



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	George Best Belfast City Airport – Planning Agreement and Proposed Runway Extension
Date:	4th February, 2009
Reporting Officer:	Mrs. Suzanne Wylie, Head of Environmental Health, ext. 3281
Contact Officer:	Mrs. Siobhan Toland, Health & Community Safety Manager, ext. 3275

Relevant Background Information

Planning Agreement

The Committee, at its meeting on 5th November, was advised that the Planning Service had agreed and executed a modified Planning Agreement controlling the use of the George Best Belfast City Airport (GBBCA). The revised Planning Agreement is attached as Appendix 1.

Having considered the implications arising from the revised document, the Committee agreed that:

- the Planning Service be requested to clarify how the points raised within the Council's response to the consultation on the Planning Agreement were considered in the review process;
- the Planning Service be advised of the Committee's concerns in relation to noise monitoring and noise contours and be requested to explain why the issue of an appropriate scrutiny and management process had not been defined clearly within either the Planning Agreement or the accompanying Explanatory Document;
- the attention of the Planning Service be drawn to the recommendations within the Examination in Public relating to:
 - (i) changes which should be effected within the revised Planning Agreement and, in particular, that the independent panel had advised that, as all of the issues raised were interdependent, that they should be adopted in their entirety (Paragraph 2.2.2 and 7.1.1 EIP June, 2006); and
 - (ii) the imposition of a levy against late night flights and the administration of a potential community fund.

A letter to this effect was issued to the Planning Service following ratification of the Committee minutes by the Council on 1st December 2008.

Runway Extension

At its meeting on 7th January 2009, the Committee was provided with a verbal report on the application made by GBBCA to extend the runway. At this meeting, the Committee endorsed the approach which had been taken to date by the Environmental Health Service in respect of seeking more information from the applicant on noise and odour and agreed that a holding letter be sent to the Planning Service in this regard. It also agreed that the Town Planning Committee be recommended to consider writing to the Planning Service to request that a Public Local Inquiry be held and, further, to write to both the Ministers for DHSSPS and DOE, recommending that a Health Impact Assessment be carried out in respect of the runway extension. The Committee agreed also that the Council investigate the possibility of encouraging expert advice on the impact of the runway extension.

Key Issues

Planning Agreement

A letter of response to the Council's correspondence was received from the Planning Service on 12th January 2009 and is attached in Appendix 2. The letter provides a response to each of the issues raised by this Committee. However, it is considered that there are still two specific areas of concern relating to noise monitoring which need further clarification, namely:

- Clarification on which body has overall enforcement powers in respect of noise monitoring and noise control in respect of the airport. The Airports (NI) Order 1994 gives the Department for Regional Development (DRD) powers to direct the Airport Operator to mitigate any excessive noise in respect of the airport and gives DRD powers to develop a sound insulation scheme for homes within the 63 dB contour. However with the introduction of the Environmental Noise Directive (END) and the Draft END Action Plan (including the draft Noise Action Plan for GBBCA), DRD has asked for a legal opinion as to where their powers under the Airports Order have been superseded by END which is the responsibility of the DOE. In addition the DRD does not carry out any monitoring of noise from the airport at present;
- The letter states that the Department "is satisfied that arrangements have been put in place by the airport that provide for adequate scrutiny and oversight of the noise monitoring position". However the question needs to be asked as to where the expertise to assess this is based as this is a very specialised area of acoustics.

The Environmental Health Service will work with both the DOE and DRD to try to clarify these issues over the coming weeks and will bring a further report on the outcome to Committee.

Runway Extension

The Town Planning Committee at its meeting of 8th January, agreed to write to the Planning Service requesting that a Public Local Inquiry be held in respect of the runway extension. Given this, the Environmental Health Service is of the opinion that it will need to engage an expert to assist it in making a full response to the Planning Service on the areas of specific concern, namely noise control.

Although there are a number of suitably qualified and experienced officers in acoustics within the Environmental Protection team, aviation acoustics is a specialist area of noise control and an expert in this field is required to assess the noise chapter of the Environmental Statement submitted by the applicant and to initially provide direction to

the Council on the comments it should be making to the Planning Service. However depending on what the initial assessment shows up, there could be a need to request that an alternative noise statement is prepared which could include modelling. It may also be advisable that this expert would present issues on behalf of the Council at any Public Local Inquiry. The use of the consultant would place the City Council in a strong position to consider the application in terms of potential noise problems for residents who may be affected by the proposal.

The Unit has undertaken an initial scoping exercise to assess the level of expertise needed, the extent of the assignment and the likely costs and these are detailed below:

- To conduct an assessment of the Environmental Statement prepared by the applicant would cost approximately £3,000.
- If, following this assessment, it is decided that a similar noise statement including actual measurements and modelling is required, then completion of this work would cost in the region of £12,000 - £15,000, depending on the actual consultancy days required.
- The above estimates are based on the current cost of an Aviation Acoustics expert, which is approximately £1,000 a day.

Resource Implications

Financial

The costs of engaging an Aviation Acoustics expert to assist the Council to make comment on the Environmental Statement would be at most £15,000. If further work is required by way of presentation to a Public Local Inquiry, a further report will be brought back to Committee seeking approval.

A small sum was included in the Revenue Estimates (2008/2009) for consultancy work of this nature. However the remainder will need to be made up from a slight underspend caused by a member of staff leaving the Environmental Protection Unit earlier in the year and a time lag in terms of replacing that member of staff.

Human Resources

None

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the response from the Planning Service and the continued concern of the Environmental Health Service in respect of management and scrutiny of noise measurement and monitoring systems. A further report on this issue will be brought back once further negotiations have been held with the parties involved; and
2. Agree to the engagement of an aviation acoustics expert to assist the Environmental Health Service in assessing the Environmental Statement submitted as part of the application for the runway extension and to undertake a noise assessment, including actual measurements and modelling should this be required.

Key to Abbreviations

DOE – Department of the Environment

DHSSPS – Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

DRD – Department of Regional Development

GBBCA - George Best Belfast City Airport

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Revised Planning Agreement

Appendix 2 - Letter Received from the Planning Service in respect of the Planning Agreement