



The General Aviation Awareness Council

President: The Lord Rotherwick

Co-ordinating Office:

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Website: www.gaac.org.uk

Cllr John Nicholls
Chairman of Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel Committee
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
Council Offices, Campus East
Welwyn Garden City.
Herts. AL8 6BR

(See also circulation at end of letter)

16th December 2014

Re: Panshanger Airfield

Dear Cllr Nicholls

I understand that at the CHPP Committee meeting on 11th December 2014, during discussions on the content of the local plan public consultation starting in January, it was stated that the Panshanger airfield site is being reassessed as “more favourable” to meet assessed housing needs. This, without any public debate, moves the site from its previously “finely balanced” status and appears to be driven by an assertion that the airfield is a) safeguarded land (i.e. removed from the greenbelt) and b) no longer an airfield.

The latter assertion used as grounds for this decision is both incorrect and inappropriate. Whilst the decision of Mariposa Investments to not renew the operating lease to North London Flying School in September has resulted in the ending of their operations on the airfield, it remains classified as a flying site under the terms of its planning permission and thus, in planning law.

It is noted that Mariposa Investments have on several earlier occasions sought to sell the land for either gravel extraction or housing, but it has been clear that planning permission could not be gained for either change of use. These planning precedents continue to indicate that the site should remain in its current role as an airfield, serving business users and acting as a much-needed access point and local amenity for pilot training and sport aviation. It is noted that the airfield is being considered for classification by Sport England as a Significant Area for Sport in connection with the latter.

As you know from previous correspondence the GAAC is recognised by Government, the Civil Aviation Authority and other regulators as a representative organisation for General Aviation insofar as airfields and airfield planning status is concerned.

We have formally expressed our concerns over the processes carried out by WHBC since Panshanger was named in the draft 'emerging core strategy' of 2012 as a possible location for housing. As you are aware, public consultation surrounding that document revealed sufficient flaws that the strategy had to be reviewed.

It was noteworthy that the 2012 Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Report provided a detailed assessment of a series of the distribution options. The Planning Officers' professional recommendation was to spread new housing across Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, and larger villages. However the elected cabinet decided to ignore this and instead restricted new housing to only Hatfield Garden Village and Panshanger. It has been asked why the cabinet decided upon this strategy many times, but no satisfactory answer has yet been given. In the new consultation, this proportionality will be largely by-passed once again, with the result that Panshanger will be re-included in the process, despite substantial opposition.





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As and when this proposed development re-enters consultation, the GAAC and its member organisations will both lobby against Panshanger's inclusion as a housing option and will object to any subsequent planning application regarding the use of the site for any purposes other than its current designation as an airfield. I will again draw your attention to the 2013 National Planning Policy Framework statement (NPPF para 33):

"When planning for ports, airports and airfields that are not subject to a separate national policy statement, plans should consider their growth and role in serving business, leisure, training and emergency service needs. Plans should take account of this Framework as well as the principles set out in the relevant national policy statements and the Government Framework for UK Aviation."

In addition to believing that WHBC is failing many of those whom it seeks to represent in attempting to reclassify Panshanger for other use, we believe that the importance of maintaining a network of GA flying sites across the country reflects the fact that GA is not a "local" issue, as each site forms part of a larger national network. Given its close proximity to north London and to the national road and rail infrastructure, Panshanger remains a potentially important part of that network.

It is noteworthy that while the Council's assessments appear to have overlooked these important areas, a large number of local residents and environmental groups have recognised this oversight and also responded to you. It should be noted too, that there are clear precedents set by other Local Planning Authorities.

In 2012, West Oxfordshire County Council ruled against a planning application and appeal which would have materially affected Enstone Aerodrome on the grounds that it would: *"Materially impact on the use of the airfield for general aviation purposes and result in the loss of an important community facility."*

In December 2014, following a lengthy dialogue with organisations including the CPRE who supported the airfield as a sustainable green space, Medway Council entered planning submissions for a long-term strategy to maintain Rochester Airport, based on a business plan for the next 25 years. The council describe the airport as *"An important asset in Medway. We aim to safeguard aviation for business, heritage and leisure use in this well-connected location."*

I hope therefore that you will place this letter on file and that you consider this as part of your future deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

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cc.

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