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17<sup>th</sup> March 2015

Mr John Redwood MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Redwood

As you are aware, as at other airports across the UK, last year Heathrow undertook airspace trials as part of the government's plan to modernise UK airspace through their Future Airspace Strategy. These trials were run in conjunction with NATS to test techniques necessary to inform how airspace can be better managed in the future.

The most recent airspace trials affected aircraft departing from Heathrow to the west (i.e. on westerly operations) and to the east (on easterly operations). The trials were carried out last summer and finished on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014. The effect of these trials was to concentrate flights along narrower corridors.

Following the ending of the trials, Heathrow was approached by a number of residents and their elected representatives with concerns that flights were being routed differently. Heathrow approached NATS to ask whether there had been any other relevant changes to airspace and were told that no changes had taken place.

However, as a result of further investigations by NATS and the CAA, a procedural change has been identified, affecting air traffic in areas to the southwest of the airport.

The change affects aircraft in 'higher level' airspace (approximately 7,000 feet and above) using one of the six departure routes from Heathrow during periods of easterly winds. The 'Compton' route is used by 16% of departing aircraft turning west when the airport is on easterly operations – equating to around 6% of total departures from Heathrow. Other departure routes are not affected.

Prior to the change, aircraft using this departure route were directed across a wide swathe of airspace before moving into the next sector of airspace anywhere within a 13-mile 'gateway' near Compton (hence its name) at approximately 8,000ft. Since NATS made the procedural change, this gateway for departures has been narrowed to around 7 miles, which means that aircraft are now climbing through a narrower area of the existing airspace in order to be in the correct location to go through the gateway. This has resulted in more concentration of departure aircraft activity over some areas and a reduction in others. It has also altered the position of some flights before they reach 7,000 feet, but not below 4,000 feet.

Areas affected by this concentration include Virginia Water, Ascot, Binfield and some parts of Bracknell. For other areas, including Windlesham, Lightwater and Bagshot, the number of departing aircraft over them has reduced. The operational change does not affect areas to the east of the airport such as Teddington, East Molesey and Twickenham, and it also does not result in aircraft flying over new areas.

There is no suggestion that NATS did not follow the current agreed process. While the control of aircraft at these levels does not involve airports, in light of the fact that the areas affected by this change include many of the same areas that were affected by the airspace trials last year, I would have expected NATS to have made us aware of the changes. Had we been aware of the potential impacts of the procedural change on the Compton route, we would have been able to accurately respond to questions from local residents.

NATS failure to identify this change to us resulted in Heathrow mistakenly telling residents after the airspace trials ended in November that no other changes had occurred.

In light of this, the Chief Executive of NATS has agreed to our request to urgently review his company's procedures to ensure that NATS shares information with Heathrow on any changes which may alter the pattern of aircraft over communities living around the airport. I asked him to consider reverting to the prior operational procedures on easterly departures; however NATS advised us that this change was made to improve the safe and efficient management of traffic departing from Heathrow and they are not planning to revert.

While I and my team have acted in good faith with the information we received, I recognise that as an airport community we have let you down in this instance. We need to do better to be a good neighbour and I would like to unequivocally apologise to you and your constituents.

We have issued a statement and more information today about this which can be found on our website [www.heathrow.com/noise](http://www.heathrow.com/noise). We are also writing to local councils including Wokingham.

I will continue to push for greater transparency from the aviation industry to promote trust amongst stakeholders and residents. We have recently set up the Heathrow Community Noise Forum which brings together local community representatives, councillors, and NATS, the CAA and DfT. This will be an important platform to address matters like this.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely



John Holland-Kaye  
Chief Executive Officer

Encs