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Flight path disappointment

Residents under the Gatwick flight path known as Departure Route 4 will be deeply disappointed by the decision by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to confirm this flight path in its current position.¹

Introduced in May 2016, this route (where aircraft take-off to the west and then turn sharp right through 180° to fly east on a narrow and highly concentrated path between Horley and Reigate) has proved intensely unpopular, with nearly 17,000 complaints from nearly 2,000 addresses between May and November 2016. No less than three local protest groups have sprung up.

According to Brendon Sewill, GACC chairman: 'We are appalled that the CAA suggest that these complaints can be discounted because they come from places not within the 57 leq noise contour.² That measurement is discredited: it measures average noise which is inappropriate for intermittent events; it is out-dated - the current Airspace consultation by the Department for Transport suggests that it should be replaced by the 54 leq contour; and, as GACC has constantly stressed, it does not take into account background ambient noise.'

Residents under Route 4 have a ray of hope for the future in that the CAA have instructed Gatwick Airport to investigate the possibility of a second route further north to be used, perhaps on alternate days. But this in turn would not be popular with those under this new route. As Sewill says: 'That is the problem with all flight path issues - they tend to set one community against another. Because GACC represents the whole area around the airport, we have never taken sides in arguments about moving flight paths from A to B. We have, however, supported the principle of dispersal (where aircraft are spread across the sky) or respite (where different routes are used on different days) - but not over areas previously unaffected by aircraft noise.'

There are some good features in the CAA report:

- ➔ The problem of aircraft flying over Horley (population 22,000) has been resolved: it was due to faulty instructions to air traffic controllers.
- ➔ Aircraft are being prevented from cutting the corner over Newdigate.
- ➔ The rule holding down the level of some flights from Gatwick due to flights from Heathrow is to be revised: it was found that the rule only related to aircraft flying between Heathrow and Gatwick (of which there are few). So this will mean that Route 4 flights can climb more steeply.

What is lacking from the CAA report is any mention of compensation. Most people prefer a return to peace and quiet, but GACC has proposed that, when a new concentrated flight path is made permanent, compensation should be paid on the same basis as applies to a new motorway.³

¹ <http://publicapps.caa.co.uk/modalapplication.aspx?appid=11&mode=detail&id=7861>

² CAA Report (as note 1) paragraph 102.

³ See GACC Response to the DfT Airspace consultation. March 2017. Paragraphs 12-16.
<http://www.gacc.org.uk/flight-paths.php>