

# New flight paths - Lee under threat

By David Jones

A consultation document has been issued by the National Air Traffic Service (NATS) outlining plans to re-route certain air corridors in the South of England. As they stand, they represent a most serious threat to the tranquillity of The Lee and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## Background

The majority of commercial aircraft over-flying The Lee is traffic in or out of Heathrow at 6000 feet or more, plus light traffic from Northolt. This is generally relatively unobtrusive in both noise and visibility even though Government guidelines consider aircraft below 7000 ft to be a major noise hazard. It does not detract from the tranquillity of the area, nor spoil it for the residents and the many visitors who come to the area each year.

## The threat

Under the new proposals, this will change dramatically and we are faced with the prospect of up to 10 flights per hour between 6:00 am and 11:00 pm at heights as low as 2500 feet above our village, less than half the height of current traffic with around 10 times the noise level. Furthermore, there could be two or three flights per hour overnight.

Specifically, the proposals redirect outbound flights from Luton to southwesterly destinations directly over The Chilterns at flight levels between 3000 and 4000 ft above sea level (which means 2500 to 3500 ft above The Lee) and with traffic out of Luton set to increase to make it London's second busiest airport, this is a really serious issue for all of us.

## Key issues

With the ever-increasing air traffic around London, something had to be done. NATS has come up with proposals which are the simplest for them to implement and which take as one of the key criteria an attempt to minimise the density of the population affected by air traffic pollution. They have completely ignored the fact that noise impact in a quiet rural environment is far more obtrusive than in a city environment, where ambient noise levels are much higher and buildings actually screen much of the noise. Furthermore, one of their guidelines was to avoid National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They have failed to recognise The Chilterns AONB in their proposals.

Once the proposals are adopted they will be here for a long time, designed as they are to allow for the expected expansion in air traffic. It is therefore vital that the plans be opposed in the strongest possible terms at every level.

Not only will we have increased traffic at much lower heights, the very nature of the flight profile (aircraft climbing, fully laden, plus the probability of long-haul jumbos) means that the actual noise profile will be dramatically higher than we are led to believe.

## Conclusion

Some change is inevitable. The congested airspace routings over South East England have to be redrawn. However NATS has used a blunt instrument with which to fashion the proposed changes and by its own admission has chosen to ignore the relative impact of noise in favour of a perceived softer option of re-routing over rural areas. They have exacerbated the effects by reducing the

height above the ground at which the aircraft will transit the area. Most residents have chosen to live in the area, and paid a sizeable premium for their property, in order to find the very tranquillity which, at a stroke, will be destroyed and which will wipe tens of thousands of pounds off the values of their homes.

It is absolutely vital that everyone understand the scale of the threat and that the proposals be fought in the strongest possible terms.

There are alternatives in terms of flight paths, heights and speed restrictions and these must be forced on NATS by every individual, organisation and public representative body before irreparable harm is done to our environment.