



## **The General Aviation Awareness Council**

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**President: The Lord Rotherwick**

- To: Ms. Sue Tiley  
Head of Planning Policy  
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council  
Council Offices, The Campus  
Welwyn Garden City  
AL8 6AE
- cc. Mr. Charles Henry, Chairman, GAAC.  
Mr. Martin Robinson, Chairman, AOPA UK.  
Mr. David Ogilvy, AOPA.  
Mr. Dean McBride, Panshanger Community Group.

28<sup>th</sup> January 2013

**Re: Objection to inclusion of Panshanger Aerodrome as Residential Development Land (C3 Use) in Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council Strategic Housing Land Allocation Assessment.**

Dear Ms. Tiley

I wish to register an objection to the inclusion of Panshanger Aerodrome as residential development land in the Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council core strategy document, which is currently open for consultation.

The proposal to reclassify this land, BLG1 / WGC4, currently used as an active local airfield, leisure amenity and flying school, is inappropriate and runs contrary both to the Council's responsibilities as outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework and its own Planning Strategy; as outlined in policy CS11, Protection of Critical Assets (environmental and heritage) and Policy CS 12, Infrastructure; which includes maintaining Physical Infrastructure such as transport, Social Infrastructure including leisure amenities and Green Infrastructure, which includes formal and informal green space, green corridors and open spaces.

In addition there are a number of significant unanswered questions about the processes carried out thus far. This includes the process and methodology employed for the landscape and visual character assessment of the site.

This important assessment, which is regarded as a specialist discipline and usually outsourced to professionals in that field, appears to have been carried out in-house (the plans refer to having been drawn up by 'Planning Policy'). While I am sure that the Department feels its staff members are fully qualified, such findings are necessarily subjective and a lack of independent review constitutes a notable breach of good planning practice.

I write on behalf of the General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) and the UK Aircraft Owners' and Pilots' Association (AOPA UK), for whom I assist in a voluntary basis in advising on aerodrome planning matters. I am also a qualified private pilot, vintage aircraft restorer and Chairman of the Vintage Aircraft Club, who along with many fellow members have visited Panshanger Aerodrome on a number of occasions, including the annual vintage car and aircraft events, which are an important community and heritage asset.

The General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) was formed in 1991, as a national body representing the general and light aviation movement. It has assisted Government in preparing policies and offering a co-ordinated approach to major issues and aims to explain the nature of GA, promote its purpose and value, protect its facilities and ensure its future.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association UK is part of the largest association of pilots in the world, with over 470,000 members in over 50 countries. AOPA UK is a not-for-profit organisation which exists to serve the interests of its members as aircraft owners and pilots, promoting the economy, safety, utility and popularity of flight in general aviation aircraft.

#### NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

In policy terms, the requirement for general aviation airfields and other flying sites for recreational, business, training and emergency services use is reflected both in the past PPG13 and today, in the new National Planning Policy Framework.

*“Local planning authorities should consider the role of small airports and airfields in serving business, recreational and emergency services needs.”*

*“Local authorities should avoid development at or close to an airport or airfield which is incompatible with any existing or potential aviation operations.”*

*“When planning for ports, airports and airfields that are not subject to a separate national policy statement, plans should consider their growth and role in serving business, leisure, training and emergency service needs. Plans should take account of this Framework as well as the principles set out in the relevant national policy statements and the Government Framework for UK Aviation.” (NPPF Para 33).*

#### BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT ASSET

WHBC does not seem to have recognised the value of Panshanger Aerodrome, as a local amenity, as an important asset to the local business community and as a driver for additional inward business investment. Indeed it seems in recent years that the Council has actively attempted to obstruct the use of a potentially valuable local asset.

If a business person wishes to travel to other parts of the UK or the near continent, a light aircraft is an effective means of avoiding congested roads, offering efficient ‘point-to-point’ transportation by flying from a small aerodrome such as the one the council intends to close. The Council should be promoting the aerodrome as a business asset, not closing it.

Panshanger Aerodrome is served by a single grass-surfaced runway of 933m length, which although precluding heavier business aircraft, allows operation by a wide range of lighter aircraft within the general aviation sector. In addition to leisure flying and flight training, these aircraft are used extensively as business tools.

Panshanger’s location close to the A1M and East Coast main line makes it an ideal location to be part of an integrated business travel network and an important element in the network of General Aviation airfields, more-so given its location between Stansted and Luton airports. It is thus likely to be a contributor to employment in a much wider area than the immediate environs of the airfield.

General Aviation (GA), together with Aerial Work (AW), covers all civil aircraft activity other than that carried out by the commercial air transport (CAT) sector. It is the largest part of the UK aviation community. Whilst commercial air transport about 900 aircraft and uses 25 airports, the active GA fleet comprises some 15,500 aircraft, including helicopters, gliders, microlights and balloons. These are flown by more than 32,000 pilots. GA in the UK uses 143 aerodromes licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and around 1,000 other flying sites.

Whilst 85% of filled seats on airlines are occupied by people flying for leisure purposes, more than 70% of flights carried out by GA/AW have some business or safety connotation. These include business flights, pipeline work, police and pollution patrols, traffic surveys, medical

flights, newspaper and postal flights, aerial surveys, civil search and rescue operations and pilot training.

#### ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

In Section 12 and Policy CS11 of the Strategy, paragraph 12.2 refers to the green spaces, natural elements and the multi-functional uses of these spaces. The aerodrome at Panshanger is already demonstrably a large green open space that while allowing flying to take place, is also the habitat of many species of wild flora and fauna. This has not been recognised by the Strategy, nor by the potentially flawed environmental assessments so far carried out by the Council.

Policy CS 11 also covers protection of critical assets. It states "the Council is committed to protecting and enhancing the borough's natural and historic environment" and "any loss or damage to the value of these assets will be resisted and opportunities for enhancement will be supported". This is diametrically opposed to the proposed loss if the aerodrome, continuously operational for 70 years, is forced to be closed. According to this policy the aerodrome should be "protected and enhanced".

It is noteworthy that while the Council's assessments appear to have overlooked these important areas, a large number of local residents and environmental groups have recognised this oversight and also responded thus to the consultation. I will therefore not waste your time by further repeating their comments here. It should be noted too, that there are clear precedents set by other Local Planning Authorities.

In early 2012, West Oxfordshire County Council ruled against a planning application and appeal which would have materially affected Enstone Aerodrome on the grounds that it would: "*Materially impact on the use of the airfield for general aviation purposes and result in the loss of an important community facility.*"

In December 2012, following a lengthy dialogue with organisations including the CPRE who supported the airfield as a sustainable green space, Medway Council agreed a long-term strategy to maintain Rochester Airport, based on a business plan for the next 25 years. The council describe the airport as "*An important asset in Medway. We aim to safeguard aviation for business, heritage and leisure use in this well-connected location.*"

#### IN CONCLUSION

I have little doubt that if Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council were to review this proposed change of use, Panshanger Aerodrome is capable of operating within well-managed and controlled environmental guidelines and will offer a successful local amenity enhancing the community. In contrast the current plans will lead to significant disruption and loss of amenity for local residents, the obliteration of a noted heritage location and the loss of established wildlife habitats, in addition to the loss of a valuable national aviation asset.

I therefore hope that you will please register this objection to the proposed strategy.

Yours faithfully



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