aerospace technologies.

As part of the ANPS review, we are updating our carbon analysis which will include assumptions for a third runway at Heathrow Airport. This analysis will be published alongside any amended ANPS for consultation in summer 2026.

Recommendation 5

The government should ensure that evidence on the climate impacts of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is credible and that decisions on expanding its use are based on realistic scenarios and actual emissions from aircraft and real-world constraints rather than future technology and optimistic forecasts.

SAF is one of the key measures required to reach net zero emissions from aviation by 2050. We have a comprehensive plan in place for SAF. We have set ambitious targets in the SAF Mandate, are providing grant funding to support investment in a UK SAF industry and are working to deliver a revenue certainty mechanism. The SAF Mandate will secure demand for SAF, by setting targets for the supply of an increasing amount of SAF in the overall UK aviation fuel mix. SAF supplied under the SAF Mandate must adhere to strict sustainability criteria around sourcing and land use.

According to our official statistics, sustainable aviation fuel represented 2% of aviation fuel supplied to the UK in 2024. The SAF Mandate makes provision for the publication of detailed statistics on the supply of SAF, including feedstock, country of origin, and carbon and sustainability data. In 2024, SAF achieved an average of 84% greenhouse gas emission reductions compared to conventional fossil fuel. We will continue to review the evidence and update eligibility and sustainability criteria on a regular basis. In line with this commitment, the Government recently published a consultation on the development of a Common Biomass Sustainability Framework, which includes proposals for strengthening existing biomass sustainability criteria, in line with latest evidence.

Recommendation 6

In the Airspace change process, London's green spaces and other areas of tranquillity should be protected from noise disturbance. When designing airspace, providing respite for communities and bans on night flights should be retained.

Any future airspace change proposals (ACPs) for the London region will continue to follow the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) Airspace Change Process (CAP1616), which sets out how airspace change proposals should be developed and delivered, including potential options for respite and flexibility to minimise the impact to local communities where possible.

On 25 November we launched a consultation and proposed changes to the Air Navigation Directions and Guidance which aims to futureproof the regulatory framework for the CAA's airspace change process and is due to close on 20 January 2026. I would encourage your Committee to respond to this consultation as an opportunity to propose what should be included in the guidance. You can find a link to the consultation [here](#).

The CAA are also currently consulting on proposed updates to the airspace change process, but it will still include full environmental assessments, which includes assessments on noise, and consulting with those affected by the airspace change.

Separately, as you may be aware, the current ANPS provides clear requirements on noise mitigation that any scheme for a north west runway at Heathrow should meet. This includes a scheduled night flight ban of 6.5 hours, between the hours of 11pm and 7am, a runway alternation scheme that provides communities affected with predictable periods of respite, and a noise envelope with clear noise performance targets. The review of the ANPS will consider if any change is required to the noise impacts and mitigations set out in the existing ANPS.

Recommendation 7

Any update to the Airports National Policy Statement should formalise the consultation process for people potentially affected by airport expansion, including formal roles for the Council for Independent Scrutiny of Heathrow Airport (CISHA) and the London Assembly, ensuring that Londoners have an informed and meaningful opportunity to ask questions and share their views.

The Government recognises the importance of engagement with those affected by the review of the ANPS and by any revisions that are then made to the ANPS. We are in the process of planning stakeholder engagement activity to ensure that contributions are considered transparently and feed directly into policy development at the appropriate times. If we then propose amendments to the ANPS we will undertake a public consultation on them which will be open to all, and they will also be subject to parliamentary scrutiny, both of which are required by the Planning Act 2008.

On 25 November the Government published its approach to stakeholder engagement which can be accessed [here](#). This sets out how we will ensure that the development and review of the ANPS is conducted in a manner that is transparent, inclusive, and informed by a comprehensive range of stakeholder views. We will engage with local authorities and the Greater London Authority about consultation and publicity requirements of any amended ANPS, as specified by the Planning Act 2008.

The existing ANPS is clear that any applicant must engage constructively with a community engagement board, and the Council for Independent Scrutiny of Heathrow Airport currently fulfils and delivers this requirement. As part of the ANPS review we will consider if any changes have occurred since 2018 that would justify any updates to be made to the community engagement section of the ANPS.

My thanks once again to you and your Committee for raising these concerns with me, and to those who contributed to the Committee's meeting.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keir Mather". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

KEIR MATHER MP

MINISTER FOR AVIATION, MARITIME AND DECARBONISATION