



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Shadow Strategic Policy & Resources Shadow Committee.
Subject:	George Best Belfast City Airport Planning Agreement Modification.
Date:	19 December 2014.
Reporting Officers:	Mrs. Siobhan Toland, Lead Operations Officer HES, Mr John Walsh Town Solicitor
Contact Officers:	Mr. Stephen Leonard, Environmental Health Manager (ext 3312) and Mrs Lisa Toland Development Department.

1	Relevant Background Information.
1.1	In March 2012, GBBCA submitted a request to the Department of the Environment (DoENI) to vary the terms of its 1997 Planning Agreement established under Article 40(A) of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 and modified during 2008. Operating restrictions applied under the 2008 agreement mean that the Airport cannot accept more than 48,000 air traffic movements or offer more than 2 million departing 'seats for sale' in any 12 month period.
1.2	The Airport has requested that its 'seats for sale' restriction be removed and replaced with a noise control contour and noise control measures. Members considered this application and a Committee response was forwarded to the Department in June 2012.
1.3	Following completion of this public consultation exercise, the Department wrote to the Planning Appeals Commission asking it to hold a Public Local Inquiry into the proposals and the consultation responses to them. In addition, the Department requested further information from the Airport in respect of the impact of the proposed modification on noise, habitats and road transport.
1.4	A revised proposal and supporting information were submitted to the Department in December 2013 and the Airport submitted further supporting information in May 2014. Additional technical information relating to road transport, drainage and land contamination was received by the Department in July 2014.
1.5	It should be noted that the Department is required to consider the Planning Appeals Commission's report before it decides upon its final response to the Airport's modification request, but it is not obliged to accept the Commission's recommendations

2	Key Issues.
2.1	The Planning Appeals Commission has now written to the council to advise formally that a Public Local Inquiry into the proposed modification of the planning agreement between the George Best Belfast City Airport and the Department of the Environment.
2.2	Accordingly, the key dates for the Public Local Inquiry are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of case to be submitted – 19th February 2015 • Rebuttal statements to be submitted – 9th April 2015 • Public Inquiry – 11th -22nd May 2015

2.3	Members will recall that the Committee considered in detail the Airport's proposals and additionally submitted information, to modify its planning agreement at the Committee meeting of 6 March 2014. A consultation response was provided subsequently to the Department affirming council support for the Airport's aspirations for passenger growth but recognising the need to ensure that effective noise management arrangements are in place to safeguard local communities in line with Industry best practice.
2.4	A copy of the full consultation response is included within Appendix 1 to this report.
2.5	Members are advised that the Council now needs to prepare and submit its statement of case for the first phase of the Public Inquiry. Officers from the Development and Health and Environmental Services Departments under the direction of the Town Solicitor are preparing the statements supported by industry Experts. Subject to member approval the Council's case will centre on supporting the abolition of the seats for sale restriction and will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highlight how its removal compliments the Regional Development Strategy and our own Belfast City Centre Regeneration and City Investment Plan aim(s) of strengthening Belfast as the regional economic driver, • focus on how it's removal will help sustain job growth in the city, • provide information on the cumulative number of recent Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and highlight improved connectivity as one of the key decision making factors for potential FDI projects, • Highlight the importance of better connectivity in delivering the significant growth in tourist numbers identified in our new Tourism Strategy, • Highlight GBBCA as an important employer in the city and contributes significantly to the economy. • Input regarding the noise management proposals and other environmental considerations.

3	Resource Implications.
3.1	The costs associated with the preparation for the statement case and attendance of senior counsel and industry experts at the enquiry has been included in the revenue estimates.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	None.

5	Call In
5.1	This is subject to call-in.

6	Recommendations
6.1	Members are invited to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the content of this report and agree that the statement of case follow the guidelines outlined in paragraph 2.6 above; • Agree that Officers from the Environmental Health Service, Development Department and Town Solicitors office will attend the Public Local Inquiry in order to present the council's Statement of Case and to participate in the Inquiry.

7	Decision Tracking
7.1	The Director of the Health and Environmental Services Department will attend Committee in connection with this agenda item.

8	Key to Abbreviations
DoENI – Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. GBBCA – George Best Belfast City Airport. FDI- Foreign Direct Investment	

9	Documents attached
Appendix 1 – Copy of the council consultation response of 7 March 2014 – George Best Belfast City Airport - Planning Agreement Modification Process.	

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Strategic Planning Division (Headquarters) Department of the Environment
Millennium House
17 - 25 Great Victoria. Street
Belfast.
BT2 7BN

Dear Sir

GEORGE BEST BELFAST CITY AIRPORT- PLANNING AGREEMENT MODIFICATION PROCESS.

As a consultee, Belfast City Council has reviewed the content of the George Best Belfast City Airport 'Request and Related Documents' in support of the Airport's request to vary the terms of its Planning Agreement with the Department of the Environment of 22 January 1997, as modified in 2008, pursuant to Article 40A(1)(a) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and would submit the following comments by way of representation response.

Belfast City Council is supportive of George Best Belfast City Airport's aspirations for passenger growth and is cognisant of the benefits that such an expansion will bring in terms of both local employment and added value to the local economy.

The Council also appreciates the need to ensure effective noise management arrangements are in place to ensure that noise levels experienced by exposed communities are kept to lowest levels that can reasonably be managed.

Therefore, the Council considers that the size of the noise control contour and the management conditions contained in any new Article 40 agreement are crucial to ensuring that the abovementioned benefits are realised whilst providing reasonable protection to local residents impacted by the Airport's operations. The Council also recognises that George Best Belfast City Airport wishes to achieve this balance. The Council welcomes also that the airport will continue to commission independent annual reports, through the Department for Regional Development (Air and Sea Ports branch) on its performance against set noise management criteria.

It is important that airports are incentivised to implement continuous improvement in noise management practices required in order to achieve the desired balance. This is the case with some United Kingdom airports which continue to achieve sustainable economic growth whilst at the same time have been able to reduce their noise contours as aircraft become quieter and good noise management practices enhance operations.

For these reasons, Belfast City Council requests that the forthcoming inquiry should examine the Airport's expansion proposals giving consideration to the noise management proposals submitted, including the control contour size and any other appropriate measures that may achieve the right balance between the socio-economic benefits of airport expansion with the need to provide reasonable protection to the surrounding community (an outcome that both the applicant and Minister have stated they are seeking).

Please note, whilst this response has been agreed by the Council's Town Planning Committee, at its meeting on 6 March, it is subject to ratification by full Council, at its meeting on 1 April.

Should you have any queries regarding these comments, in the first instance please contact Stephen Leonard, Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection and Public Health and Housing Unit) on 028 9032 0202 ext 3312.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Claire Hanna
Chairman
Town Planning Committee