

This is the response of Much Hadham Parish Council (“MHPC”) to the consultation report prepared by the Department for Transport on behalf of the Government on “Night Flight Restrictions: Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted Airports from October 2025”.

1. The Parish of Much Hadham

The Parish of Much Hadham lies approximately eight miles south-west of Stansted Airport. As well as the village of Much Hadham, the Parish includes the hamlets of Green Tye and Perry Green and covers an area of some seven square miles.

Aircraft taking off from Stansted Airport tracking D22BZD are supposed to pass to the east of Much Hadham village but, in practice, it is not uncommon for them to pass directly overhead, starting to throttle back only as they do so. The noise of aircraft taking off is particularly intrusive and a matter of common complaint and discussion within the Parish, particularly in the summer months when there are more flights and there is less cloud cover. The Parish is also affected by noise from aircraft coming into land, as they follow the ILS Glidescope on their descent towards the airport.

Flights take place throughout the night, and typically several successive flights take off from (and sometimes before) 0600 hrs. The detrimental effect of aircraft noise on physical and mental health is well documented and need not be repeated here. Night flights, causing interruption of sleep, are the biggest single cause of complaint.

2. Lobbying by Manchester Airports Group

As a result of Freedom of Information requests submitted by Stansted Airport Watch (“SAW”) it has become apparent that Manchester Airports Group (“MAG”) has been lobbying the DfT to “de-designate” Stansted Airport so that, henceforth, Government restrictions on night flights no longer would apply to it.

We understand that this lobbying activity by MAG puts it in clear breach of an agreement it entered into previously with Uttlesford District Council not to seek any relaxation of the night flight restrictions currently in force. This shows a worrying disregard both for an agreement lawfully entered into and for the adverse impact of night flights upon the health and well-being of those living in the shadow of the airport. As ever, the driving force behind MAG’s strategy is one-dimensional – profit. All landing and departure fees between 2300 hrs. and 0600 hrs. attract a 50% surcharge. Night flights therefore earn Stansted Airport a disproportionate level of profit.

3. Options identified to regulate noise from night flights at Stansted Airport

In the consultation paper the DfT has put forward three options for Stansted Airport which we summarise below for ease of reference.

Option 1

All Government night controls to be removed in October 2026, after which the only restrictions on night flights would be those imposed by local planning conditions;

Option 2

Similar to Option 1, but Government night controls would be lifted in October 2025. A quota count (“QC”) limit (see below) would apply but there would be no numerical limit on the number of night flights; and

Option 3

The existing government restrictions on night flights would continue unchanged.

It seems clear that Options 1 and 2 have been included in the consultation paper as a consequence of lobbying by MAG. In contrast to the proposals for Stansted, no changes to the already much more stringent restrictions on night flights at Heathrow and Gatwick are proposed.

4. MHPC’s response to the three options

We take the three options in turn.

Option 1 is, self-evidently, an attempt by MAG to by-pass the legal protections which the Government imposes as a means of regulating the aircraft industry, including by imposing protections to safeguard the interests of those affected by aircraft noise. Such protections rightly exist in addition to such local planning restrictions as may apply. As such, we consider that Option 1 should be dismissed out of hand.

MAG’s purpose in having lobbied for Option 2 is more subtle but, like Option 1, has the potential to be seriously detrimental to the interests of those tens of thousands of people whose lives are adversely affected by night-time aircraft noise. In this regard the current regulations apply both a numerical limit on the number of night flights and a QC limit. Our understanding is that the QC system allocates points to each aircraft type on a sliding scale, the noisiest aircraft attracting the largest number of points and the least noisy the smallest. The practical effect of this is that the permitted maximum number of night flights during a quota period will depend on the cumulative total number of points generated by the night flights which take place during the period. Once the quota has been reached no more flights will be permitted. Put simply, the less noisy the aircraft using the airport during a quota period, the more flights will be permitted. It follows that as older, noisier aircraft are phased out over future years, if the permitted maximum number of night flights were determined solely by the QC limit (as Option 2 provides), the consequence would be an increase in the number of night-time flights, potentially well beyond current levels.

In our submission Option 2 therefore also should be rejected.

This leaves Option 3. The position of MHPC with regard to this option is that it is the most attractive of the three, maintaining as it does the status quo. However, Option 3 would do no more than maintain a situation which already is unsatisfactory due to the extent to which night-time aircraft noise adversely affects the lives of our parishioners, and the adoption of Option 3 would in our opinion mark the missing of a major opportunity by the DfT to re-set the balance between MAG’s focus on increasing profits for the benefit of its shareholders on the one hand and the interests of those thousands of households (including those in our Parish)

who are adversely affected by the noise generated by aircraft using Stansted Airport operations on the other. We consider that there is a compelling case to phase out night flights from Stansted altogether, but in immediate response to this consultation we would urge the DfT not to be constrained by the three options identified and introduce measures to reduce the number of night flight, taking the following into account:

1. The widely accepted meaning of “night” (including as defined by the World Health Organisation) is the eight hours from 2300 hrs. to 0700 hrs. However, currently “night time” flights at Stansted only are restricted during the six and a half hours between 2330 hrs. and 0600 hrs. This period should be extended to eight hours, particularly during the summer months;
2. Stansted currently is allowed 13,700 night flights a year. Heathrow, which handles many more flights than Stansted, is allowed only 5,800 night flights. Those living under or near the flightpaths of aircraft taking off and landing at Stansted are therefore significantly and disproportionately affected by the noise generated by night flights. The number of night flights permitted at Stansted should be reduced proportionately; and
3. Those responsible for the management of major airports such as Stansted are entitled to grant “dispensations” which allow aircraft to use the airports at night when flights are delayed by bad weather or due to Air Traffic Control problems. Such flights do not count as “night time” flights for the purpose of the airport’s limit on night flights. The system is self-policing, which is inherently unsatisfactory. The number of dispensations issued by Stansted Airport is surprising. We understand from enquiries conducted by SAW that Stansted granted as many as 1,200 dispensations over the course of the summer of 2023, whereas Heathrow (a much bigger airport handling many more flights) granted only 462. There is no obvious explanation for this wide divergence and we would urge the DfT to either take the right to issue dispensations out of the hands of the managers of Stansted airport or impose an effective method of independent verification of the grounds relied upon by Stansted when dispensations are granted.

5. Summary: MHPC’s response to the Consultation

Of the three options identified in the Consultation Paper to regulate night flights at Stansted Airport, MHPC considers that Options 1 and 2 to be unacceptable, and Option 3 is preferred. However, we urge the DfT to take the opportunity not only to reject any move to relax the existing restrictions on the number of night flights (particularly over the summer months when sleep patterns are particularly disrupted) but to bring into force new, tighter regulations which will reduce the incidence of night flights, a development which would add significantly to the quality of life of those within our Parish (and beyond) whose lives currently are adversely affected by the blight of noise from night flights from Stansted Airport.