

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport
Robert Courts MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Transport

30 June 2022

By email

Dear Secretary of State, dear Minister

Night flights

Last weekend's Sunday Times reported that the Government is considering a temporary relaxation of night-flight restrictions to ease the chaos at airports this summer. Your officials have confirmed that this is one of a number of ideas, submitted by the industry, that you are considering, although we understand no decisions have been taken.

The recent disruption at some airports is entirely of the industry's making. It has oversold flights and failed to employ sufficient staff to handle demand. It would be grossly inequitable and wholly unacceptable if the industry was to be rewarded for its failings with an increase in flights at night, which the Government recognises are the least acceptable aspect of aircraft operations and which have the greatest health impacts. That should be an unthinkable outcome. The Government should therefore be clear that it will not permit any relaxation of current night flight limits and rules.

Given the industry's evident desire to increase flights at night, additional steps are also needed to ensure that dispensations from night flight quotas at the designated airports are only granted in the very limited circumstances in which they are currently permitted. We would be grateful if you could set out how the Department will ensure that is the case, recognising that several thousand dispensations were improperly granted by airports in 2018, without appropriate oversight or control by the Department. Self-approval by airports of their own dispensations is clearly not appropriate in current circumstances.

While Flightpath to the Future has deferred consideration of the detailed policies to reduce aircraft noise, this issue is an early test of the Government's stated intent to ensure the industry's recovery takes full account of local environmental impacts.

If the Government is minded to allow additional night flights we expect that any changes to will be subject to public consultation as is the custom and practice on night flight matters.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Barclay, Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign
Paul Beckford, Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise
Charles Lloyd, Aviation Environment Federation Airspace and Noise Community Forum
Martin Peachey, Stansted Airport Watch