

The Rt Hon Alistair Darling MP

Secretary of State

Department for Transport

Great Minster House

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As you know, Nottingham East Midlands Airport is undertaking a second consultation exercise ostensibly to give those people of the East Midlands affected by their proposed new flight paths the opportunity to make their views known.

This second consultation is being undertaken because NEMA failed to consult a number of East Midlands local authorities in their first consultation, including Oadby and Wigston Borough Council in my Harborough constituency, thereby failing to comply with the CAA process (CAP724) for requesting an airspace change. Despite this the CAA approved the proposal in July 2004 and merely delayed its implementation.

As I understand the position, NEMA have sent the second consultation document to 214 East Midlands unitary authorities with a covering letter stating that "all comments, as before, will be passed to the CAA and it will be for them to decide whether or not to approve the proposed changes"

The Director of Civil Airspace, John Arscott has, however, now confirmed in a letter (23/11/04) that "the approval granted by the CAA on 27th July 2004 for the NEMA airspace change proposal still stands" and that the CAA is ready to implement the original proposal at NEMA's request. He went on to say that "the second period of

consultation was undertaken on NEMA's own initiative and is not a requirement of the Airspace Change Process".

This means that at best NEMA has mis-informed the 214 consultees and, through their brochures, press articles and road shows, the residents of the East Midlands on the process being followed in the second consultation, leading them to believe that the decision on the proposed flight paths is still to be made.

At worst NEMA are attempting to pacify those previously un-consulted residents and their representatives who have legitimate concerns about the impact of the airspace change proposal and future expansion plans, with a sham consultation that can have no impact on a decision that is already made. Furthermore, NEMA have allowed consultees only 12 weeks to respond, which for most of the councils who meet monthly is a near impossibility, even without Christmas in the middle.

As you will no doubt have noted, I raised this confusion on the floor of the House of Commons last week as a point of order to the Speaker. I asked that you come to the House to clear the matter up. It is unacceptable for NEMA to treat the people of the East Midlands in such a contemptible manner and I ask that, irrespective of your views on the merits of the proposed airspace change, you require the CAA to rescind their decision of 27th July (based on the first consultation being flawed) and direct NEMA to restart the Airspace Change Process, this time following it diligently so as to consider the wider impact on the surrounding community.

Even if the eventual outcome is the same, it will have been arrived at through due process and not through commercial pressure from companies cynically ignoring the genuine concerns of the residents of Leicestershire.

Nottingham East Midlands Airport already has more night flights than Heathrow, than Gatwick and than Stansted. They are all designated airports under the Civil Aviation Act 1982. NEMA is not and should be. It is high time some serious thought was given to designating NEMA so that my constituents and other residents of Leicestershire are not left at the mercy of the Manchester Airport Group who have no interest in Leicestershire save as a site for their airport to make money to reduce the council tax bills of the residents of the local authorities in and around Manchester that own the company.

We are currently being left with no choice but to conclude that the consultation process is a sham and that your Department is not interested in seeing fair play or local accountability.

Edward Garnier