

In the UK, almost all building work, or changes of use of land, must receive planning permission from the relevant Local Authority. This building work includes our houses (including small extensions to our homes or, in some cases, even changes in window style) through to shops, office blocks and business parks. Planning permission is not granted unless an application conforms to policies which relate to the type of proposal or the site location. So far, so good, but many pilots and aircraft owners do not appreciate that their flying prospects may be even more tightly controlled.

No County or District policy stops all new house building in the related administrative area, nor is there any policy which prevents extensions to any buildings. Yet just such severe restrictions can be – and often are – placed on aviation activities. A policy can state that no new aerodromes will be allowed and/or that no expansion of activity will be permitted at an existing aerodrome.

The General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) is a consortium of GA associations and supporting bodies. One of the many tasks conducted by the GAAC is to monitor these planning policies which are found in County Structure Plans and District Local Plans. An input is made, at the appropriate time, when the contents (from an aviation standpoint) are found wanting. This may seem far removed from the practical aspects of flying an aeroplane, but unless the background work is carried out, that very practical business of getting into the air may become impossible.

Often the GAAC's work takes the form of a written input to a draft plan. This requests that GA is not only recognised but a balanced approach is adopted towards aviation related proposals. In many cases, policies have been amended accordingly. In some instances, though, this involves giving formal evidence at Examinations in Public (EIPs), recent examples being Warwickshire Structure Plan (with a very restrictive policy) and Northamptonshire Structure Plan.

We all hear of serious planning problems with individual aerodromes, but in many cases these difficulties are exacerbated because of failings in the planning policy background. Only if the policy documents provide some support for aviation is there any hope of a specific flying site receiving favourable support from a Local Authority.

The scale of the GAAC's continuing work to achieve this can be demonstrated by looking at some recent figures. In 1995, representations were made on 14 plans. Only four years later, in 1999, an input was made in respect of 79 different types of plan. This means that 79 Councils have had to consider aviation issues when, in some cases, they had not even given them a second thought. Of course, not all will decide to incorporate a policy. However, in many cases, a well balanced GA policy has subsequently been included.

Each positive outcome adds another brick in the wall which defends GA's future. There is still a long way to go, and the work cannot stop. Structure and Local Plans are the subject of continuous review and the GAAC must, and will, remain vigilant. The GAAC is the **only** UK GA organisation to undertake this essential work, which is conducted mainly by Anna Bloomfield, a chartered town planner who is the Council's Planning Co-ordinator.

Says David Ogilvy, the GAAC Chairman: "The problem is to convince people in general aviation to look ahead and to consider whether their home aerodromes – or places to which they fly – will still be there in a few years from now. Our work is essential if GA is to survive on a worthwhile scale, so we need more support and more funding from the many people who are affected."

Do I need planning permission?

Planning is a complex subject and it is not possible to say whether planning permission is, or is not, required for a particular proposal without obtaining a great deal of information. The following guidelines should not be taken in isolation and decisions should not be made based solely upon this fact sheet. You are strongly advised to contact your Local Planning Authority (LPA) at an early stage if you are not sure.

Planning permission may not be required in the following circumstances:

- When land is used as an airstrip for not more than 28 days in total in any calendar year (the "28 day rule").
- In many cases the "28 day rule" also applies to the storage of aircraft. Any associated buildings (other than moveable structures, such as caravans) would need separate planning permission.
- Land forming part of an agricultural unit can be used for the taking off and landing of an aircraft provided it is used solely or mainly for an agricultural purpose, such as crop spraying. Other persons or aircraft would not be able to use such a site. This is a "grey" area of planning law and great caution is advised if you wish to pursue this further.
- Where the take-off or landing of helicopters or aircraft is ancillary to the main use of the land, for example a hotel.
- The use of land as a helipad within the curtilage (boundary) of a dwelling. This is another "grey" area open to a wide range of interpretation so check carefully with your LPA before embarking on any new development.

How to obtain local support for your proposal

The following matters could form the basis of an information leaflet, or letter, to local residents. It should be stressed that these are just suggestions and do not necessarily have to be included. You may also wish to incorporate elements which have not been listed below.

1. Personal information

Include details of:

- aviation background and flying experience
- knowledge of locality
- reason for proposal

2. Summary of proposal

Include details of:

- movements (per annum ideally)

- days/hours of operation
- circuit pattern(s)
- restrictions (if any) on visiting aircraft
- the number, and type, of aircraft to be based on the site
- the type of GA activity to be undertaken, e.g. gliding, business, leisure, police surveillance etc.

Use your own organisation to help with background information if necessary. For example, the BGA and BMAA have produced helpful guidance and AOPA also offers free first aid assistance to its members.

3. Issues arising

Residents' concerns generally fall under three main headings (although each site will be different). These are:

- i) noise
- ii) safety
- iii) proposal is the "thin end of the wedge" for a larger operation.

It is impossible to address all the possible responses that could be made in respect of these (and other) issues. No two proposals are identical, nor are the surrounding local residents. However, you can help your case by including the following points:

- i) noise
 - explain how you will operate, to avoid overflying houses and other sensitive spots where possible
 - use, and abide by, the "More Considerate Flying" leaflet produced by the GAAC
 - produce noise contours if possible (you may be required to do so in any event)
 - offer to set up a Consultative Committee, to provide a channel for dialogue between yourself and residents
- ii) safety
 - safety issues are set out by the CAA in CAP 428 or CAP 168 (as appropriate)
 - if you know the safety record applicable to your particular aircraft/activity use the relevant statistics
 - explain your policy regarding visiting pilots' use of the site, in respect of environmental and safety aspects, e.g. joining procedures

iii) the "thin end of the wedge"

This is the most difficult area to cover, as you could risk opening up ideas not previously considered by residents. However, many residents do get concerned at the potential for a hard runway to be built or for jets to land. You need to spell out what is not proposed, before a misleading campaign is orchestrated based upon incorrect information.

When, or if, you decide to inform local residents about your proposal is very much down to individual circumstances. It is not possible to give hard and fast rules. However, you can best judge how to deal with this delicate subject by monitoring the local situation (perhaps through friends or colleagues).

Planning conditions and legal undertakings

In many instances an officer of your Local Planning Authority (LPA) may never have encountered a GA related proposal before. Therefore it could be "easier" for him/her to refuse the application rather than undertake research into relevant conditions. This may result in an unnecessary appeal so you should be aware of the type of conditions that could be imposed in order to make a GA related proposal acceptable.

A key element to avoid an appeal (assuming that there is some encouragement for your proposal) is negotiation with the Authority to ensure that suggested conditions, or a legal agreement, are broadly acceptable and will not hamper the operation to such an extent as to make it unviable.

LPAs need to follow Central Government advice found in Circular 11/95, which refers to the use of conditions. Other advice is found in PPG24 - *Planning and Noise* which gives specific examples of suitable planning conditions relating to GA. In any discussions with the LPA, it would be helpful to be aware that this advice is available (and should be accessible on the Government's web site).

The following is a list of possible conditions that could be imposed by LPA, or by an Inspector if the matter has gone to appeal:

1. **Temporary permissions**, usually for a minimum period of two to three years to gauge accurately the impact of an operation. (This may prove difficult for those needing to make long term investment but is sometimes the only way to appease local concern).
2. **Restrictions on the number of movements**. It is much better to have an annual limit (if this is being discussed), as opposed to a daily/weekly/monthly limit which is far less flexible and does not allow for the weather dependent nature of flying. Assuming a restriction on the number of movements per annum, it is helpful to allow for special events, such as "fly-ins", which should be in addition to the maximum permitted total of movements.
3. **Restrictions on the number and times of "touch and go" movements**. This type of condition is less common as each element is usually just treated as one movement, so the overall figures need to take this element into account. The reason it is sometimes imposed is because such movements can inevitably be more intrusive on the locality. Normally they relate to flying schools and clubs.
4. **Restrictions on the number of days flying**. As above, it is much better to have an annual limit for example, 200 days per annum, as opposed to a daily/weekly/monthly limit as this builds in flexibility.
5. **Restrictions on times of take-offs and landings**. Some conditions restrict flying times, such as no flights between 2100 – 0730. Some refer to one hour before sunrise and one hour after sunset - this is better as it allows for seasonal variations and builds in flexibility. Bear in mind that allowance should be made for later landings for aircraft returning from other places, possibly business flights. The condition should always make an exception for emergency landings. Such a condition could also impose different hours of operation at weekends and Bank Holidays to suit local needs.
6. **Restrictions on aircraft type**, for example fixed wing aircraft only, would preclude the use of helicopters so be sure this will not cause future operating difficulties.

7. **Restrictions on engine type**, for example jets, piston-engines, turbo-prop etc. as relevant. Again, be certain that this will not cause future operating difficulties.

8. **Restrictions by maximum total permitted weight of an aircraft**. This is referred to in PPG24 but is not very helpful. Officers of the LPA need to have the situation explained to them. Imposition of the condition is usually based on the belief that increased weight leads to increased noise. This is not always true. A weight limit may prevent a very quiet, slightly heavier aircraft replacing a lighter, noisier one. Such a condition therefore needs to be treated with caution.

9. **Restrictions on activities undertaken**, for example the site shall not be used for parachuting, public displays or as a flying school. It is also possible to restrict aerobatic activity within a specified distance of the airfield perimeter but only by reference to the take-off/landing of aircraft used for that purpose.

10. **Restriction on the number of aero-tow launches** per day and on the power of towing aircraft (in gliding cases). As with 8 above, more power does not necessarily mean more noise.

11. **Take-off and landing directions** to be controlled by reference to the preferred runway with restrictions on use of alternative runways except when wind, weather or other conditions make use of the other runway advisable on safety grounds.

12. **Restrictions on ancillary maintenance and storage**, for example within approved or existing buildings and hangars and subject to noise attenuation measures if deemed necessary.

13. **Log books to be kept on site** and made available for inspection on request and, insofar as it relates to environmental impact and not air safety, a manual to be agreed which sets out recommended flight paths, circuit patterns and other matters relating to the operational use of the aerodrome.

It should be stressed that this is not an exhaustive list as different circumstances demand different approaches to ensure proper control over a proposed/existing operation.

Some conditions imposed, by both LPAs and Inspectors, do not achieve the desired effect. Such conditions may not be outside the law ("ultra vires") but they could prove to be unnecessary or impractical to operate. Conditions 8 and 10 above are two examples.

Conditions preventing the operation of larger aircraft are often unnecessary. Runway length will effectively preclude such aircraft operating from a particular site as they have very different requirements to smaller aircraft. Longer runways can increase the types of aircraft able to use an aerodrome. However, some aircraft requiring a longer runway may actually be quicker in operation and cause less noise disturbance, by leaving the vicinity more promptly. Therefore, care needs to be taken to ensure that LPA officers appreciate this point.

Government advice¹ makes it clear that it would be unacceptable "to require that aircraft should only arrive or depart at an aerodrome on specified air traffic routes. This condition deals with an activity which is regulated by quite different statutory provisions and may well be unenforceable if the aerodrome operator is not responsible for air traffic control ...". Planning control does not extend to aircraft in flight.

When discussing conditions with the planning officer, you need to be aware of the implications of agreeing certain restrictions. It is all too easy to get carried away with the goal of achieving a planning permission at all costs but end up with it being so tightly regulated it becomes financially or operationally unviable.

¹ Paragraph 12 of Appendix B to Circular 11/95.

Legal agreements

Where the Local Planning Authority is unable to secure reasonable restrictions on the use by condition only, it may enter into a planning agreement or obligation with the applicant, under S106 of the 1990 Planning Act. Consensus between both parties is essential. Several cases have emerged where airstrip owners have felt unable to sign agreements, usually for operational reasons. This has resulted in further time consuming negotiations.

The aerodrome/airstrip operator may also, on occasion, offer a unilateral undertaking to propose a solution to a problem not resolved by planning condition. This can be offered to the Authority or Inspector/Secretary of State. If it appears that the unilateral undertaking is acceptable, there is no need for a decision to be deferred until agreement is reached.

Types of Appeal

If your planning application has been refused, or unreasonable conditions have been imposed, you can appeal. Information attached to the decision notice should explain how to do this. There are three types of procedure available, namely Written Representations, Informal Hearing and Public Inquiry.

Written Representations are exchanges of written evidence primarily between yourself as appellant and the Local Planning Authority (LPA). However objectors/supporters, the Parish Council and other bodies may also submit their views both for, and against, the proposal. The procedure follows a strict timetable, which is set out in the various booklets produced by the Inspectorate. You must adhere to this. After the Inspector has received all the written views, a visit is made to the site. The total time-scale varies considerably, five months likely to be the shortest period.

Informal Hearings follow a Code of Practice, which can be found in the various free booklets produced by the Inspectorate. The Inspector chairs an informal discussion with, usually, no more than five or six persons seated around a table. No party has legal representation and there is no cross examination of witnesses. The discussion may continue on site. The total time-scale, before a decision is reached, is likely to be at least eight months.

Public Inquiries are relatively high profile, often with press coverage. They involve a much more judicial approach with proceedings somewhat akin to a court, with witnesses called and being cross-examined. Therefore, the proceedings are formal and legal representation is highly recommended (although not essential). The Inspectorate's free booklets give clear advice on Public Inquiry procedure and set out each formal stage of the process. Appeals heard by way of a Public Inquiry take a long time to be determined. The overall process can run to at least a year.

The advantages and disadvantages of the three types of appeal are summarised below. This relates to the situation in England and Wales, but similar processes apply in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Advantages Disadvantages

Written Relatively inexpensive. No opportunity to present case.

Representations

Least time consuming. Slightly lower success rate than Public Inquiries.

Usually quicker decisions. Cannot apply for costs (except in enforcement cases).

Informal Hearings No legal representation Obtaining a date may take a required. while.

Less "litigious" than Public Not acceptable to the Inspectorate

Inquiries. when there are many objectors.

Costs can be awarded.

Public Inquiries Good opportunity to explore Expensive, legal representation issues thoroughly. strongly recommended.

Slightly higher chance of The Inquiry date is often success. many months away.

Can call other witnesses. Long time-scale.

Costs may be awarded. Opportunity for objectors to be there in force.

You can choose the type of appeal but may not get your choice. For example, you may have opted for Written Representations on cost grounds, but the Inspectorate or the LPA insists upon a Public Inquiry as complex issues are raised or evidence needs to be given under oath. This is important, as your carefully calculated budget may be unworkable in such circumstances. It is possible to challenge the Inspectorate on its decision but there is no guarantee of success. Sadly, some appellants have been forced to withdraw in these circumstances.

It is possible to change from one type of appeal to another during its processing, but do not assume that your request will be granted. Much will depend on the stage in the appeal process – the earlier the better. If you change your mind at a late stage, after the LPA has undertaken work, you could find yourself open to a claim for costs against you.

Types of Enforcement Notice

You could find yourself the subject of enforcement action with no prior warning whatsoever. However, in most cases the Local Planning Authority (LPA) will need some basic background information, such as land ownership and site boundaries, prior to issuing a notice. This is sought via a Planning Contravention Notice (PCN). A PCN can be served before, or instead of, an Enforcement Notice. It enables the LPA to gather information about a suspected breach of planning control, and ultimately to make a decision whether or not to take further action.

If you receive a PCN you must supply the information requested, by the date given on the notice. Failure to do so is an offence and may attract a fine. You may also be offered the chance to meet the relevant planning officer to try and resolve the problem before an Enforcement Notice is issued. Do accept this offer. It may not seem like it, but the LPA would prefer not to issue a Notice if it can be avoided and the officer is trying to help you. The vast majority of officers would rather negotiate than fight an appeal.

Four courses of action are then available to the LPA. The first is that it takes the decision not to proceed further with enforcement investigations. The other three courses are now examined.

1. Breach of Condition Notice (BCN)

This is one way of remedying an alleged failure to comply with a condition imposed on a planning permission. It can be served in addition, or as an alternative, to an Enforcement Notice. The significant difference between the two elements is that you cannot appeal against a BCN. Failure to comply with its requirements is a criminal offence.

The position is complicated. It is possible to appeal against an allegation of failure to comply with a condition embodied in an Enforcement Notice. In some circumstances it may be possible to give yourself a right to appeal by a somewhat circuitous route through the planning system. This fact sheet is not the place in which to expand on such a complex option.

2. Stop Notice

This is very serious. This type of notice is separate from, but directly related to, the Enforcement Notice which alleges the breach of planning control. The Stop Notice means just that - you must immediately stop the activities referred to in the Notice. There is no right of appeal. If you do not comply with the Notice you can be prosecuted immediately in the Magistrates or Crown Court. If you feel the LPA's decision was not justified you must contact the authority as a matter of urgency. Professional help should also be sought.

Once a Stop Notice has been served, usually it remains effective until expiry of the period for compliance, specified in the accompanying Enforcement Notice, unless the LPA decide to withdraw the Notice.

3. Enforcement Notice

This is the most common type of notice but confusion can be caused by use of its title as a generic term to cover all types of Enforcement Notice (PCNs, BCNs and Stop Notices). An Enforcement Notice is used where the LPA consider that a breach of planning control has occurred and that it is "expedient" to take action. If you receive a Notice it will include the following basic information:

- a description of the site with an attached plan showing its boundaries
- a description of the alleged breach of planning control
- reason(s) for service of the Notice
- step(s) to be taken to comply with the Notice

- the time period for compliance
- the date the Notice comes into effect.

Check this last point very carefully. Assuming you want to appeal, this must be lodged with the Inspectorate before the date upon which the notice comes into effect.

Enforcement appeals

Unlike a planning appeal, you have very little time to lodge an appeal against an Enforcement Notice so you must act quickly. If you wish to lodge a simultaneous planning appeal, you must adopt the timescale for the Enforcement appeal. You cannot assume that because you have six months to appeal against the associated planning decision, this will also apply to the Enforcement Notice. It does not.

The appeal papers must be lodged with the Inspectorate at the appropriate address for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, before the date on which the notice is stated to take effect. If that date is a weekend, Monday or Public Holiday, it must be posted in time to arrive on the last day on which there is a postal delivery, before those days. The importance of lodging the appeal in time cannot be emphasised too strongly. There are no discretionary powers to extend the period – one day too late and you must comply with the notice (or face prosecution).

It is beyond the remit of this advice to suggest that you should employ professional help when handling an enforcement appeal. In some straightforward cases it may be possible to deal with matters yourself but, where legal arguments need to be advanced to present your case as well as possible, this may require outside help. The following advice may assist your decision making.

Your Local Planning Authority (LPA) should send appeal forms with the Enforcement Notice but you might have to obtain them for yourself from the address given. Do not delay in requesting them, even if you subsequently decide not to appeal. In Scotland, at the time of writing, no forms are available and you appeal by letter.

The advantages and disadvantages of different methods of appealing are set out in *Fact Sheet 9* and are equally relevant to enforcement appeals, although Informal Hearings are not usually available for enforcement cases. (Please check with the appropriate Inspectorate as this could change).

An enforcement appeal can be made on seven (eight in Northern Ireland) grounds. (The additional ground in Northern Ireland relates to cases where it is possible to prove continuous and similar use of land or a building prior to 26 August 1964).

When you have completed the form, you need to enclose a copy of the related Enforcement Notice and send them both to the Inspectorate at the address shown on the form. Unless you have already paid a fee for an associated planning application, a fee will be payable in due course and you will be invoiced by the Inspectorate. Depending on where you live, the fee will vary. In England, Wales and Scotland it will be twice the equivalent fee you would have had to pay the LPA if you had applied to the authority for planning permission for the matters to which the Enforcement Notice relates.

In Northern Ireland, a flat rate fee is payable upon submission of the appeal together with the deemed planning application fee. If you do not pay the appropriate fee, the merits of your case cannot be examined, only legal or procedural issues. There are some exemptions from paying a fee and refunds can be made in some circumstances. Full details are available in the Planning Inspectorate, Planning Appeals Commission and Scottish Office booklets.

Grounds of appeal

There are seven (or eight in Northern Ireland) grounds of appeal upon which you can base your case. Unless you have failed to pay the required fee, all appeals should include ground (a). The other grounds are only relevant in certain cases. The following relates to the seven grounds of appeal only:

Ground (a) (Planning permission should be granted or the condition/limitation alleged not to have been complied with should be discharged).

This ground relates to the planning merits of your case and allows you to put forward all the arguments you would make had this been an appeal against refusal of a planning application.

Ground (b) (The breach has not occurred).

You will need to demonstrate that what was alleged in the notice has not actually taken place. It is not sufficient to simply state this - you will need to back up any such claim with facts.

Ground (c) (There has not been a breach of planning control).

There is a distinction between grounds (b) and (c). One argues that there has not been any breach as a matter of fact. The other argues that the matters enforced against have not breached planning legislation and are therefore "permitted development". If you find yourself in the position of having to argue on this (or other) legal grounds you are strongly advised to seek professional help.

Ground (d) (It was too late for enforcement action to be taken).

Certain actions are exempt from enforcement action after a four year period and others (such as changes of use or non compliance with conditions) are exempt after ten years. If you can prove your case falls into the relevant category you should appeal on this ground. You need to clearly set out facts to support your contention. It is not enough to say that "the use commenced ten years ago". The Inspectorates' booklets are helpful on this matter. The keeping of good records, such as accurate logbooks, is very important. If you wish to appeal on this ground, it is highly likely that the appeal will be dealt with by way of a Public Inquiry, as evidence will need to be taken on oath. This should be taken into consideration when assessing the overall cost of the appeal.

(Note: *Fact Sheet 12 on Lawful Development Certificates* may also be of interest on this issue).

Ground (e) (The Notice was not properly served).

Advice on this ground is set out in the Inspectorates' booklets. You will need to show that the person, who should have had a notice served on them, has been substantially prejudiced by the failure to do so. If you cannot do this, the Planning Inspector (or Secretary of State) may disregard this ground of appeal.

Ground (f) (The steps required to remedy the breach are excessive).

This ground is used quite frequently. You will need to explain why you feel the steps are excessive. It may be that compliance with the steps set out on the notice could prevent you from carrying out an otherwise lawful use of the land.

Ground (g) (The period for compliance is too short).

This ground is included in most appeals. It is useful to argue for an extension of time as, if the Inspector agrees to this, but dismisses the other grounds, you will give yourself a few months longer in which to settle matters.

Lawful Development Certificates

For the purpose of this advice, the term Lawful Development Certificate (**LDC**) is used. However, confusingly these are also sometimes referred to as Certificates of Lawful Development or Certificates of Lawfulness of Existing Use or Development (**CLEUD**).

You can apply for an LDC if:

(i) your flying activity has continued, at a similar level, and of a similar nature without a break for at least ten years (known as the "ten year rule"). Recent case law suggests that this ten year period may not need to be up to the present day (i.e. not currently subsisting). Further professional advice is essential should you wish to pursue that argument. The operation may have built up over a longer period but provided you can prove ten years at a certain level, that should normally be sufficient. Please note that, as use of a site for 28 days per annum or less is "permitted development", the "ten year rule" applies only when the use exceeds that number of days, and;

(ii) the site has not been the subject of an Enforcement Notice which came into effect, and;

(iii) you can prove a continuous level of use by reference to documentary evidence. LDCs need to be very well documented and severe penalties apply for false declarations.

If you feel you meet the above criteria you will need to obtain forms from your Local Planning Authority (**LPA**) and follow the instructions. A helpful booklet should also be available from your LPA. An application fee will be payable upon submission.

Provide as much supporting documentation as you can. If you find more during the processing of the application do submit this. The LPA may refuse to grant an LDC if insufficient evidence is supplied but this does not preclude you from trying again in the future if more information becomes available.

Information can be found through the following:

- movement records/logs
- pilots' logbooks
- pilots' statements/Statutory Declarations
- local residents' statements/Statutory Declarations (obviously only supportive residents will oblige)
- the Council's own files such as rating records* (although they would not give any information on the level of operation)
- newspaper cuttings or other articles
- invoices and receipts etc.

* Please be aware that, if the site has not been rated in the past, the granting of a Lawful Development Certificate could lead to back payment of rates due in previous years.

Unlike a planning application, the LPA should not consider the merits of the case. Even if there are policy presumptions against the operation they are not relevant. Consultations may be undertaken, but only on the basis of corroborating evidence. If there is conflicting evidence you should be given the opportunity to resolve the matter.

Assuming that sufficient evidence is supplied to enable an LDC to be granted, the LPA may impose limitations upon this, but cannot condition the operation, beyond its current operating limits. For example, in a case where there has never been any helicopter activity this limitation would continue. The most difficult area of negotiation usually relates to numbers/days of movements, where specialist advice and skilled negotiation may be necessary.

