

WYCOMBE AIR PARK JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 30th April 2014

PRESENT

Mr R Pushman	Chairman
Mr D Phillips	General Manager, Wycombe Air Park
Councillor R Metcalfe	WDC Member, Hambleden Valley
Councillor Z Ahmed	WDC Member, Sands
Councillor I McEnnis	WDC Member, Chiltern Rise
Councillor D White	Hambleden Parish Council
Councillor N Timberlake	West Wycombe Parish Council
Mr N Dunn	Great Marlow Parish Council
Mr H Luxton	Booker Common and Woods Protection Society
Mr R Wetenhall	Wycombe Air Park Action Group (WAPAG)
Mr N Phillips	Sands Residents' Association
Mr R Martyn	Booker Gliding Club
Mr A Young	Heli Air
Mr J Smith	Divisional EHO, WDC

(8 members of the public were in attendance)

1. The Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting. He advised that it was his intention to allow full public participation, within reason, and not to cut this short. He asked all to preserve the relaxed and amicable conduct that had previously prevailed at these meetings.
2. **Duration of meeting**
The Chairman anticipated that the meeting duration would be around 1½ hours.
3. R Pushman opened the public participation section of the meeting.

Q. Mrs S Pratt, resident Spring Coppice, raised the issue of the recent change of operations at the air park as detailed in an article in Flying Magazine, which advised that Heli Air were taking over the new lease at the air park. She asked when Heli Air proposed to consult with the community and the JCC. She also said that she had heard the current owner of the air park had decided to relinquish the lease because he did not like the restrictions imposed by the noise action plan and she asked for confirmation from Wycombe District Council (WDC) that they would not relax these restrictions. She further suggested that the air park was a valuable asset for WDC and many people would be affected if flying from it was unrestricted and in addition that she considered residents would be greatly affected by Heli Air taking over the lease. Finally, she stated that WDC (and their taxpayers) were not getting the best return for their site, and as a result, were failing in their public duty.

A. The Chairman stated that the meeting would not be able to answer all the questions and he advised that he considered the resident was making some serious implications. He confirmed that the Wycombe Plan had been publicised and that consultation had taken place. The same resident further advised that flying over Spring Coppice during the Easter period had been particularly bad with aircraft vastly off track. She considered that weekends were worst.

Q. Another resident from Spring Coppice addressed the meeting. She had noticed a large increase in helicopter activity over her garden. She had studied the noise abatement procedures and advised that if pilots adhered to it there would be no issue, but this was not the case. She asked what penalties were imposed on pilots.

A. The Chairman advised that this matter would be covered under item 6.0 on the agenda. D Phillips confirmed that he would visit the resident.

Q. The same resident enquired as to the strategic direction of Heli Air.

A. The Chairman considered this question was premature.

Q. M Pratt, resident Spring Coppice, advised the meeting that he had flown with D Phillips and L Smith, and been advised that it was difficult for pilots to stay on track and he considered that the entire flight path was inappropriate, and therefore almost impossible for a student pilot not to fly over Spring Coppice.

A. D Phillips stated it was not an inappropriate flight path and the majority of pilots could successfully follow a particular route. He confirmed that the routes were difficult, even for experienced pilots, but that the public's expectations posed the greatest problems. Pilots did make their best efforts to avoid all the hot spots.

Q. Resident Skirmett, enquired about the press release confirming Heli Air as the new owner of the lease and asked what the process of consultation would be and with whom. He stated that it was alarming if this transaction by WDC was being "kept quiet".

A. The Chairman advised that there were three District Councillors present who would no doubt feed back the public's concern.

Q. R Wetenhall stated that initial documentation had stated that consultation would take place and it was now six weeks since the transfer of the lease and nothing had been heard.

A. Councillor Metcalfe advised that whilst he had not seen the press release referred to, the Local Plan had been consulted upon. The JCC could not run any consultation on the terms of the lease as it was not in its remit to do so. Residents were however correct in that the lease would set out the terms of operation for a sizeable period.

Q. R Wetenhall reiterated that the views of the JCC needed to be made to WDC.

A. The Chairman stated he considered that because of the sensitive commercial nature of negotiations, any consultation was a tad premature at this stage.

Q. H Luxton stated that he could not understand how the new lease had been formed unless WDC had made up its mind on the Local Plan and he suggested that WDC be asked for some assurance.

A. Councillor Metcalfe stated that the Local Plan consisted of various options and it was not in the JCC's remit to lead any response. R Pushman advised that he did not want the meeting to become bogged down with this issue. J Smith advised that WDC were fully aware of all the comments regarding the noise action plan and stated that they formed the baseline of negotiation. The lease was a commercial lease and as such there was unlikely to be any consultation on it. The JCC would not have an opportunity to comment either and the District

Councillors on the JCC were the conduit for consultation.

Q. T Griffith, resident Sands, referred to incidents of aircraft “dropping out of the sky” in other areas and the fact that trainee pilots flew over built up areas.

A. The Chairman stated that such situations could not be related to here. D Phillips also stated that he did not apportion any extra risk to a trainee pilot.

4. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillor M Detsiny, and Councillor D Barnes. Councillor R Metcalfe had apologised for lateness.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 15th January 2014

The minutes of the above meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

6. Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

There were none.

7. AAA Change of Ownership

R Pushman advised the meeting that D Phillips would make a statement and he did not want him to subsequently be cross examined. He reminded the meeting that these were commercially contracted arrangements.

AAA had previously been owned by Booker UK Investment Trust and the link with the air park went back some 20 years. During the last two years, the owner had endeavoured to engage with WDC over the lease renewal. He advised that these negotiations with WDC had been slow and tricky and in the run up to Xmas, the owner decided to sell on the lease. This actually took place in the first week in March and it was made known that AAA was purchased by Helicopter Aircrafts Holding Limited, a parent company of Heli Air Scotland. There had been a change of shareholders and directors only in AAA. AAA is therefore the company under new ownership and holds the head lease.

D Phillips confirmed he had advised the directors that he felt the change would make the public nervous and there was much work still ongoing. Whilst he personally had limited visibility of the lease negotiations, he understood there were positive negotiations ongoing with WDC. In respect of the draft Local Plan, whilst he did not know the official WDC view, his opinion was that the air park activities would continue.

Discussion ensued regarding the noise action plan; the actual owners of the lease and the author responsible for the press release.

R Wetenhall asked whether the views of WAPAG would be heard before the lease was signed. J Smith confirmed that WAPAG would not be asked for its views.

Councillor I McEnnis advised that WDC had not changed direction; it was intent on making the most of its assets and would get the best advice it could.

R Wetenhall asked if the Chairman intended to feedback the JCC's views to WDC. R Pushman confirmed that he, the Vice Chairman and J Smith had fed back the JCC's views to the decision makers at WDC.

R Wetenhall asked that an item to this effect appear on the next agenda as it was important for this group to understand and be aware of WDC's view on environmental issues. N Phillips stated that the majority of the noise mitigation measures included in the noise action plan did not relate to helicopters.

8. Noise complaints received by the Air Park

D Phillips advised that in the last three months because of the wind direction, he had been forced to take off in the direction of Sands, Booker and Spring Coppice. In addition, this month would also see an end to the student solo flying sessions and whilst there had been a number of issues there had been no real singular significant offence.

In summary therefore complaints had been more than in the previous three months but were not at the high level of the past. Complaints were however coming from a broader spectrum of people.

R Wetenhall stated that the problem was more pronounced at weekends and he wondered if this had anything to do with the fact that D Phillips was not present. D Phillips advised that whilst there was actually more flying undertaken during the week, there was a different cohort

of instructors present at the air park at weekends, who were part time professionals. The Head of Training worked Tuesday – Saturday inclusive and he accepted that there may be a need to supervise the recreational flyers on a Sunday. The meeting was advised that the front page of the website contained the complaint form and from this D Phillips could collate an electronic spreadsheet of complaints. He had moved away from providing statistics as he considered these were not helpful but he could produce pie charts. Councillor Metcalfe asked to meet with D Phillips in order to discuss certain criteria such as location; weekend/special days versus weekdays; elevation – too high/low; fixed wing or helicopter so that trends could in future be more easily identified.

9. Letters of complaint received by WDC

J Smith reported that one letter had been received from a resident of Booker who had lived in the area for 50 years, who advised that there had been an increase in air traffic, namely take offs, over his home. His other concern had been a general increase in helicopter movements and disturbance from their hovering over the airfield.

D Phillips stated that aircraft should avoid the Booker Common area so this was an interesting complaint and one which he would investigate and respond to.

10. Community Matters

D Phillips advised that he had corresponded with R Rendall who had asked that an embargo on flying take place on a particular day which would affect both St Katherine's Retreat and the Cricket Club. D Phillips confirmed that he would accommodate this request. He had been asked to also consider flying embargoes to tie in with the cricket club match schedule. He confirmed that he would do his best to schedule in some respite and he agreed to revisit the issue of respite at the next meeting.

D Phillips advised that he had been approached by a local parish council asking to use the facilities at the air park and he confirmed that this was something he hoped to develop. He was very keen that the air park diversified and became part of the community.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Provisionally 8th July 2014 at 6.30 pm at the air park.

Councillor N Timberlake asked that if any substantive news required to be communicated to the JCC prior to this date, that this be circulated by email. The Chairman confirmed either the former would take place or an Extra Ordinary meeting would be called. He did however, remind the meeting that it was purely a consultative committee; it had no powers but could make recommendations and its views known, which it did.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm.