



The General Aviation Awareness Council

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GAAC WIND-TURBINE WORKSHOP FOCUSES ON SAFETY

The workshop held at RAeS House, London, on 12 November was organised as a response to the growing safety threat posed to General Aviation by the Government's promotion of wind-turbines. The workshop was attended by representatives of aviation organisations including major international airports, general aviation airfield operators, aviation associations, planning specialists, the British Wind Energy Association (BWEA) and the CAA.

The workshop was chaired by Charles Henry (Chairman GAAC). Presentations were given by Peter Harvey (CEO of the LAA), Anna Bloomfield (Planning Advisor to GAAC), Peter Kember (Aviation Planning Consultant), Paul Burtwistle (Farmer/wind-turbine developer), Keith Neagle (Chairman BMAA), Sqn Ldr Darren Phelps (CAA).

Peter Harvey opened the workshop reminding delegates that the promotion of turbines was big business and heavily politicised. Accurate information was scarce and Local Authorities driven by Central Government targets rather than sound economics.

Anna Bloomfield drew a gloomy picture explaining that Local Structure Plans were too cumbersome and ignored local input. Government guidance in PPS22 gave no clear guidance on aviation matters and the Infrastructure Planning Commission would be used to drive through planning consents. There was a glimmer of hope in the form of Airfield Safeguarding but this was not being used enough. (Further information on the GAAC web-site).

Peter Kember said that the planning system was "falling apart" and it was unlikely that things would be different in a year's time. Proposed turbine developments could only be resisted with accurate, targeted, cohesive data and arguments presented forcefully and without the complications of other issues. He gave examples of successful appeals and others where obvious dangers had been ignored and planning consent granted regardless.

Keith Neagle warned that turbine developers were driving around looking for land owners and using 'hard sell' techniques to sign contracts before local residents got to hear about it. He advised delegates to keep a look out for vans parked in unusual places, surveyors, and 'men in wellies'. Early warning of activity may be sourced from Parish Councils, local farmers and the local pub.

A successful campaign against a development would include getting to know the local residents, making friends with the Parish Council, monitoring planning information, getting letters of support, recording movements, applying for Lawful Use status.

Paul Burtwistle said that concern about his carbon footprint had led him to agree a deal with a turbine development company. He suggested that GA should embrace renewable energy sources and balance this against the use of aircraft. He went on to suggest that turbines could be placed on the dead side of airfields to gain useful income. The BGA delegate pointed out that this could be dangerous for gliders who may approach from any direction.

Darren Phelps said that regardless of Government targets the CAA would always raise objections on safety grounds and would comment on an airfield Hazard Assessment report. Although 'tall' test masts are NOTAM'd the position was not clear on lower masts which could present a danger to helicopters and gliders. He invited contacting the CAA on this matter.

During the discussion period delegates suggested a number of initiatives including the setting up of a fund to finance appeals, adding airfields to the ½ mil and OS maps and contact with the CAA over test mast NOTAMS. Further discussion included a recommendation by the CAA that the BWEA web-site was worth a visit as they were focussed on aviation issues.

Overall it was clear that GA must work together to deal with this issue and work far harder to educate the public and Local Authorities on what GA is and what it has to offer local communities.

The Chairman thanked all for their contributions saying that the sharing of information was valuable. He hoped for co-operation with Wind Turbine Developers rather than confrontation and requested that delegates provide him with 'lines in the sand' that he might convey to the BWEA in discussions he hopes to hold with their Aviation Expert.

He felt that the following points were key to the future:

1. The need to extend both unofficial and official 'Safeguarding' plans for all airfields. He would seek to discuss the extension of 'official safeguarding' with the CAA but also invited views on this from the smaller airfields such as Denham and Old Buckenham as to whether this would find favour with them.
2. He invited input in response to the Government's National Policy Statement and gave the web-link as <http://data.energynpsconsultation.decc.gov.uk/documents/nps/EN-1.pdf>
3. He noted that payments to landowners of up to £25,000 per turbine per annum were an incentive to the landowner but was paid for by the taxpayer. There is a need to build a 'fighting fund' so that independent expert advice may be obtained.
4. A 'Tool Kit' was needed to provide a briefing to those affected by wind turbine development and a section of the GAAC web-site should be allocated to freely available cumulative knowledge and experience.
5. He would write to Mark 'Baggy' Smales at the CAA with a request that NOTAMS be issued to warn of anemometry masts or other hazards to safe navigation, particularly in the vicinity of airfields, and suggested 50m or higher within the ATZ demanded such a warning.
6. He emphasised that the GAAC was in favour of all actions that preserved the environment but safety was paramount.

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