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## Healthwatch Hillingdon's submission on The Airports Commission's consultation on the three options for a new runway in the South East of England

### INTRODUCTION

Healthwatch Hillingdon is a statutory consumer champion, serving the residents and users of health and social care services within the London Borough of Hillingdon. Independent of the NHS and local Council we ensure the voice of the consumer is strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate services; influencing the delivery and design of local services, for people who use them now, and those who may need to use them in future.

Our standalone response to the Commission's consultation on the short-listed options; Gatwick Airport Second Runway; Heathrow Airport Extended Northern Runway and Heathrow Airport North West Runway, is focussed upon question 4 of the consultation:

- In your view, are there any relevant factors that have not been fully addressed by the Commission to date?

Our response sets out the considerations of Healthwatch Hillingdon in summary, and outlines areas the Commission should consider in detail before any recommendation is made to Government.

### RESPONSE

Having reviewed the information made available by the Commission in the consultation document, the 16 appraisal modules and supporting documentation, we would like to draw the Commission's attention to 2 relevant factors that have not been fully addressed by the Commission to date:

1. The full effect upon the health and wellbeing of Hillingdon's residents
2. The full effect upon health and social care services within Hillingdon

In explanation of our position we will be reflecting our knowledge and experience of Hillingdon, but feel the points made will be equally relevant, in part, to other areas within the vicinity of both Heathrow and Gatwick Airports.

## The effects upon the health and wellbeing of people

It is well documented by the Commission that studies of noise and the effect it has upon people's health and wellbeing are being taken into consideration and we therefore will not add to this subject.

There are however a number of other factors that affect health. As a Health Impact Assessment has not yet been carried out the current effects have not yet been fully determined, but we would bring the following to the Commissions attention:

- London's air has improved in recent years, due to initiatives such as the congestion charge. However, Heathrow Airport and other areas continue to breach the EU legal limits for NO<sub>2</sub> and the levels of particulate matter (see Fig 1.) are above World Health Organisation recommended limits. Flight activity at Heathrow has an unequivocal relationship with air pollution. This was acutely demonstrated when the volcanic ash cloud closed the airport for 6 days in April 2010, by the dramatic reduction in recorded air pollution around Heathrow during that period.

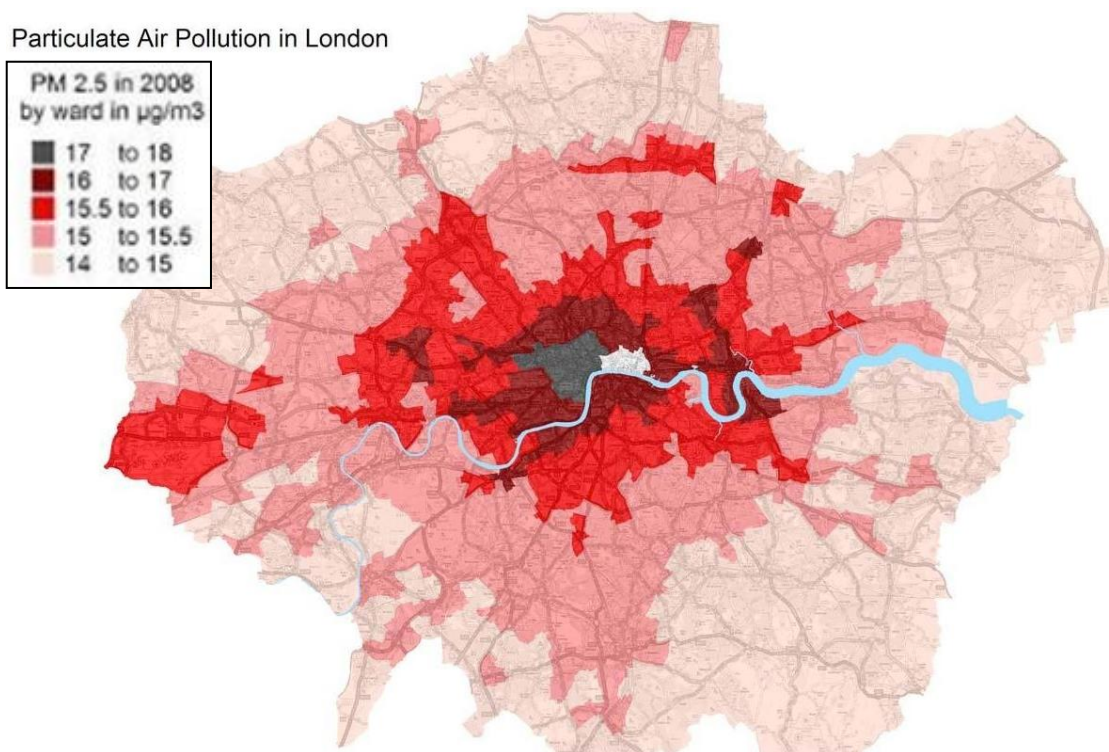
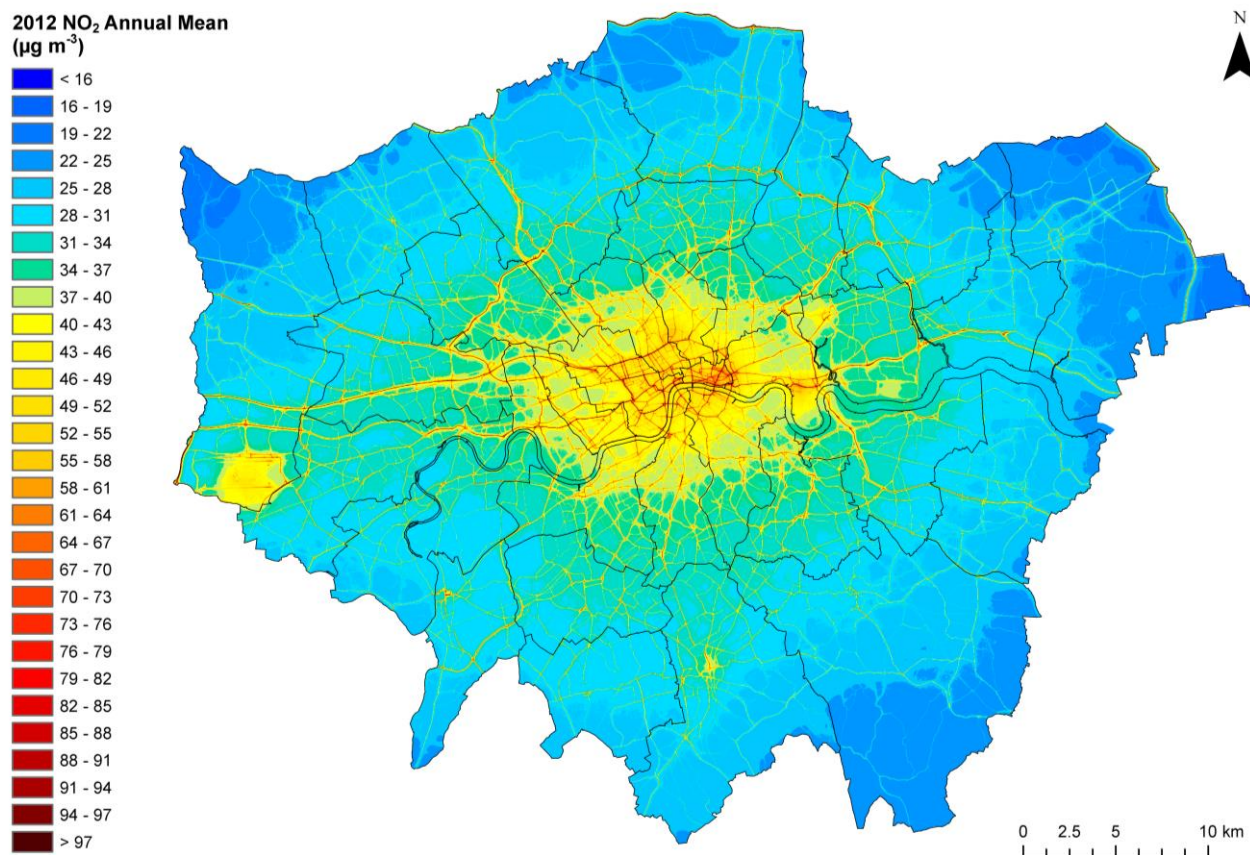


Fig.1.

Air quality also has a direct impact upon health. High levels of air pollution can adversely affect lung function and trigger asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) exacerbations. Air pollution also increases risk of acute cardiovascular events and the development of coronary artery disease.



Studies of respiratory disease in North West London have shown that there is a greater intensity of adults with a prevalence of COPD and asthma living close to Heathrow and the M4 and M40 corridors into central London. This correlates directly with air pollution and the increase in concentration of NO<sub>2</sub> (see Fig.2.)

The increase in flights and number of vehicles which will be attending Heathrow, brought about by the expansion, will increase air pollution and subsequently affect the health and wellbeing of local residents.

- Worry and anxiety of the proposed expansion of Heathrow is already impacting upon the morale and mental wellbeing of the communities within the Heathrow Villages. With the high number of people losing their homes and being displaced through relocation there will undoubtedly be those who will require intervention for their mental wellbeing, should those plans go ahead.
- The sense of community cohesion is high in the Heathrow Villages. The displacement of residents will undoubtedly lead to a loss of community. For some, especially for the elderly, this will lead to social isolation and loneliness. In addition to issues with mental wellbeing, studies by Age UK have also shown that isolation has a detrimental impact on physical health and a greater dependency upon care services.

Anecdotal evidence reported to Healthwatch would also suggest that isolation is not just an issue facing residents but also those who work at Heathrow Airport and associated businesses.

## The effect upon health and social care services

The Commission has outlined its consultation with MPs and Councillors, but it is not clear what conversations have been held with health and social care commissioners and providers, to determine the effects Heathrow Airport currently has upon services and what the impact may be with increased passenger flows.

As Heathrow Airport is within the Borough of Hillingdon, we would have expected conversations to be held with the NHS Hillingdon Clinical Commissioning Group, The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Central West London NHS Foundation Trust, Hillingdon Public Health, Hillingdon Council Social Services and London Ambulance Service. To our knowledge these conversations have not taken place and the affect upon services has not been considered by the Commission.

For this response we outline a number of factors, which have been brought to our attention through the course of our work, that impact upon services. We would however say that this is not a definitive list and would recommend the Commission has direct dialogue with local organisations, to enable a full understanding to be obtained of the impact that Heathrow Airport and any future expansion will have upon care services.

- Care services within Hillingdon are already treating the affects that Heathrow Airport has upon the health and wellbeing of Hillingdon residents, and those working at, or near the vicinity of the airport.
- Respiratory, Asthma and COPD related conditions are a major contributing factor to the 20% rise in attendances at Hillingdon Hospital A&E during the winter of 2014.
- Passengers who fall unwell at, or on flights to Heathrow are brought to Hillingdon Hospital for treatment. This adds an additional pressure to the hospital especially the Accident and Emergency Department.
- Admitted patients who come directly from the airport often cannot be safely discharged as they have no fixed abode, and “block” a much needed bed.
- The Council’s Housing Department have to take responsibility to find accommodation for these patients, in an already saturated sector.
- There is a rise in ex-pats returning to the UK, especially with dementia, some who are now in care homes under the charge of Hillingdon Social Services.
- Some non UK residents are liable to pay for their treatment when they are admitted. This is administratively time consuming. Obtaining payment is not always easy and sometimes impossible.
- Unaccompanied minors who come through Heathrow become the responsibility of Hillingdon Social Services.



- Hillingdon Hospital is a designated hospital for contagious diseases and has to be trained and ready to react to flights coming into Heathrow. Ebola has heightened this need.
- People from countries affected by conflict with mental health issues are being treated by Central West London NHS Foundation Trust.
- The GP Services in Hillingdon to the north of the airport in Harlington, West Drayton, Yiewsley and Uxbridge are already facing capacity challenges, with patients waiting more than average to see their GP. An expansion of Heathrow with its additional work force can only add to this pressure.
- The closure of the GP Practice in the Heathrow Villages, following the retirement of the incumbent GP has led to all residents having to register with GPs in the surrounding areas, which has exacerbated capacity issues.
- It is worth noting that following the closure of this GP Practice and the village chemist, that there are now no health services within the Heathrow Villages. Due to the uncertainty over the expansion of the airport, no services have been, or will be planned until a final decision is made.

## CONCLUSION

The information outlined in Healthwatch Hillingdon's response to the consultation gives a brief overview of areas which we consider to require further investigation by the Commission.

Healthwatch Hillingdon would recommend that prior to submitting a report to Government on whether a new runway is commissioned for the South East of England, that comprehensive impact assessments are carried out, to ascertain the effects:

- Upon health and social care services in proximity to Heathrow and Gatwick Airports
- On the health and wellbeing of people living and working within, or, in the proximity of Heathrow and Gatwick Airports, or its flight paths

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