



**Department
for Transport**

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From the Minister of State
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Thank you for your letter of 7 May, to the Secretary of State, about Aviation Policy Framework. We received nearly 500 responses to the consultation and I am grateful to the London Assembly, and in particular the Health and Environment Committee, for your response. I am replying as Minister of State responsible for Aviation.

Noise impacts

Responses to the draft Aviation Policy Framework consultation were polarised on the question of whether to retain the 57 dB LAeq,16h contour as the average level of daytime aircraft noise marking the approximate onset of significant community annoyance, and whether to map noise to a lower level at the designated airports. As your letter notes, generally, responses from the aviation sector and business organisations supported the status quo whereas local authorities, environmental groups and the public supported a move to lower levels.

There remains a lack of conclusive evidence on community responses to aircraft noise, making it a difficult area on which to make policy. Maintaining the status quo at this time will have the benefit of allowing noise exposure levels to be compared with historic trends at airports. Moreover, the 57 dB contour is a baseline; airports may wish to map to different levels and the Airports Commission may wish to use additional metrics in its work to consider, and then communicate, the noise impacts of any new airport capacity proposals. Indeed, the Commission has stated that this is an issue

on which it will carry out further detailed work and public engagement. I hope that you will contribute to this work as it develops.

On compensation to those affected most by aircraft noise, the consultation asked whether airports' compensation schemes were considered to be reasonable and proportionate. As your letter notes, the majority of views expressed felt that they were not and the schemes should be more generous, either in scope or in the amounts offered. However, we are aware that some airports are already reviewing their compensation schemes and the Aviation Policy Framework confirms that where compensation schemes have been in place for many years and there are few properties still eligible for compensation, airport operators should review their schemes to ensure they remain reasonable and proportionate. It also restates and clarifies existing minimum thresholds. However, in line with our general policy on regulation, the Government does not believe it is appropriate to regulate airports on this matter.

Air quality and climate change

Regarding air quality, I welcome the fact that you see the APF's recognition of the importance of surface access strategies and the need for a wide range of partners to be involved as a step in the right direction. Since the draft document was published for consultation, the Government has set up the independent Airports Commission to examine the question of how best the UK can maintain its international connectivity, including any new capacity. The Commission has recently published the assessment criteria it will use to consider any proposals for new capacity. These include looking at the air quality, as well as noise, implications of any proposal.

Equally, the Airports Commission has confirmed that it will consider how any proposal compares, in terms of its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, with alternative options for providing similar amount of additional capacity; if indeed it finds that there is a need for new capacity. The Government's emphasis remains on global action as the best means of making a significant and cost effective contribution towards reducing aviation's emissions, followed by action at the European level and then national action, where it is appropriate and justified in terms of the balance between benefits and costs.

Thank you again for your writing on this important issue. As a Government, we believe that aviation needs to grow, delivering the benefits essential to our economic wellbeing, whilst respecting the environment and protecting quality

of life. The way ahead will be challenging as we work together to strike the right balance. But it is critical that we do so in order to safeguard our long-term economic prosperity. I am copying this letter electronically, as requested, to Ian Williamson at ian.williamson@london.gov.uk.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'S. Burns', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

THE RT. HON. SIMON BURNS