

## NPS Consultation Response: **Thematic Paper** Impact Assessments

May 2017

### Key Points:

- The NPS is the framework for a significantly important piece of national infrastructure and should be based on transparent, robust assessments of the impacts.
- Instead, there is a fundamental lack of clarity around what is being assessed, who is impacted, the scale of the impacts and what measures are required to mitigate harm.
- The lack of a cumulative assessment is a particular weakness which precludes a proper understanding of how individuals are affected by the combination of different impacts.

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The NPS should be supported by transparent and robust impact assessments, which provide the evidence base for its framework. In fact, the impact assessments provided by the NPS' supporting documentation are very weak, do not follow best practice and for the most part simply reiterate what the Airports Commission (AC) concluded.

### 2. Appraisal of Sustainability

- 2.1 The NPS is supported by the Appraisal of Sustainability (AoS) as well as an appendix on each assessment topic, such as air quality and noise. Producing an AoS is a requirement of the Planning Act 2008; it must be produced prior to an NPS being designated and, in accordance with Directive 2001/42/EC, must assess the likely environmental impacts and effects that a proposal may have and set out the mitigations required to reduce impacts. Furthermore, the Government had committed to assessing the social and economic impacts, including noise and equalities, as part of its AoS.
- 2.2 This, however, has turned out not to be the case with the AoS produced in respect of the NPS. Instead of an assessment of the impacts of the third runway and the mitigations required, most of the AoS appendices rely on detailed mitigation measures being defined at the design stage.

- 2.3 Where mitigation measures are given the AoS largely reflects those recommended by the AC; at times, some are considered as a required part of the mitigation package but at other times measures are just quoted, without any clarity as to whether they are being reported or required. The AoS needs to be clearer on this. It is a failure that the NPS provides a long list of mitigation measures recommended by the AC without indicating if the NPS requires them for a third runway.
- 2.4 The AoS uses a five-point scale to determine the impact of each of the shortlisted options on every topic. This approach makes nuanced comparison of options nearly impossible. There is no allowance to determine the magnitude of the impact, and while there has been some comparative assessment between shortlisted options, this is not enough. This issue is particularly evident for the environmental factors, where all three shortlisted options are generally presented as having a “Significant negative effect”, despite huge variation in the magnitude of the impacts.

**Table 1: Appraisal of Sustainability – comments on Noise**

Topic	Noise
AoS	“The LGW-2R [London Gatwick two runway] scheme presents the least negative effects on the noise topic objective”
AoS Noise Appendix	“Population noise exposure around Gatwick with a second runway was predicted to be around 40 times smaller than for either of the Heathrow expansion schemes”
AoS Score	London Gatwick two runway scheme: <b>Significant Negative Effect</b>
	London Heathrow third runway scheme: <b>Significant Negative Effect</b>

Source: Appraisal of Sustainability and Appraisal of Sustainability Noise Appendix

- 2.5 Table 1 above shows an example of how the five-point scale has its limitations. The AoS rates both the second runway at Gatwick and the third runway as having a “significant negative effect”. The difference in the number of people affected by noise at Heathrow, compared to Gatwick, is however, 40 times higher. This scale of difference is not accurately captured by the assessments.

### 3. Health Impact Analysis

- 3.1 We expected the NPS to be supported by a Health Impact Assessment; instead, the NPS was supported by a Health Impact Analysis that falls short of best practice. It fails to fully identify those whose health will be impacted by a third runway, it fails to properly assess what the health impacts are and it fails to provide a full assessment of suitable mitigations. The reason for the NPS taking this approach is unclear.
- 3.2 Understanding and assessing the health impacts of a third runway is vital. The communities who live near Heathrow already have to deal with the negative health impacts of noise and air quality associated with the airport. These impacts are harmful to all but particularly to children, older residents, those most deprived and

those with existing health conditions.

- 3.3 The Health Impact Analysis should consider the health impacts of a third runway on the population within the study areas but this is not the case. This is further complicated by the use of two different study areas. Best practice would be to have a single study area based on where the impacts are experienced, not arbitrary administrative boundaries, nor having different study areas for different impacts. The result is that the Health Impact Analysis does not fully reflect the geographical area where the impacts are experienced.
- 3.4 The Health Impact Analysis fails to fully assess the health impacts because the document does not comment on the effect or the scale of impacts, and so is lacking in quantification. For example, the impact of noise would be to disrupt sleep and concentration, which has the effect of increasing stress from disrupted sleep and limiting a child's educational ability through lack of concentration. There should also be commentary regarding how many people would have their sleep disturbed and how many children are in education in the affected areas.
- 3.5 The Health Impact Analysis should consider all suitable forms of mitigation but this document is restricted to only considering those already proposed by Heathrow airport<sup>1</sup>. Best practice would mean assessing the effectiveness of any relevant mitigation rather than blindly accepting those proposed by HAL. As a result, the Health Impact Analysis fails to provide a full assessment of the measures that would be suitable to mitigate the harm.
- 3.6 The Health Impact Analysis includes the same assessment topics as the AoS in order to be consistent<sup>2</sup>. Again, this does not follow best practice and no reason is given about why health had to be consistent with the AoS. As a result, some of the topics included in the Health Impact Analysis would normally be scoped out, for example on soil and landscape.
- 3.7 One topic key to health, is air quality. Poor air quality is linked to serious medical conditions but one of the limitations of the Health Impact Analysis is that the traffic impacts – a key air quality driver – were not assessed in detail<sup>3</sup>. The reason given for this was that the data was not available at the time of analysis. The Health Impact Analysis therefore has an incomplete assessment of the traffic impacts and the effects of poor air quality – one of the key health challenges given that the area around Heathrow already breaches the legal limit value for Nitrogen Dioxide and has high levels of particulate matter.
- 3.8 The Health Impact Analysis for the NPS is wholly inadequate; it fails to follow best practice in several key areas and therefore is not able to provide an assessment of the

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<sup>1</sup> Draft National Policy Statement, Health Impact Analysis, section 2.4.1

<sup>2</sup> Draft National Policy Statement, Health Impact Analysis, section 2.4.1

<sup>3</sup> Draft National Policy Statement, Health Impact Analysis, section 6.1.2

health impacts of a third runway.

#### **4. Interim Equality Assessment**

- 4.1 We expected the NPS to be supported by a robust Equalities assessment that captures all the impacts and effects of the third runway. Crucially the Interim Equality Assessment considered some protected groups but only those which have a presence in the study area above regional levels only<sup>4</sup>. This is not in line with best practice. All protected groups within the study area should be considered, irrespective of their proportion to the regional baseline.
- 4.2 Additionally a limited definition of disability was used in this assessment resulting in an inability to fully identify impacts on residents with disabilities. This definition was based on census data<sup>5</sup>, specifically people claiming job seekers allowance with a disability premium. This definition is not sufficiently inclusive.
- 4.3 In its conclusion, the Interim Equality Assessment states, “it also seems that many negative equalities impacts could be fully or partially mitigated through good design, operations and mitigations plans”<sup>6</sup>. There is no assessment or evidence to support this conclusion and it demonstrates an over reliance on the promoter somehow mitigating the negative impacts at the next stage.

#### **5. Habitats Regulations Assessment**

- 5.1 If a third runway was built there will be a loss of European designated sites. The Habitats Regulation Assessment must demonstrate the consideration of all the likely impacts from a third runway and the impact on the integrity of the European designated site. It should identify what mitigations are required to reduce harm and what compensation is required if harm cannot be reduced. The Habitats Regulation Assessment does not meet the specific tests from the regulations and fails to assess any mitigations or compensations.
- 5.2 We do not consider that there has been an appropriate assessment of alternative solutions. There are other solutions, which may have a lesser impact or avoid impacts on European sites all together.
- 5.3 We do not consider that the test for imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) has been met by the Habitats Regulations Assessment. The IROPI test allows for allows plans or projects that may have an adverse effect on the integrity of a European site to go ahead on grounds of “imperative reasons of overriding public interest”. The NPS states that a third runway at Heathrow meets this test<sup>7</sup> but does

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<sup>4</sup> Interim Equality Assessment, section 3.1.2

<sup>5</sup> Interim Equality Assessment, section 2.4.2

<sup>6</sup> Interim Equality Assessment, section 7.1.2

<sup>7</sup> Draft National Policy Statement, section 1.28

not provide comprehensive justification for why this might be the case.

- 5.4 Additionally the Habitats Regulation Assessment relies heavily on the negative impacts of a third runway being addressed at the detailed design stage<sup>8</sup> with no detail as to how this conclusion was reached or on what evidence it is based.

## 6. Cumulative impact

- 6.1 People do not experience benefits and disbenefits in isolation. Many local residents who are impacted by aviation noise are likely to be the same ones also impacted by poor air quality, loss of housing or community facilities. Some also work at the airport or might benefit from future jobs.
- 6.2 In order to fully understand the impact of a third runway, the NPS should integrate its assessments of a third runway. However, the NPS fails to provide any kind of cumulative or integrated assessment, and therefore underplays that impact that a third runway will have.
- 6.3 As well as separating the assessments, the NPS uses different years, as well as different study areas, to assess different impacts; this inconsistent approach makes it difficult to compare the impacts identified in the assessments. Some assessments are for when the third runway is expected to open in 2025, others are for 2030 and some only assess the base (or current) year. This is set out in Table 2 below. No explanation is given for this inconsistency.

**Table 2: List of documents that support the NPS and the year that their assessments are based on**

NPS Assessment	Year(s) Assessed
Appraisal of Sustainability – Community	2020-25 and 2030
Appraisal of Sustainability – Quality of Life	2030
Appraisal of Sustainability – Economy	2030 and 2050
Appraisal of Sustainability – Noise	2030 and 2040
Appraisal of Sustainability – Biodiversity	Base Year 2015/16
Appraisal of Sustainability – Soil	Base Year 2015/16
Appraisal of Sustainability – Water	Base Year 2026
Appraisal of Sustainability – Air Quality	2025 and 2030
Appraisal of Sustainability – Carbon	2025/26 and 2050
Appraisal of Sustainability – Resources and Waste	2030 and 2050
Appraisal of Sustainability – Historic Environment	Base Year 2015/16
Appraisal of Sustainability – Landscape	Base Year 2015/16
Interim Equality Assessment	Base Year 2015/16
Habitats Regulation Assessment	Base Year 2015/16
Health Impacts Analysis	Base Year 2015/16

<sup>8</sup> Habitats Regulations Assessment, Statement to inform appropriate assessment, section 12.1.2

- 6.4 The inability to properly gauge the cumulative impact of a third runway at Heathrow is a particular weakness of this NPS. This effectively precludes a full understanding of how individuals are affected by the combination of different impacts.