

GATWICK – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE FUTURE

In 2000, BAA Gatwick published its Sustainable Development Strategy which sets out how the airport should develop over the decade. The publication of the Strategy followed a period of close consultation with local authorities and communities around the airport, including GATCOM.

The strategy is based on a one runway, two terminal airport developed within its current boundary. It brings together the land use plan, social, environmental, and economic issues and the other airport strategies in one document. It sets out a framework for the future growth of the airport to accommodate 40 million passengers per annum by 2008/09 (although since the terrorist attacks on 11th September, 2001, the airport is now expected to handle 40 million passengers in 2010/11)

New facilities will be built and brought into use as and when justified by demand. Within the terminals, work is likely to include enhancements to the departure lounges, check in areas, baggage reclaim halls and baggage facilities.

On the airfield, proposals will include providing more aircraft stands to accommodate the larger, quieter aircraft such as the latest Airbus fleets and Boeing 777s.

To ensure Gatwick continues to provide good levels of customer service for passengers, it also needs to consider concepts for piers or satellites connected to the North Terminal. It also needs to plan for more cargo and maintenance facilities.

To enable the airport to grow with the support and trust of its neighbours, the strategy contains 142 commitments from BAA Gatwick, which seek to mitigate the effects of the growth of the airport. These commitments will bring forward the introduction of action plans and the setting of annual targets, and the adoption of best practice approaches to environmental management. Many of the commitments are given added force by 36 obligations forming part of a Section 106 legal agreement with the local planning authorities (West Sussex County Council and Crawley Borough Council). One of the legal obligations requires BAA Gatwick, West Sussex County Council and Crawley Borough Council to prepare an Annual Monitoring Report of all the commitments and legal obligations for subsequent independent consideration and verification by an environmental consultant. GATCOM is one of the consultees in the monitoring process and is able to suggest specific commitments/obligations for independent verification.

The importance of involving the neighbouring local authorities and gaining their support to the overall approach set out in the legal agreement and in the Sustainable Development Strategy cannot be underestimated. This has been achieved through them signing up to the Memorandum of Understanding, which gives them the opportunity to participate in the implementation and monitoring functions and represents a substantial public commitment by all the local authorities concerned. The benefits of the overall partnership approach are far-reaching particularly in view of the complex issues that need to be addressed.

One of GATCOM's main challenges is to ensure effective monitoring of the performance of BAA Gatwick against its environmental and transport targets and action plans. Although the Development Strategy sets out how Gatwick intends to report on its performance, this will generally be on an annual basis to GATCOM and some matters may require the Committee's consideration more frequently.

What is in the 2001 Legal Agreement?

This unique legal agreement has been agreed between BAA Gatwick, West Sussex County Council and Crawley Borough Council and is designed to protect local communities from the impact of future airport growth. It contains 36 legally binding obligations by BAA Gatwick including action to reduce the impact of aircraft noise, investment to reduce ground noise on the airport, investment in a range of transport initiatives, the launch of an employment forum and the setting up of a Community Trust Fund.

The legal agreement will run until 31 March 2009, but does not in any way affect the existing 'single runway' agreement entered into in 1979. This legally binding agreement with West Sussex County Council, prevents the construction or opening of another major runway before 2019. The two agreements complement one another and both are now in force.

The 36 obligations made by BAA Gatwick in the legal agreement include:

Air noise

To work to reduce the size of the area most affected by air noise. Actions to achieve this are based around a continued focus on encouraging airlines to operate the quietest types of aircraft. This includes continuing to impose higher landing charges on noisier aircraft and fining aircraft that exceed noise limits. Also, to work with the airlines to improve aircraft track-keeping performance as well as the review of aircraft landing procedures with the aim of reducing the noise impact of aircraft on surrounding communities.

Ground Noise

To develop a 'ground run pen' to protect local communities from the noise of aircraft engine testing, and to consider building more noise barriers, such as earth bunds at key points around the airfield.

Transport

To invest more than £10 million in initiatives to cut down growth in road traffic, to include £4 million towards FastWay, a high quality public transport system serving the Crawley area and nearly £2 million on road improvements at junctions 9 and 9a of the M23 and a new access off the A23 to relieve congestion.

The first phase of Fastway was opened in September, 2003 and carried 1.8 million passengers in its first year of operation.

Employment

To set up an annual airport employment forum involving businesses, local authorities and other groups, to identify a range of recruitment strategies and projects. The forum would also work with local housing authorities and agencies to identify local housing needs and consider transport issues.

The Employment Forum has been established and meets annually.

The Community Fund

A Community Trust Fund was established in 2001 and BAA Gatwick undertakes to invest £100,000 a year, for nine years, for the fund to spend on community and environmental projects in areas affected by the airport's operation. The Fund will be index-linked and will also receive money raised through fines on airlines that infringe noise limits. A team of nine trustees will be appointed to manage the fund independently of BAA Gatwick. GATCOM nominates one of the trustees.

The Community Trust has been established and BAA Gatwick also provides a member of staff one day per week as Secretariat for the Trust.

Energy Saving

To consider constructing a combined heat and power station on airport to see if it provides a sustainable solution to meeting the airport's growing energy needs.

Air quality

To cut fuel emissions by providing fixed electrical ground power units for all aircraft stands and restricting the use of mobile units; to rebuild the airport's fire training ground so that training exercises can use the more environmentally-friendly liquid petroleum gas; to contribute towards certain local authority costs for air monitoring and to play an active part in local air quality management action plans.

Fixed electrical ground power units are now available on all aircraft stands. A new fire training rig became operational in 2004.

Landscaping

To develop schemes to reduce the visual impact of new airport developments on neighbouring communities, to include the potential creation of new earth bunds and tree planting both on and off airport. Also, to protect, manage and enhance the natural landscaping around the airport boundary.