

<p>London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham</p> <p>COMMUNITY SAFETY, ENVIRONMENT AND RESIDENTS SERVICES POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE</p> <p>20 November 2017</p>	
<p>HELICOPTER NOISE ISSUES</p>	
<p>Report of the Lead Director for Regeneration, Planning & Housing Services</p>	
<p>Open Report</p>	
<p>Classification: For review and comment Key Decision: No</p>	
<p>Consultation: Corporate Safety and Residential Operations</p>	
<p>Wards Affected: All</p>	
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report outlines the main reasons why helicopter noise is an issue for some parts of the borough, explains the controls that are in place to help minimise the impacts of helicopter movements across H&F and also provides information on the actions the council can take to help deal with this issue.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the committee notes the impacts of helicopter noise for the borough and the activities of the council to date;
- 2.2. That the committee recommends additional measures or actions that the council should take.

3. HELICOPTER NOISE ISSUES IN H&F

- 3.1. Helicopters generate noise (often defined as “unwanted sound”) which has different characteristics from that of other transport noise sources and is often regarded as being more intrusive. In part this is because of the ‘pulsing’ noise created by the main rotor blades which tend to be more annoying than constant noises and the frequencies of the noises, especially from the smaller tail rotors, which are higher and more noticeable. Helicopters can also be very loud – with some creating noise levels similar to those of passenger jets at take-off.
- 3.2. Helicopter noise can have negative impacts on the quality of life for some people and the affected communities are not just those that live in close proximity to the London Heliport but also those that are affected by helicopters passing overhead, especially if this becomes a regular event. Impacts of noise include annoyance, interference with everyday activities (conversation, reading etc), stress, sleep disturbance and mental health impacts. Little research has been done on the specific impacts of helicopter noise although more work has been done on assessing aircraft noise impacts on health, and the impacts are likely to be similar.
- 3.3. According to the data collected and published by the Civil Aviation Authority on their website, there are fewer helicopters flying over London in recent years than there were 10 years ago. However, helicopters continue to cause noise impacts across much of London, but for Hammersmith & Fulham there are a number of reasons why some residents experience higher levels of impacts than others, as outlined below.

Proximity of the London Heliport

- 3.4. The heliport is located on the south side of the River Thames in Battersea directly opposite Fulham riverside as shown in Figure 1 in the Appendix. Residential properties in this part of H&F are about 250m from the heliport.
- 3.5. Normal operating hours for arrivals and departures run from 7:30am to 7:30pm Mondays to Fridays, with slightly shorter hours at weekends and bank holidays (8:00am to 6:00pm). However, extended operating hours from 0:700am to 11:00pm are possible by prior arrangement. Helicopters are audible as they land at and depart the heliport. Although helicopters are required to fly over the River Thames as much as possible when using the heliport, helicopters are likely to be flying over H&F on their way to/from the heliport. In recent years, the heliport has seen an increase in sightseeing tours which start and end their flights at the heliport. This could be increasing noise impacts as it increases movements, albeit, within the limits that are in place.

Recent Increases in Flights

- 3.6 According to CAA figures there were just over 22,000 helicopter flights London in 2016. This is an increase of just over 3,000 since 2012, but less than the number recorded for the previous years for which the CAA provides data on their website (2007-2011).

Use of Designated Helicopter Routes

- 3.7 Airspace over large parts of London, including H&F is controlled and helicopters flying in London are subject to Air Traffic Control clearance. As shown in Figure 2 in the Appendix, there are a number of designated helicopter routes in this airspace where helicopters can be directed. The main designated route through central London follows the River Thames (Route H4) along the whole of the Fulham riverside area and then continues along the Thames, through Hammersmith as Route H10. Two other key routes, H3 and H7 intersect H4.
- 3.8 These routes were originally selected to provide maximum safety by avoiding flying over built up areas as much as possible. However, use of these routes brings helicopters into close proximity to residential areas along the river as these locations have seen considerable development in recent years, often with industrial/commercial land uses being redeveloped for housing. Use of designated routes appears to be reducing as the number of single engine helicopters falls compared to those with twin engines.

Use of Direct Routes

- 3.9 Single-engine helicopters are usually required to fly along the designated routes. However, twin engine helicopters can be provided with clearance by air Traffic Control to use more direct routes through London's controlled airspace. This means that residents that do not live near the heliport or the main designated helicopter routes, can also be subject to noise from helicopters overhead. Use of direct routes has been increasing over time, meaning that noise impacts could be spreading and there is local concern that these direct routes become 'informal' routes in some areas like the designated routes, increasing noise impacts.

Flight Altitudes

- 3.10 Except with the written permission of the CAA, an aircraft flying over a congested area of a city town or settlement is not permitted to fly below a height of 1,000 feet above the highest fixed obstacle within a horizontal radius of 600 metres of the aircraft. As well as helicopters in H&F airspace, there are also aircraft, most often these are flights making their final landing approach to Heathrow. These typically pass over the southern part of the borough at around 3,000 to 2,500 feet as they descend. The presence of a constant flow of Heathrow bound planes (c.600 a day) means that helicopters are unlikely to fly much higher than the minimum 1,000 feet minimum as they need to ensure separation from Heathrow traffic overhead.

Airspace Restrictions

- 3.11 Occasionally, extra airspace restrictions are implemented in London that impact on helicopter activity over H&F. An example of this is when tall cranes are erected on large construction sites. These can be 300 feet (91.4m) or

taller and present a potential obstacle to helicopters. These are notifiable to the CAA and the heliport. Pilots are made aware of these obstructions and the avoidance area around it (typically a radius of 1 nautical mile). In the summer, a tall crane in RBK&C was erected as shown in Figure 3 in the Appendix which impacted on helicopter movements from July to September, causing them to fly over areas not usually impacted. This can be very noticeable for residents and the causes are not immediately obvious. A temporary airspace restriction was also put in place at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire and remained in place for several weeks.

Police, Emergency Services and Military Helicopters

- 3.12 The Metropolitan Police Air Support Unit and the Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (HEMS) helicopters are subject to special requirements associated with the nature of the tasks they are performing. Therefore, Police and HEMS helicopters may need to operate at lower altitudes or hold over specific locations. Hovering can create prolonged periods of disturbance, but is sometimes required by the Police to support officers on the ground to search for suspects etc. The Air Ambulance may need to land close to residential areas to attend to emergencies. Military helicopters are often sighted flying along the Thames River route and as these are larger they are noisier, such as the twin engine and double rotor Chinook.

HELICOPTER NOISE CONTROLS

- 3.13 Over time, helicopter designs have integrated measures to reduce noise impacts. These include measures to reduce blade and rotor noise, increase the rate at which helicopters can climb and reducing cruising speed requirements. The EU Clean Sky programme continues to research new technologies aimed at reducing noise impacts for aircraft, including helicopters. However, it is difficult to assess how quickly new technologies are adopted or the level of benefit they provide under operational conditions.
- 3.14 There are additional measures in place, as outlined below, that aim to minimise noise impacts of helicopter use.

The “Rules of the Air” Regulations

- 3.15 Aircraft and helicopter noise impacts are exempt from the noise nuisance controls contained in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 that are used by the council to deal with other noise issues. Generally, so long as the Rules of the Air Regulations (in effect a ‘Highway Code’ for airspace) which have recently been largely replaced by the Standardised European Rules of the Air are complied with then aircraft are deemed to be flying in a safe and acceptable manner. Some of the rules relate to controlling low flying and landing/take off manoeuvres which help to reduce noise impacts.
- 3.16 Additionally, within controlled airspace, such as central London, including H&F, helicopters need air traffic control clearance to fly and obey any instructions given to them by air traffic controllers.

- 3.17 Pilots navigate mostly by reference to ground features (such as the Thames). In the past, the use of the main H4 designated route through London, flying along the Thames was considered to be a way to avoid the most built up and residential areas, helping to minimise noise impacts, but this is now not the case.

London Heliport Controls

- 3.18 The London Heliport has planning permission for a maximum of 12,000 commercial helicopter movements per year, although there are exemptions for police, military and emergency services, so in any given year there could be more than 12,000 movements. There is a maximum limit of 80 movements a day although this can be raised to 160 on 5 days of the year, which correspond with busy sporting events such as the British Grand Prix.
- 3.19 There is also a noise limit in place which means that helicopters not able to meet the noise standard of 81dB(A) at a distance of 150m from take-off position are restricted to a maximum of 1,500 movements a year.
- 3.20 The other main aspect to noise controls at the heliport is the manner in which landing and departing helicopters are required to follow routes into and out of the heliport that fly over the centre of the river and at the highest possible safe altitude whilst making an approach or departure.
- 3.21 Residents can also complain to the heliport if they have concerns in terms of noise or safety issues and if the helicopter in question is using the heliport (as opposed to one that is just over-flying the borough), then the heliport can investigate and take appropriate action.

The Role of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)

- 3.22 The CAA are the aviation regulator in the UK who ensure that the aviation industry meets their safety obligations and also manages its environmental impacts.
- 3.23 Noise complaints can be made to the CAA about helicopter activity, however their main concern in terms of investigating helicopters is whether or not the pilot has done something that creates a public safety concern. If they are following the Rules of the Air and have air traffic control clearance to be in controlled airspace, the CAA will not be able to take action. They will take enforcement action and prosecute helicopter pilots where necessary, however, the complaints procedure is generally felt to be difficult to use.
- 3.24 The CAA collect and publish data on helicopter movements in London controlled airspace. Although this provides some useful data on the overall total number of movements, it is not possible to determine borough level information such as specific flights over H&F or routes used etc.

ACTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE COUNCIL

Investigating Noise Complaints

- 3.25 As highlighted above, the council cannot take direct action against noise impacts caused by helicopters as there is no legal route for the council to do this. However, if residents complain to the council, officers will advise of the potential routes to take action (via the CAA and/or the heliport) and also investigate directly where possible and provide feedback.

Lobbying for Tighter Controls on Helicopters

- 3.26 During 2017, the council has responded the Government's consultation on development of a national Aviation Strategy where we highlighted the omission of helicopter noise issues, arguing that the next round of consultation should include this topic.
- 3.27 We also commented on the Mayor of London's draft Transport Strategy where we noted a similar lack of reference to the London heliport or use of helicopters in London. Our response stated that there was concern that helicopter movements and their impacts are increasing and are not adequately regulated in London. We suggested an additional policy should be included in the Transport Strategy to cover the following points:
- The Mayor should work with the Heliport and boroughs to identify action that can be taken to reduce the impacts of helicopter movements across London.
 - The Mayor should work with other relevant stakeholders to raise the environmental performance standards of helicopters.
 - The Mayor should consider seeking powers to limit the overall number of helicopter movements in London's airspace in order to manage their environmental impacts, particularly in relation to noise.
- 3.28 The Mayor of London's draft Environment Strategy does refer to helicopter noise issues which we welcomed but suggested that further commitments were required in line with the comments we submitted on the draft Transport Strategy.
- 3.29 In the past (in 2006), the council responded to the London Assembly's review of helicopter noise issues which made a number of recommendations. We do not consider that the key recommendation in the Assembly's report for the Department for Transport, which was for a full review of the impact of helicopter movements and noise in London, with the aim of putting in place a series of policy responses designed to mitigate the impacts, was ever implemented.

Heliport Consultative Group

- 3.30 In 2006, the London Heliport Consultative Group was established with the purpose of acting as an effective means of consultation in relation to the London Heliport. The Group is comprised of councillors and resident representatives from Wandsworth, RBKC and H&F as well as heliport management and users. The H&F representatives raise issues of importance for local residents and have recently helped galvanise more proactive actions, including the commissioning of a noise study and questionnaire.
- 3.31 The main aim of the H&F representatives is to work with the Consultative Group to lobby the Mayor of London and central Government to put the regime governing helicopter flights over London onto the same footing as aircraft flights over London. This would include:
- Establishing flightpaths and a regime for consulting on changes to them. One specific aspect of helicopter routes H&F wants to pursue is route dispersal and respite, in other words for the Heliport and operators to be obliged to adopt a range of routes so that no particular area or areas experience all flights overhead.
 - Clearer and more accessible information to be published by the Heliport on a range of matters such as on movements overhead in real time and complaint procedures and the outcome of complaints.
- 3.33 Once the noise study and questionnaire results have been published, these will be used to assess whether or not the terms of the Heliport's planning permission are being adhered to, and to seek a formal declaration from Wandsworth Council that no further permission will be given for more flights than the currently allowed 12,000.

The Heliport Noise Study

- 3.31 During 2017, a noise study has been carried out around the heliport by South Bank University, funded by H&F, RBKC and Wandsworth boroughs. As well as measuring noise levels, the study has included a questionnaire for completion by residents in the 3 boroughs on helicopter noise issues.
- 3.32 The Heliport consultative committee provided a list of volunteers which was used to select the dwellings used in the monitoring. Monitoring was undertaken over the spring/summer of 2017 to establish baseline noise levels for the residents both internally and externally. Measurements were taken during heliport operating hours: 0700-2300. Long term measurements were taken at four locations in three boroughs and these have been assessed with reference to the Professional Planning Guidance: Planning and Noise, published in May 2017 and to British Standard 8233:2014 Guidance on Sound Insulation and Noise Reduction for Buildings. The full report is expected to be published in November.

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT

4.1 None.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix

Figure 1 – Location of London Heliport

Figure 2 – Designated Helicopter Routes

Figure 3 – Airspace Restriction impacting H&F

Appendix

Figure 1 – Location of London Heliport

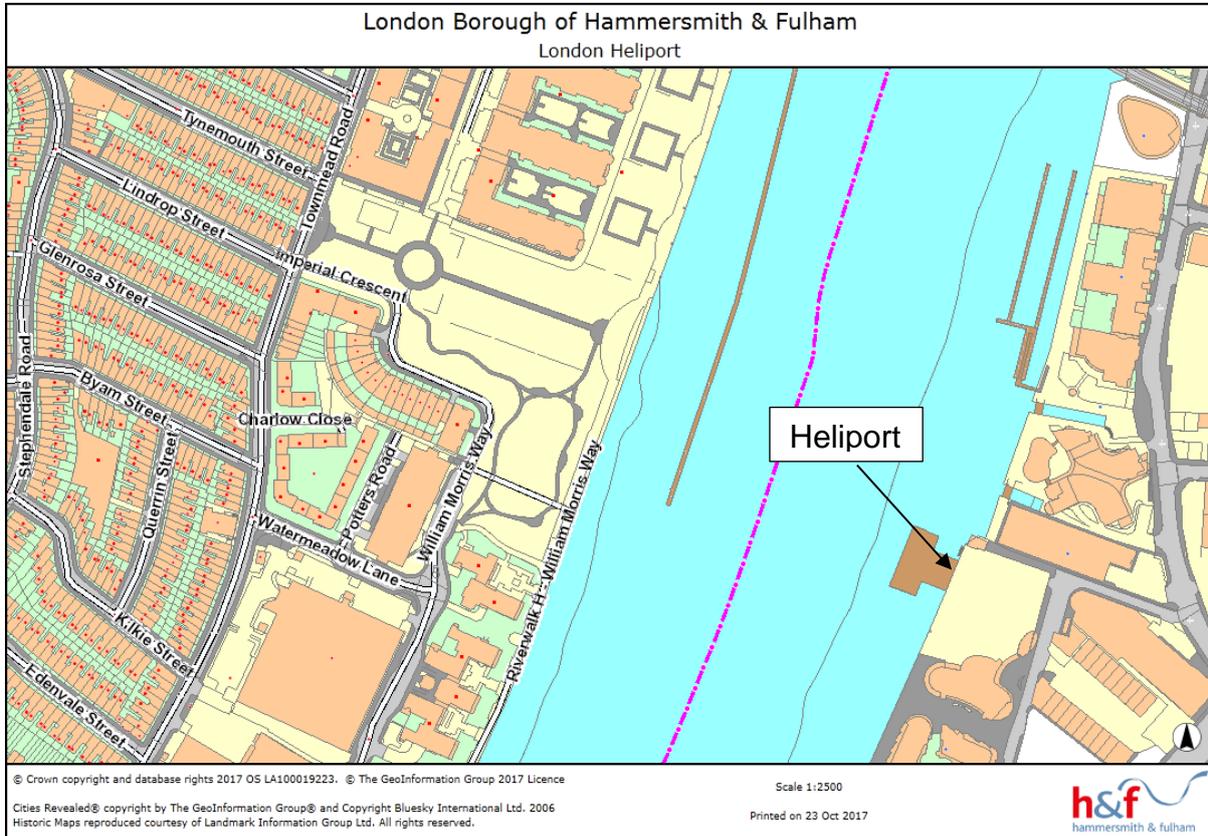


Figure 2 – Designated Helicopter Routes

HELICOPTER ROUTES IN THE LONDON CTR AND LONDON/CITY CTR

LONDON HEATHROW

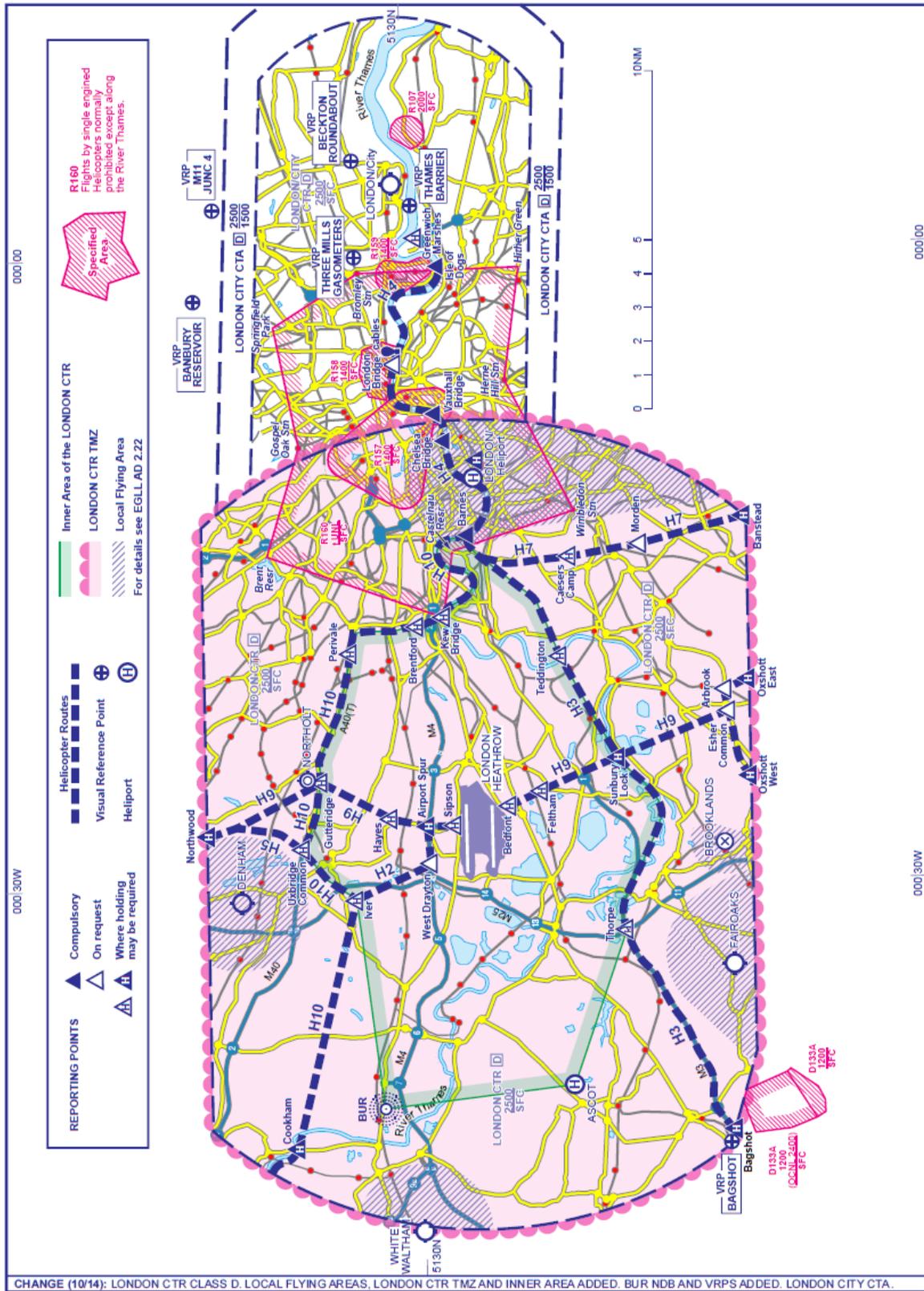


Figure 3 – Airspace Restriction impacting H&F

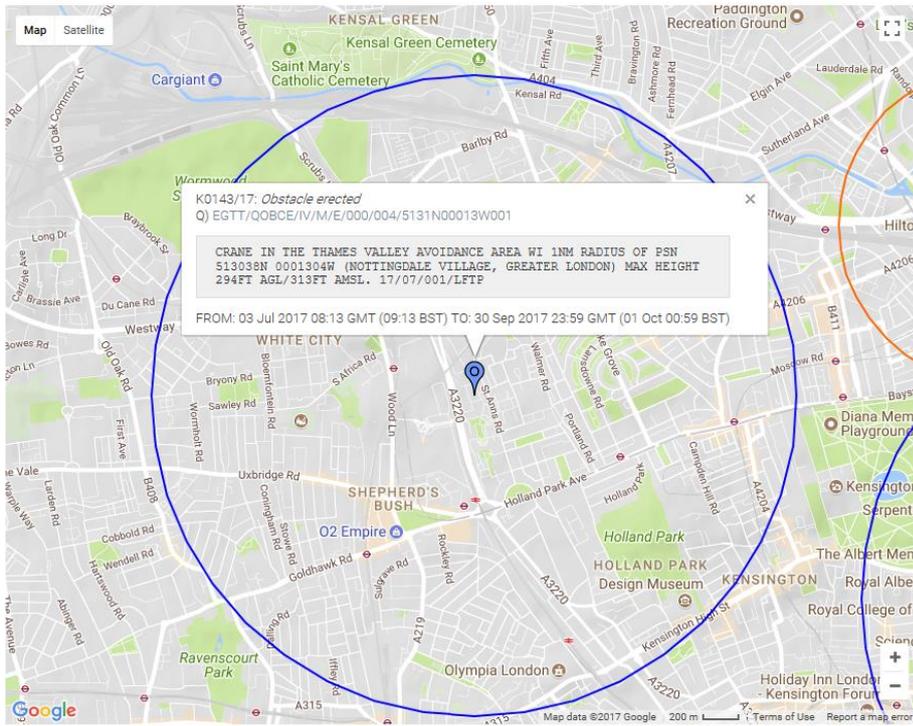


NOTAM Info

Up to date NOTAMS plotted on a map, or delivered via RSS feeds and Email

- HOME
- SET UP MAPS & FEEDS
- ROUTE NOTAMS
- AREA NOTAMS
- MY LOCAL MAP
- FLIGHT PLANNING MAP
- LATEST BRIEFING
- CONTACT
- HELP

Flight Planning Map: UK



NOTAM details

- Show navigation warnings
- Show en-route info
- Show aerodrome info
- Show hidden NOTAMs
- Show NOTAMS outside daylight hours (Sunrise is 06:49, sunset 20:18 today)

Show NOTAMs for **the week ahead**

Airspace Details

Flying Sites:

- Show PG hill sites
- Show HG hill sites
- Show PG winching sites
- Show HG winching sites
- Show HG aerotow sites
- Show glider airfields
- Show commercial/GA/other airfields

Details from surface to **FL55/5500ALT**

NOTAMs extracted from NATS web site, briefing ID 1709051105, at 08 Sep 2017 11:05 BST