

Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign

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Gatwick bad for your health – and for your wealth

New research published this week has found that deaths from stroke, heart and circulatory disease are significantly higher in areas with high levels of aircraft noise than in places with the least noise. Researchers at Imperial College London and King's College London compared data on day- and night-time aircraft noise with hospital admissions and mortality rates among a population of 3.6 million people living near Heathrow airport.¹

Although there are fewer people living under the flight-paths at Gatwick, the number of people at risk may be just as great because the lower background noise makes the noise impact worse.²

AS GACC joint vice-chairman, Peter Barclay, says: 'Councils and MPs have a duty of care with respect to the health of the residents that they represent and that means no more noise. How would the local hospitals cope with more heart attacks and strokes in addition to all the other pressures from a new runway? The damage that poor sleep does to performance at work won't help local businesses either.'

Blight made worse

The recent speech by Sir Howard Davies, chairman of the Airports Commission, in which he concluded that a new runway, or runways, would be needed in the South East has inevitably increased worries that Gatwick may be in line for a new runway.³ House prices will be depressed in any area that could be affected by increased noise, and that could involve over 10,000 home owners.⁴ Anxiety about not being able to sell one's house has led some people into acute depression.

Sir Howard said that he is looking for a solution to the blight problem. GACC has joined with airport environmental groups around other London airports to ask him to make it a rule that any airport which wishes to be included in his short-list (due in December) as a potential site for a new runway must produce a scheme to alleviate blight.⁵

When in July GACC suggested to Gatwick Airport that they should re-introduce blight schemes similar to those set up by BAA in 2005, they replied that nothing would be done until 2015 at the earliest, but that the existing schemes remain in place. Yet people who have enquired about them can find nothing on the Gatwick website, and phone calls produce nil response.

GACC joint vice-chairman, John Byng, said: 'It is a disgrace that the airport spends so much money promoting the idea of a new runway but is not prepared to do anything for those who suffer misery and anxiety as a result.'

Additional notes

Sussex residents have long been promised a new hospital. Despite campaigns supported by local MPS, there is still no new NHS hospital to care for the existing population, let alone the increased population due to expanding Gatwick.

Night flights can damage health - it is known that insufficient sleep increases the levels of 'stress hormones' in the body, but new research has now shown that it takes much longer than previously thought to recover from the adverse effects of sleep deprivation, particularly with regard to daytime performance deficits.⁶

GACC is a voluntary community association with members from a wide area around Gatwick. To join, click on www.gacc.org.uk or write to GACC at RH6 0EP.

¹ British Medical Journal press release. 8 October 2013. <http://www.bmj.com/press-releases/2013/10/08/researchers-find-link-between-aircraft-noise-and-heart-disease>

² According to the International Standards Organisation the noise standard in rural areas should be 10 dB lower than in urban residential areas. See www.gacc.org.uk/latest-news (Noise correction)

³ GACC does not agree with Sir Howard's conclusion – see www.gacc.org.uk/latest-news (GACC rejects ...)

⁴ Based on predicted number of houses within the 54 leq contour. See www.gacc.org.uk/latest-news (Blight)

⁵ Letter is available at www.gacc.org.uk/latest-news (Blight).

⁶ American Journal of Physiology - Endocrinology and Metabolism. 1 October 2013. <http://ajpendo.physiology.org/content/305/7/E890>