

Ms. Sue Tiley
Planning Policy & Implementation Manager
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
Council Offices
Campus East
Welwyn Garden City
Herts
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2 September 2013

Dear Ms. Tiley,

Panshanger Aerodrome

Thank you for your letter dated 30th July 2013 regarding the above site. I apologise for the delay in responding but I have been on leave for a large proportion of the intervening period since receiving the response. I would wish to reply to your queries as follows:

Significant Areas for Sport (SASPs)

The majority of the queries in your letter relate to SASPs which provide recognition to the most nationally and regionally important sites in England for specific sports. SASPs are identified by individual national governing bodies of sports in partnership with Sport England and identify and describe why a specific site is important to that sport and what specific features make the site special. Full details on SASPs including the rationale for them, the criteria used to identify them, how SASPs are used and the full list of current SASPs are on Sport England's website at www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance/significant-areas-for-sport/

In relation to Panshanger Aerodrome, I would first wish to clarify that the site is not currently a SASP as implied by your letter. As advised in our representations on the Emerging Core Strategy dated 28th January 2013, Panshanger Aerodrome offers the potential to become a regionally important SASP but is not actually a SASP at present. However, as set out in our representations the site is considered to be of strategic importance for air sports (at least regionally important) although it is not currently a SASP.

The reason that Panshanger Aerodrome is not a SASP at present has nothing to do with the merits of Panshanger Aerodrome in terms of its suitability for SASP identification. It relates to the SASP identification process. Before identifying any SASPs, individual sports governing bodies such as the Light Aircraft Association

(LAA), have to provide information for all of the sites in England which they consider offer potential to be identified as a nationally or regionally important SASP. This information is then considered by Sport England against the identified SASP criteria in order to ensure that only the sites that fully meet the criteria are subsequently confirmed as SASPs. Sport England rigorously checks and challenges the information provided to ensure that only sites that meet the relevant criteria are confirmed as SASPs in order to ensure that only the most important sites are identified in order to maintain the credibility of SASP status. It is essential that all of the potential sites in the country are considered at the same time so that a robust comparative assessment can take place of the merits of individual sites in terms of their national or regional importance. To ensure that the process is objective and to maintain the credibility of SASP status, individual sites are not identified as SASPs in isolation directly in response to threats of development or closure.

At present, the process of identifying SASPs in relation to light aircraft sites has not yet started and there is currently no timetable for this process. Due to the number of sites that data has to be collected for and the check and challenge process that takes place, the identification of SASPs is a resource intensive process for both Sport England and the relevant sports governing bodies and it is not uncommon for the whole process to take several years. To date, only four sports have confirmed SASPs which is mainly due to the resources required to undertake the process.

While Panshanger Aerodrome (and no other aerodromes in England) is not currently identified as a SASP, this does not diminish the strategic importance of the site for sports aviation. Our representations on the Emerging Core Strategy have articulated the reasons why the site is considered to be a light aircraft site of at least regional importance. Our representations also advised that because of these reasons the site offered potential to be identified by Sport England as a regionally important SASP. As set out above, Sport England would not assess an application for SASP status for an individual site because the process requires all potential sites to be assessed at the same time. However, based on Sport England's experience of assessing nationally/regionally important sites relating to other air sports for SASP status and on assessing the Panshanger Aerodrome site individually against the SASP criteria, it can be confirmed that the site offers strong potential to be identified as a regionally important SASP (if the SASP process for light aircraft sport progresses). Sport England would advocate that the strategic importance of the site for sports aviation and its potential for regional SASP status be afforded weight when decisions are made about the future of the site.

In relation to your query about standards for auditing the quality of individual aerodrome facilities in the context of SASPs, Sport England requires governing bodies to provide sufficient information about individual facilities to demonstrate that they can meet SASP criteria e.g. use for competitions, use for training, scarcity, heritage etc but does not prescribe that any quality standards have to be met. The LAA will be providing more detail to the Council on how the quality of aerodromes is

assessed by the Civil Aviation Authority and the information that is available for Panshanger Aerodrome.

In terms of your queries about assessments of facility needs in the local area, analysis of predicted growth of the sport, existing and future participation levels and expansion needs, these matters are not considered as part of the SASP identification process as SASP identification focuses on assessing the current importance of a site for an individual sport. Sport England does not have data on participation for sports such as light aircraft and does not set targets. Such data, if available, is provided by the sports governing bodies. The LAA have advised that they will be writing to you shortly to provide advice on these matters.

Welwyn Hatfield Sports Facility Study/Strategy

In your letter reference is made to Sport England being represented on the steering group for the Welwyn Hatfield Sports Facility Study/Strategy and that Panshanger Aerodrome was not recommended for inclusion in terms of the scope of the study. In response, I would make the following points:

- Advice is provided by Sport England to local authorities on the scope of local sports facility studies based on local circumstances. At the time of the study, the Council and other stakeholders on the steering group did not make reference to the future of Panshanger Aerodrome being under threat and therefore the need to include the facility within the scope of the study was not discussed. Consequently, at the time there was not a basis to justify inclusion within the scope of the study;
- Specialist sports facilities which have a more than local catchment are not recommended to be included in local sports facility studies. This applies to a range of facilities such as air sports, water sports, snow sports etc. This is because such facilities (including aerodromes) usually have a regional or sub-regional role and therefore it would be inappropriate to assess current or future needs in the local context as the majority of current and potential users originate from outside the local area and consideration has to be given to the role of other facilities in the region/sub-region which are usually outside the area covered by the local study. As explained by the LAA and Sport England in our representations on the Emerging Core Strategy, Panshanger Aerodrome has a regional catchment and consequently any assessments of need would be inappropriate on a Welwyn Hatfield district basis as the district only has one air sports facility which serves a catchment that extends as far as London. Such facilities would need to be assessed on a regional basis which would require a specialist study to be undertaken that would have gone beyond the scope of the Welwyn Hatfield Sports Facilities Study which focused on the needs of the community living in Welwyn Hatfield district and covered facilities such as sports pitches, swimming pools etc which do have a local catchment and which are appropriate to assess on a local basis.

Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation Response (2009)

Reference is made to a 2004 research study that was submitted as part of a response to the above consultation which considered alternative options to Panshanger Aerodrome. No detail has been provided of who the author of the study was, what the rationale for preparing the study was, what methodology was used or whether the study was an objective needs assessment or a study prepared by bodies promoting the disposal of Panshanger Aerodrome. As the study was prepared almost 10 years ago (and will not have accounted for changes to the supply and demand of light aircraft facilities over the intervening period) and because of the lack of context and detail relating to the study it is considered inappropriate to provide detailed comments on the extract that has been provided and it is not advocated that significant weight be given to its content. However, within the constraints of the information provided, the LAA will shortly be providing the Council with their comments on the study.

I hope this response is helpful in responding to your queries. If you would like any further information or advice please contact the undersigned at the address below.

Yours sincerely

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Planning Manager

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