Department for Transport

Air Navigation Guidance

Proposed 2026 version

November 2025

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Contents

Introduction

Section 70(2) of the Transport Act 2000 requires the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), when carrying out its air navigation functions, to take account of guidance on environmental objectives given to it by the Secretary of State. These functions are set out in the Air Navigation Directions 2026, made by the Secretary of State under sections 66(1), 68 and section 104(2) of the Transport Act 2000. This document, the Air Navigation Guidance 2026, is that guidance. It replaces the Air Navigation Guidance 2017 with effect from the date of publication[1].

The CAA's air navigation functions are conferred by Air Navigation Directions issued under sections 66(1), 68 and 104(2) of the Transport Act 2000, currently the Air Navigation Directions 2026. The functions include preparing the UK's Airspace Modernisation Strategy (AMS) in consultation with the Secretary of State, and approving individual changes to the UK's airspace design. In this Guidance the terms "air navigation functions" and "airspace functions" are used interchangeably.

The Airspace Modernisation Strategy (AMS) was refreshed in 2023. The AMS takes into account the latest developments in innovation and technology, the continuing need for more efficient airspace design, the need to treat environmental sustainability as an overarching principle to be applied through all modernisation activities, and the requirement to meet the UK's international obligations in regard to airspace and navigation.

Aims of the Guidance

The Air Navigation Guidance 2026 sets out key guidance on environmental objectives for airspace modernisation to aid the CAA, as the UK's independent regulator, in determining how to balance the factors set out in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000. This includes:

Setting out the Government's priorities for airspace redesign, through a set of principles called the "Airspace Design Priorities", explaining how environmental objectives sit alongside other aims and objectives of Government policy for aviation;

[1] See paragraph below on how this Guidance applies to airspace changes which are already under way.

Providing clarity on the relationship between airspace change and the planning process. Removing duplication means that airspace redesign can best realise the objectives of planning decisions within the scope of the requirements set by the planning process;

Improving the UK's airspace change process to deliver the wider societal and economic benefits aviation can bring, including by new users such as unmanned aircraft systems;

Strengthening the ability of the airspace change process to deliver Government priorities for UK airspace. This is achieved by providing a clear policy framework for decisions about the design and use of particular volumes of airspace;

Enabling the CAA's airspace change process to meet the Government's policy to reduce regulatory burden wherever possible and appropriate to do so.

Applicability of the Guidance

This document gives the CAA and sponsors guidance in relation to the CAA's responsibilities as set out in the Air Navigation Directions.

This guidance extends to all the CAA's air navigation functions. Government intends to keep this Guidance under review and update it when necessary to reflect development of policy in related areas.

The CAA is expected to carry out its airspace and air navigation functions in an environmentally sensible manner, reflected in (among other provisions) section 70(2)(c) and (d) of the Transport Act 2000. This guidance, given to the CAA under section 70(2)(d), addresses environmental impacts of aircraft movements while acknowledging that there are other operational objectives which must also be met. These include the overriding need to maintain a high standard of safety, and the need to enhance and maximise the overall efficiency of the UK airspace network. The CAA, as the UK's independent regulator, is best placed to determine how to balance these factors as set out in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000.

When there is conflict in the application of the factors set out in s.70(2) in the exercise of the CAA's air navigation functions, the CAA should take this guidance into account when applying section 70(3) to determine the most appropriate balance. This will help ensure that airspace designers have a clear understanding of the scope of environmental matters that individual airspace change proposals will need to address. This information should also be noted and taken into consideration by the aviation industry.

This document is statutory guidance to the CAA in accordance with section 70(2) of the Transport Act 2000 and should be read alongside the Air Navigation Directions 2026.

The Air Navigation Guidance has two purposes:

1. It sets out the Government's environmental objectives that the CAA must take into account in the exercise of its air navigation functions; and

2. It provides the CAA with guidance on how to achieve these objectives in the context of its duties under s. 70 of the Transport Act 2000.

The objectives addressed in this Guidance are to:

- Minimise emissions of greenhouse gases from individual flights by maximising flight efficiency.
- Minimise the adverse noise impact on the ground from individual flights by maximising flight efficiency.
- Achieve an appropriate distribution of noise impacts experienced on the ground from the use of airspace.
- Ensure appropriate engagement with communities likely to be affected by the impacts of changes to the design and use of airspace.
- Ensure that environmental impacts of aviation are addressed at the appropriate point in the overall decision-making process by the appropriate decision maker, and wherever possible avoid duplication with other processes, such as planning processes.

The chapters of this Guidance set out the impacts with which the Guidance is concerned and the way in which the CAA is expected to address them in carrying out its air navigation functions. This Guidance should be read and approached as a whole.

The Secretary of State has provided this Guidance to update and bring together all elements of Government policy and guidance likely to be relevant to the CAA's exercise of its airspace functions.

This Guidance will help ensure that airspace designers, and others with an interest in the CAA's airspace functions, have a clear understanding about the scope of the environmental matters that individual airspace change proposals will need to address.

New Airspace Users

Section 3 contains guidance on how the CAA is to consider the environmental impacts of certain proposed changes to airspace design (namely temporary airspace changes or airspace trials) to facilitate Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) operations. The Government's objective with this guidance is to facilitate time-limited trial activity which furthers the Government policy of enabling new users to integrate into the existing aviation system, driving economic growth, and enables the opportunity for such activity to collect data. This will inform future Government policy, which will be reflected in future iterations of this Guidance.

Interpretation

Terms used in this Guidance have the same meaning as in the Transport Act 2000 and the Air Navigation Directions 2026 unless otherwise stated.

In this Guidance, all altitude figures are expressed in feet above mean sea level (amsl). Please note, in some locations the actual height of the land maybe several hundred feet above sea level.

Strategic Direction and Prioritisation

Strategic Context

The Government believes that aviation can make a key contribution to the achievement of economic growth, increasing the prosperity of the whole country. The Government aims to facilitate the delivery of the economic benefits from aviation within its legally binding climate obligations.

Recognising that the CAA's primary responsibility for UK airspace is to maintain a high level of safety, reflected in section 70(1) Transport Act 2000, the CAA is also to ensure that UK airspace is utilised in an efficient manner, which makes best use of the airspace available, as reflected in section 70(2)(a) of the Act. This ensures that the overall network and flights operate as effectively as possible, improving overall resilience of this nationally strategic important infrastructure. The Government considers that efficiency plays an important role in minimising the environmental impacts of aviation. Efficient flight patterns, achieved by appropriate airspace design, are likely to mean that aircraft are flown over shorter departure and arrival routes and, particularly in the case of arrivals, under lower power. This can enable a lower fuel burn, lower carbon emissions, and lower levels of noise experienced on the ground while aircraft are manoeuvring at low altitudes.

The majority of aviation activity in the UK is enabled by airports and aerodromes. The CAA's airspace functions do not include policymaking or decision-taking about the scale, location or use of ground infrastructure. Policies and decisions are made about the construction and operation of airports and aerodromes by the planning process. Planning permissions and development consent orders (DCO) determine whether new infrastructure may be introduced in a particular location and may include conditions or requirements limiting the scale of operations.

This means that changes to airspace design on their own will not lead to increased numbers of air traffic movements. The numbers of flights to, from and over the UK is set by a number of factors, including the planning process which governs airport runway or terminal capacity. The aim of the airspace change process is to deliver airspace improvements to enable the capacity or other limits set by any planning decision.

The Government's policy is that airspace changes should seek to achieve the safest and most efficient use of airspace, taking into account the following constraints:

- Any limit on physical airport capacity.
- The number of flights permitted by planning decisions.
- Planning conditions such as noise preferential routes.
- Any limit on carbon emissions in planning conditions.

The airspace change process is not intended as a mechanism to impose or revisit those limits, nor should it duplicate the assessment of impacts and community engagement that should take place as part of the planning process.

The approach set by Government provides policy on the priorities for UK airspace, to inform how to best design and implement changes to airspace design. It is important that the impact of the use of airports, particularly the noise impact in the vicinity of airports, is taken into account by the Government when setting this policy, and this is reflected in the priorities set out below.

Policy Priorities for CAA Airspace Functions (the Airspace Design Priorities)

Aviation infrastructure cannot meet the Government objective of economic growth unless domestic and international aviation can access a modern airspace system. The design of this airspace must enable aircraft to take off from UK airports, swiftly enter the global network and land at UK airports without encountering delays.

The Airspace Design Priorities provide guidance on the way in which the statutory factors listed in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000 should be applied when maintaining (and keeping under review, in consultation with the Secretary of State) the Airspace Modernisation Strategy and when undertaking an airspace change. Safety remains the overriding priority. The Airspace Design Priorities strike a balance between seeking to achieve the Government's objective for economic growth, meeting our climate obligations and minimising adverse noise impacts on local communities. In summary, airspace should be designed to safely meet the capacity needed to enable economic growth, minimise newly overflown populations, minimise the adverse noise impact of aircraft below 4,000 feet, and enable the most flight-efficient flight profiles (thereby minimising greenhouse gas and noise emissions per flight) at and above 4,000 ft.

Overarching Principles for Airspace Design

The design of airspace must safely enable the capacity permitted by the planning decisions applicable to each UK airport, so that:

- Where the relevant planning decision places a cap on the number of aircraft movements, the airspace design must enable that number of aircraft movements to the extent that it is safe to do so;

- Where the relevant planning decision places no cap on the number of aircraft movement, the airspace design must enable the safe maximum number of movements, having regard to the demand for air transport, to and from the runway.

Consequently the CAA should perform its air navigation functions, particularly those concerning decisions which alter airspace design (including the associated processes and procedures), by applying or implementing the Airspace Design Priorities. The CAA should prioritise outcomes in the following order:

1. First, ensure safety and viability (operational flyability) of the design;

2. Within the possibilities remaining after prioritising 1, enable aviation activity permitted by planning decisions;

3. Within the possibilities remaining after prioritising 1 and 2, minimise change to the areas where aircraft noise is currently experienced from aircraft below 4,000 ft;

4. Within the possibilities after prioritising 1, 2 and 3, minimise adverse noise impacts of aircraft below 4,000 ft;

5. Within the possibilities remaining after prioritising 1, 2, 3 and 4, prioritise flight efficiency where aircraft are at 4,000 ft and above.

Guidance on the Airspace Design Priorities

Recognising that increased aviation capacity (and therefore activity) will increase carbon emissions from the aviation sector, reducing carbon emissions per flight remains a key objective for airspace modernisation. The Government notes that there is a correlation between minimising fuel burn, greenhouse gas emissions, noise impacts and the most flight efficient airspace design. However, in applying priorities 3 and 4, the Government's guidance is that where aircraft are below 4,000ft, the CAA should prioritise minimising noise impacts rather than greenhouse gas emissions.

In applying priority 4, where practicable, the CAA should take into account the desirability of minimising noise impacts for noise sensitive buildings of which the CAA is aware.

Guidance on Single and Multiple routes

Designs may include single or multiple routes. Each has both costs and benefits for affected parties and stakeholders. Some stakeholders prefer the impact of flights from airports to be distributed over a wider area. Advancements in technology such as Performance Based Navigation mean that aircraft can fly more accurately and predictably, both laterally and vertically. Multiple routes can provide operational flexibility, and to some extent spread the impact between communities. The Government has taken these considerations into account when developing the Airspace Design Priorities above.

The CAA must require that any airspace design developed and proposed by a sponsor aligns with the Airspace Design Priorities. Noting that the opportunity for multiple routes will vary (depending on the circumstances of each volume of airspace, such as the relative congestion of the surrounding airspace, the proximity of other airports and the operational

needs of the airport), it is for airspace change sponsors to consider whether single or multiple routes best achieve those priorities.

Sponsors should explain their choice between single and multiple routes clearly and transparently.

Airspace Design in the Planning Context

Airports and aerodromes provide the means for the majority of aviation activity in UK airspace to take place through ground infrastructure such as runways. As noted above, the construction of this infrastructure, together with any limits on permitted operations, generally results from decisions taken through planning processes. The CAA is a statutory consultee for applications for planning permission and development consent for aviation infrastructure.

Decision-making efficiency

Planning decisions, including conditions or requirements attached to planning permission or a DCO, determine ground-based infrastructure (airports), and therefore where and at what scale aviation activity is possible. Airspace design decisions determine how the resulting air traffic movement activity is safely enabled.

Each decision-maker should avoid considering, or reconsidering, an issue already or more appropriately determined by another decision-maker.

Wherever possible, airspace change sponsors, and other stakeholders should not be asked to duplicate evidence, analysis and other information over different or successive regulatory processes.

In relation to the CAA's airspace design decision-making, sponsors should be asked to provide only information that relates to considerations properly relevant to the airspace design decision, and not information relating to matters on which that decision has no impact.

Following a decision to approve an airspace change, the change will need to be deployed in order to become operational. Because of the size and complexity of some parts of airspace, it is possible that the safest and most effective approach to making an airspace change operational may be through several phased deployments. The CAA's processes and procedures should support this approach where appropriate. The Government will seek to enable the CAA to safeguard such multi-deployment flight procedures[2]. Where an airspace change is delivered through multiple deployments, this should include an appropriate degree of flexibility for the CAA to agree minor amendments to design after the first deployment has taken place, without requiring a new airspace change.

[2] By making an amendments to the Safeguarding Planning Circular: Safeguarding aerodromes, technical sites and military explosives storage areas - GOV.UK

Guidance on how to assess an airspace design against the Airspace Design Priorities

Introduction

When the CAA exercises its air navigation functions, it is required first to maintain a high standard of safety in the provision of its air traffic services and then to apply consideration to the various factors listed within section 70(2) of the Transport Act 2000. If there is a conflict in the application of the provisions listed in section 70(2), the CAA must, according to section 70(3), apply them in a manner it thinks is reasonable having a regard to those factors as a whole.

To help the CAA do this, airspace change sponsors should be required to demonstrate how they have undertaken an adequate assessment of different impacts and taken into consideration the views of different parties when developing proposed airspace changes.

The CAA should develop processes and procedures containing this requirement in accordance with the following considerations.

A pragmatic approach should be taken to utilising existing environmental assessments where they are still relevant and up to date for the purpose of an airspace change proposal (ACP). This could include, but is not limited to, assessments already undertaken for the purpose of a planning application or other regulatory process for aviation activities to avoid duplicative efforts. The CAA should robustly scrutinise and satisfy itself that any pre-existing environmental assessment relied on by a sponsor remains valid and fit for the purpose of an ACP. Where an existing assessment only partially fulfils the requirements of an ACP, the CAA should ensure that sponsors carry out sufficient supplemental work.

Noise Assessments Metrics

In order to enable the CAA to apply the Airspace Design Priorities, the CAA's processes and procedures should require sponsors to carry out an adequate assessment of potential noise impacts of the proposed change as follows.

Change in noise referred to in the Airspace Design Priorities (Section 2) should be considered to be where there is a change, plus or minus, one decibel of noise (i.e. ±1 dB).

The CAA should publish guidance on how to assess change, for the purpose of preparing an airspace change proposal in its relevant processes and procedures.

Noise impacts should be assessed using noise modelling software and inputs in accordance with CAP20913. Noise exposure from aircraft must be calculated up to 4,000 feet; vertical profiles must be truncated at 4,000 feet to exclude noise from aircraft above this level. Noise exposure must be evaluated for the summer average4 using:

- (1) the LAeq,16h daytime metric between 7am-11pm; and
- (2) the LAeq,8h nighttime metric between 11pm-7am.

Population exposure within the resulting noise contours should be estimated using the latest available demographic data. Noise from aircraft flying at or above 4,000 feet is not a relevant consideration.

Flight Efficiency Assessments

Flight efficiency in this context means the minimum fuel burn per flight. Maximising flight efficiency results in minimising fuel burn for a given flight and is commensurate with minimising carbon emissions for that given flight.

The planning system, within decisions about physical infrastructure, determines the overall capacity, and thus of the carbon emissions of air traffic movements to and from UK airports. This considers the overall carbon impact of the airport (including if applicable its construction) as part of that decision process. The Government recognises that the aim of the airspace change process is to deliver airspace improvements within this set capacity, determined by the planning process. In this way, planning decisions are likely to have a greater impact on carbon emissions from aviation than from the airspace change decisions. The aim of the airspace change process is to deliver airspace improvements within the capacity or other limits set by any planning decision.

Additionally, the CAA should require sponsors to demonstrate any net benefits using comparison to a defined baseline scenario agreed with the CAA. The CAA should publish guidance on how to make this assessment, for the purpose of preparing an airspace change proposal in its relevant processes and procedures. When making airspace change decisions the CAA should have regard only to the carbon emissions of aircraft using airspace and not of any other activity enabled or consequential on that aviation activity.

Transport Analysis Guidance

The Department for Transport's Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG)[5] includes a means for valuing the positive and negative impacts of an infrastructure proposal or project. Use of TAG allows decisions on transport schemes to take account of the costs and benefits of different options in a consistent manner. The CAA must require the sponsor to use TAG as a method to compare the anticipated impacts of the different options, even if only a single

[3] CAP2091: CAA Policy on Minimum Standards for Noise Modelling | UK Civil Aviation Authority
[4] 92-day summer period from 16 June to 15 September (inclusive)
[5] Transport analysis guidance - GOV.UK

option is developed. The CAA's processes and procedures should guide sponsors on the TAG parameters relevant for the purpose of airspace change proposals.

Local Air Quality

Emissions from aircraft above 1,000ft are unlikely to have a significant impact on local air quality. The impact of airspace design on local air quality is generally negligible compared to the impact changes in the volume of air traffic and in use of the local transport infrastructure. Those matters will be considered as part of the planning process.

Accordingly the impact of air traffic movements to and from UK airports on local air quality is not a relevant consideration for the CAA when exercising its air navigation functions.

National Parks, Habitats, Biodiversity, Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The CAA's processes and procedures will need to take account of any relevant and applicable environmental legislation. When undertaking air navigation functions, the CAA is required to consider other relevant policy and guidance issued by the government and devolved administrations relating to habitats, especially those regarding noise, carbon and air pollution.

The impact of aviation activity on habitats, biodiversity, national parks and sites of special scientific interest is not determined by the airspace design. The impact is determined by the planning decisions that enable the airport to be built, and the conditions placed on their operations.

Given the finite amount of airspace available, it will not always be possible to design flight procedures that avoid flying over National Parks, sensitive habitats or Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Guidance related to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Space and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)

The CAA is not required to take into account the impacts on the environment when considering airspace change proposals of the following kinds:

- A proposal submitted by or on behalf of the MoD, for aircraft operating by or on behalf of the armed forces.

- A proposal for an airspace trial which has been submitted for the purpose of enabling UAS flights to support policy development and learning or a temporary airspace change to facilitate Government policy to enable new users in order to promote economic growth. Noise complaints during such a trial or temporary airspace change should be required to be monitored by the sponsor and reported to the CAA. Noise attitude surveys should be undertaken as a condition of sufficient trials to build an evidence base to enable future Government policy to be developed to support this activity whilst taking into account its impacts on all stakeholders.

- A proposal for an airspace change which has been submitted to facilitate spaceflight or rocket activities where the environmental impact has already been considered as part of a licence application.

New users and innovation

Introduction

It is Government policy to facilitate the entry of new users into the UK aviation system, and the AMS makes clear that UK airspace should be accessible by all. To support novel and innovative users, changes to airspace design, or air traffic control (ATC) operational procedures are required for the purpose of research and development.

As outlined above in this guidance, the CAA does not need to take into account the impacts on the environment when considering airspace change proposals for UAS which supports Government policy development and learning.

Airspace trials

All airspace trials require prior approval from the CAA and must have a defined objective and a confirmed start and end date. Airspace trials must not be seen as a mechanism to avoid the full airspace change process. If the sponsor wishes to make an airspace trial permanent, it will need to undertake the full airspace change process.

The Government recognises that it is not proportionate for a sponsor wishing to implement a trial to be required to follow the full environmental assessments required for a permanent airspace change. The CAA should consider what assessment is sufficient and proportionate to the proposed trial.

After an airspace trial, the airspace should revert to its original state until such time as the full airspace change process can be completed. However, it is not always practical to disestablish a trial procedure. In such instances, the CAA may consider extending the trial whilst the airspace change process is being completed.

DfT expect that sufficient information is provided to those likely to be impacted by the trial before implementation and that noise complaints are monitored by the sponsor, and reported to the CAA, as part of the trial data. If the basis of the noise complaints suggests to the CAA that the sponsor failed to provide information properly before implementation or that the trial is not meeting its objectives, the CAA should seek to end the trial as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so.

Temporary change to airspace design

A temporary airspace arrangement will usually revert to its original state at the end of the designated period. Under extraordinary circumstances it may not do so but this is only permitted with the express authorisation of the CAA.

The Government recognises that it is not proportionate for a sponsor wishing to implement a temporary airspace arrangement to follow the full environmental assessments required for a permanent airspace change. The CAA should consider what assessment is sufficient and proportionate to the temporary arrangement.

If a sponsor wishes to extend a temporary airspace arrangement beyond the originally agreed end date, the CAA should assess whether the rationale for doing so is appropriate. An extension should not be granted solely to remove the effort required by a sponsor when pursing the full airspace change process.

The sponsor should monitor and report to the CAA any complaints associated with a temporary airspace arrangement once it has been implemented. Any complaints should be taken into account by the CAA before any decision to extend the period of the temporary change.

Guidance on engaging with those impacted by airspace use

Introduction

Airports should have high quality and open engagement with their local communities on an ongoing basis. Specific consultation requirements for sponsors should be set out by the CAA as part of their airspace change processes and procedures. This guidance deals with both airspace change processes and aspects of the CAA's air navigation functions that concern ongoing airport operations.

Consultation on an airspace change proposal

Where the CAA's process and procedures require consultation with local communities, sponsors should be required to adhere to the principles set out in the Cabinet Office Guidance on Consultation principles[6].

In all cases, the CAA should determine the appropriate level of consultation required of a sponsor for a given change, and scale the required process accordingly.

CAA should require sponsors, when undertaking consultation, to select the most appropriate and proportionate delivery medium based on what is best suited to their stakeholder group and local communities. The CAA should encourage sponsors, where appropriate, to consider the use of bodies such as local authorities or representative bodies during consultations.

The principles set out in Section 2 of this Guidance must be applied to the particular volume of airspace that is the subject of each ACP. The CAA's processes and procedures should require sponsors to gather the information needed to apply those principles to the volume of airspace in question having regard to its location and other characteristics.

Expectations for transparency on aircraft movements

Whether or not they are engaged in a current airspace change process, airports and their air navigation service providers should engage proactively on the noise impact of aircraft

[6] Consultation principles: guidance - GOV.UK

operating into and out of their airport with their local communities. This could be achieved through established bodies such as Airport Consultative Committees, other relevant consultative groups, and, where appropriate, through other means such as the internet and social media, to engage and inform their communities as appropriate on relevant air operations.

As part of the engagement activities carried out by the airports, they are required, where it is practicable to do so, to provide their local communities with information on the tracks flown by aircraft, the numbers of flights, and altitude data.

Aircraft operational changes affecting the use of airspace

The Government recognises the need to avoid disproportionate regulatory burden, and the CAA should take this into account when carrying out its function of guiding airports on specific flight information to publish. However, where an airport has approved standard instrument departure flight procedures, the CAA should encourage airports to publish information that compares the actual routes flown by aircraft departing UK airports as compared to the nominal tracks of those departure procedures.

Airports and airspace change sponsors should also be aware that over time it is possible that the distribution pattern of air traffic and the types of aircraft being flown can change and that this can have a noise impact. For example, airlines may make changes to the routes they fly or increase the intensity of flights to more popular destinations. Airports and sponsors are therefore expected, where practical to analyse how aircraft operations involving their airport affect the use of airspace, be transparent with communities about any identified changes to the distribution of air traffic and consider whether any such changes may constitute a Planned and Permanent Redistribution of Air Traffic (PPR).

The CAA should set specific guidance for aircraft operational changes affecting the use of airspace. This guidance should outline expectations for airports around community engagement and transparency. The CAA's guidance should focus on the provision of information by airports and airspace change sponsors to communities and increasing the level of transparency that exists with air operations. Where the CAA is aware that an airport is withholding information, it should consider exercising its powers to obtain information from providers of air traffic services.

Publication of route information by airports

To provide communities with transparency on the numbers of aircraft flown near them, the CAA’s guidance should encourage airports to publish details of where the aircraft are actually flying, and the amount of noise created. These airports, working with their local communities, may determine the precise information they wish to publish.

The CAA’s guidance should guide airports that the information should be made available on the airport’s website and also provided to their respective consultative committees. It should be updated on a regular basis, although the airport should be able determine the precise frequency of this taking into account the views of their local communities. Airports should also be encouraged to provide annual information returns which will enable communities to see whether there have been any changes in traffic patterns over previous years.

Use of airspace by helicopters and light aircraft operators

The CAA should guide airspace users, such as helicopter and light aircraft operators, to ensure that when operating over built up areas they do so with consideration for the people who may live there. In addition, airspace users not flying instrument flight procedures should also give similar consideration when they operate over National Parks and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

It is desirable to try to balance benefits on the one hand against any noise impacts on the other. The Government therefore strongly urges all airports and aerodromes across the UK to engage closely with their statutory airport consultative committees. Measures which could be taken include establishing local community meeting groups where all can meet and discuss any ongoing concerns, encouraging pilots to avoid overflying built up areas where practical to do so, and greater attention paid to the effect of noise from intensive operations such as take-off and landing training exercises.

Arrangements for airspace change proposals already under development at the date of publication of this Guidance

This guidance will apply:

- In respect of all new airspace change proposals commenced after its publication.
- Where an airspace change proposal designing a block of UK airspace that covers the area of airspace managed by more than one airport and is being progressed by the UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS).
- Where an airspace change proposal has not completed the stage 2 gateway of the CAA's current CAP1616 process at the date of its publication.

The Air Navigation Guidance 2017 (or Air Navigation Guidance 2014 if applicable) continues to apply to other airspace change proposals that are in progress provided that an airspace change proposal is submitted to the CAA for decision by the end July of 2027. The CAA is encouraged to consult the Secretary of State if it considers there is any doubt whether the Air Navigation Guidance 2026 may apply to an ongoing airspace change proposal.

Glossary

ACP - Airspace Change Proposal

A proposal (usually from an airport or air navigation service provider) to change the design of UK airspace.

AMS - Airspace Modernisation Strategy

The UK CAA's coordinated strategy and plan for the use of UK airspace. It is based on four strategic objectives: Safety, Integration, Simplification and Environment.

AMSL - Above Mean Sea Level

A unit of measurement (usually in feet) for elevation or altitude, indicating the vertical distance of a location relative to a historical average of the ocean's surface.

AND - Air Navigation Directions

In these Directions the Secretary of State gives the UK CAA its functions in relation to air navigation.

Airspace Design Priorities

The Airspace Design Priorities, sets out the Government's priorities for airspace redesign, explaining how environmental objectives sit alongside other aims and objectives of Government policy for aviation.

ANSP - Air Navigation Service Provider

An organisation which operates the technical system, infrastructure, procedures and rules of an air navigation service system, which may include air traffic control.

ATC - Air Traffic Control

The service provided by controllers to prevent collisions between aircraft and to expedite and maintain an orderly flow of air traffic.

ATS - Air Traffic Services

The various flight information services, alerting services, air traffic advisory services and ATC services (area, approach and aerodrome control services).

Airspace Design

The structure of airspace and flight procedures within it.

Airspace Management

A function with the primary objective of maximising the efficient use of airspace.

Airspace Users

All persons or organisations who make use of the United Kingdom's airspace to conduct or support an aerial activity, whether by operating within it, managing its use, or influencing its accessibility.

CAA - Civil Aviation Authority

The statutory body which oversees and regulates all aspects of civil aviation in the United Kingdom.

CAP 1616 - Airspace Change Process

The staged process an airspace change sponsor follows to submit a proposed change in airspace design to the UK CAA for a decision.

CAT - Commercial Air Transport

Any aircraft operation involving the transport of passengers, cargo or mail for remuneration or hire.

dB - Decibel of Noise

A decibel is a logarithmic unit describing sound level or changes of sound level.

DCO - Development Consent Orders

A Development Consent Order is the formal permission required to build a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project in the UK, such as large energy or transport developments.

DfT - Department for Transport

The government department that leads on UK aviation and the author of the Air Navigation Guidance.

EASA - European Union Aviation Safety Agency

The European Union authority for aviation safety.

eVTOL - Electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing

Also known as advanced air mobility or aerial taxis. Still in development, eVTOL aircraft are powered by electricity.

GA - General Aviation

All civil aircraft, which encompasses a wide range of aviation activity from paragliders, microlights, gliders and balloons to corporate business jets, including aerial survey, flying training and all sport and leisure flying.

ICAO - International Civil Aviation Organisation

The international aviation body established by the 1944 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation.

MoD - Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence protects the security, independence and interests of the UK at home and abroad. Its aim is to ensure that the armed forces have the training, equipment and support necessary for their work, and that they keep within budget.

Navigation Services

The facilities and services that provide aircraft with positioning and timing information.

Noise Contours

These are lines or circles on a map showing where equal levels of noise are experienced.

NPRs - Noise Preferential Routes

A set departure path that aircraft should try to follow when using an airport; established through local planning processes for noise management purposes.

PBN - Performance Based Navigation

A concept developed by ICAO that moves aviation away from the traditional use of aircraft navigating by ground-based beacons to a system more reliant on airborne technologies, utilising area navigation and global navigation satellite systems.

PPR - Planned and Permanent Redistribution

Air traffic control operational procedure changes that give rise to a planned and permanent redistribution of air traffic.

SofS - Secretary of State

The Secretary of State for Transport oversees the policies and priorities to deliver the government's transport agenda.

Sponsor

An organisation that proposes, or sponsors, a change to the airspace design in accordance with the UK CAA’s CAP 1616 airspace change process.

TAG - Transport Appraisal Guidance

This is the structured process for evaluating potential transport interventions by assessing their costs, benefits, and wider impacts.

Transport Act 2000

The legislative framework created to establish the framework for modernising and integrating transport systems, introducing measures like local transport plans and strategies.

UAS - Unmanned Aerial Systems

Also commonly known as a drone or RPAS, an aircraft system without a pilot on board which is controlled and operated from a remote location.

UKADS - UK Airspace Design Service

A proposed single entity to propose, design and deliver a holistic and modernised UK airspace.