

Consultation on Air Quality

Environment Food & Rural Affairs Committee, Environment Audit Committee, Health Committee and Transport Committee

Response from Richmond Heathrow Campaign 9 November 2017

Introduction

1. This is the written response of the Richmond Heathrow Campaign (RHC) to the joint inquiry by the Environment Food & Rural Affairs Committee, Environment Audit Committee, Health Committee and Transport Committee on their consultation on Air Quality.
2. RHC represents three amenity groups in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames: The Richmond Society, The Friends of Richmond Green, and the Kew Society, which together have over 2000 members. The members of our amenity groups are adversely affected by poor air quality and road and rail congestion in the west of London on account of Heathrow Airport and its access and also noise from Heathrow's flight paths. We acknowledge Heathrow's contribution to the UK economy and seek constructive engagement in pursuit of a better Heathrow. We are an active participant in the Heathrow Community Noise Forum.
3. RHC's principle concern is with Heathrow and the adverse economic and environmental impact of any Heathrow expansion. Our response therefore focusses on the impact Heathrow has on air quality and in particular the NOx pollution from road traffic accessing Heathrow, which is the main source of NOx concentrations in the area around Heathrow. Having said this, we recognise the consultation is about the UK and we suggest that the issues we raise in connection with London and Heathrow are probably relevant to other areas across the UK.
4. We believe it would be preferable to aim for a better Heathrow rather than bigger Heathrow and to capitalise on the world beating advantage of London's five airports, in particular by improving surface accessibility to all five airports, which would be a major benefit to users and to reducing air pollution. Our approach, as explained below, is to continue supporting the case for no new runways in the UK which is a position fully supported by the Airports Commission's evidence in comparing the Do-minimum option and the Heathrow Northwest Runway Option (NWR). In addition to the economic benefits from this approach it also avoids increasing NOx emissions and concentrations that arise with expansion.
5. Over recent years we have undertaken extensive research on Heathrow and submitted a large number of papers to the Airports Commission (the Commission) and others - all of which can be found at www.richmondheathrowcampaign.org and www.rhcfacts.org. Our consultation responses include those on Air Quality and in particular the *'Draft revised UK Air Quality Plan for tackling nitrogen dioxide'* submitted on 15 June 2017 and the *'Richmond Air Quality Action Plan'* submitted on 30 October 2017. Our response here to the Joint Inquiry is to the specific questions asked but further background to our answers can be found in our responses to the aforementioned consultations.

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Richmond Heathrow Campaign Responses to Joint Inquiry on Air Quality

A. How effectively do Government policies take into account the health and environmental impacts of poor air quality?

1. The UK Air Quality Plan says *'The focus of this plan is on government's most immediate air quality challenge: to reduce concentrations of NO₂ around roads. The aim is to achieve the statutory limit values for the whole of the UK within the shortest possible time.'* Broadly, we concur with this objective as far as it goes and note the operative word is 'reduce' so that an increase in NO₂ would be contrary to the stated objective. Also, any lengthening of time to meeting the statutory limits would be contrary to the objective.
2. We note that the Airports Commission's stated objective in appraising air quality was *"to improve air quality consistent with EU standards and local planning requirements"* (our italics). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that sustainable development should contribute to *reducing* pollution (our italics). The National Policy Statement for National Networks, specific to nationally significant infrastructure projects, requires the Secretary of State to "give air quality considerations substantial weight".
3. Therefore, on the face of it the UK Air Quality Plan is consistent with the air quality objectives in Planning law in seeking to reduce air pollution. However, we have three important reservations with the Air Quality objective as stated and propose the following changes:
 - a. **Thresholds.** It has already been proven that particulates (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) have no lower limit value that can be said to avoid harm to human health. While research has not yet proven the same causal link for NO₂, the evidence is heading towards demonstrating that NO₂ levels below the statutory limits can also be harmful, especially to the vulnerable. We do not accept that once statutory exceedences are eliminated that there is no harm to health from lower levels of NO₂. We propose that the Air Quality objectives should go further than the statutory threshold and seek to reduce NO₂ levels whatever they might be and not just those above the statutory limits. We suggest eliminating exceedences should be the first priority, reducing levels from above to below the statutory limits should be the second priority and reducing levels already below the statutory limits to still lower levels should be the third priority.
 - b. **Granularity.** The UK is divided into 43 zones for monitoring and control in order to satisfy the Air Quality objectives. The statutory limit values apply to the highest value at any location within each zone. We understand this is the Government's interpretation of the law. However, it tends to let those locations within a control zone that are below the highest exceedences off the hook. Within the London agglomeration, the highest exceedences are in the centre of London along Marylebone Road and Oxford Street. We do not agree with the Government's interpretation of the law, and we contend that lesser exceedences (and indeed lesser levels of NO₂ below limit values, given point (a) above)) also need to be the subject of a reduction objective. We see no justification at all for locations around Heathrow being allowed to increase their NO₂ levels, and especially exceedences where they occur, on the grounds that they are still below the highest exceedences elsewhere in the London zone and that it is only the latter that are subject to legal compliance.

The Air Quality objective needs to be revised to clarify this situation so that each and every location in the UK is singularly controlled and subject to a legal requirement that NO₂ be reduced in the shortest possible time. The objective should also ensure that displacement of pollution from one sensitive location to another is prohibited and only permitted where the displaced concentration does no harm. An analogous situation occurs with aircraft noise where the many people recently affected by changes in aircraft noise have voiced concern at the use of averaging metrics. In the case of air pollution the impact needs to be managed on a street by street basis and not just in terms of averages over large areas, such as the London agglomeration area. There is no attempt to apply the objectives to the granularity needed within by far the most polluted UK zone, London, which is a major failing of the Plan. This needs to be remedied so that objectives and targets are defined for each location where there is an exceedance or likely to be one in the future.

- c. **Satisfying the Objective - future compliance and uncertainty.** It is not clear that when the Air Quality objective in the UK Plan refers to reducing NO₂ in the shortest possible time what might be the base level of NO₂ against which a reduction is measured and from what date is the 'shortest possible time' measured and when might the objective be met. Presumably compliance is based on factual evidence at a particular time, whereas the satisfaction of the objective applies to both the present and predicted future. The objective would not be satisfied if compliance were not expected to be met at some future date. This is an important distinction between compliance and objective, both of which need to be satisfied.

The UK Plan is deficient in not converting the broad objective into meaningful targets for compliance in the shortest possible time. There is no target time-table for compliance by each of the 43 zones. The UK Plan does estimate the reduction in NO₂ for each of the proposed mitigation options - comparing the Do-minimum case with each mitigation option. But the results are far too generalised.

The UK Plan not only fails to apply the mitigation options to the real world but also to provide estimates of the uncertainty and confidence levels. The Plan and its Technical Report do discuss uncertainty but it is not applied to the outcomes of the Plan, because there is no detailed Plan. We should remember that the Government predicted UK NO₂ compliance by 2010 and then by 2015. Even an optimistic view of the Plan suggests compliance will not be before 2025 and London compliance may not be before 2030 or later. Past estimates of compliance must surely lead to scepticism with regard to current predictions.

4. **CAZ effectiveness.** The UK Plan takes the view that introducing CAZs is the most effective way of reducing the impact of pollution. But there is no explanation as to the impact of a CAZ on London for example, which in 2017 is predicted to have an annual mean NO₂ level of 103 $\mu\text{m}/\text{m}^3$ or indeed on locations around Heathrow or for that matter any specific location in the UK. The outcomes for each option are too generalised to avail of proper assessment and assessment of the UK pollution hot spots. The CAZ reduces the NO₂ by around 8 $\mu\text{m}/\text{m}^3$ in the first year compared to the Do-minimum but the impact diminishes each year. In effect, the CAZ accelerates the reduction in NO₂ but in the longer term has little impact.

B. Do these plans set out effective and proportionate measures to achieve necessary emissions reductions as quickly as possible?

1. See answer to question A.
2. Heathrow expansion is not considered by the Plan, which is extraordinarily remiss. While the concentrations near Heathrow are not the highest in London they substantially exceed the statutory limits and with the expansion of Heathrow there is the risk that any steps taken to reduce NO₂ will be more than offset by the increased road traffic accessing Heathrow.
3. It is unacceptable that efforts to reduce air pollution around Heathrow by the Mayor and others are to be offset by Heathrow expansion. It is a fundamental failure of the UK Plan in not recognising this issue.
4. It may well be that the third runway could not be used because of these exceedences above the statutory limit of 40 ug/m³. A two year delay for example would wreck havoc with Heathrow's project economics.
5. We are very concerned that the UK Plan fails to address this issue but also that a National Policy Statement is being finalised before this matter is addressed. Indeed the Heathrow expansion may be put before Parliament in spring 2018 before the Air Quality issues are addressed, which we believe would be wholly unacceptable.

C. Are other nations or cities taking more effective action that the UK could learn from?

Not answered.

D. Is there enough cross-government collaboration to set in place the right fiscal and policy incentives?

No. There is no effective body co-ordinating the several agencies and Heathrow in solving the major issue of pollution from access to Heathrow.

E. How can those charged with delivering national plans at local level be best supported and challenged?

Responsibility for mitigation.

The Government places great emphasis on delegating the problem and its solution to Local Authorities. However, they lack the means of control and resources. For example, the draft Richmond Noise Action Plan does not list each of the pollution hot spots in the Borough with details of the exceedences, measures to achieve compliance and time scale for reduction. Some of the highest exceedences are believed to be in Richmond town centre which one can but guess are due largely to buses. Yet Richmond Council can only try and influence the Mayor and London Buses to replace the polluting vehicles. The UK Plan fails to deal realistically with responsibilities for mitigating pollution. This point is also made in relation to pollution caused by access to Heathrow (see Question D).

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