

WYCOMBE AIR PARK JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON
29th November 2021**

PRESENT

Councillor D Barnes	Interim Chairman & Buckinghamshire Council Member, Chiltern Villages
Mr S Brown	CEO, AAA
Mr A Anderson- Brown	Director, AAA
Mr R Sowden	General Manager, WAP
Councillor N Dunn	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 R Martyn	Booker Gliding Club
Ms J Moore	Booker Gliding Club
Mr B Coakley	Buckinghamshire Council

(17 members of the public in attendance)

1. M Detsiny advised that it had as yet not been possible to make an appointment to the role of Chairman. Whilst members of the Council were not permitted to chair meetings of the JCC on a regular basis, the Parish Councils represented on the JCC, had on this occasion, asked that Cllr Dominic Barnes chair this meeting using a more productive format.

Cllr Barnes advised that he understood the importance of these meetings to residents and intended to give people the opportunity to speak and have their say. He asked that the meeting remained cordial and that speakers identified themselves together with their location. Cllr Barnes introduced himself in that he was a councillor on the new unitary Buckinghamshire Council representing the ward of Chiltern Village, which encompassed most of the areas surrounding the air park. He also asked all other representatives on the JCC to introduce themselves.

2. **Duration of Meeting**

In terms of the duration of the meeting, Cllr Barnes advised that he would not be prescriptive and all would be allowed to have their say.

3. **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies had been received.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 13th September 2021

The minutes of 13th September 2021 were tabled and agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Matters Arising

Following the last meeting, the flight exercises had taken place with those residents most affected together with a subsequent working group meeting. R Wetenhall, a resident of Frieth, offered thanks to the air park for taking the time and effort to conduct the helicopter flights and he considered progress had been made. The general observations from the day had been that when the helicopters had been flown accurately, residents had confirmed that they were roughly where they expected them to have been in relation to their homes, but closer than they would have liked. Large objects at a distance looked closer than they thought. All were now satisfied that they understood where the correct track should be. It was considered that there were two pinch points where noise was a particular concern – at the most westerly point in the circuit where if helicopters did not stay far enough out, infringed Lane End. The other area was the flight back by the water tower and a large number of residents were affected by noise at that location, particularly as the shape (and development) of Lane End had changed considerably. The Golden Guff Development would in fact be right underneath the flight path and it was considered some measured dialogue was required to try and move the noise away from that area.

R Wetenhall stated that the pandemic had undoubtedly changed people's expectations; more people had worked from home and the impact of the recent circuit change had as a result provoked a more sensitive response to the increase in noise. He suggested that the main cause of noise to residents was the off track flying away from the circuits and therefore what could be done to make matters better in terms of handling complaints and dealing with visiting pilots so that they did not stray into the NAZ.

R Wetenhall also advised that two changes had already been made by the air park – the new circuit had been abandoned for which all were grateful and the particularly large Augusta helicopter had been asked to keep out of the circuit. However, residents would like to see progress on a number of other things also and he urged for progress at some speed on same. If progress could be continued and matters moved forward, he stated that residents would become more convinced that the air park wanted to be a good neighbour.

Cllr D Barnes wished to also place on record his thanks to the air park for conducting the exercise.

R Sowden, advised that he acted as air field manager reporting to Sean and Alex Brown. He advised that he was stationed on the ground in Lane End during the exercise, with residents flying the circuit with the CFI from HeliAir. In terms of further actions and pace of change, it was the air park's intention to retain the Working Group in order that these actions could be developed and momentum retained and that there was accountability. The Working Group had met twice since the last JCC so as to work at pace. The complaints process had been discussed as had the air park's broader engagement with the community. When the group had met to review the outcome of the flying exercise, this had given the air park a better understanding of things on the ground. All of HeliAir's pilots would now fly the circuit with the CFI, which included S Brown, air traffic staff and other helicopter operators on site. Instructions to visiting pilots would be made extremely clear and the flight patterns for all aircraft and the NAZ would be reviewed in order to investigate if noise could be mitigated even further. He reminded the meeting that the tracks were essentially roads in the sky that were fixed and three dimensional.

In terms of the development of homes in Lane End, the air park would be writing to the Council's Planning Directorate to highlight the fact that people needed to be advised that there was a helicopter flight path above some of the planned developments. The Working Group would continue to develop and work on areas of concern – one of which was around the NAZ, which was not a no fly zone, but a noise abatement zone, so more work was needed in this area to ensure there was a common understanding of its meaning.

6. The Chairman then opened up the meeting for public participation and questions.

Q. A resident from Denham Farm advised that her home was 600' above the airfield on top of a hill and helicopters flew really low and it felt as though the helicopters were over her head. It was a listed building over 200 years old which literally shook with the vibrations, which clearly was not doing it any good at all. It was noisy both inside and outside of her house. She stated that she had not known how to complain but that post Covid-19 her situation had got worse.

A. A Brown advised that there was an on-line form where complaints could be lodged under Community Noise Complaints, but that he would investigate her issues outside of the meeting. He also advised that helicopters flew at 750' above the airfield and fixed wing aircraft at 1000'.

Q. Peter Rose a resident of Lane End advised that he had submitted noise complaints via the website, totalling approximately 38, some of which related to a number of circuits. He advised that he had not had a single reply, unless he had followed them up with a phone call. He asked as to what the current process was and whether complaints received since the last JCC meeting could be routinely reported.

A. R Sowden advised that the air park received a significant number of complaints. As a quick guide, there had been approximately 143 in a month; 121 had been about helicopters with 97 (80%) coming from 4 people. He went on to explain that when a number of complaints were reported after the event, the complexity of the investigation increased and it was challenging to track all the required information in order to be able to investigate fully. Because of the volume coming through the air park was as a result struggling to turnaround an accurate response.

S Brown advised that the focus of the exercise undertaken on 19th November had been to identify those people adversely affected, such as the lady who had previously spoken. Now that the circuit had been flown to identify the correct track etc, R Sowden wished to put out a plea that complaints were only submitted if the pilot was in breach of the circuit. If residents were aware that the flight had been flown correctly but the complaint referred to noise, he asked that such complaints be minimised as short of employing two more staff (which was not possible) the air park was simply not able to catch up with responses.

P Rose stated that he would have expected figures to have been reported as how could figures be analysed. D Barnes stated that he had asked the air park to record on the website the number of complaints received and he advised that this was currently being explored by management. He did however question the rationale for recording multiple complaints against the same flight and wished to reiterate the appetite from the air park to work with residents to come to an accommodation. He re-emphasised that if aircraft were sticking to the flight track they were not in breach, although he accepted that there was a separate issue around noise sensitivity, which had been discussed earlier. S Brown wished to advise that if there were numerous complaints that had to be investigated and aircraft were found to be on the correct track, this would very likely lead to true complaints being missed. The purpose of the exercise on the 19th November was to get all to a point of understanding and the air park would try and use circuits that flew over the minimum number of houses. However, as had been noted, the shape of some of the villages was changing due to development and it would be impossible for the air park to avoid all homes. That said, S Brown gave his full commitment to deal with genuine complaints and confirmed that poor airmanship would not be tolerated at the air park.

C Goss wished to support the comments made by S Brown in that when the airfield was first built the surrounding area was open fields and clearly development had taken place and this was not now the case. Being an ex-aviator himself he had not complained as he considered aircraft noise to be that of freedom. However, exactly two weeks ago he did have cause to complain and had been somewhat surprised that he had not had a response, despite others also having lodged complaints. It was about a heavy helicopter whose flight was outside of opening times and flew straight over Claymoor Park. A Brown asked that he send him details

directly and he gave an undertaking to review same. S Brown advised that flights out of normal hours required certain documentation to be completed as certain liabilities needed to be taken on board and therefore this was one of the complaints that he would like to come through the system more quickly. D Barnes suggested that consideration be given to a service level agreement (SLA) for response times and he wondered if the air park could consider same. D Barnes asked all to feel confident that residents' complaints would not go ignored and he urged residents that if they considered aircraft were potentially on track, but could not be sure, to not complain. R Wetenhall stated that from a resident's point of view whether aircraft were on or off track did not matter as they were both a complaint about noise. He accepted that the air park could however deal with them differently. S Brown reiterated that the air park simply did not have the capacity to deal with noise complaints when aircraft were on track at this point in time so he asked residents to refrain from reporting same and give the air park some time to study tracks and height with a view to any changes. With the scant resources that he had available he would prefer to deal with those pilots who should not be operating from the air park, ie the bad guys. Given time, the air park would then give consideration to what could be done in terms of height and any change of circuit. A Brown advised that the Working Group was a good outlet for notification of hot spot areas and therefore he would like the on-line system to be used to report genuine breaches. A Brown also wished to confirm that more and more aircraft were being equipped with flight radar and some operators had offered to purchase GPS software so the best system was currently being evaluated.

Two residents stated that it had only been in the last year that the helicopters had been such a problem. R Sowden provided the statistics for helicopter movements broken down by quarters viz:

July – September 2018 there were 3975

July – September 2019 there were 2574

July – September 2020 there were 486

July – September 2021 there were 1689

The Chairman wondered why therefore there was such a difference in perception by residents. A Brown could not answer that and confirmed that the air park would continue to work with the JCC. The Chairman cited the data which clearly showed that movements in 2021 were less than half of those in 2018 and 1,000 less than in 2019 but certain residents perceive the situation to be worse.

R Martyn wondered if the suspension of glider movements had led to an increase in noise complaints. S Brown advised that the gliders had not in any case operated from the north side and in fact, he had received comments in respect of how quiet it had been on the south side. The Chairman could not therefore see any correlation.

Q. R Clark, Church Road, Lane End stated that on the day of the exercise pilots had demonstrated that they could fly on track. However, he advised that it had only taken until the following Monday/Tuesday for pilots to revert to cutting the corner and flying straight over the village on the wrong side of the water tower and flying straight over the conference centre. He advised that the main culprit appeared to be a dark helicopter with a gold/orange stripe, which he was pretty sure was operated by HeliAir. He further suggested that it was the instructors who were the main offenders.

A. Both R Sowden and S Brown advised that every single instructor would receive training but not all flights were with an instructor so that incident may have been a pilot that had not been here for a while and therefore full compliance would take some time to achieve. R Clark advised that it seemed that nothing was ever resolved and he considered the situation was as bad now as it always had been. D Barnes stated that clearly if helicopters were over the conference centre there was a problem and using the analogy that "Rome wasn't built in a day", there had been a firm commitment from the air park management to work on this.

Q. R Kier, a resident of Moor Common advised that helicopters flew down the length of his garden. He was far more aware of them since Covid-19 and working from home and since he retired, had become even more aware of them. He had come tonight as he had been surprised that there was only one route for the helicopters and he wondered if anything could

be done to get some variation to that route and some relief for those directly under the flight path.

A. A Brown advised that his comments had been received and would be taken on board when reviewing height and any track changes.

A Brown also expressed concern that varying the track was what the airfield had advised other local residents that they would avoid where possible. He suggested that it was impossible for aircraft to be 100% accurate and that would create a natural slight variation.

A resident who lived between Church Road and Lane End Conference Centre advised that she had noticed the same helicopter reported earlier overflying the conference centre.

Q. A resident of Lane End who had resided there for some 40 years stated that he had observed helicopters flying lower than the altitude suggested. He stated that when this took place and manoeuvres were also conducted this created far more noise pollution and he wondered if such manoeuvres could be undertaken outside of the circuit.

A. A Brown advised that this would be considered. He did however state that pilots did already try to spend as little time in the circuit as possible.

Q. A resident of Clinkard Place, Lane End stated that contextually for him the summer of 2018 had not been as troublesome in terms of helicopters as now and he cited an overflying of the conference centre today at 12.26 about which he had called.

A. A Brown advised that if possible he would prefer such instances to be reported using the online system so as to unclog the system and allow for clear breaches, as this was, to be concentrated upon. He emphasised that as he ran the airfield he would be able to exercise control and sanctions against offending pilots.

Q. P Rose suggested that consideration be given to improving the information for visiting pilots on the website. He considered that the videos were poor and that a concise pdf document giving a quick review would really help alleviate some of the complaints.

A. S Brown did not disagree. However, this would be a great deal of work and he therefore favoured a review of the circuits and heights in the first place before undertaking this task. He therefore asked for time to get each component part reviewed before setting something in stone.

M Detsiny suggested that in order to get on top of complaints perhaps the air park could consider a full time post for a few months to get on top of same. The Chairman stated that he believed an agreement had been reached whereby clear complaints were reported on line and others reported via the Working Group, through either R Wetenhall or himself.

Q. Resident, Oakwood Place, Lane End referred to the last set of minutes whereby R Sowden had advised that the air park had resources to manage complaints, yet a number appeared to have not been answered in a satisfactory timeframe. He also asked for an update on helicopter silencers.

A. R Sowden advised that he had been part of the resource for managing complaints and he confirmed that had been insufficient and that he was now recruiting for this resource. At the current volume it was too time consuming to track back and investigate each complaint and he had vastly underestimated the task. A Brown also stated that the air park, along with many other companies, was finding recruitment of the right people currently challenging. In terms of silencers, there had not been a commitment for additional silencers for helicopters – this had always been for fixed wing.

As there had been over one hour's public participation, and there were no new questions, the Chairman drew this section of the meeting to a close. He concluded that there was a clear

commitment from the air park to work with the community.

7. Election of Chairman

A Brown advised that two good candidates had come forward. However, applications were not yet closed so if anyone knew of any local, independent applicants, he asked that their names be put forward.

8. Use of Respite Days

A Brown advised that one request had been received from Parmoor House and this had been accepted. Respite over the Queen's Jubilee had also been made and M Detsiny qualified this in that it was for the Saturday only. A Brown advised that from memory respite days were 5 in number but he agreed to check this.

9. Matters of report not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

N Phillips enquired as to the situation in respect of the planning application with regard to the gliders. S Brown advised that he could not comment on this. The air park had lodged an objection but other than that he was not aware of progress. The Chairman advised that this would be considered on 8th December. S Brown considered that the application was both frivolous and illegal yet he suggested that it was being pushed through by the council. He stated that he and his team would not allow same and he could not understand why it had been put in.

C Goss had been asked by residents of Claymoor Park to enquire about the film studio as there had been a massive increase in noise from a generator and light pollution which was causing general angst amongst residents. B Coakley agreed to take this matter away for investigation.

Action – B Coakley

S Brown wished to enter into discussions with Booker Common & Woods Protection Society with regard to the height of some trees. S Fryer to send over contact details.

Action – S Fryer

10. Community Matters

A Brown made a plea for any community events that could be supported by the air park to be forwarded to him.

R Wetenhall enquired if there would be an AeroExpo this year and if so, that advance comms be issued to Parish Councils etc particularly if there was to be a suspension of the NAZ. A Brown advised that there would be one similar event, an Elite Show, taking place on 17/18 May 2022 but the NAZ would not be suspended.

There would also be a vintage flying exhibition taking place on the first weekend in September 2022.

S Brown also advised that there had been some interest shown in respect of model aircraft flying when the air park was closed during the summer, one evening a week and he would be investigating whether this could take place.

11. AOB

A Mann advised that he had sat on the JCC for a very long time and the framing of the conversation over the years had not changed much viz a viz complaints and lack of resources. However, what had changed, and which deserved great credit, was that people were now able to speak and had a voice, and indeed the air park could answer and get their point across and matters were now being funnelled into smaller conversations, which he considered was hugely helpful and he asked that this be recorded.

12. Date of Next Meeting

28th February 2022 at 6.30 pm at the Air Park.

There would however be a meeting of the sub group prior to the JCC.

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm