

WYCOMBE AIR PARK JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON
13th September 2021**

PRESENT

Mr R Pushman	Chairman
Mr S Brown	CEO, AAA
Mr A Anderson-Brown	Director, AAA
Mr R Sowden	General Manager, WAP
Councillor D Barnes	Buckinghamshire Council Member, Chiltern Villages
Councillor M Pack	Great Marlow Parish Council
Councillor M Detsiny	Lane End Parish Council
Mr R Russell	Frieth Village Society
Mr N Phillips	Sands Residents' Association
Mrs L Batt-Rawden	Booker Common & Woods Protection Society
Mr C Goss	Claymoor Park Residents Association
Mr A Mann	WAPAG
Mr S Econonou	Booker Gliding Club
Mr A Young	HeliAir
Mr B Coakley	Buckinghamshire Council

(50 members of the public in attendance)

1. The Chairman opened by stating that he had been Chairman of the WAP JCC for almost 10 years and wished to announce his retirement at the close of this meeting.

He also asked all present to be mindful that Covid-19 was still prevalent in the community and to keep masks on unless speaking.

As there were a number of members of the public present, he introduced Sean Brown, who leased the air park from Buckinghamshire Council on a 50 year lease, which had been granted in 2016. He further advised that S Brown would make a statement during the public participation section of the meeting in relation to items 6, 7 and 8 of the formal agenda, following which questions would be invited, which he asked all to keep as brief as possible, so that time could be spent on discussing possible solutions. He concluded by stating that he hoped debate would be good natured and respectful.

Introductions from the other members of the JCC were made.

2. **Duration of Meeting**

This was anticipated to be 1.5 hours.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from R Martyn, Cllr D Broad, Cllr N Dunn, Cllr M Pack, Cllr T Green, Cllr N Thomas and Cllr A Hussain.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 4th February 2020

The minutes of 4th February 2020 were tabled and agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Matters Arising

There were none.

6. Update on sub group on Review of Constitution

R Pushman advised that some changes to the elected councillors from Buckinghamshire Council had been proposed which needed to be finalised and therefore the review of the constitution would be held in abeyance for the time being.

Action – B Coakley/new Chair

7. Statement from S Brown, CEO

Firstly, S Brown thanked those present for attending. He acknowledged that there was a problem that needed to be resolved for residents and which would need to be made up of a number of steps. He therefore wished to set the scene.

He stated that whilst Covid-19 had been a trying time for many businesses it had hit the aviation industry tremendously hard. It had also affected other areas and Councils generally, were now experiencing approximately 30% more noise complaints as residents had become far more sensitive to noise, particularly when working from home, which he stated he could fully appreciate.

There had been changes at the air field – helicopter activity had reduced as some of the operators no longer carried out activity from the air field; he had made improvements to the fleet, acquiring new quieter aircraft and he had diversified to generate income, attracting other businesses, such as outside storage.

A key, unusual element this year however had also been the persistence of a northerly wind (generally the wind would be from a westerly direction) which had meant that R06 had been in use considerably more. Additionally, when the wind was northerly some activity would, under normal circumstances, have taken place from R35/17 but due to a legal matter, which was subject to court proceedings with Buckinghamshire Council, the air park had been unable to use R35/17, which had exacerbated the use of R06.

Whilst turning specifically to the issue of helicopter noise, which he considered had been the reason for the attendance of the vast majority of residents present, he assured residents with other complaints that they would not be ignored.

He referred the meeting to the unfortunate accident at Waddesdon when a helicopter and fixed wing aircraft collided and a near miss, again involving a helicopter and fixed wing aircraft, recorded on R06, which were both the subject of investigation. One of the recommendations from the investigation had been that the operations of fixed wing and helicopters needed to have greater separation. The air space between Freith and Lane End was quite narrow and as a result pilots had been asked to fly closer to the NAZ, not in it, and that trial had lasted for a month with no effects on safety. The helicopter circuit was returned to normal and the risk was mitigated by fixed wing aircraft being stopped from flying that route when helicopters were in the circuit, which meant that fixed wing had to go all the way around and come back in. During this period, it had become clear that there was a misunderstanding amongst people as to where the circuit was or had been. S Brown stated that he believed that aircraft, particularly helicopters were flying accurately, however the unusual northerly wind for a prolonged period of time had exacerbated the use of R06.

He proposed a solution to the meeting in that a Working Party be set up whereby people would be given the opportunity for the Working Party to go to affected homes/areas and pilots

would undertake an exercise whereby they flew accurately in the circuit; inaccurately in the circuit and also flew within the NAZ so that all could see exactly where helicopter should be. He would also extend an invitation to all those who wished to fly with the pilot so that they could witness first hand the correct course; the course close to the NAZ and when in the NAZ. He acknowledged that there may be a skills fade from visiting pilots, although these were now few in number and procedures had been reinforced through articles and technology, but he could and would control the actions of those pilots flying from the air park and indeed could give direction to the helicopter companies operating from the air park. He concluded his statement by reiterating that whilst he believed all of us had become more sensitive to noise, we all needed to work together to bring back the status quo between the air park and its neighbours.

The Chairman opened up the meeting to questions.

Q. A resident refuted that pilots were flying accurately. It had been clear to the 50 or so people in the room that pilots had changed their course. He also refuted that all had become more sensitive to noise - there was simply a lot more noise. He asked what evidence the air park had to support their statement that pilots were flying accurately.

A. S Brown disagreed with the comments and advised that the intention of the Working Party was to attend affected residents' homes and set up a controlled exercise to clearly establish whether craft were flying the correct route. The resident stated that the route had been changed. S Brown stated that whilst it had changed for a month, helicopters were no longer flying that course. The resident enquired as to how the air park could be confident that helicopters were now flying accurately. S Brown stated that flights had been tracked but not those from visiting pilots. The pilots operating from the air park flew very accurately.

Q. A resident asked that all be provided with an accurate map of the NAZ.

A. S Brown advised that this pilot routings were available on the website. The resident went onto continue that overflying by helicopters over the village, church and conference centre in Lane End took place on a daily basis, which was an infringement of the NAZ.

Q. A resident challenged the statement that some of the issues had been caused by additional usage of R06. This resident advised that for years and years both R24 & R06 had been flown incorrectly by helicopter pilots. He had even sent in a screen shot of where helicopters had been. He maintained that from his garden he should not be able to even see them but currently they were about 50 ft away flying over the field behind his house. He believed that the instructors were training pilots to break the circuit. He stated that in no way were they flying accurately.

A. S Brown advised that the purpose of the Working Party would be to establish once and for all the correct route.

Q. A resident made a statement that he had lived in his home for 30 years and he had not experienced anything like this previously. Helicopters flew over his house on a daily basis which he had filmed and was on his second memory stick. He believed that this was something the air park and its pilots had done and he wanted a resolution to be sorted out quickly.

Q. A resident enquired if the absence of ATC made it more difficult to control pilots.

A. S Brown advised that was not the case. Helicopters in the circuit had not been controlled by ATC, who only controlled fixed wing aircraft.

Q. M Detsiny, Chairman Lane End Parish Council, advised that he was receiving between 10 and 15 calls every day regarding helicopters overflying the church, Lane End Conference Centre and Ditchfield Common. Residents were upset. He supported the setting up of a Working Party but considered it should be made up of independent people rather than being supported by air park management.

A. S Brown advised that the Working Party would be set up so that a controlled three phased circuit could be flown in order to conclusively determine genuine complaints/inaccuracies.

Q. A resident suggested that it might be useful to view his and other people's video recordings that had been provided over the last few months which clearly showed where residents lived and aircraft positions. He personally could offer 10 separate clips where the NAZ had been breached.

Q. Another resident advised that he had submitted similar recordings in which you could see and hear what residents had to put up with.

Q. M Detsiny suggested that representatives from the parishes most affected by noise from helicopters, namely Lane End and Frieth, be included in the membership of the Working Party.

A. R Sowden confirmed that the right representation would be included on the Working Party. He acknowledged the level of complaints and that this was a period of challenge for the air park. He stated that he would be happy to be the driving force behind the Working Party to ensure clarity and accuracy from all sides. S Brown acknowledged that residents were upset. He also advised that irrespective of the costs, the Working Party would undertake as many visits to individual homes or if it was possible groupings of homes, in order to undertake the controlled flying exercise, to bottom out once and for all which homes were genuinely affected and which complaints were valid. He reminded all that airspace was limited and therefore there was not much choice as to where the helicopters could fly.

Q. A resident suggested that as aircraft flew so close to the NAZ it effectively made it invalid.

A. S Brown advised that there were two NAZs close together and whilst on paper these could be defined, there was no ability to draw a line in the air and therefore flying close to the zone was not infringing the zone. The NAZs were very important and the air park went to great lengths to ensure aircraft stayed out of them. They were however, a noise avoidance zone not a no overfly zone. As he had stated previously, the air park had mistakenly caused this current issue by flying closer to the zone in an attempt to benefit safety in the circuit. He also advised that if a helicopter strayed into the zone for example to avoid a Red Kite, then safety clearly took precedent.

Q. R Rendell reminded all present that some residents remained affected by fixed wing aircraft and asked that they were not excluded. He also advised that a previous air park manager had undertaken a similar exercise but pilots had not adhered to the route.

A. S Brown advised that this exercise would be to establish once and for all those homes which were both within and outside of the NAZ.

Q. Cllr D Barnes summarised the offer in that the air park would provide those people affected with the opportunity to understand what was the correct route; what was incorrect and what the air park proposed to do about it and this would take place relatively quickly and in any case before the next meeting of the JCC. Representatives of the communities affected would also be welcome to join the Working Party. S Brown considered that this would be a major step in educating all and there would also be an opportunity for any resident to fly in the helicopter to experience first hand the difficulties the pilots faced. The Chairman urged residents to take up this opportunity. He had done so and advised that a gust of wind or a Red Kite had made it enormously difficult to fly in a straight line.

Q. A resident considered that the process could be speeded up as many residents had already submitted evidence and he did not think that a Working Party was needed.

A. A Brown advised that it was considered it would be more beneficial to undertake an active demonstration with a point of reference, with residents present. The video evidence submitted had been reviewed, which the air park considered to be inaccurate in the assumption of what it showed – hence the real need for this exercise to take place. The

exercise would be time consuming and costly but accuracy was needed as opposed to assumptions. R Sowden urged everyone who had a complaint to contact the air park with their name and address so that an appointment could be made. If there were a number of houses that could be grouped together that would also be helpful. S Brown advised that he would like to start with the people in the room as he considered they had the highest priority.

Q. A resident made the suggestion that published routes together with the main roads leading out of Lane End be displayed in one of the notice Boards outside the Village Hall as she considered this would assist residents.

A. A Brown considered this to be a very good idea. He also advised that a review of how the circuits were presented on the website would be also undertaken.

Q. In an attempt to be positive, one resident asked, assuming the exercise had taken place and households were aware of whether they were in or out of the NAZ, did the air park have the necessary technology to check that the helicopters were flying correctly.

A. A Brown advised that a previous JCC meeting had been advised that the air park had been reviewing the benefits of Sky Echo, a similar tool to flight radar. It had however decided to go one step further and commission the design of software that would allow for flight information to be tracked to a far greater degree. The resident enquired if that would mean that in future it would be quite clear if a helicopter had flown in the NAZ and the air park would be able to respond immediately and properly. A Brown confirmed that was the objective, rather than as now relying on the aircraft landing, downloading information and then assessing it. The new system would be a live one. There was however, no date for completion at the current time.

Q. A resident from Sands advised that fixed wing aircraft were consistently off track and very noisy. He enquired if silencers could be fitted to them to reduce the noise pollution. He advised that some however were relatively quiet in comparison.

A. A Brown advised that new aircraft fitted with silencers had been brought in, however, the noise difference with a silencer fitted was not discernible. The air park was therefore looking at aircraft with new engine technology, which were much quieter. One had been purchased with another due at the beginning of next year. The caveat to this was that they needed to perform well as training aircraft.

Q. A resident enquired if the leaseholder of the air park could sustain the level of rent with the current amount of income.

A. S Brown confirmed in the positive and that was with a lower number of movements. That said, it was not easy and he and his team were looking at all ways to generate additional income. He advised that the air park would not be going back to the days of intensification of student training. He advised he would prefer to have less people and train private flyers in order that training could be spread around and there was no intensification. The resident enquired if it was therefore reasonable to assume the air park's business plan did not assume an increased level of movements. S Brown advised that it was considered sustainable and reiterated that it was however not easy, particularly with the year that we had all experienced. Other councils had supported their air fields but Buckinghamshire had still expected rent and rates to be paid and the air park had had no support. The same resident advised that he had observed flights at the air park and suggested that 98% had been tutored helicopter movements and he questioned the need for the air park to be in existence,

Q. A resident advised that over a 30 year period the air park had been a good neighbour to him and he had been able to walk the perimeter of the air field but this was no longer possible. He also enquired in respect of diversification of activities, whether planning permission was required.

A. S Brown stated that a requirement of the lease had been that the council did some works to the road. They started by taking away the gates and the height restrictor, then COVID

struck. As the air park had shut down, he had made the decision to keep it open for people to walk on and use etc. However, when it came to restarting the air park runway patrols had to be undertaken prior to any take offs and he and his wife moved in to protect the air park. However, they had suffered much abuse and he cited incidents, especially when a picnicking family refused to move off the runway when asked and became so verbally abusive that he passed the comments onto the Police. He also advised that a private flyer with a new quiet aircraft who also hangered it here and was a perfect customer, the type that he was trying so hard to procure, got out of his plane onto the apron and stepped in dog poo. From a safety point of view, that was why the decision to erect a fence had been made. However, he still wanted the public to be able to have access so he presented his insurers with an indemnity form so that a Walkers Group could be established. The insurers unfortunately would not accept same. The resident advised that he had filed a modification with the council. S Brown stated that recently he had an aircraft land and he rotated and cart wheeled off the runway, had there been any walkers at that time they would have been killed. S Brown advised that there was still an open footpath that had not been blocked.

Q. A resident had just had a copy of the NAZ handed to him and he advised that just today three helicopters had gone straight over his house. He stated that the culprits appeared to be the same ones – a dark helicopter with a large orange stripe and a white one with a blue undercarriage. He believed they were the ones that had caused much misery to residents.

Q. A resident asked when the visit to his home took place, would the Working Party also review the video footage that he had taken from his garden.

A. A Brown advised that the video footage could be reviewed sooner and invited the resident to send it to him. The resident advised that his complaints were a mere fraction of the inconvenience that he had suffered and no doubt others whilst trying to run a business from home. He considered that over the years people had generally been supportive of the air park and he felt himself bristle somewhat at some of the comments as his experience was legitimate and real and from the number of people in attendance tonight, it would indicate it was real to them also.

Q. A resident stated that comments had been made that the air park could not deal with the wall of complaints sent to it. He therefore wondered what had changed as there would be even more data to review.

A. A Brown advised that resources were now in place.

Q. A resident enquired as to what sanctions would be applied to repeat offenders who breached the NAZ.

A. A Brown advised that in the first instance efforts would be made to re-educate but if infringements were found to be continuously repeated or malicious, then the ultimate sanction would be a ban, which A Brown confirmed would be taken.

Q. A resident enquired if there were any statistics that detailed the location of complaints as he would be interested to see groupings.

A. A Brown advised that resources were now in place and he urged people to use the on-line noise complaint facility that would allow for such groupings to be ascertained.

8. Noise Action Management Plan

S Brown advised that the reference to the changes to the circuit patterns related to moving the gliders north side and then looking to change the circuit pattern south side for helicopters and fixed wing. However, this had not happened as there was currently a legal dispute with Buckinghamshire council over this matter, which as a result, prevented further discussion at this point. He pointed out that to move the gliders, everything would need to move. Having experienced what a very small tweak to the helicopter routing had done, he advised that if this was to be pursued, there would need to be a full consultation, as this would amount to a massive change and he suggested that as part of any consultation, a similar exercise as to

what had been agreed to earlier would need to be incorporated. He confirmed that it would work from the air park's point of view but it also needed to work for the community. This would be a seismic change and would need to be done properly and carefully thought through and of course consultation with the CAA would be needed. He stated he had been angered that the agreed process had not been honoured by Buckinghamshire council and that they had submitted an illegal planning application for effectively a third runway, which had never been discussed with him.

R Russell enquired about the continued unusual wind direction and wondered if it was likely to continue. S Brown confirmed that he had not before known it drag on for so many months. He had tried to use R24 on as many occasions as possible. R35 was part of the dispute and had it not been for the dispute, this runway would have been in operation.

N Phillips stated that he had pleased to hear that the number of student pilots from the university had been reduced and also staggered. However, he advised that fixed wing overflying from R06 had suddenly got worse. A Brown advised that the technology that he had referred to earlier would apply to all aircraft not just helicopters.

S Econonou wished to state that the gliders had been excluded from the air park on grounds that they vehemently disagreed with, and this formed part of the legal action. They had been based at the air park for 50 years.

A Mann advised that there was a rumour circulating that there were advanced talks taking place in respect of film studios at the air park. S Brown advised that he too had heard this rumour and it related to land that had been handed back to the council. He further stated that he had not been kept informed by the council on this matter.

9. Community Matters

S Brown advised that the air park had seen a massive increase in sea gulls, which had been attributed to the High Heavens Waste Disposal Site and which had resulted in several bird strikes. B Coakley agreed to look into this matter with the waste team.

Action – B Coakley

Additionally, C Goss advised that he was aware of a company who could undertake bird surveys and identify potential risks. He agreed to pass on the name to A Brown.

Action – C Goss

R Russell made reference to the four weekend respite days for the coming year. S Brown asked all to give some consideration as to those. He also reminded the meeting that additionally there could be three closures of the air field for larger events. Only one had so far been booked. The obvious one was the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. A Brown confirmed that if someone wished to put forward ideas the air park could host same. Cllr D Barnes advised that the south west community board was looking at doing something.

Action – All

A Brown advised that the air park had an event this coming weekend which would attract some visiting aircraft. Numbers had been limited and details put on the website.

10. Matters of report not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

There were none.

11. AOB

In view of the issues raised by the public, M Detsiny suggested that the JCC should meet again in three months rather than four, particularly as it had been 18 months since the last meeting. Cllr D Barnes added that S Brown had volunteered to undertake much work and therefore the JCC should allow him a three month period to get this underway.

Discussion took place regarding the depth of the minutes and M Detsiny suggested that the minutes could be shortened to cover only what had been agreed. Other members advised that they found the context helpful and it was agreed they would remain as is.

Additionally, the JCC had three months in which to find a new Chairman, which was considered workable. Nominations would need to come from the council and any Chairman needed to be independent from the council and the air park.

In terms of how the exercise would work in practice, S Brown had estimated that he would need to set up at least 20 flights with complainants. He envisaged that he could start this work whilst the membership of the Working Party was being finalised. The Working Party should include local representatives from the areas most affected by helicopter noise.

N Phillips enquired as to the current council nominations to the JCC and suggested that they were rather random. Cllr D Barnes advised that the original nominations were in the process of being reviewed and the new nominations, were councillors who were more local to the air park. Confirmation of names was awaited and would be circulated in due course.

Action – B Coakley

Finally, on behalf of the JCC, Cllr D Barnes recorded a vote of thanks to the Chairman for his 10 years of service to the JCC, which was a voluntary role, and often thankless. The Chairman responded in that it had been an interesting Chairmanship.

12. Date of Next Meeting
22nd November 2021 at 6.30 pm at the Air Park

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm