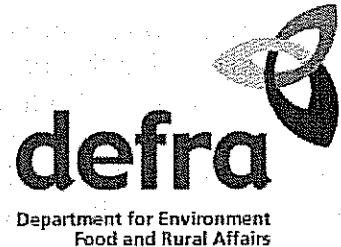


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**Our ref:** MC 84535/AT  
20 May 2008

**From Jonathan Shaw MP**  
Minister for Marine, Landscape & Rural Affairs and Minister for the South East

*Dear Caroline*

Thank you for your letter of 7 May enclosing a copy of one about noise mapping and reduction around Gatwick and other UK airports.

We are currently preparing guidance on how action plans to manage airport noise should be drawn up. This guidance will be subject to public consultation before it is launched and will address the question of the displacement of noise.

A competent authority will be responsible for implementing the action plans. In the case of airports, this will be the airport operator. In all other cases, it will be the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State may enter into agreements with the organisations with the power to take measures to develop action plans. For each noise source, a key body will draw up a draft plan in consultation with other interested organisations. In all cases the plans will be subject to full consultation. Wherever possible, key bodies will be encouraged to use existing processes for consultation and action planning.

The Environmental Noise Directive (END) states that the measures to manage and reduce noise within the plans are at the discretion of the competent authority. However, these should address priorities which may be identified by the exceeding of any relevant limit value (the UK currently has none) or by other criteria chosen by the Member State. The measures within the plans have to in particular address the most important areas established by noise mapping. A cost benefit analysis has to be carried out of any action proposed during the development of action plans. This will help to ensure that limited resources are being channelled to the most effective measures. The Directive specifically requires action to protect quiet areas in agglomerations.

The Government believes that it is appropriate to designate the airport operators of non-designated airports as competent authorities given the different circumstances in which air

transport operates as compared with other modes of transport. The expertise, data and methodology for the creation of noise maps is already well established as many airport operators already produce noise contours and have the necessary systems in place to be able to do so. Airports also have consultative committees which include local authorities and other amenity representatives. In cases of doubt about the integrity of the maps, these bodies can investigate the matter.

The Government has built certain powers into the implementing regulations in the unlikely event that the airport operators default on their obligations. These include powers to amend or reject maps and action plans if the Secretary of State considers that it does not meet the requirements of the Directive. There are also powers to require the competent authority to resubmit the maps or action plans remedying the shortcomings. However, it is important to bear in mind that noise is an inevitable consequence of a mature and vibrant society. People enjoy and benefit from air transport and this benefit manifests itself in terms of business, leisure, the movement of goods and employment. When managing the environmental noise that arises from aircraft we will have to strike a careful balance.

Yours sincerely  
Jonathan Shaw

**JONATHAN SHAW**