The Most Overflown Boroughs in London
UPDATED ANALYSIS 2017

This analysis is an updated version of our original work, undertaken in 2009, highlighting the boroughs in London that experience the greatest number of aircraft overhead. The analysis uses 2015 and, where available, 2016 statistics. The London boroughs of Hounslow, Richmond and Waltham Forest retain the top three positions. Only three of the top twelve are West London boroughs, explained by the use of runway alternation (where planes switch runways at 3pm to give residents a half day's break from the noise), and that West London is not overflown by London City aircraft.

Top 12 London boroughs

	No. of aircraft per year	% Heathrow flights	2009 ranking
1. Hounslow	239,000	100%	1
2. Richmond	200,400	100%	2
3. Waltham Forest	190,000	69%	3
4. Lambeth	189,900	90%	6
5. Southwark	187,900	89%	10
6. Wandsworth	178,400	100%	6
7. Newham	176,000	55%	4
8. Lewisham	172,500	88%	13
9. Greenwich	165,000	50%	8
10. Tower Hamlets	129,000	38%	7
11. Croydon	116,000	100%	11
12. Haringey	115,000	100%	15

Further information

See page 3 for links to Heathrow arrival and departure flight paths. To contact us about this analysis, email info@hacan.org.uk or call us on 0207 737 6641.

Methodology

- **The figures are indicative.** Precise figures would require a much more in-depth study which took detailed account of all the variables. Though we believe the figures are broadly accurate; they are all taken from official sources. However, they are intended to provide a broad snapshot rather than a detailed analysis.

- **We only factored in the planes which used Heathrow and City Airports,** though we didn't take into account their height. We ignored planes using Northolt. We also ignored those which use other UK airports (over London they tend to be at a height where they don't cause noise problems).

It is also worth stressing that, while it is clear Heathrow, in particular, impacts a large swathe of London, there are parts of most boroughs which are relatively unaffected by aircraft noise.

Observations

It is not surprising that Hounslow and Richmond remain the most overflown. They are the London boroughs closest to Heathrow (Hillingdon, the borough in which Heathrow is located, is parallel to the airport so it is overflown much less). They are overflown when planes are landing from the east – 70% of the time in a typical year – and when planes take off from the west – 30% of the time. It is worth saying, though, that there are few, if any, areas in either borough which are flown over all day long every day of the year.

Waltham Forest remains so high in the list because it is overflown by Heathrow aircraft when there is both an east and west wind blowing and has a lot of City aircraft.

Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham's prominence on the list reflects that the majority of aircraft landing at Heathrow when a west wind is blowing (70% of the year) fly over south London and, when an east wind is blowing, parts of each borough are overflown by City aircraft.

Boroughs such as Ealing don't feature in the top 12 or even top 15 simply because the days of the year they get aircraft noise are limited (only when an east wind is blowing). Though when easterly operations are taking place, it can cause considerable noise disturbance.

Newham retains a high position because it is overflown by Heathrow aircraft but principally because it contains City Airport and all planes using City fly over it (but only for a short part of their journey).

Change from 2009 analysis

The most significant change is the fall in the number of flights over Islington, Camden and Hackney. When aircraft are landing from the north, it appears more of them are crossing the Thames further to the east than before. It means that more are crossing into Southwark, Lambeth and even Lewisham, in a way they were not seven years ago.

Next steps

Flight paths will change around Heathrow once Precision Navigation technology is brought in. This is where, using new computer technology, aircraft landing and departing will be guided much more precisely. Used well, this precision technology can have benefits for residents. It allows air traffic controllers to use multiple route when guiding the planes. It would also allow for some dispersion where multiple routes were not practicable.

Heathrow has commissioned a wide-ranging study to look at how all this can be used to the greatest effect. It is expected to be published in spring 2017. City Airport introduced Precision Navigation in 2016. **In concentrating its routes, City Airport are depriving people of the respite multiple routes would provide.** There are hopes that it will review this decision in 2017.

If both Heathrow and City Airports introduce multiple routes and some dispersal – and coordinate their activities – a 2024/5 HACAN analysis could show an overall increase in the number of planes over each borough but a decrease in the number of planes over the majority of communities in most of the boroughs. The exception would be West London boroughs where it is difficult to see how, even with an element of respite, people would not get more planes if a third runway was built than they have today.

Maps

Below are links to maps, taken from Heathrow's website, which show all the arrivals and departures.

http://www.heathrow.com/file_source/HeathrowNoise/Static/arr_west_2015b.pdf - arrivals when a west wind is blowing

http://www.heathrow.com/file_source/HeathrowNoise/Static/arr_east_2015b.pdf - arrivals when an east wind is blowing

http://www.heathrow.com/file_source/HeathrowNoise/Static/dep_west_2015.pdf - departures when a west wind is blowing

http://www.heathrow.com/file_source/HeathrowNoise/Static/dep_east_2015.pdf - departures when an east wind is blowing