

# No Place to Hide

(Summary prepared by HACAN)

HACAN commissioned the consultants Bureau Veritas\*\* to carry out a study to assess if, and how, flight paths over London have changed over the past 10 years. The study, *No Place to Hide*, was paid for by a grant from the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. It just covered London. It did not cover areas to the west of the airport, but the findings outlined would be applicable to those areas.

## Key findings:

- Aircraft noise has become a **London-wide problem**.
- In places **20 kilometres from Heathrow** “aircraft noise dominated the local environment.” For example, there was “an almost constant background of aircraft noise” in Kennington Park, close to the Oval Cricket Ground, well over 15 kilometres from the airport.
- In some areas of **East London** flown over by both Heathrow planes *and* City Airport noise levels were comparable to those in parts of West London.

## Key conclusions:

- “The **increase in the number of movements** between 1996 and 2005 can clearly be seen”
- “In terms of geographical spread, the greatest increases have occurred in the **early morning and in the evening** – arguably the relatively more sensitive times of day”
- “The relatively high levels of aircraft noise that do occur at some distance from the airport are certainly enough to be noticed by those living in those areas and in certain circumstances to **cause some disturbance and intrusion**.”
- “The results of this study do explain why aircraft noise from operations at London Heathrow is a cause for concern **beyond the boundary of (the officially recognised\*) contour**.”

\* The official contour (where the Government and aviation industry acknowledge there may be a noise problem) contains the area enclosed by the 57 dB(A) LAeq contour. That is, the area where aircraft noise averages out at 57 decibels over the course of the summer - roughly between Barnes and Heathrow.

## Key reason for the increase:

**The growth in the number of aircraft using Heathrow (and in some areas, City Airport) has required changes to be made to landing patterns:**

- Many **more routes** between the holding stacks and the airport are now in use;
- Planes are forced to take less direct routes from the stacks, resulting in **many more turning movements** (which has increased noise levels).

## Key readings:

- In **Ruskin Park** in South London, 20 kilometres from the airport, aircraft noise dominates the local environment. During busy hours a plane flies over almost every 90 seconds, usually louder than 60 decibels.

■ In **Kennington Park**, just slightly closer to the airport, planes are coming over every 97 seconds, almost all over 60 decibels and the vast majority heading for Heathrow.

■ At **Clapham Common**, well outside the area where noise is officially recognised as a problem, aircraft fly over at the rate of one a minute, the vast majority of them registering over 60 decibels.

■ In **Poplar** it recorded 84 planes flying over in a two hour period, 45 Heathrow and 26 City Airport. The noise level of the Heathrow aircraft ranged from 60 – 69 decibels and the City aircraft from 64 – 82 decibels.

### **Continuous Descent Approach**

The study did not specifically look at Continuous Descent Approach (CDA), the procedure which aircraft are encouraged to use when landing at Heathrow. Aircraft use CDA to achieve a smoother approach to the airport, rather than the ‘step-by-step’ approach they once adopted. There does seem to have been some correlation between the greater use of CDA and the increase in the number of complaints from areas more distant from the airport. Is this because, in order to achieve a smoother landing, planes need to get in line further from Heathrow, thus causing the sort of constant background noise the study noted in places like Kennington Park?

### **Key implications for decision-makers:**

■ The area where aircraft noise is a problem is much wider than that officially recognised by the authorities. Unless this is factored into policy-making processes, there is the danger of policy being formulated on the basis of poor information.

■ Consultation of any plans to expand Heathrow should include local authorities and residents well beyond West London. Indeed, there is a case for involving these local authorities to participate in regular consultation meetings such as the Heathrow Area Consultative Committee.

■ The noise contours for areas affected by planes from both Heathrow and City airports need to reflect the combined effect of the aircraft passing overhead.

■ Further work needs to be undertaken on whether the greater use of Continuous Descent Approach has worsened noise levels in areas further from the airport.

**\*\* Bureau Veritas is a firm with a distinguished record which has done work for a variety of clients including local authorities and the Government. Its Director, Stephen Turner, acts as an adviser to DEFRA.**