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Orpington
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The Rt Hon Mike Kane MP
Minister for Aviation
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Dear Mike

Re: Non-Compliance with Government Guidelines on Airport Consultation Committees by Biggin Hill Airport, Bromley

Congratulations on your new role, and best of luck in dealing with the in-box.

I know you will have a million tasks requiring attention, but could I draw your attention to this matter?

In the London Borough of Bromley sits Biggin Hill Airport. Once famous as a WW2 base for the RAF, the lease was sold by the council in 1994 to private investors. Since that time the number and size of aircraft has increased very significantly, particularly since 2016 when the council agreed to extended hours and a weakening of noise controls.

Our concerns as residents are common with many who live near airports across the country. To help improve engagement between airports and their local communities the Department for Transport issued Guidelines in April 2014. Despite the crucial role ACCs could play it is apparent that most airports only partly adhere to the guidelines: this was highlighted by an Information Gathering Exercise by the DfT in 2023.

Our concern is that Biggin Hill seem to be very much at lowest level of compliance with the guidelines. This means the local community gets no real interaction with the airport – meetings are managed by the CEO with a non-independent chairman: who can shut down any consenting voices.

I have attached a document titled "ACC Constitution vs Government Guidelines" that provides a detailed analysis of the shortcomings. Below is a summary of the key issues:

1. **Lack of Independence:** The Chairman is not independent, having commercial contracts with the airport and being a user of its facilities. Additionally, the Secretary, who should be impartial, is appointed by the airport itself.
2. **Opaque Appointments Process:** There is no transparency over the appointment process for the Chairs of the ACC and the Noise and Safety Sub-Committee (NSSC).
3. **Limited Participation:** Meetings are largely dominated by the CEO, resulting in minimal input from other attendees, including elected councillors.
4. **Reduced Representation:** A recent change to the ACC's constitution has significantly reduced representation from the majority of communities under the flight path, leaving only three of the thirty-five resident associations represented, and limiting councilor participation to three including those who have shown they are not independent of the airport.
5. **Lack of Public Access:** ACC meetings are closed to the public, hindering transparency and broader community engagement.
6. **Exclusion of Dissenting Views:** The minutes of meetings fail to include minority or contrary opinions, giving a misleading impression of unanimous agreement on critical issues.
7. **Restricted Community Dialogue:** Instead of promoting dialogue with the community, questions directed to the Chair are routinely referred back to the CEO and COO, limiting genuine engagement.
8. **Delayed Communication:** Meeting papers are frequently circulated on the day of the meeting, and minutes are often delayed by up to three months, making it difficult for attendees to prepare or respond effectively.
9. **Risk of Dissent Suppression:** The ACC constitution has been amended to allow for the removal of any member by a simple majority vote, effectively stifling dissenting voices.
10. **Lack of Complaint Visibility:** Complaints are handled exclusively by a sub-committee, mostly comprising airport employees, preventing independent scrutiny of community concerns.
11. **Expansion Beyond Remit:** The inclusion of an additional paragraph in the constitution states that the ACC's role is "to allow the efficient functioning and economic development of the airport." Encouraging economic development is outside the remit of an ACC and conflicts with its role of community representation.

May I ask you to review the attached document and consider taking appropriate action to ensure that Biggin Hill Airport's ACC adheres to Government guidelines, thereby restoring its intended purpose of fostering transparent and effective communication between the airport and its surrounding communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Flightpath Watch (flightpathwatch.co.uk)

Cc: Louise Haigh MP, Secretary of State for Transport
Gareth Bacon MP for Orpington
Peter Fortune MP for Bromley and Biggin Hill
Bromley Councillors