

12 March 2008

AIRCRAFT NOISE IS SHOWN TO BE INCREASINGLY ANNOYING

There was no surprise when research recently published by the Department for Transport showed that people are more annoyed by aircraft noise now than they were in the early 1980's when fewer aircraft dominated the skies.

What was surprising was that after over 6 years of study by consultants the government feels unable to use the expensive research for policy guidance. What a shambles!

SASIG has written to the Department for Transport to press for an early resolution of the situation.

The government's press release announcing the publication of the ANASE study (Attitudes to Noise from Aviation Sources in England) identified that there were two key conclusions:

- first, that people are more annoyed by all levels of aircraft noise than they were in 1985 when the last major study in this field was carried out; and
- second, there is no identifiable threshold at which noise becomes a serious problem. Even relatively low levels of noise can cause some annoyance, which rises as the noise increases.

The press release then indicated that government will take the findings into account in developing air transport policy but, because of criticisms about the work, the study could not be used to provide a reliable way of attaching a monetary figure to the impact of aircraft noise.

But SASIG is critical that the government has then totally ignored the research when bringing forward their proposals for another runway and terminal at Heathrow and will presumably continue to ignore it at other airports.

SASIG is keen that new policies should be set sooner rather than later – perhaps leaving the monetary issues for further work in the future. For example planning policies set in 1994 (PPG 24) are based on the assumption that the onset of significant noise disturbance starts at the 57 Leq level and major new housing development should not be built in areas above 60 Leq. The research showed that the onset of disturbance could now be as low as 50 Leq and thus SASIG would like to see both the control of new housing and insulation for existing housing at a much lower figure than currently in use.

Richard Worrall, Chairman of SASIG commented "I have written to the Department stressing that there is no need to delay updating PPG24 – planners need that new policy guidance now – and it should be based on the acceptance that aircraft noise is now known to be more annoying than earlier research showed. Instead of using the now outdated 57 Leq contour we should have an interim policy based on 54 Leq and then carry out further research to test if that figure should be even lower."

ENDS

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NOTE TO EDITORS

SASIG has a broad national membership of local authorities but does not speak on behalf of the Local Government Association as a whole.