



Flight path changes: Wheathampstead response makes NATS think again

The recent efforts of WDPDS and District Councillor Judy Shardlow in publicising and responding to the National Air Traffic Services (NATS) proposed changes to airspace movements over South East England north of the Thames have certainly raised Wheathampstead's profile, both locally and nationally. NATS thought they could get away with moving the flight path for departures from Luton Airport away from Harpenden and over Wheathampstead where the population is lower and therefore fewer people would be affected by aircraft noise. Instead, the response from the people of Wheathampstead will surely make them think again.

Influencing the District Council's response

Following the local public meeting on 21 April organised by WDPDS and Councillor Shardlow, WDPDS Chairman Rick Sanderson spoke at the St Albans District Council Planning Policy Advisory Panel (PPAP) meeting on 22 April to try to get the Council to modify its proposed response to the consultation to take into account the effect on Wheathampstead. As a result, the Council's draft response was modified to include references to Wheathampstead. However, the draft response did not go as far as we wanted, so Rick spoke again at the PPAP meeting on 22 May. The Council's final response asks NATS to ensure that over-flying of Wheathampstead is completely avoided, but we doubt that this can actually be achieved.



Above: Waving the flag for Wheathampstead at the London demonstration on 19 June.

Under pressure from various directions, NATS extended the consultation period for a further month to 19 June. On that day, a campaign group called AirportWatch organised a demonstration near the NATS office in London, attended by protesters from a wide range of communities and areas affected by the proposals. Wheathampstead was represented by a small number of people, who 'waved the flag' for this area.



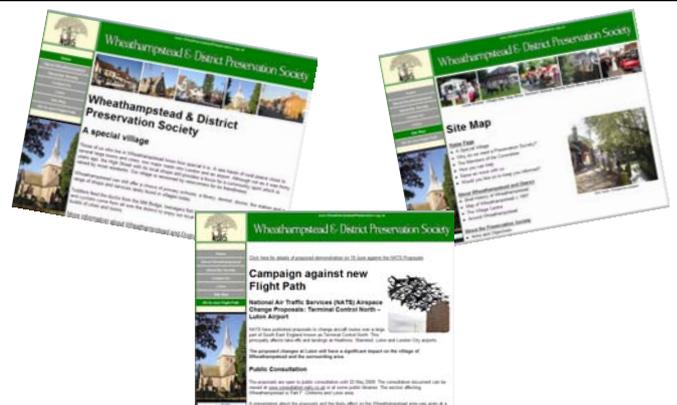
VILLAGE DAY Sunday July 13th

Left: WDPDS stand,
Village Day 2007

Our stand at Wheathampstead Village Day is a great opportunity to come and see what we have been working on during the past year – and discuss any concerns you have about the village and the surrounding area.

We shall as usual be raffling hampers, containing produce that, as far as possible, has been produced locally.

We hope to see you on the 13th!



Have you visited our new website?

We launched our new website in April. If you have not visited it yet, please do so if you have access to the internet. There are facilities for raising issues with us online as well as information about our campaigns. www.wheathampsteadpreservation.org.uk

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The WDPS response to the NATS consultation is on our website: www.wheathampsteadpreservation.org.uk

Here is a summary of the points we made:

1. Inadequacy of the consultation process and the evidence base

The consultation does not comply with Government guidance which requires consultations on proposed airspace changes to justify options and proposals in detail. No real alternative options have been presented, and insufficient evidence is provided to justify the proposals that have been put forward. Insufficient research into the effects of aircraft noise has been carried out, particularly with regard to those less-populated areas with low ambient (background) noise levels which are now being targeted to receive increased over-flying.

2. Limited scope of this consultation with particular regard to Bovingdon hold

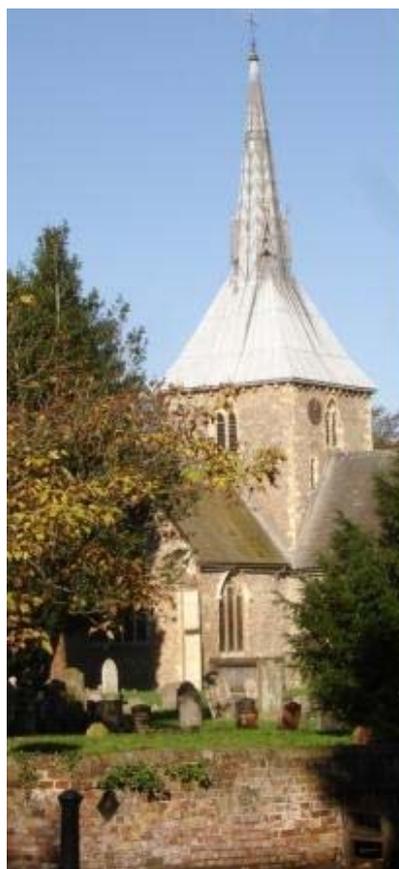
An airspace area of 12 – 15 miles diameter over Bovingdon is used as a holding ('stacking') area for aircraft waiting to land at Heathrow Airport. This has the effect of pushing departure flights from Heathrow further east, over south west Hertfordshire, at about 6,000 feet, and forces air traffic from Luton Airport to be kept lower for longer. NATS should give consideration to moving the Bovingdon hold significantly further west to create more room for Luton.

3. Effect of the proposals on Wheathampstead

Under the new proposals, take-offs from Luton to the east for destinations to the south west are intended to pass through the narrow gap between Wheathampstead and Sandridge, but will impact on the south eastern side of Wheathampstead due to the amount of leeway allowed. We believe that many more flights will pass directly over Wheathampstead because of the temptation for pilots to take a direct line from Ayot St Peter to the area north of Hemel Hempstead. We would prefer departures over Wheathampstead to be more dispersed by not introducing the new P-RNAV precise navigating system on this route, so that everyone gets a share of the noise, rather than the noise being concentrated along a relatively narrow channel.

NATS are now analysing the responses received, and say that they will publish a summary on their website towards the end of July. NATS's final proposals will then be submitted to the UK airspace regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority, for approval. Their declared intention is to introduce any changes to airspace in Spring 2009.

It is important that we all keep up the pressure on NATS and the airport operators by complaining whenever a particularly disruptive flight or series of flights passes overhead. This should be done by contacting the Airfield Environment Office (AEO) at Luton Airport, by telephone on 01582 395382 (where an automatic menu guides and records your complaint) or by e-mail to noise@ltn.aero. Every complaint is added to the statistics for complaints, which influences decisions on future aircraft operations, and you receive a nice, if ineffective, letter from the AEO.



Donation to cost of restoring St Helen's

WDPS was pleased recently to make a donation of £120 to St Helen's Church. The money will go towards the cost of restoring the church building.

During the Spring we organised two guided walks for members around the centre of Wheathampstead (see page 4), for which the participants paid the usual fee to St Albans

Museum Service. Naturally, St Helen's Church and churchyard featured prominently in the tours, and we decided that it would be appropriate for the Society to make a donation to the Church restoration fund, equivalent to the amount collected.

The Lower Luton Road lorry ban controversy rumbles on ...

Once again possible action to enforce the ban on lorries of more than 7.5 tonnes weight using Lower Luton Road has been deferred.

The ban on lorries using a number of unsuitable roads in the St Albans area was introduced about 20 years ago, but has never worked satisfactorily in Wheathampstead. Since the M1 motorway widening works began more than 2 years ago, the ban has been ignored by the authorities, and lorries have been allowed to use the B653 (Lower Luton Road) as a 'rat run' between the M1 and A1(M) motorways. The road is also used as a short cut by long-distance coaches, but these are not covered by the lorry ban.

We have raised this issue with various authorities over the past two years, and were led to believe that the matter would be addressed in time for the completion of the M1 roadworks, expected by the end of this year. A year ago, the Police Traffic Management Unit told the Parish Council that *"the issue of lorries travelling through the village will be dealt with by revoking the current unworkable ... lorry ban and replacing it with something more user friendly. This will be progressed through the St Albans District Transport Plan"*. After several 'false starts', the Plan* eventually appeared in May, and we eagerly searched its pages to find out what action was being proposed to deal with 'the lorry ban that never was'.



Above: Tyre damage caused to the grass verge on Lower Luton Road by heavy vehicles

Transport Plan barely mentions lorry ban

Imagine our disappointment to discover that there is hardly any mention of the lorry ban in this document. For a start, the Plan only covers the St Albans city area, and not the surrounding rural parts of the

District. There is a chapter on *Freight Strategy* which includes a section on signing and routing. Paragraph 8.16 says that *"Hertfordshire County Council are currently in the process of developing a St Albans wide signing strategy, primarily for commercial vehicles"*. Paragraph



A4.17 of Appendix A of the document tells us that weight and height restrictions for the whole county, intended to stop large vehicles from using inappropriate roads, are posted on the Hertfordshire Highways website. A look at the website shows how completely inadequate it is in informing heavy goods vehicle operators of where they should not go. The page on Wheathampstead shows a 7.5 tonne restriction on Brewhouse Hill and Leasey Bridge Lane, but nothing on Lower Luton Road.

What action should we take now?

We will be writing to Hertfordshire Highways to impress upon them the need to impose a workable lorry ban on Lower Luton Road and on other unsuitable roads through Wheathampstead. (A copy will appear on our website: www.wheathampsteadpreservation.org.uk). But it is no use WDPS taking this up as a lone voice. We need the Parish Council and our local County and District Councillors to take the matter up as well. This will only happen if you, the general public, make it clear to your elected representatives that you want some action taken on this issue. We have taken it as far as we can without more support from our members.

Write to:

Hertfordshire Highways, Highways House, 41-45 Broadwater Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3SP and send copies to your elected representatives. Please send WDPS a (silent) copy, so that we know how much support we have for this campaign.

* **St Albans Urban Transport Plan:** Consultation Document, May 2008. See website: www.hertsdirect.org/envroads/roadstrans/transplan/tcatp08/tcatp/stalbanurbantransportplan/

Tesco's in Wheathampstead – Good News and Bad News

The good news is that Tesco's have at last put in planning applications to convert the One Stop shop and the railway video office into a Tesco Express store. This is long overdue and should provide Wheathampstead with a large enough convenience shop to meet local residents' day to day needs. Hopefully, it will increase 'footfall' in the village centre and give a boost to other businesses in the High Street.



Planning applications have been submitted to convert these premises into a Tesco Express store.

The bad news is that Tesco's propose to make deliveries to the shop by creating a wedge-shaped layby cut into the paved area in front of the shop. Due to the restricted area available, this will not be large enough to fit one of their large articulated vehicles, the rear end of which will stick out nearly halfway into the High Street, causing congestion and delay for other road users. The lorries cannot deliver at the rear of the shop because they are too large to turn the corner into East Lane.

We have asked the District Council, as local planning authority, to negotiate further with Tesco's on this. We have suggested that, if all else fails, deliveries should be restricted to early morning and late evening.



WDPS Guided Walks sell out

Guided walks through the conservation area in the heart of Wheathampstead proved very popular this Spring. WDPS organized two walks for our members, one in the evening (on 23 April) and one on a Sunday afternoon (18 May). Our guide on both occasions was Maureen Butler from St Albans Museum Service.



Most people who came admitted they had not appreciated how interesting a village Wheathampstead is. Many of the premises in the conservation area have fascinating histories, and what particularly interested some walkers was that several of the buildings, apparently of brick construction, are in fact timber-framed faced with a more recent cladding of brick.

Our thanks go to Committee member Julie Bell for organising the walks.

