

Future runway operations document

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1. Purpose of this document

1.1 Purpose and scope

- 1.1.1 The purpose of this document is to explain our preferred proposals for the operation of a three-runway airport.
- 1.1.2 Our proposals are intended to improve our operational performance while delivering the capacity, economic and societal benefits outlined in the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS). Equally, they are designed to mitigate negative environmental effects such as aircraft noise.
- 1.1.3 This document relates to the following operational proposals:
 - Respite through runway alternation
 - Night flights
 - Directional preference
 - Noise management and mitigation
 - Early Growth
- 1.1.4 The Government recently concluded its consultation on proposed amendments to the 2018 ANPS, to be known once amended as the Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS). The Government is now considering consultation feedback, alongside the outcome of parliamentary scrutiny once concluded, and subject to parliamentary approval of the Government's final form of the proposed amendments is expected to publish the amended form as the HENPS by the end of 2026. In preparing our consultation materials, we have reviewed the proposed amendments to the ANPS and are continuing to consider the potential implications for our preferred scheme and accompanying assessments. Where relevant, the requirements of the ANPS are referenced in this document together with any potential changes arising from the proposed ANPS amendments, recognising that current policy in the ANPS remains the starting point for the consideration of Heathrow expansion until the amendments to the ANPS have been finalised and the amended version published as the HENPS. Once the ANPS has been amended and published as the HENPS, we will engage with relevant stakeholders on the policy amendments as part of our ongoing programme of pre-application engagement and consider if targeted consultation is necessary.

- 1.1.5 This document is part of a set of consultation documents, all of which are interrelated. The suite of consultation documents which should be considered alongside this document is set out in the **Consultation Document**. You may also be interested to read the following documents which complement this one and provide more detail on related issues:
- **Environmental Information Consultation Document (EICD)** – this sets out our current assessment of the potential significant environmental effects of all aspects of our expansion proposals.
 - **Environmentally Managed Growth (EMG) Topic Paper** – this document sets out the framework for managing the changes in environmental effects relating to the four aspects included in the EMG (noise, surface access, carbon and air quality) as the airport grows over time.
 - **Noise Insulation Policy** – This document outlines the proposed noise and vortex schemes designed to reduce impacts on those most affected by aircraft operations. The document provides information about each scheme's eligibility, what is provided under each scheme and how each scheme will be delivered.
- 1.1.6 This consultation is not an opportunity to comment on the location of the flight paths required for expansion. The airspace design will be determined separately through the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA's) Airspace Change Process (known as 'CAP1616'). CAP1616 required public consultation on the airspace design and gives affected communities the opportunity to provide feedback on any proposed changes.
- 1.1.7 The airspace design will be developed by a new body created by the Department for Transport and the CAA, namely the UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) which was established in May 2026. This is a change since our 2019 proposals, where we had responsibility for developing the airspace design via the Airspace Change Process. Please refer to **Appendix A** for a more detailed summary of this change.
- 1.1.8 In **Appendix B** we have brought together a graphical summary of the operational proposals set out in this document.

1.2 Relationship to previous consultations

Figure 1.1: Timeline of the project and previous consultations



- 1.2.1 Previous responses to three earlier consultations in 2018 and 2019 have been considered in developing our current approach.
- 1.2.2 Broadly, our current proposals are similar to those presented as part of our Airport Expansion Consultation in June 2019. There are, however, a number of key differences, including to roles and responsibilities, such as:
- Reforms to airspace design sponsorship and coordination mean the airspace changes required for a future Heathrow expansion will now be led by UKADS. For more details on this, please refer to **Appendix A** of this document.
 - Taking the June 2019 consultation responses into account, we have discounted 14:00 as a timing for runway alternation in this consultation. Based on further consultation feedback, we have included an alternative option in this consultation where we only alternate runways overnight in between the runways closing for the night and opening the next morning. For more details on this, please refer to **Section 3** of this document.
 - Previously we consulted on introducing and using Independent Parallel Approaches (IPA), Wake Turbulence Re-categorisation (RECAT EU) and enhanced time-based separations (eTBS Pairwise) to enable our proposals to increase the use of our existing runways before the new runway is operational, which we refer to as Early Growth. Due to a combination of factors, including feedback received in 2019, we are not pursuing the separate airspace change proposal for IPA. We have already implemented RECAT EU and eTBS Pairwise over the course of the past five years with the benefits of this already being seen and delivered on a daily basis.

1.3 Invitation for feedback

- 1.3.1 You can find more information about how to provide feedback and engage with this consultation in **Chapter 8.2. Have your say** of the **Consultation Document**.

2. Our runways today

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 Before setting out our proposals for how a three-runway airport would operate, it is important to describe how our existing two runways are used today. This section explains the physical dimensions and positions of the existing runways and how they operate today. It also outlines our separate plans for the introduction of Easterly Alternation, which is expected before the third runway opens.

2.2 Two-runway airport

The United Kingdom's only hub airport

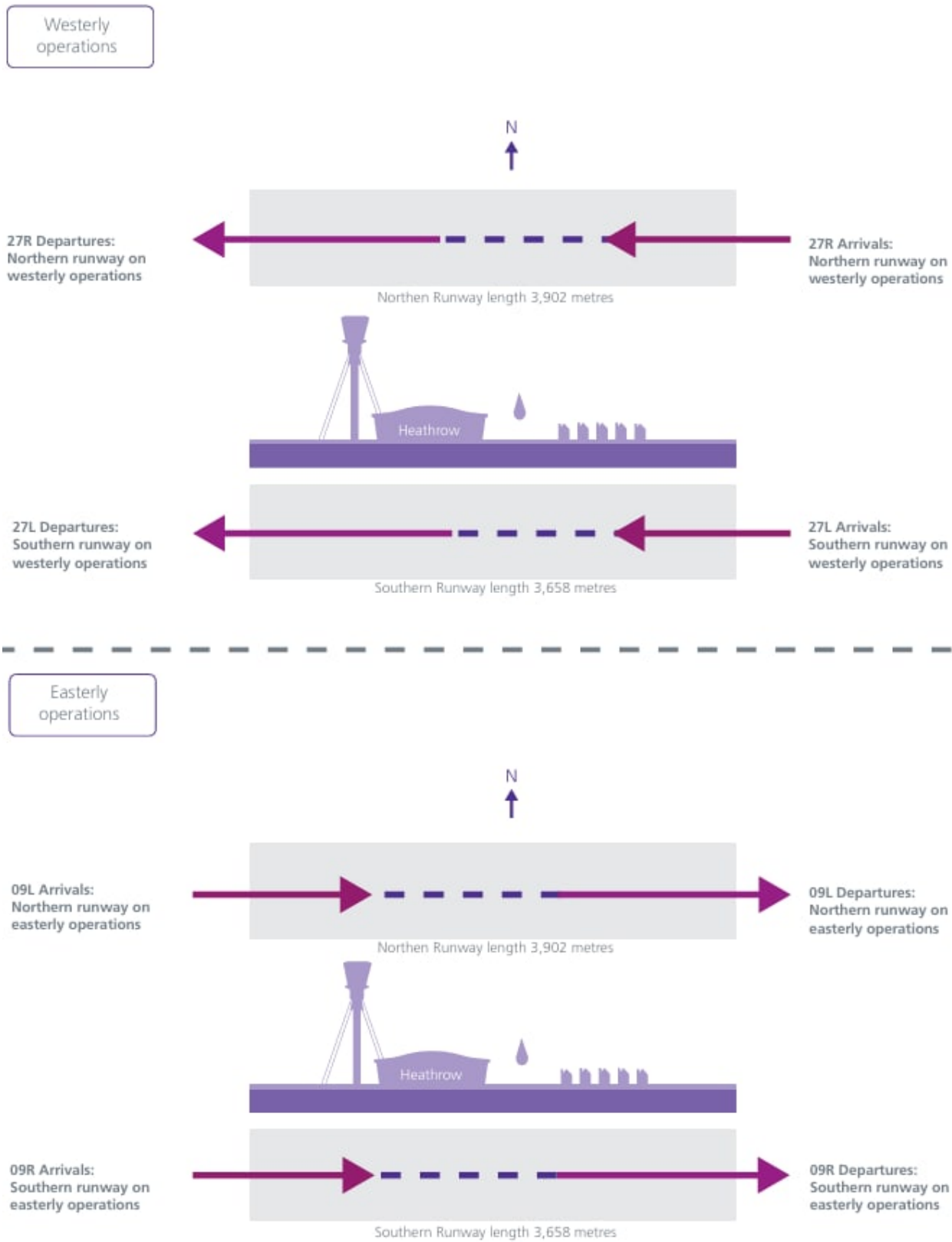
- 2.2.1 We are the UK's only hub airport. Hub airports combine direct passengers, transfer passengers and freight on the same aircraft, making it possible to serve destinations that could not be supported by local demand alone. We connect the UK to over 200 destinations in more than 80 countries and are one of the most internationally connected airports in the world.
- 2.2.2 In 2025, we handled 84.5 million passengers and 477,894 air transport movements (ATMs). This is an average of around 1,300 arrivals and departures every day and was the busiest year in the airport's history.
- We are currently limited to 480,000 ATMs each year as a condition of the 2001 Terminal 5 planning permission. We are required to report data annually to the Civil Aviation Authority¹ and to the local planning authority, the London Borough of Hillingdon. In practice, we have been operating very close to this limit for many years, with both runways near to full capacity for much of the day.

Physical runway configuration

- 2.2.3 We have two parallel runways orientated broadly east–west. To maximise lift, aircraft generally take off and land into the wind. The direction in which our runways are used is therefore determined mainly by the prevailing wind direction. When the wind comes from the west, aircraft approach the airport from the east (over London) and take-off towards the west, this is referred to as westerly operations. Easterly operations occur when the wind is coming from the east, so aircraft approach from the west (over Windsor and Berkshire) and take off towards the east.
- 2.2.4 The northern of the two runways is 3,902 metres long. It is named Runway 09L when used in an easterly direction and Runway 27R when used in a westerly direction. The southern runway is 3,658 metres long. It is named Runway 09R when used in an easterly direction and Runway 27L when used in a westerly direction. Both runways can handle the largest commercial aircraft types in service today.

¹ The Civil Aviation Authority is the United Kingdom's aviation regulator.

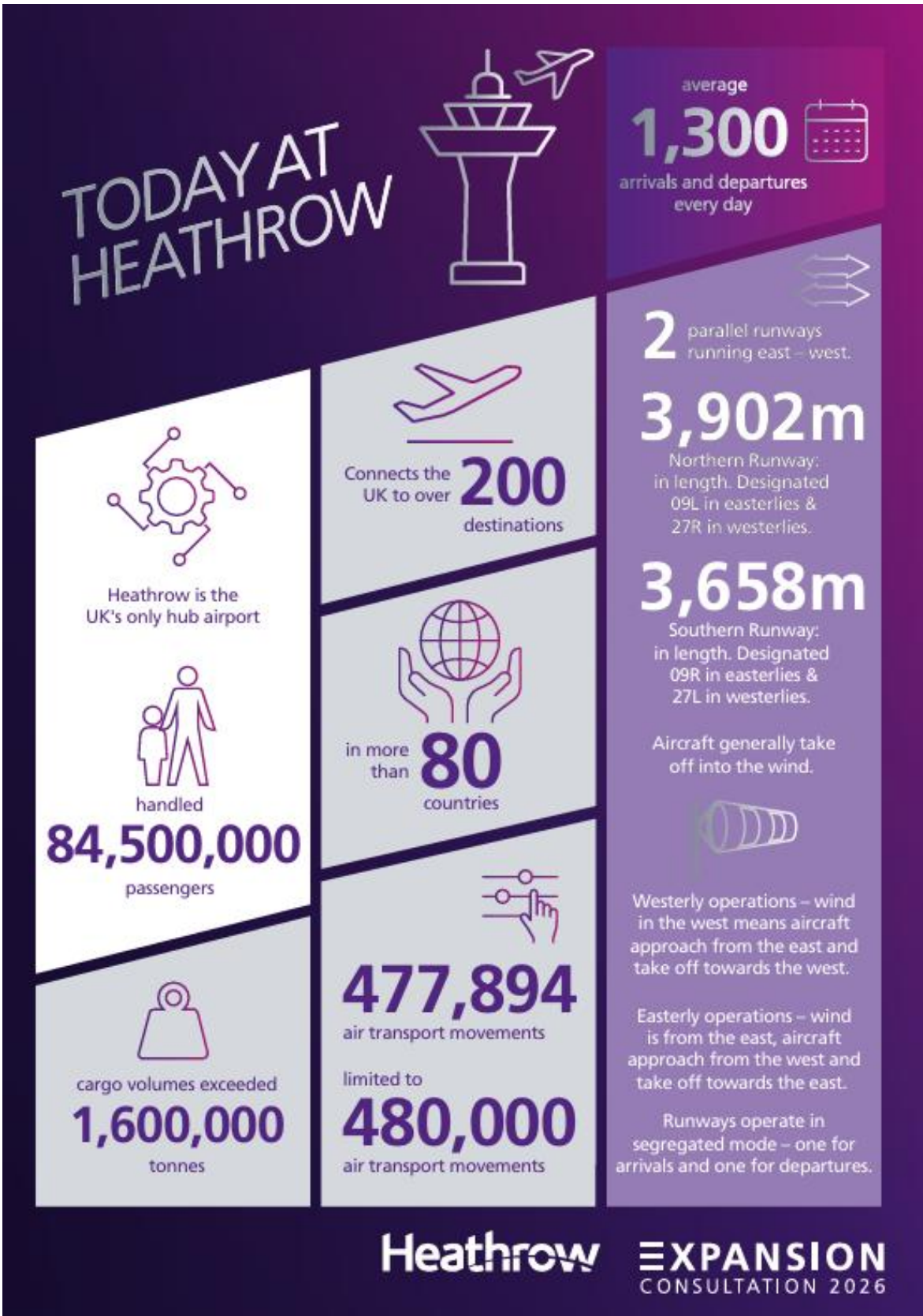
Figure 2.1: Runway operations today at Heathrow on westerly and easterly operations



How we use the runways: segregated mode

- 2.2.5 The runways are generally operated in segregated mode, meaning that one runway is used for arrivals and the other is used for departures. This provides a predictable pattern of aircraft movements for communities affected by noise from arriving and departing aircraft. However, during the day, when delays build up in the holding stacks, we can use both runways for landing to minimise delays and unwanted impacts such as increased fuel burn.

Figure 2.2: Today at Heathrow – 2026, current operations and infrastructure overview



2.3 Runway alternation

2.3.1 During the day, when aircraft are landing and taking off towards the west (westerly operations) we alternate the use of our two runways to provide local communities with respite from noise. The alternation pattern means that for part of the day we use one runway for landings and the other for take-offs, then at 15:00 we switch over. At the end of each week, we switch completely so that communities get respite from planes in the morning one week and in the evening the next. The alternation schedule is published around a year in advance and is available on our website².

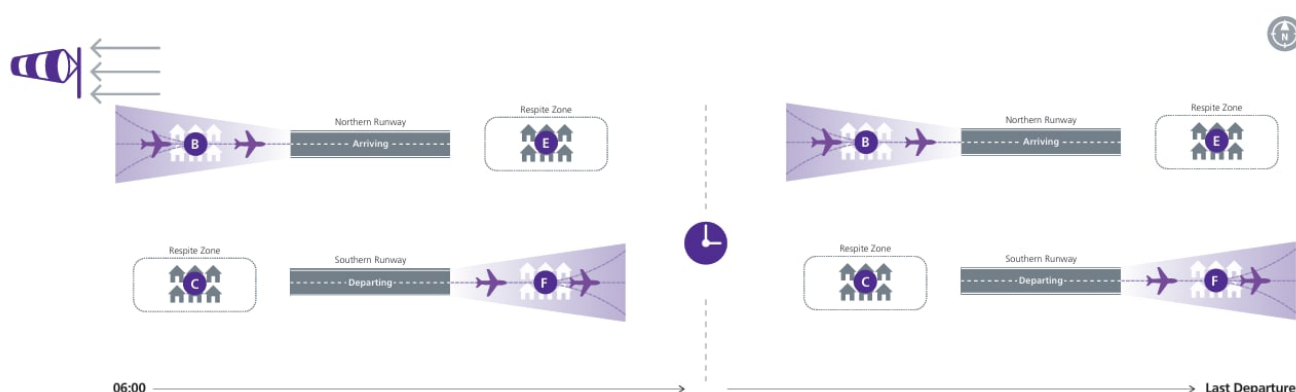
Figure 2.3: Current runway alternation (westerly and easterly operations)



Easterly Alternation

- 2.3.2 We are currently progressing with a project called Easterly Alternation, with the intention that this will become part of normal operations before the third runway is timetabled to open. The introduction of Easterly Alternation will bring predictable periods of respite from aircraft noise during our easterly operations. Aircraft noise will be shared more equally – as it is today during westerly operations.
- 2.3.3 At present, when aircraft are landing and taking off towards the east (easterly operations), we do not alternate the runways due to the legacy of the Cranford Agreement, an historic commitment given by the Government which prevented aircraft from taking off over the village other than in exceptional circumstances. Although the Cranford Agreement has ended, we have not yet introduced Easterly Alternation on the northern runway because ground infrastructure changes are required to enable it. These include adjustments to the taxiways leading to the northern runway, and the construction of a new noise barrier near Longford.
- 2.3.4 In October 2024, we submitted a planning application to the London Borough of Hillingdon for the required ground infrastructure works. In December 2025, Hillingdon Council's Planning Committee resolved to grant planning permission for the proposed development³.
- 2.3.5 Because Easterly Alternation is planned to be delivered for the two-runway operation before any opening of a third runway, the proposals set out in this consultation assume that alternation is available during both westerly and easterly operations. **We are not seeking views on the introduction of Easterly Alternation for our existing two runways in this consultation.**

Figure 2.4: Easterly Alternation



² Heathrow Runway Alternation (2026)

(https://www.heathrow.com/content/dam/heathrow/web/common/documents/company/local-community/noise/operations/runway-alternation/Heathrow_Runway_Alternation_Programme_2026.pdf)

³ For further information on the Cranford Agreement and Easterly Alternation please visit our website: <https://www.heathrow.com/company/local-community/noise/operations/easterly-alternation>.

2.4 Noise performance

- 2.4.1 Aircraft noise is one of the most important issues for communities around us and has been central to how we have developed the proposals set out in this document. A noise assessment of the Heathrow expansion proposals is set out in the **Environmental Information Consultation Document (EICD)**.
- 2.4.2 We have long been at the forefront of the aviation sector's efforts to mitigate aircraft noise. Despite a significant growth in the number of aircraft movements in recent decades, the airport's noise footprint (the areas exposed to higher levels of aircraft noise) has shrunk considerably. Building on industry development and investment in quieter aircraft technology, we have secured this reduction through:
- Operating restrictions and incentives, such as rewarding quieter aircraft and penalising noisier ones through landing charges.
 - Operational procedures, such as continuous descent and climb operations and runway alternation.
- 2.4.3 We remain committed to continuing to reduce, limit and manage noise impacts and the proposals in this document help meet that goal.

3. Respite through runway alternation

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 Our current runway alternation system is used to provide predictable periods of respite from aircraft noise for communities living close to the ends of our runways. Predictable respite is defined as predictable relief from aircraft noise for a period of time⁴. More information on how this works today is described earlier in **Section 2.3** of this document. Our proposals for expansion would provide us with the flexibility to continue to alternate the use of our runways.
- 3.1.2 We know from community feedback to the June 2019 Consultation that the respite offered by runway alternation is highly valued by many. This is recognised in the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) (at paragraph 5.61), and draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS) (at paragraph 5.46), which require our application for development consent for expansion to include a runway alternation scheme that would continue to provide affected communities with predictable periods of respite, acknowledging that the duration of periods of respite that currently apply will be reduced.
- 3.1.3 In June 2019, our proposals included plans for three types of alternation: airspace alternation, flight path alternation and runway alternation. Airspace alternation and flight path alternation proposed to use airspace design as a means to provide respite for local communities, switching between flight paths and routings. Runway alternation uses the runways to provide this respite. As a result of government and Civil Aviation Authority-led reforms to the sponsorship of airspace change, we are no longer responsible for leading the development of the airspace design around Heathrow. For more details on this, please refer to **Appendix A** of this document. Therefore, the proposals in this section of the document relate only to runway alternation.

3.2 Previous consultation feedback

- 3.2.1 In 2019 we asked the following question on runway alternation:
“Please tell us what you think of our runway alternation proposals, in particular we would like to know if you think we should alternate the runways at 14:00 or 15:00.”
- 3.2.2 Several responses favoured retaining the 15:00 runway alternation time, noting this was preferential due to familiarity and alignment with the existing patterns. Suggestions were made around increasing respite where possible and having this planned as far in advance as possible.
- 3.2.3 We have taken the consultation responses into account and noted the potential impact during school hours of a 14:00 time for runway alternation. We also

⁴ Respite research | Heathrow (<https://www.heathrow.com/company/local-community/noise/making-heathrow-quieter/respites-research>)

considered additional feedback from NATS⁵ that 14:00 as a time for runway alternation would clash with shift changeovers at both our airport and at London Terminal Control at Swanwick. Those factors have influenced our decision to not propose 14:00 in this consultation.

- 3.2.4 The **2019 AEC consultation report** summarises the responses by theme and sets out how we have considered and taken account of the feedback when reviewing and developing our proposals.

3.3 Runway alternation considerations

- 3.3.1 We are considering a range of options which would provide predictable respite through runway alternation, having regard to the feedback from consultation and engagement. This section sets out the considerations that underpin our runway alternation options presented for consultation.

- 3.3.2 The runway alternation patterns we are considering were built from four main components:

- **Runway mode allocation** means how a runway is allocated to be used for landings or departures. If it is used for both landings and departures, we call this 'mixed mode'.
For example, the new third runway might be allocated to a mixed mode (labelled 'M'), the centre runway for arrivals (labelled 'L' for landings) and the southern runway departures (labelled 'D'): running north to south we would call this mode 'MLD'.
The middle runway cannot be used for mixed mode for safety reasons, leaving four operationally viable mode allocations: MLD, MDL, LDM, DLM.
- **The sequence** in which the runway mode allocation will cycle between the three runways. The mode allocation will cycle through at pre-set intervals to provide respite for those communities closest to the airport.
- **The duration** for which a particular runway mode allocation is in place.
- **The time** of day (or point in a week) when the runway mode allocation changes over to the next in the sequence.

3.4 Runway alternation options

Mode allocations and sequence

- 3.4.1 **Figure 3.1** and **Figure 3.2** below set out the four possible mode allocations referred to above, in both westerly and easterly operations, and the local communities at each runway end. We seek to provide reflective alternation, which would ensure the same communities are provided with respite, regardless of the direction of operation during core operational hours (06:00–23:00). This will need further assessment and work with NATS to ensure this is safe and operationally deliverable.

⁵ NATS is the UK's air navigation service provider and provides air traffic control services at Heathrow and for the wider UK Airspace.

Figure 3.1: Runway mode allocations

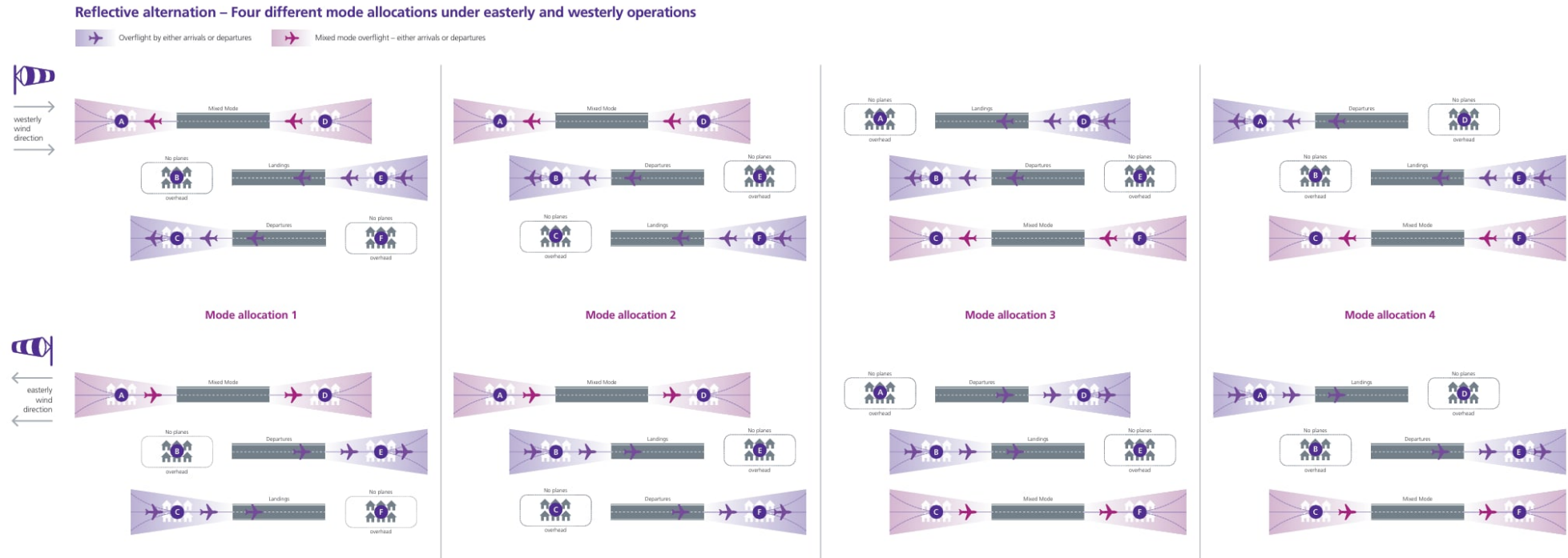
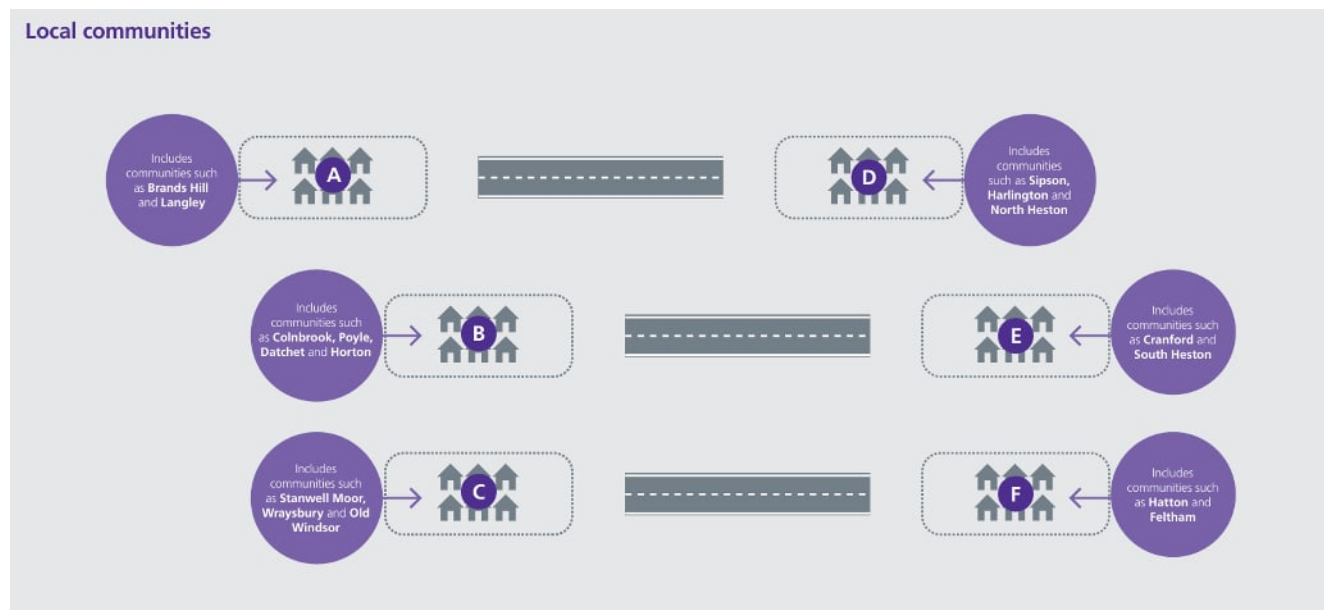


Figure 3.2: Local communities at each runway end



- 3.4.2 Our current thinking is that we could cycle through mode allocations in a daily runway alternation pattern that will repeat sequences every four days. So, on Day Five we would start again as on Day One.
- 3.4.3 We are considering two options for the timing of runway alternation, overnight only and 15:00 and overnight (see **3.4.10 – 3.4.15** for an explanation of these timings). See **Appendix B** for visual representation of this pattern.
- 3.4.4 **Table 3.1** and **Table 3.2** below are examples of how we could move through mode allocations over the four-day sequence using these timings, and the associated overflight and respite for local communities. **Sections 5.8** and **5.9** explain further how we propose to operate early arrivals (05:15–06:00) and restricted recovery (23:00–00:00). It is not expected that the restricted recovery period will be utilised every night. The restricted recovery period allows late running aircraft to use the runways but there are no flights scheduled during this period. This means communities may experience respite from 23:00 if the restricted recovery period is not utilised.
- 3.4.5 The following key applies to all tables:

Key:	ARR – Arrivals	DEP – Departures	RES – Respite
	Pink – Early morning arrivals or restricted recovery period	Grey – Full scheduled operations	Purple – No overflight

3.4.6 If alternating runways overnight only, **Table 3.1** below is an example of how we could move through the mode allocations daily on both westerly and easterly operations:

Table 3.1: Runway mode allocation – alternating overnight only

Day	Mode allocation	Time period		Overflight and respite pattern across communities											
				A		B		C		D		E		F	
		Direction of operations		West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East
1	2	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP
			15:00 – 23:00	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	DEP
			23:30 – 00:00	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP
		No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES
2	1	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP	RES	RES
			15:00 – 23:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP	RES	RES
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES
			23:30 – 00:00	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES
		No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES
3	3	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP
			15:00 – 23:00	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES
			23:30 – 00:00	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES
		No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES
4	4	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP
			15:00 – 23:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES
			23:30 – 00:00	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES
		No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES

3.4.8 If alternating at 15:00 and overnight, **Table 3.2** below is an example of how we could move through the mode allocations to provide predictable respite on both westerly and easterly operations:

Table 3.2: Runway mode allocation – alternating at 15:00 and overnight

Day	Mode allocation	Time period		Overflight and respite pattern across communities												
				A		B		C		D		E		F		
Direction of operations				West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	
1	1	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	RES
	3		15:00 – 23:00	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES
			23:30 – 00:00	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES
	No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	
2	4	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP	RES
	1		15:00 – 23:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	RES
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	RES
			23:30 – 00:00	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES
	No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	
3	2	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES
	4		15:00 – 23:00	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	ARR	DEP	RES
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	RES
			23:30 – 00:00	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES
	No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	
4	3	Early morning arrivals	05:15 – 06:00	RES	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES
		Full scheduled operations	06:00 – 15:00	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES
	2		15:00 – 23:00	DEP	ARR	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES
		Restricted recovery period	23:00 – 23:30	RES	RES	DEP	ARR	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	ARR	DEP	RES
			23:30 – 00:00	RES	RES	DEP	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	DEP	RES
	No flights (exceptional circumstances only)	00:00 – 05:15	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	RES	

3.4.9 Further work on runway alternation and mode allocation changes will be required in collaboration with NATS. That work will consider feedback received as part of this consultation. We want to ensure that our proposals meet the requirements of the ANPS, responds to local priorities for predictable respite, and also works operationally for air traffic control and reduces any operational concerns to as low as reasonably practicable.

Timing of runway mode allocation changes

- 3.4.10 We are considering two options for the timing of runway alternation: at 15:00 as well as overnight, or only overnight. In considering what time we should alternate the runways, there are technical and operational requirements that we must take into account as we seek your feedback on this consultation.

Changing the pattern at 15:00 and overnight

- 3.4.11 Since our current runway alternation scheme changes at 15:00 and overnight, this proposal would mean no change to the time we alternate modes on our runways compared to current operations. Further work will be required to validate if we could alternate the mixed mode runway at 15:00 alongside the landing and departures runways, as this could introduce additional operational complexity. Alternating runways overnight would occur between the runways closing for the night and opening the next morning.
- 3.4.12 This proposal would mean local communities could expect a mixture of periods of predictable respite over the 4-day sequence. However, this proposal would mean we are not able to provide every local community a full day of respite during the four-day sequence.
- 3.4.13 Feedback from NATS air traffic controllers has indicated that alternation within the day would add additional complexity. This could result in additional airfield and airspace delay due to the time it would take to switch modes of each of the three runways. The output of this is likely to increase delay and reduce resilience in the airfield and airspace.

Changing the pattern overnight only

- 3.4.14 Based on the feedback from NATS air traffic controllers indicating that alternation within the day would add additional complexity and in addition to community feedback that proposed alternative respite patterns that provided longer periods of respite, we include an alternative option in this consultation where we only alternate runways overnight in between the runways closing for the night and opening the next morning. This would essentially mean that there is no alternation of the runway modes during the day.
- 3.4.15 This proposal would mean local communities could expect at least one full day of respite during the four-day sequence.
- 3.4.16 How these alternation patterns could work in practice is illustrated in the examples in **Table 3.1**, **Table 3.2** and **Appendix B**. What expansion could mean for the local communities most affected is also shown in the In Your Area documents produced as part of this consultation.
- 3.4.17 We remain committed to publishing runway alternation schedules, as we do today.

Duration of runway mode allocations

- 3.4.18 We propose that the runways alternate daily at either 15:00 and overnight or overnight only.
- 3.4.19 We propose no more than two mode changes per day to ensure deliverability. This could, however, mean that some communities do not receive daytime respite every day. However, the pattern of daytime respite would change throughout the sequence. While the distribution of respite varies from day to day, all communities receive daytime respite during the overall cycle.
- 3.4.20 Feedback from the Airspace and Future Runway Operations Consultation (January 2019) showed that communities strongly value having respite every day. While we have taken this feedback into account, we also need to ensure the airport can operate safely and efficiently, align with airspace requirements, and meet the capacity targets set out in the ANPS. As a result, we have sought to balance community preferences with these operational needs.
- 3.4.21 How this would work in practice is detailed in **Table 3.1** and **Table 3.2** above and the graphics in **Appendix B** to this document.

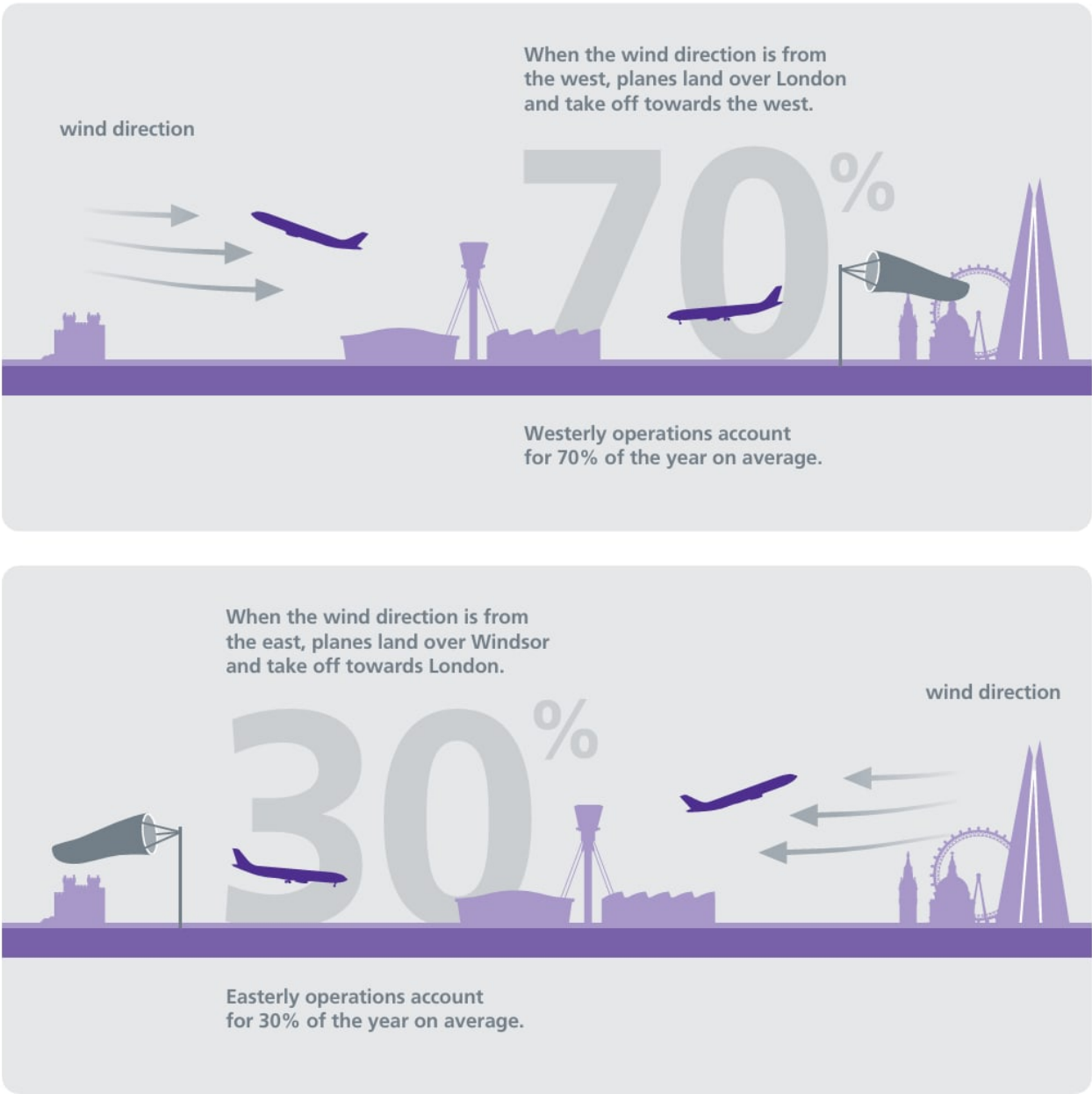
4. Directional preference

4.1 Current operations

- 4.1.1 To maximise lift for take-off and slow down arriving aircraft, arriving and departing aircraft typically fly into the wind. If the wind direction is from the west, one runway is used for aircraft departing towards the west and the other is used for aircraft arriving from the east. If the wind direction is from the east, then the reverse applies.
- 4.1.2 When winds are light (below five knots – about six miles per hour) aircraft can potentially take off or land in either direction. Currently we operate with a ‘westerly preference’, explained below, when winds meet this criterion.
- 4.1.3 The wind naturally favours westerly operations about half the time and easterly operations about 30% of the time. During the remaining 20% of the time, when winds are light and either direction could potentially⁶ be used, the airport operates in a westerly direction (westerly preference). This means that, overall, aircraft use the westerly direction about 70% of the time and the easterly direction about 30% of the time.
- 4.1.4 The direction of operations and whether aircraft are arriving or departing over certain communities directly influences respite and frequency of overflight. Being able to manage this more proactively and take advantage of the lighter winds will deliver greater opportunities for noise mitigation.

⁶ Winds at altitude in the vicinity of Heathrow may prohibit operating in one direction or the other even if ground level winds are light.

Figure 4.1: Summary of time spent in easterly and westerly operations



4.2 Consultation and feedback

- 4.2.1 In the June 2019 Consultation we asked for feedback on our proposed approach to directional preference, including whether we should continue with the existing westerly preference or move towards a managed preference approach. This followed the January 2019 Airspace and Future Operations Consultation, where we sought views on whether, as part of our mitigation proposals, we should investigate operating procedures that could share aircraft noise more equitably between easterly and westerly operations.
- 4.2.2 The **2019 AEC consultation report** summarises the responses by theme and sets out how we have considered and taken account of the feedback when reviewing and developing our proposals.

4.3 Overlap with London City Airport

- 4.3.1 In our Airspace and Future Operations Consultation (January 2019) we described an issue that has been raised by communities in the east of London where London City Airport and Heathrow flight paths overlap in certain combinations of runway use at each airport.
- 4.3.2 The issue occurs when there is a light easterly wind: London City Airport will select easterly operations (the aircraft come in via the Thames Estuary route to the south of the airfield and then turn right to align with their easterly runway, usually in the vicinity of Vauxhall) and, due to the westerly preference, we will select westerly operations (landing over London towards the west).
- 4.3.3 Our thoughts were that this could be managed using a managed preference, in which we could decide to adopt easterly operations instead of always applying a westerly preference. Further analysis and development work has shown, however, that managed preference is unlikely to be an effective tool to resolve this issue.
- 4.3.4 London City Airport has to take into account a very steep approach angle and a relatively short runway and for safety reasons it does not operate a directional preference – instead aircraft land into the wind whenever possible. This means London City Airport changes runways far more frequently than Heathrow and may not be able to provide much notice to us of the time of change.
- 4.3.5 In these situations, there is very limited opportunity to safely coordinate and implement a change in runway direction to provide respite for affected communities. Any runway change requires airspace to be reconfigured, which temporarily reduces Heathrow's capacity. Because wind direction can change frequently, and London City Airport may also need to change its runway direction in response, it can be difficult to be confident that the change would deliver a meaningful or lasting period of respite before conditions require operations to change again.

- 4.3.6 We have therefore suggested that in partnership with the UK Airspace Design Service and London City Airport, we will work together to develop proposals that, where possible, complement and seek to address concerns through future route and airspace design.
- 4.3.7 We have sought to take full account of all the issues raised as we consider our preferred proposals.

4.4 Our preferred proposal for directional preference

- 4.4.1 Based on community feedback and to reduce the times where we operate long, uninterrupted periods in a single operating direction, we believe that a managed preference may be beneficial and our proposals have not changed since 2019 in this regard. This would allow us to use the direction of operations as a tool, within the wider package of noise management measures, to achieve our noise objective. In principle, there must be benefit in being able to interrupt long periods where the current automatic westerly preference prevents full respite being delivered to some communities. However, it will be necessary to develop some clear rules or guidelines around how a managed preference might operate.
- 4.4.2 To clarify, the ability to exercise a managed preference relates only to roughly 20% of the time where wind speeds are typically below five knots, which may allow for aircraft to use the runways in either direction.
- 4.4.3 The ability to operate with a managed preference will be new to us and will therefore need to be developed to ensure it is operationally safe, but also fair and equitable to all local communities. It would only apply to roughly 20% of the time and only reduce the potential to operate long periods of time where we operate in a single direction. How it will be used operationally will be the subject of further engagement with stakeholders and will be worked up over time.

5. Night flights

5.1 Why night flights exist

- 5.1.1 Night flights are flights that take place during the night period, which is defined by the Government as 23:00–07:00. There is no formal ban on night flights at Heathrow, but government has placed restrictions on them since the 1960s.
- 5.1.2 Night flights are important for the United Kingdom's (UK's) global connectivity, freight and onward travel. They also form an important part of airport operations around the world. The time differences in an interconnected global transport system mean that it is difficult to avoid night flights. The relationship between flight durations and time zones means that early morning arrivals at Heathrow are particularly suited to serving flights from much of China, Southeast Asia and South Asia. The early arrivals allow a full day's business in the UK and enable the overnight freight dispatch of time-sensitive goods such as pharmaceuticals and fresh produce. Early arrivals also maximise the timing opportunities for those passengers making onward flight connections from London. Transferring passengers arriving on early flights play an important role in maintaining the range and frequency of destinations served by Heathrow.
- 5.1.3 Late evening and early morning flights are also very important for freight, which is often carried in the belly hold of passenger aircraft, and which in turn supports the viability of connections to long haul routes such as East Asia, the Far and Middle East, and North America. Independent studies have shown that night flights at Heathrow make a significant contribution to the economy and support the UK's long-term economic prosperity⁷.
- 5.1.4 However, we know that night flights are particularly sensitive for local communities. Research shows that exposure to noise at night from sources such as road traffic, railways and aircraft can affect health and quality of life through interrupted sleep. The Government's Overarching Aviation Noise Policy Statement⁸ outlines its approach to managing aviation noise while recognising the economic importance and consumer benefits of night flights.
- 5.1.5 The Government has restricted the use of night flights since the 1960s at Heathrow, applying some of the strongest restrictions on night flights for any hub airport in Europe. We are continuously working with the airlines to reduce and mitigate noise, and we strive to operate well within the limits set by the Government, rather than

⁷ Systra, 2017, Economic impacts of night flights: research study (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82a96bed915d74e3402ed2/economic-impacts-of-night-flights-research-study.pdf>); York Aviation, 2021, The Economic Impact of Night Flying in the UK – Docslib.org (<https://docslib.org/doc/12317326/the-economic-impact-of-night-flying-in-the-uk>)

⁸ Overarching aviation noise policy – GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/aviation-noise-policy-statement/overarching-aviation-noise-policy>)

simply meet them. Over recent years we have increased the number of nights without late-running flights from 144 in 2023 to 207 in 2025.

- 5.1.6 As part of our expansion proposals, we are proposing additional measures to further manage the effects of our night-time operations. These are described later in this section.

5.2 Airports National Policy Statement requirements

- 5.2.1 The Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) sets out the Government's expectation that with expansion there should be a six-and-a-half-hour ban on scheduled night flights between the hours of 23:00 and 07:00.

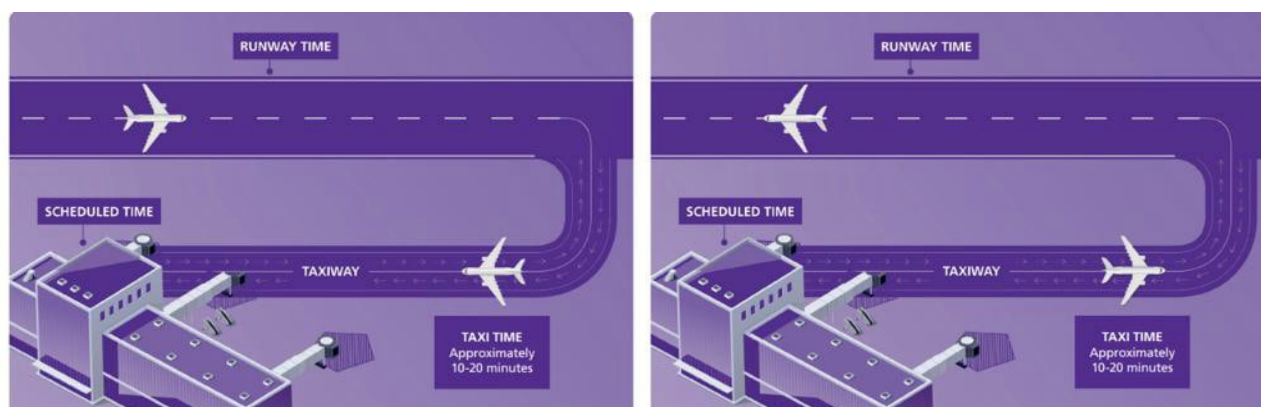
“The Government also expects a ban on scheduled night flights for a period of six and a half hours, between the hours of 11pm and 7am, to be implemented. The rules around its operation, including the exact timings of such a ban, should be defined in consultation with local communities and relevant stakeholders, in line with EU Regulation 598/2014. In addition, outside the hours of a ban, the Government expects the applicant to make particular efforts to incentivise the use of the quietest aircraft at night.” (ANPS paragraph 5.62).
- 5.2.2 We support the Government’s expectation of a six-and-a-half-hour scheduled night flight ban and we have evaluated options for the ban in line with EU Regulation 598/2014, which adopts the International Civil Aviation Organisation’s ‘Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management’⁹. We undertook consultation on options for the scheduled night flight ban in 2018 and 2019, and consultation feedback has helped to define the preferred proposal presented later in this section.
- 5.2.3 The Government recently concluded its consultation on proposed amendments to the 2018 ANPS. The final, amended, version will be known as the Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS). The Government is now considering consultation feedback and in due course will take account of the results of Parliament’s scrutiny of the proposed amendments. The final HENPS is expected to be published by the end of 2026, if approved by Parliament.
- 5.2.4 In preparing our consultation materials, we have reviewed the proposed amendments to the ANPS and considered the potential implications for our preferred scheme and accompanying assessments. However, current policy remains the starting point for the consideration of expansion until the amendments to the ANPS have been finalised and the amended version published as the HENPS. Once the HENPS is effective, we will engage with relevant stakeholders on any policy amendments as part of our ongoing programme of pre-application engagement. We will also consider if additional targeted consultation is necessary.

⁹ Regulation (EU) No 598/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on the establishment of rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at Union airports within a Balanced Approach.

5.3 Scheduled vs runway time

- 5.3.1 There is a difference between the scheduled time (the time shown on arrival and departure boards) and the time planes arrive or depart from the runway. Using arrivals as an example:
- The runway time is the time the plane touches down on the runway.
 - The scheduled time is the time that the plane is scheduled to reach the airport stand (when the plane stops at the terminal gate and passengers leave the aircraft).
- 5.3.2 Scheduled times at the terminal gate are used to plan operations. There are many factors, such as weather or passengers arriving late to the terminal gate, that can influence the exact time that an aircraft lands or takes off from the runway. In establishing restrictions for night flights, both scheduled and runway times are important.
- 5.3.3 The scheduled time is important for enabling operations to be planned in and around the night period and in relation to delivering the policy expectation in the ANPS for a ban on scheduled night flights of six and a half hours. However, runway time needs to be considered in relation to other restrictions and impacts during the night period, such as considering the time that late-running aircraft can depart the runway after their scheduled time.
- 5.3.4 Today, we assume there is approximately 15 minutes (on average¹⁰) between a plane touching down on the runway and it arriving at the airport stand (although this will vary between flights and by time of the day).
- 5.3.5 It is the same for departures, the scheduled time is the time the plane will push back from the gate, but the time the plane takes off from the runway (the 'runway time') will be approximately 15 minutes later (on average).

Figure 5.1: The difference between schedule time and runway time for arrivals (left) and departures (right)



¹⁰ Note that an average of 15 minutes between scheduled and runway times is assumed for the purpose of summarising our proposals. In practice, there is a range of different taxi times depending on the distance between the terminal and assigned runway. Taxi times generally vary from five minutes to 35 minutes.

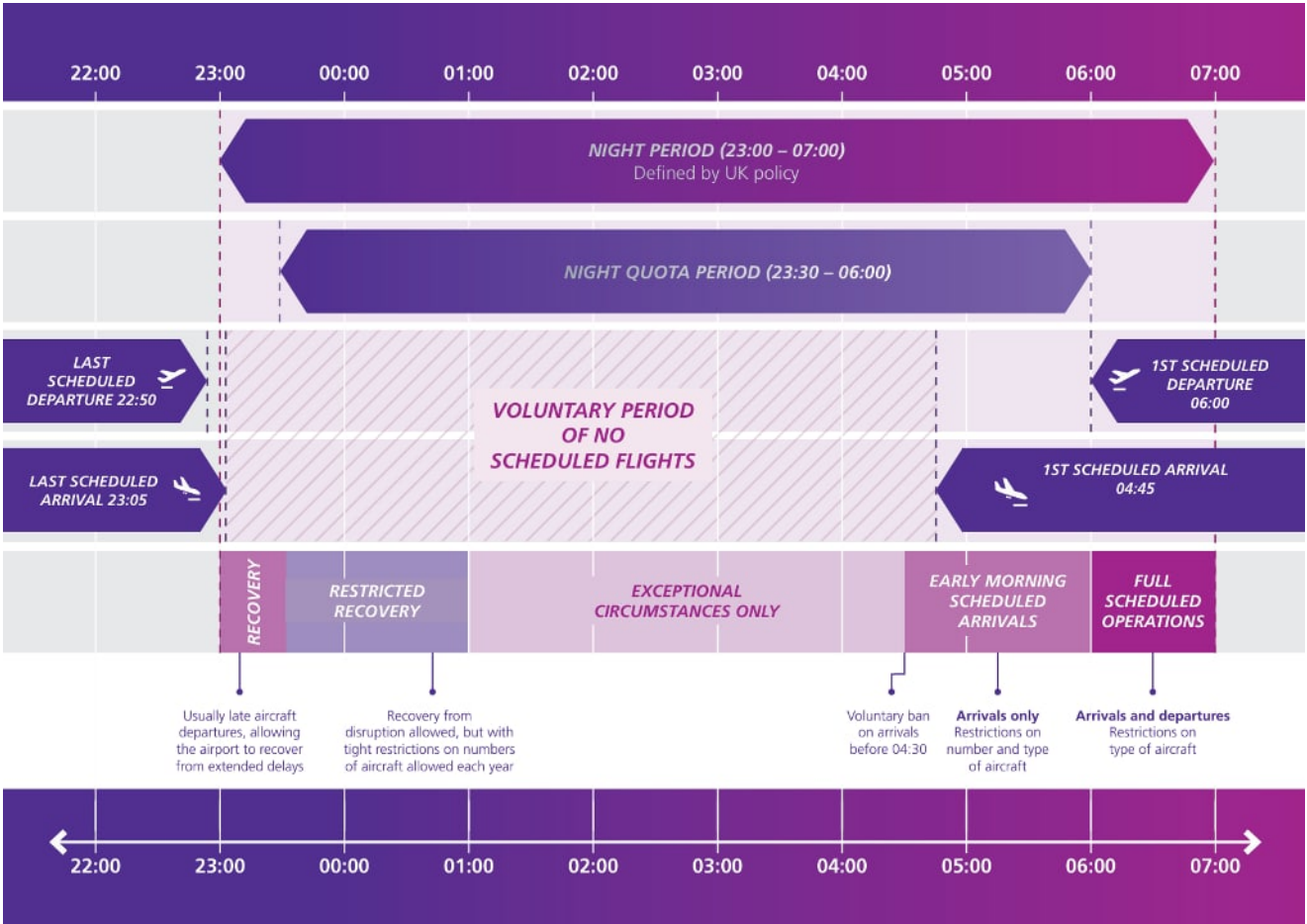
- 5.3.6 Scheduled times are the times used by the airport, airlines and passengers. In practice, taxi times to the airport stand from the runway for arrivals (and to the runway from the airport stand for departures) vary significantly. It is therefore important that the night flight ban is based on scheduled times since a ban based on runway times would introduce significant complexity to airport and airline planning and would result in under-utilisation of the runways to allow for uncertainty in taxi times.

5.4 Current operations

- 5.4.1 We currently apply a combination of operating restrictions set by government and voluntary measures to control noise from aircraft operations during the night period. The operating restrictions set by government apply to all major London airports (Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted) and set movement limits as well as a 'quota count' (QC) system. The QC system classifies all aircraft according to noise standards and assigns them a number of points. The noisier the aircraft type, the higher the number of points. If a plane lands or takes off during the night quota period (23:30–06:00), its points count towards a seasonal limit¹¹. Only aircraft below a specific QC are allowed to operate during the night quota period.
- 5.4.2 The measures in place to control noise during the night period today are illustrated below (**Figure 5.2**).

¹¹ Heathrow is currently limited to 5,800 night flights a year during the night quota period (23:30–06:00).

Figure 5.2: Current night flying arrangements



5.4.3 The different phases of the night flying regime are explained in **Table 5.1** below.

Table 5.1: Our night operations by time period

Time period	Current operations
23:00–23:30	Recovery period: This is the period when the last scheduled departures leave the runway and the airport schedule can recover from any delays that have built up over the course of the day. This period is not subject to movement restrictions, but it falls within the night period and no operations are scheduled to leave the gate at this time.
23:30–01:00	Restricted recovery period: This is the period when the airport can continue to recover from any delays that have built up over the course of the day or any aircraft technical issues, if needed. The night quota period (23:30–06:00) restricts the type and number of aircraft that can operate in this time. If a flight needs to leave after 23:30, the airline must request permission and explain the reason for the delay. There is no guarantee that an aircraft will be allowed to operate during this period, even if there are quota and movements still available.
01:00–04:30	Exceptional circumstances only: This period will not typically have any night operations. We operate a voluntary ban on night flights at this time but have the discretion to allow flights in exceptional circumstances. There is also a government dispensation regime which means certain flights do not count towards the limits in the night quota period, such as in emergencies or during recovery from periods of prolonged disruption.
04:30–06:00	Early morning scheduled operations: This is the beginning of the operational day. The first aircraft begin to arrive on the runway from 04:30, with the first scheduled arrival reaching the airport stand at 04:45. There may be up to 20 aircraft scheduled to arrive during this period on any one day, with an average of 15 per day. This period still falls within the night quota period, so the number and type of aircraft are tightly controlled.
06:00–07:00	Full scheduled operations, with restrictions on the type of aircraft that can operate: During this period the airport moves into a full schedule of arrival and departures. It is not within the night quota period so there are no limits on the number of aircraft.
07:00–23:00	Full scheduled operations.

Night movements

5.4.4 Sometimes planes need to operate in the night period when they have not been scheduled to do so. There are a number of reasons for this such as delays that have built up during the day or a technical fault with an aircraft. There is always a delicate balance to be struck as to whether a flight should be allowed at night, considering the effects on local communities, passengers and the airline network. Having a recovery period allows us to reduce the potential for aircraft to be diverted to other airports as

well as the knock-on effects to the airline network and to our passengers, who may be required to stay overnight until the next available flight.

- 5.4.5 We operate a voluntary ban between 01:00–04:30 and flights are only allowed to operate during this period if there is disruption, an emergency or passenger hardship. These flights are known as dispensed flights. These are not subject to the night quota restrictions. There are specific reasons for dispensed flights given under the Civil Aviation Act 1982 and set out in government guidance¹², for example immediate danger to life or health, or diversions from other airports due to low visibility.
- 5.4.6 We are required to report regularly to the Government and the Council for the Independent Scrutiny of Heathrow Airport on our compliance with night noise restrictions. We produce an annual report with data on night flights and write to the Government twice a year setting out the reasons for any dispensed flights. Both the report and letter are published on our website¹³.

Reductions in night noise over time

- 5.4.7 Aircraft have progressively become quieter over time as new technologies develop. The costs associated with airlines replacing their fleet are significant, and incentives to continue this investment are necessary to ensure Heathrow continues to attract the quietest aircraft.
- 5.4.8 The night quota system is designed to discourage the use of noisier, older planes and encourage the use of quieter, newer planes. No plane with a very high score (the oldest and noisiest) is allowed to take off or land during the night quota period.
- 5.4.9 We will continue to encourage the use of the quietest aircraft at night through a new, additional QC limit between 06:00–07:00 and the regular review of all QC limits, including those that already apply between 23:00–06:00. A reduction in QC will either lead to a reduction in movements of the same aircraft types or the adoption of quieter variants to enable the same number or additional movements to be allowed.
- 5.4.10 The effectiveness of this approach has been illustrated by our progress in reducing night noise since the early 1990s. Over that period Heathrow has operated within the same night movements limits, whilst the QC limits have been reduced regularly. The same number of aircraft movements has been possible due to significant reductions in the average QC of the aircraft operating. The positive impacts of this have been shown through significant reductions in the night quota period contours over time.
- 5.4.11 We also use other ways to incentivise the use of quieter aircraft. Our charging structure offers reduced charges for the quietest aircraft types to operate at the airport and higher charges for noisier ones. In addition, aircraft that run into the night quota period are charged five times more to encourage punctuality, and any aircraft that need to operate between midnight and 04:30 are charged eight times more. We regularly review this structure to maintain the right incentives. We can and do

¹² Night flight dispensations - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/night-flight-dispensations/night-flight-dispensations>)

¹³ Reports | Heathrow (<https://www.heathrow.com/company/local-community/noise/data/reports>)

financially penalise airlines who breach noise requirements imposed by government. The funds this has created have been used for community, environmental and noise management projects for local schools and community groups.

- 5.4.12 Through these measures, together with collaboration with key airlines, we have been able to drive a reduction in the number of late running aircraft and in the number of dispensations over recent years.

5.5 Previous consultation feedback

- 5.5.1 At the Airspace and Future Operations Consultation in January 2019, we asked whether we should:
- Schedule flights from 05:30 using one runway, which is an earlier start but, by only using one runway, fewer people would be overflowed.
 - Schedule flights from 05:45 using two runways, which is a slightly later start but means more people would be overflowed.
- 5.5.2 A majority of those who expressed their view preferred the earlier 05:30 start using one runway. We agreed that this produces a better result and therefore took this forward in the timings of our proposed ban on scheduled night flights and in our proposals for runway alternation.
- 5.5.3 In the Airport Expansion Consultation (AEC) in June 2019 we presented and explained our preferred proposal for the length and timings of a ban on scheduled night flights. Our consultation materials also described the alternative options we had considered.
- 5.5.4 The proposal presented was a ban on scheduled night flights from 23:00–05:30, using only one runway for the early morning arrivals. We stated that this would provide each community with at least seven hours' respite between 22:00–07:00.
- 5.5.5 At the AEC we asked:
- “Please tell us what you think of our preferred proposal for a ban on scheduled night flights, and/or whether you would prefer an alternative proposal.”
- 5.5.6 The **2019 AEC consultation report** summarises the responses by theme and sets out how we have considered and taken account of the feedback when reviewing and developing our proposals.
- 5.5.7 Based on consultation feedback and further work, we have:
- Set out the night flight proposals clearly, with graphics and tables that help consultees to understand what is being proposed for each time period,
 - Further assessed the options for the timing of a scheduled night flight ban, and
 - Clearly indicated how our preferred scheduled night flight ban proposal would impact the times at which aircraft would be on the runway.

5.6 Evaluation process

- 5.6.1 During 2018–2019 we evaluated eight different night ban durations over 13 different timing configurations. We assessed the economic and environmental effects of the different options, and considered impacts and consequences for communities, airlines, passengers, airport operations and the environment.
- 5.6.2 Noise management at airports where a noise problem has been identified is subject to the concept of the ICAO Balanced Approach. EU Regulation 598/2014, which adopts the Balanced Approach, also lays down a procedure for the adoption of noise-related operating restrictions, in particular a requirement for prior consultation and evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of proposals.
- 5.6.3 We considered the consultation feedback alongside the previous evaluation work when confirming our proposals for night flights. We will continue to undertake engagement with relevant stakeholders as we consider feedback from this consultation and further assess and refine our proposals.

5.7 Preferred ban proposal

- 5.7.1 Our view is that a six-and-a-half-hour ban should not begin before 23:00 or end after 06:00 because of the following constraints:
 - The night period in the UK is set by the Government and is between 23:00–07:00.
 - A ban on scheduled operations after 06:00 would have significant economic implications and would significantly impact on our ability to compete with other European hub airports. Crucially it would not allow us to meet the capacity requirements set out in the ANPS. Equally this time period is important for both arriving and departing passengers whether travelling for business or leisure.
- 5.7.2 Based on analysis of consultation responses and further evaluation of the options and impacts, **we are retaining our proposal for a six-and-a-half-hour ban on scheduled night flights between 23:00 and 05:30**. Together with the use of just one runway for early morning arrivals between 05:30 and 06:00, this will provide each local community with at least seven hours' respite between 22:00–07:00.
- 5.7.3 The introduction of this ban on scheduled night flights will mean that no arrivals or departures will be scheduled after 23:00. The latest time for a scheduled arrival on the runway would therefore be approximately 22:45 (to allow an average of 15 minutes for the aircraft to reach the gate) and the latest time for a scheduled departure on the runway would be approximately 23:15 (15 minutes after it pushes back from the gate).
- 5.7.4 A ban on scheduled night flights is different to a full airport closure: aircraft could still operate after this time, but only if there was a specific reason, such as a need to use the 'recovery period' or if they have been dispensed by government.

- 5.7.5 The proposed ban on scheduled night flights has been designed alongside other elements of our proposals to provide a package of measures. This package balances the need for provision of respite for overflowed communities with the operational and economic requirements of our operation.

5.8 Changes to the recovery period

- 5.8.1 Our current 'recovery periods' allow late running planes to use the runways up to 01:00 and sometimes later. With expansion, we propose to limit the recovery period so that it stops at midnight. We recognise that this could be challenging for airlines. Equally, however, we know that providing greater certainty around when aircraft will and won't be overhead and extending periods of predictable respite are of high importance for our local communities.
- 5.8.2 In addition to the changes to the recovery period, we propose that we will no longer have any discretion to allow delayed aircraft to arrive or depart after the recovery period. This will mean that we have extended to at least five hours and 15 minutes the period in which aircraft will only be allowed to operate if they have been dispensed by government. These proposed changes will reduce the extent to which delays are able to extend later into the night, while allowing a degree of flexibility to support airlines and passengers in times of disruption.
- 5.8.3 With three runways, we are considering runway alternation patterns that could extend periods of respite for communities at the runway ends when affected by night operations following late-running flights. This could provide some communities with respite during the early part of the following day.

5.9 Early morning operations

- 5.9.1 As explained in **Section 5.1**, early morning arrivals are very valuable to the UK in terms of the connections and freight they allow the airport to service. As such, we are dedicated to managing noise during this period so that the UK may continue to benefit from Heathrow operating at these times.
- 5.9.2 Our proposal is to only use one runway for the early morning arrivals that are scheduled from 05:30 when the scheduled night flight ban ends. An arrival scheduled for 05:30 will land on the runway approximately 15 minutes earlier, at around 05:15.
- 5.9.3 There would be no departures scheduled before 06:00 and the other two runways will not become operational until this time. Scheduled departures would only begin from 06:00 and would not take off from the runway until after this time. A second arrival runway would be available from 06:00.
- 5.9.4 The use of one runway for early morning arrivals will mean that fewer people are overflowed at this time of the day. For those who are overflowed by the early morning arrivals on any given day, the alternation pattern will ensure that the runway which is used in the early morning will not be the one which was used in the later part of the

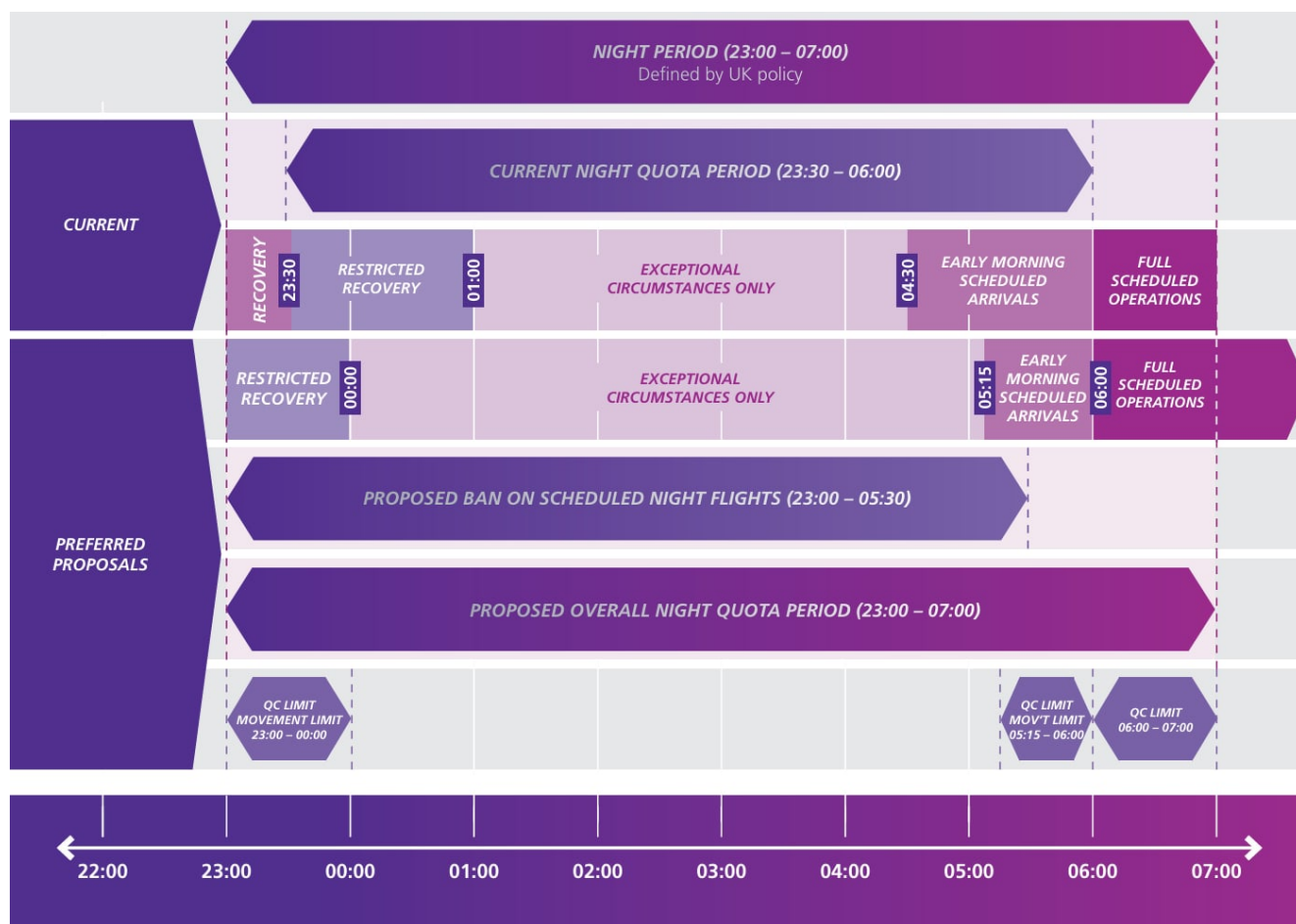
previous day. This will provide communities at the runway ends with a longer period of respite from noise. This approach is intended to minimise the total number of people affected by noise at the most sensitive times of day.

- 5.9.5 Similar to the recovery period, we intend to use QC and movement limits to further control noise in the early morning period. We do not propose a movement limit in the 06:00-07:00 period because this hour is important for delivering growth through expansion. Instead, we will focus on incentivising quieter aircraft during 06:00-07:00 via a new, separate, QC limit. Our current proposal does not allow additional movements before 06:00. This approach reflects the Government policy of sharing the benefits of new technology between industry and communities.

5.10 Summary of the preferred night flights proposal

- 5.10.1 **Figure 5.3** below sets out our preferred proposals for managing the effects of night flights, compared to the existing night operations. Our proposals combine a scheduled night flight ban with more stringent recovery period arrangements, a reduction in the number of people affected by early morning arrivals and measures to encourage quieter aircraft. The combination of measures is intended to deliver longer continuous periods of respite from noise and reduced disturbance for communities in the late evening and early morning.

Figure 5.3: Current and proposed night flight arrangements



5.10.2 **Table 5.2** below sets out each element of our proposed package of proposals for night flights, compared with today's night flight regime.

Table 5.2: Current and proposed night operations by time period

Time period (scheduled time)	Current operations	Our proposals
23:00–23:30	Recovery period: The last scheduled departures leave the runway. The airport can recover from any delays that have built up over the course of the day. No movement limits or QC limits.	Restricted recovery period: We propose to have a restricted recovery period for arrivals and departures, with movement and QC limits.
23:30–00:00	Restricted recovery period:	Restricted recovery period:

Time period (scheduled time)	Current operations	Our proposals
	The airport can continue to recover from any delays that have built up over the day, including any aircraft technical issues.	We propose a restricted recovery period for departures only, with movement and QC limits.
00:00–01:00	A movement limit and QC limit restrict the type and number of aircraft that can operate. Airlines must request permission to operate, with reasons for the delay.	No flights (exceptional circumstances only) We propose that only aircraft meeting the Government's dispensation regime will be allowed to arrive or depart.
01:00–04:30	No flights (exceptional circumstances only) This period will not typically have any night operations. We operate a voluntary ban on night flights over this time but have the discretion to allow flights in exceptional circumstances. There is also a government dispensation regime taking certain flights outside the requirements of the night quota regime.	We will no longer have any discretion (quota) to allow aircraft not meeting the dispensation rules to operate during this period.
04:30–05:30	Early morning arrivals:	Early morning arrivals:
05:30–06:00	The operational day begins with the first aircraft touching down on the runway after 04:30. Up to 20 aircraft are scheduled to arrive during this period. Still within the Night Quota Period (NQP), so the number and type of aircraft are tightly controlled.	We propose that the operational day will begin with arrivals to one runway only. Separate movement and QC limits would be established for this period.
06:00–07:00	Full scheduled operations: Full schedule of arrivals and departures. No limits on the number or type of aircraft in this time period.	Full scheduled operations but with new QC limit: Arrivals and departures would operate, but within a new QC limit. The QC limit would be regularly reviewed and increases in movements would only be possible through environmental improvements in aircraft.
07:00–23:00		Full scheduled operations: Full schedule of arrivals and departures. No limits on the number or type of aircraft in this time period.

5.10.3 In summary the overall package of night flight proposals will seek to:

- Provide extended periods of overnight respite compared with today.
- Vary effects between communities on different days to ensure that early morning, evening and night impacts and respite are shared.
- Minimise the number of communities experiencing early morning operations (pre-06:00) on any particular day.
- Ensure that communities close to runway ends experiencing any night operations (for example delayed aircraft using the recovery period) will not experience any early morning operations the following day.
- Extend the offer of noise insulation to those most affected by night flight operations. For more information please see our **Noise Insulation Policy** document.
- Encourage the use of quieter aircraft.
- Allow us to deliver the number of additional flights required in the ANPS.
- Retain Heathrow's economically important flights in the early morning, to maintain Heathrow's global hub status and support business travel, freight activity and onward travel.

6. Noise management and mitigation

6.1 Overview

- 6.1.1 We are determined to remain at the forefront of international efforts to address the challenge of aircraft noise, while continuing to safeguard the connectivity and economic benefits that the airport provides.
- 6.1.2 Our noise management framework is based on the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Balanced Approach and the requirements of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) as well as complying with EU Regulation 598/2014.
- 6.1.3 The operational measures described in this document have been informed by these policy requirements and their objectives.

6.2 ICAO Balanced Approach and EU 598

- 6.2.1 We operate in the context of international, European and UK policy and regulatory frameworks.
- 6.2.2 The Government's overarching aviation noise policy is to balance the economic and consumer benefits of aviation against their social and health implications in line with the ICAO's Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management, given legal effect in the UK through EU Regulation 598/2014 (assimilated into UK law).
- 6.2.3 The Balanced Approach is the process set out in guidance issued by ICAO (ICAO Doc 9829) for aircraft noise management at airports. EU Regulation 598/2014 gives legal effect to the Balanced Approach, and it also sets out a procedure for the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at airports. The Secretary of State for Transport is responsible for ensuring that the measures in the EU Regulation 598/2014 are carried out appropriately. The process requires that, where a 'noise problem' is identified, a noise abatement objective must be defined to address the problem. The various measures available to deliver the noise objective must then be assessed in a consistent way, with a view to identifying the most cost-effective option. The approach must explore the four principal approaches to noise management, namely:
 - Reduction at source (quieter aircraft).
 - Land-use planning and management.
 - Noise abatement operational procedures (optimising how aircraft are flown and the routes they follow to limit the noise impacts).
 - Operating restrictions (preventing certain noisier types of aircraft from flying at certain times or at any time).

- 6.2.4 The Balanced Approach therefore requires the Government to go through a process of assessment and evaluation before introducing any ‘operating restrictions’ such as movement caps, quotas or limits on operating hours. That evaluation must take account of a number of matters, including the cost effectiveness of any restrictions.

6.3 Noise objective

- 6.3.1 The proposed draft overarching Noise Abatement Objective which could apply to an expanded Heathrow is set out below, within the context of Heathrow’s sustainable growth:
- The impact of aviation noise must be mitigated as much as is practicable and realistic to do so, limiting, and where possible reducing, the total adverse impacts on health and quality of life from aviation noise including regular predictable breaks from scheduled flights for communities during the day and night.
 - This must balance the economic and consumer benefits of aviation against its social and health implications, in line with the International Civil Aviation Organisation’s Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management. This should take into account the local and national context of both passenger and freight operations and recognise the additional health impacts of night flights.
- 6.3.2 Further information on the noise objective and how it has been developed is set out in the **Environmentally managed growth topic paper**.

6.4 Noise envelope

- 6.4.1 A ‘noise envelope’ is being developed as the noise component of the **Environmentally managed growth topic paper**. A noise envelope is a framework/process that supports our growth with clear performance targets, tailored to local priorities and designed to share the benefits of future technological improvements and other measures to limit the impact of operations.

6.5 Noise mitigation

- 6.5.1 The operational proposals described in this document are not the only measures that will be used to manage aircraft noise. Consistent with the expectations set out in the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) (paragraphs 5.62 and 5.63 and repeated in paragraphs 5.47 and 5.48 of the draft HENPS), we will continue to explore and implement operational noise mitigation measures in line with best practice, working with the UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS), airlines, air navigation service providers and other partners where necessary to support their delivery. The additional operational measures currently under consideration are outlined below and are categorised according to the Balanced Approach described above. All such measures are subject to further assessment of their potential noise benefits,

operational impacts and feasibility, including ongoing work with UKADS and other relevant stakeholders.

Figure 6.1: Noise mitigation

Noise measures	Avoid	Reduce/minimise/mitigate	Quieter planes/Noise at source	Quieter procedures	Land use planning & mitigation	Restrictions
						
Displaced thresholds		✓			✓	
NW Runway separation & length		✓			✓	
Scheduled night flight ban		✓				✓
Noise Insulation Scheme	✓				✓	
Future fleet noise levels		✓	✓			
Landing gear procedures		✓		✓		
Approach gradient		✓		✓		
Continuous approach		✓		✓		
Continuous climb		✓		✓		
Runway alternation (day/night)		✓		✓		
Night flight controls		✓		✓		✓
Managed directional preference		✓		✓		
Quieter ground operations		✓	✓	✓		

Reduction at source (quieter aircraft)

- 6.5.2 We are investigating and evaluating options to incentivise the use of quieter aircraft.
- 6.5.3 In support of our goal to have the quietest aircraft practicable operating from our runways we have a long-established system of charging more for the older noisier variants of aircraft than their newer quieter counterparts.
- 6.5.4 This is based on ICAO noise certification standards (known as 'Chapters') and the margin by which a specific aircraft exceeds that standard.
- 6.5.5 We annually review the differential landing charges (the fees which apply to airlines using the airport) and track the percentage of our fleet meeting or exceeding the most recent standard (Chapter 14) which was introduced in 2017. We were the first

airport to introduce charges in relation to Chapter 14 compliance. The noisiest aircraft permitted to operate at Heathrow are certified ICAO's Chapter 3 standard.

- 6.5.6 Based on our current landing charges, the highest charge is 60 times higher than the lowest. (More information can be found on our landing charges in our Conditions of Use document¹⁴).
- 6.5.7 In 2016 Chapter 3 aircraft represented 0.55% of air transport movements and in 2025 this reduced to 0.01%. From 2016 to 2026, we revised our noise charging rates so that the cost of landing a Chapter 3 aircraft has been increased from 10.5 to 60 times more expensive than the quietest Chapter 14 aircraft. We continue to work towards our stated target of zero Chapter 3 aircraft movements as set out in our Noise Action Plan.
- 6.5.8 We also set longer-term goals, to allow the airlines sufficient timelines to manage fleet purchasing decisions. For example, our current Noise Action Plan Key Action 2¹⁵ aims to incentivise adoption of new technology with the aim of accelerating the transition to a Chapter 4-free fleet using our runways.

Land-use planning and management

- 6.5.9 While we believe that the new runway is optimally located to limit overall noise impacts, we cannot control the extent to which population changes may occur over time as a result of new development in the vicinity of the airport.
- 6.5.10 With the opening of a new runway, close liaison will be necessary and we will encourage the local authorities to put policies in place to protect future as well as current communities.
- 6.5.11 For more information please see our **Noise Insulation Policy** document.

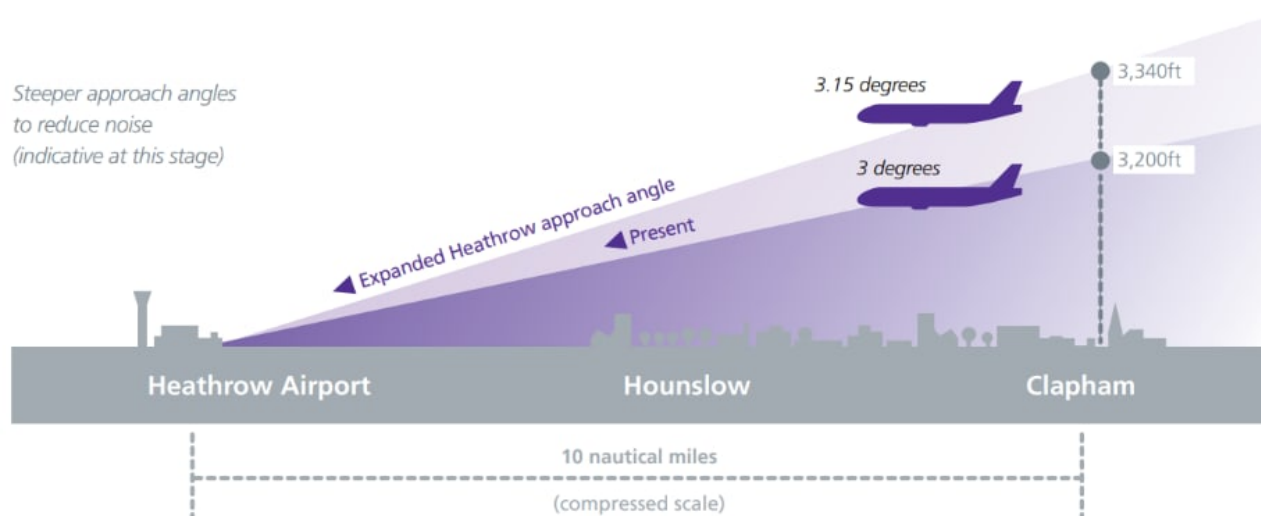
Designing for quieter operations

- 6.5.12 **Section 5** of this document explains how we have configured the proposed operational procedures to maximise the amount of respite provided to communities in the early morning, evening and night-time. In addition to this, there are a number of additional operational procedures that we are considering.
- 6.5.13 We aim, working with UKADS, to encourage the use of steeper approach gradients, so that aircraft on approach would follow a steeper descent than current procedures. This would mean aircraft are higher above sensitive locations reducing noise levels on the ground. An example of this is shown in **Figure 6.2** below.

¹⁴ <https://www.heathrow.com/company/partners-and-suppliers/conditions-of-use>

¹⁵ <https://www.heathrow.com/noise/making-heathrow-quieter/noise-action-plan>

Figure 6.2: Steeper approach angles to reduce noise (indicative at this stage)



- 6.5.14 The benefit of this approach could be applied not just to the new runway but could also be felt by communities affected by the existing runways.
- 6.5.15 In addition, a number of other measures are proposed, all of which are designed to limit impacts in accordance with our draft noise objective:
- Displaced thresholds are under consideration for all runways so that aircraft land further along the runway. This keeps planes higher for longer and therefore reduces noise levels on the ground. These reductions in noise are likely to be most noticeable for people living under the final approach paths to our existing runways.
 - Continuous Descent Operations (CDO): In our partnership with UKADS, we are seeking to secure CDO so that aircraft follow a continuous descent profile on approach to land. A continuous descent ensures that aircraft are kept as high as possible for as long as possible and generally requires less engine thrust to maintain than level flight, reducing noise levels on the ground. CDO means aircraft are higher above noise sensitive locations reducing noise levels on the ground.
 - Continuous Climb Operations (CCO): In our partnership with UKADS, we are also seeking to secure CCO, where aircraft would climb continuously following take-off to a higher altitude than today including improved routing to avoid holding stacks and therefore level flight at lower altitudes. We are seeking a minimum climb gradient of 5% compared to 4% today. As above, CCO means aircraft are higher above noise sensitive locations reducing noise levels on the ground.

- Improving the deployment of landing gear: Through influencing best practice, this reduces aircraft noise from arrivals at source and hence reduces noise experienced at ground level.

7. Early Growth

7.1 Context

- 7.1.1 As part of our proposals for Heathrow expansion, we would like to bring forward some of the benefits of expansion as soon as practical by making increased use of our existing runways before the new runway is completed. We call this ‘Early Growth’. In addition to seeking feedback through this consultation, we will consider undertaking additional targeted engagement on elements of our Early Growth proposals.
- 7.1.2 The work of the Airports Commission and subsequent analysis by Government highlighted that there are constraints on the United Kingdom’s (UK’s) existing airport capacity and that those constraints have historically and continue to cause adverse effects and will limit the UK’s potential for economic growth. The Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) identifies that constraints are restricting our ability to travel conveniently, preventing competition between airlines and causing increased fares at the same time as reducing domestic connectivity and eroding the UK’s hub status. In all these respects, the national interest is not being served, and the public interest is suffering. Consequently, the ANPS recognises:
- “The UK’s hub status is already being challenged by restricted connectivity. Hub airports at Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam have spare capacity and are able to attract new flights to growth markets in China and South America. These competitors have benefitted from the capacity constraints at Heathrow Airport and have seen faster growth over the past few years.”
- 7.1.3 The ANPS is clear that the consequences of not increasing airport capacity in the south-east would be detrimental to the UK economy and to the UK’s hub status. International connectivity would be restricted, fares are likely to rise further, while the lack of available slots makes it more difficult for new airlines to enter the market. Without expansion, capacity constraints would impose increasing costs on the rest of the economy over time, lowering economic output.
- 7.1.4 The figures set out in the draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS) also identifies the critical contribution of aviation to the UK economy; in 2023 the UK aviation sector generated around £23 billion of economic output and directly employed around 240,000 workers, supporting many more jobs indirectly.
- 7.1.5 Our operations are currently capped at 480,000 annual air transport movements (ATMs)¹⁶ by a condition imposed in the planning permission decision for Terminal 5 in 2001 (planning app ref number 47853/93/0246). Other than during COVID-19-related restrictions and recovery, we have been operating close to our capped capacity for many years and there is substantial built-up in demand from airlines to open new routes and/or reinforce services to existing domestic and international

¹⁶ An ATM is a single take-off or landing at an airport.

destinations. We want to deliver the benefits of these new connections as soon as practicable.

- 7.1.6 Estimates can be made of the economic benefits of Early Growth by extrapolating from the Government's own forecasts of economic benefits for expansion as a whole. The value of the direct benefits arising from an additional 25,000 movements is estimated at an additional £0.6 billion per annum based on the draft HENPS. In addition, indirect benefits would be achieved from the enhanced connectivity, foreign direct investment and the tourism that additional movements would generate. Based on government estimates through the draft HENPS, we have calculated a further annual benefit of £0.9 billion.
- 7.1.7 Other important benefits that would be brought forward include:
 - Enhanced connectivity for passengers, freight operators and for the UK.
 - Improved competition, greater consumer choice, more routes, and greater connectivity.
 - Direct business benefits in bringing forward Early Growth during the period before the runway opens.
- 7.1.8 In our previous expansion proposals put forward in 2019, we explained in our Early Growth document the testing we had done to consider how many additional ATMs we could deliver without affecting the airport's efficient operation, and without unacceptable environmental and community effects. That work confirmed we expected to be able to introduce up to 25,000 additional ATMs before the opening of the new runway. Our position on this remains unchanged and we are seeking to introduce the same number of additional ATMs as part of our proposals in this section.
- 7.1.9 Early Growth will bring economic and consumer benefits in the national and local interest as well as enhanced connectivity for us and the UK. We believe that the Early Growth scheme can support in the delivery of these benefits before the new runway is completed allowing capacity to be released for the benefit of passengers and businesses.
- 7.1.10 We would propose to implement Early Growth in phases, with the first phase starting around 12 months after the grant of the Development Consent Order (DCO) for Heathrow expansion, pending application approval, and with different levels of growth during peak and off-peak times of day, months and season.
- 7.1.11 The period from the grant of DCO through to the opening of the runway involves the heaviest capital investment in expansion. Early Growth could start after the DCO is granted to help mitigate the associated increase in the aeronautical charge of building the infrastructure for expansion. In the absence of Early Growth, consumers would be likely to bear the cost of higher aeronautical charges passed on by airlines. Conversely, the phased implementation of Early Growth from DCO consent would generate additional passengers, and this benefit would translate directly into helping

to meet our challenge to deliver expansion at close to current charges. Early Growth is an important component in delivering expansion in a way that is cost efficient and sustainable, minimising costs to airlines, passengers and freight owners in line with the ANPS.

7.2 Previous proposals

- 7.2.1 Previously in 2019 we consulted on introducing and using Independent Parallel Approaches (IPA), Wake Turbulence Re-categorisation (RECAT EU) and enhanced time-based separations (eTBS Pairwise) to enable Early Growth. Due to a combination of factors, including feedback received in 2019, we are not pursuing the separate airspace change proposal for IPA. We have already implemented RECAT EU and eTBS Pairwise over the course of the past five years with the benefits of this already being seen and delivered on a daily basis.
- 7.2.2 In the 2019 Consultation we asked the following question on our Early Growth proposals:
 “We plan to increase the number of arrivals and departures at Heathrow prior to the new runway opening, to respond to the urgent need for additional airport capacity. Please tell us what you think about our proposals for managing early growth?”
- 7.2.3 The **2019 AEC consultation report** summarises the responses by theme and sets out how we have considered and taken account of the feedback when reviewing and developing our proposals.

7.3 Our proposals for Early Growth

- 7.3.1 Analysis carried out has indicated that the delivery of up to 25,000 extra ATMs per year can be realised within the environmental policies of the ANPS. This analysis is included within the **Environmental Information Consultation Document (EICD)** on noise and air quality. We also aim to maintain the high level of operational performance.
- 7.3.2 Significant work has been carried out to assess the impact of 25,000 extra ATMs against a number of different scheduling options and scenarios to create a view as to how this could be achieved within our operations. Our work undertaken so far shows, in particular, that Early Growth at this scale can be accommodated with relatively limited incremental noise and air quality effects as shown in the EICD documents. In addition, conclusions from this assessment suggest that proposed enablers to deliver additional resilience in the form of Air Traffic Management efficiencies projects can minimise impacts on the airport’s operations so that we can maintain our commitments to service quality and resilience to passengers and airlines.
- 7.3.3 As outlined below, we are committed to delivering Early Growth, to bring forward some of the benefits of expansion within the agreed limits and thresholds set out in the EMG Framework for Noise

- 7.3.4 We will ensure no extra ATMs take place where they cannot be delivered within the EMG Framework's agreed limits and thresholds. Where mitigation is required, we will look to bring forward our Noise Insulation Policy to sit alongside Early Growth in addition to our existing mitigation schemes. These measures along with the other safeguards in place, detailed below, will ensure that Early Growth can be achieved without giving rise to an adverse impact on either the airport's performance or an unmitigated increase of aviation noise for overflowed communities.

7.4 Management of Early Growth period

Service ambitions

- 7.4.1 Alongside meeting the policy requirements of the ANPS, we intend to re-affirm our ambition to meet the current runway scheduling process, and to our Measures, Targets and Incentives (MTI) requirements (please see **Section 7.5** below). To ensure that these ambitions are met, it may be necessary to phase the implementation of Early Growth.
- 7.4.2 At present, it would not be appropriate to predefine a set level of growth each year because of the technical challenges of increasing capacity at an airport as busy as Heathrow.

Environment and community

- 7.4.3 In combination with our ambition to deliver service quality and resilience, we would establish a framework within which Early Growth can only proceed where its effects are demonstrably reduced to as low as practical. Our work carried out so far shows that Early Growth at our intended scale can be accommodated with relatively limited extra noise and air quality effects.
- 7.4.4 In addition, we will put in place appropriate measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of Early Growth on the environment and communities that are consistent with the policies of the ANPS.
- 7.4.5 As part of our work, we have examined which of those measures might be brought forward earlier to support the implementation of Early Growth, and our current thinking includes:
- To bring forward a ban on early morning arrivals being scheduled to arrive before 05:30 (which means no scheduled arrivals on the runway before 05:15, this would replace the current voluntary ban of scheduled arrivals before 04:30 on the runway).
 - That those properties exposed to the highest levels of noise due to Early Growth will be eligible for insulation measures as part of our proposed Noise Insulation Policy.

- The adverse noise impacts of Early Growth will be addressed through the EMG Framework for Noise.

7.4.6 Work is still ongoing to finalise how Early Growth is scheduled through the operational day. Further technical work will be undertaken on all options for control measures, alongside consideration of consultation feedback, prior to review and submission of the DCO.

7.5 How we will manage Early Growth operationally

- 7.5.1 As a regulated airport, we operate under licence conditions set by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). These require us to maintain high standards of performance and ensure that any growth in ATMs does not result in unacceptable impacts on operational resilience, service quality or delays.
- 7.5.2 We already have a comprehensive framework in place to support the efficient operation of the airport. This includes a requirement to maintain 'operational resilience', which means ensuring continuity of service, particularly during periods of disruption, in a timely, efficient and cost-effective way for those using the airport.
- 7.5.3 Our performance is monitored by the CAA through the MTI scheme, introduced in May 2023. This builds on previous regulatory approaches and focuses on delivering good outcomes for passengers, such as offering value for money, enabling predictable and reliable journeys, and ensuring people feel comfortable, secure and supported throughout their experience. Where performance falls below the required standard, we are required to return a proportion of charges to airlines.
- 7.5.4 Punctuality is a key part of this framework. It is defined as the proportion of flights departing within 15 minutes of their scheduled time. We set an annual base and stretch target for punctuality, which for 2026 are set at of 74% and 78% respectively of departures to be on time, with this target reviewed regularly to ensure it remains appropriately challenging.
- 7.5.5 We propose an ambition to use the existing seasonal capacity declaration approach and criteria when planning and implementing ATM growth, allowing airlines to be consulted on the process. This approach, together with the wider regulatory framework, has helped us improve resilience and reduce delays.
- 7.5.6 Looking ahead, if additional runway capacity is approved to support ATM growth, we will continue to prioritise resilience. Our ambition will be to meet the existing runway scheduling and delay criteria, introduce new capacity in a phased way to ensure effects can be monitored and where needed mitigated, and balance growth between peak and off-peak periods.

7.6 Slot allocation processes

- 7.6.1 A slot is a formal permission for an aircraft to arrive at or depart from an airport and use its ground infrastructure. Slots are held by airlines, typically in pairs (to reflect that an aircraft will take off at one airport and land at another) and are allocated in accordance with the Airports Slot Allocation (Amendment) (UK Exit) Regulations 2021 for the allocation of slots at community airports. The responsibility for implementing legislation is on the UK Government.
- 7.6.2 Under these rules, as a Level 3 airport, we must appoint a coordinator to allocate slots to airlines using or planning to use the airport. Airport Coordination Limited (ACL) carries out this role and is required to act in a neutral, transparent and non-discriminatory way, applying relevant parameters in the allocation of slots. Airlines make requests either to move slot times, change aircraft type or origin/destination or to acquire new slots.
- 7.6.3 It is this robust process that would be used to allocate additional capacity if Early Growth is consented through the DCO. The process is in place to protect the integrity of the airport and to ensure fairness in the distribution of slots to airlines.
- 7.6.4 We would make these slots available to ACL for them to be allocated to airlines under the slot regulations. Although Heathrow declares the capacity and its parameters, it is the role of ACL to allocate slots. The airline provides a route and aircraft type and requests ACL allocates slots; we are not able to influence the allocation process.

7.7 Early Growth next steps

- 7.7.1 In the previous sections we have explained how we aim to develop the detail of our proposals for Early Growth for inclusion in our DCO application. That process will involve further modelling, an in-depth environmental assessment, the development of any airfield infrastructure or technology improvements that may be necessary, and more detailed definition around our commitments to operational and environmental controls. To help us with that process, we are keen to receive your views on our current proposals.

8. Next steps

8.1 Next steps

- 8.1.1 You can find more information about what will happen next in **Chapter 8.0. Next steps** of the **Consultation Document**.

8.2 Have your say

- 8.2.1 You can find more information about how to provide feedback and engage with this consultation in **Chapter 8.2. Have your say** of the **Consultation Document**.

Appendix A DCO and airspace

It's helpful to understand some of the differences between the Development Consent Order (DCO) process and airspace design, and how flight paths and other airspace issues will be decided outside of the DCO.

For a third runway to be consented, constructed and become operational, two primary consents are required:

- A DCO is required under the Planning Act 2008 for the construction and operation of a new north-west runway at our airport and the additional ground-based infrastructure required for an expanded airport. The DCO application will be determined by the Secretary of State, primarily in accordance with the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) or its successor, having regard to other important and relevant considerations.
- A consent for an airspace change must be obtained from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the United Kingdom's (UK's) independent aviation regulator, by following the Airspace Change Process (known as CAP1616). Proposals for future airspace change (Airspace Change Proposals (ACPs)), in London will be sponsored by the UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) and be determined in accordance with requirements set out in CAP1616 and elsewhere¹⁷.

In principle, the DCO authorises the construction and operation of the new runway and other works comprising the expansion project, and it can impose controls and how those works are constructed and operated to ensure that the effects of the project are appropriately addressed. The airspace change process is responsible for the design and approval of flight paths and other components of airspace design.

As was the case in 2019 (when the Heathrow Expansion Consultation was published), the ANPS takes account of the differences in function and scope between the DCO process and CAP1616. For example, at paragraph 5.255 the ANPS states: "Additional consultations on issues such as airspace change, overseen by the Civil Aviation Authority, will take place outside of the planning process". The ANPS does not set the policy for airspace change.

CAP1616 is a rigorous and independent process, with strong requirements for engaging with and consulting affected stakeholders. Failure to meet those requirements properly may mean that the CAA refuses to allow an ACP to progress. An ACP must give considerable importance to the management of environmental impacts.

Government policy for airspace design in England and Wales is largely set out in the Air Navigation Guidance and the Civil Aviation (Air Navigation) Directions, both addressed to the CAA as the independent regulator. The CAA sets airspace requirements and process (for example in CAP1616) so that airspace changes meet Government policy.

¹⁷ The Secretary of State can decide to 'call-in' the ACP and to make a decision instead of the CAA where specified conditions are met.

A.1 The assessment approach to be taken in the DCO application

While the DCO process and CAP1616 are separate, the two processes interact. The DCO process requires an assessment of the ‘likely significant effects’ of the expansion project on the environment, including operational effects, and this necessitates consideration of the indicative flight paths emerging from the CAP1616 process.

While the DCO decision will not determine the airspace design, it may create requirements to be met through the airspace design, for example on the management of noise.

The ANPS gives guidance and policy on how the airspace assessment should be undertaken for the purpose of the DCO. The ANPS recognises that “precise flight designs can only be defined at a later stage after detailed airspace design has taken place” and states “the applicant’s assessment of aircraft noise should be undertaken in accordance with the developing indicative airspace design. This may involve the use of appropriate design parameters and scenarios based on indicative flight paths.”

Those design parameters, scenarios and indicative flight paths included in the DCO application may consequently be different from the final ACP designs put forward for determination by the CAA as part of the CAP1616 process. However, the DCO application will have satisfied the ANPS requirements if its assessment shows that the relevant policy requirements can be met.

A.2 UK Airspace Design Service

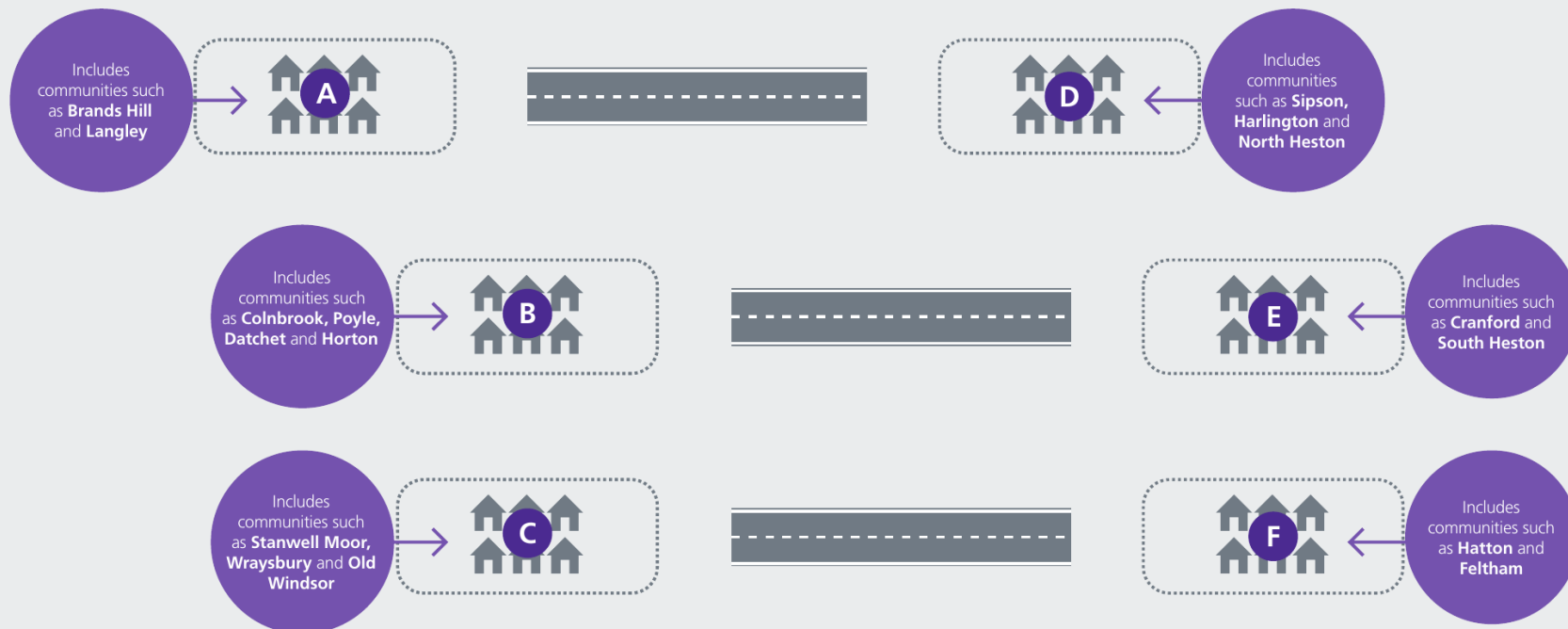
In 2019, Heathrow was responsible for developing and sponsoring the ACP, along with the relevant assessment and stakeholder engagement, needed to support expansion plans. The airspace changes required for a future Heathrow expansion will now be sponsored and coordinated by UKADS. Following a public consultation, the Government and CAA announced in June 2025 their intention to establish UKADS, which came into full effect May 2026. UKADS is a single, centralised service to design and coordinate future airspace changes.

It was also announced that NATS En Route Limited (NERL) would be asked to deliver UKADS. The initial scope will focus on designing and delivering airspace change for the south east of England as part of the UK’s Airspace Modernisation Strategy. In the longer-term the scope may be extended to include airspace change more widely within the UK.

As Heathrow is within the south east of England, the airspace changes required for expansion will be taken on by UKADS. UKADS will take the ACP through the CAA’s CAP1616 process, giving affected communities the opportunity to be consulted and make representations on the ACP. We will be a key partner in this process, working closely with UKADS and other stakeholders to help develop and deliver the airspace changes needed to support expansion Unless ‘called in’ by the Secretary of State, the CAA will determine the ACP in accordance with its statutory duty and other relevant factors under section 70 of the Transport Act 2000.

Appendix B How we propose to operate our runways in future

Local communities



Understanding the overflight and respite diagrams for local communities

The following diagrams show examples of the proposed future operations over a four day period. Once completed, the four day pattern then repeats.

We have designed our future runway alternation pattern so that regardless of the time that we conduct runway alternation – even when we change the direction that the aircraft fly in – the respite periods for each community remain the same during core operational hours (06:00 – 23:00). This is why the diagrams show a combined four day pattern for future operations which will be applicable regardless of whether we operate on easterly or westerly operations. This will offer the predictable respite that we know our communities value.

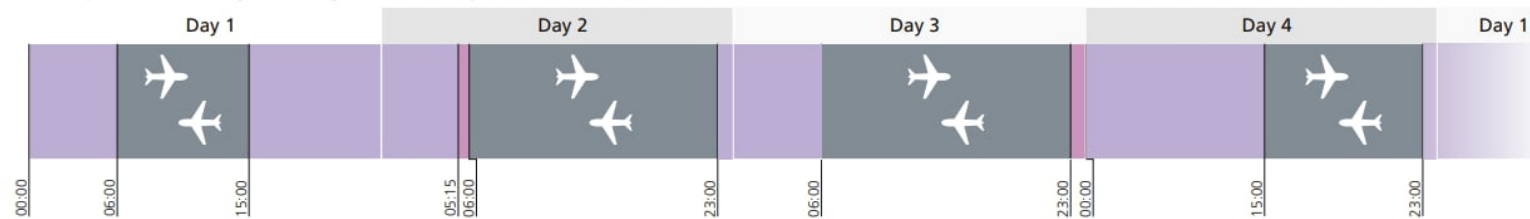
There are two future runway operations examples – one conducting runway alternation at 15:00 and overnight for all three runways and one conducting runway alternation overnight only for all three runways. All of the diagrams show a four day period of time beginning at midnight (00:00) on Day 1 and the time period during which communities can expect to be overflown. Periods of overflight by arrivals or departures are shown in grey, with planned respite shown as purple. The pink colour indicates that you may be overflown by early morning arrivals or aircraft operating into the recovery period.

Please see **Section 2.3** of this document for more information on current runway alternation and on ‘Easterly Alternation’.

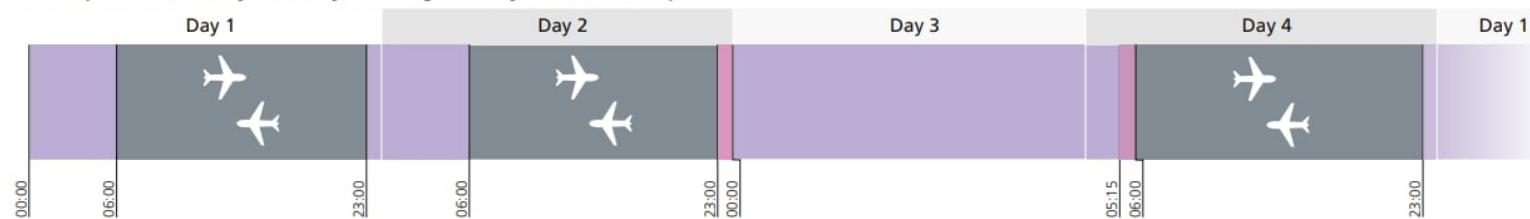
Overflight and respite for future operations examples:

Communities A – Brands Hill and Langley

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

Early morning arrivals or recovery period

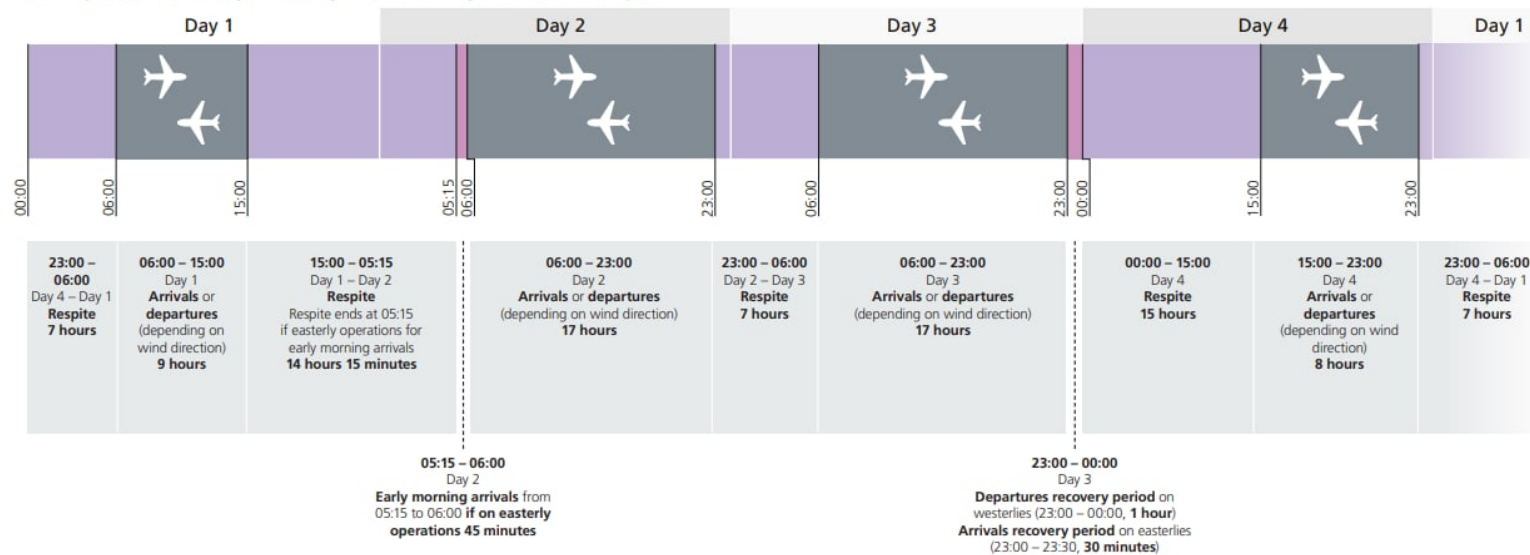
Planned overflight by arrivals or departures

Future
Runway
Operations
Example

Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

Communities A – Brands Hill and Langley

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

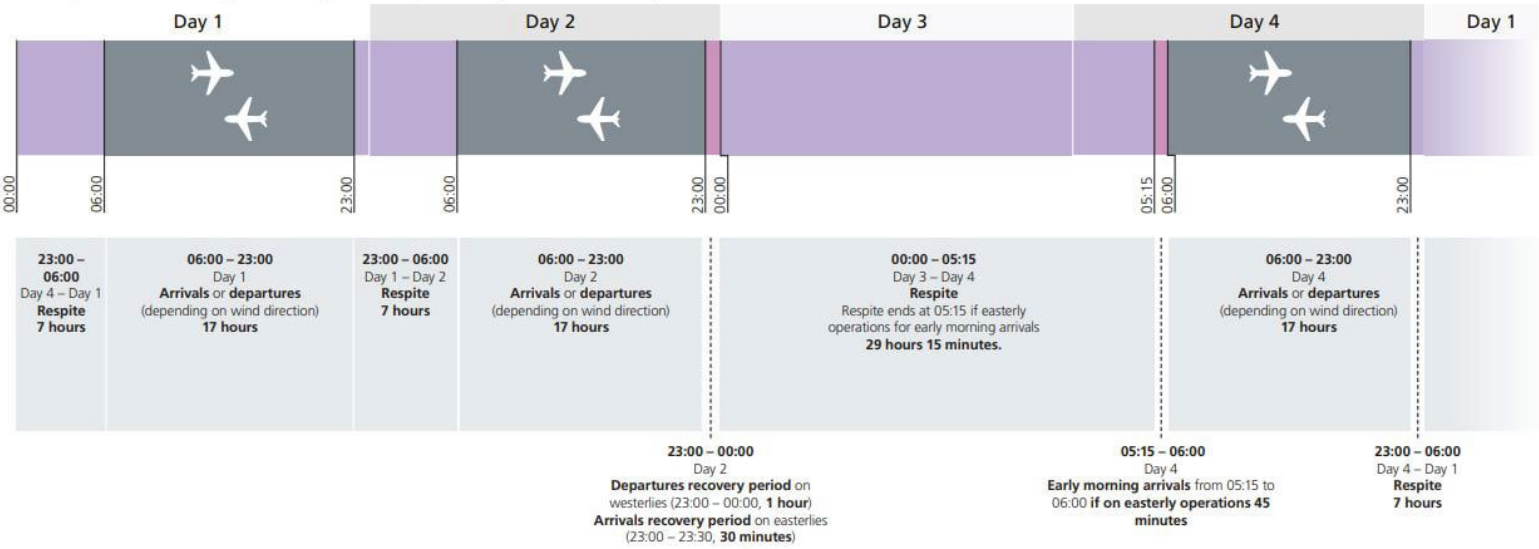
Early morning arrivals or recovery period

Planned overflight by arrivals or departures

Future
Runway
Operations
Example

Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:
Communities A – Brands Hill and Langley

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

- Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)
- Early morning arrivals or recovery period
- Planned overflight by arrivals or departures

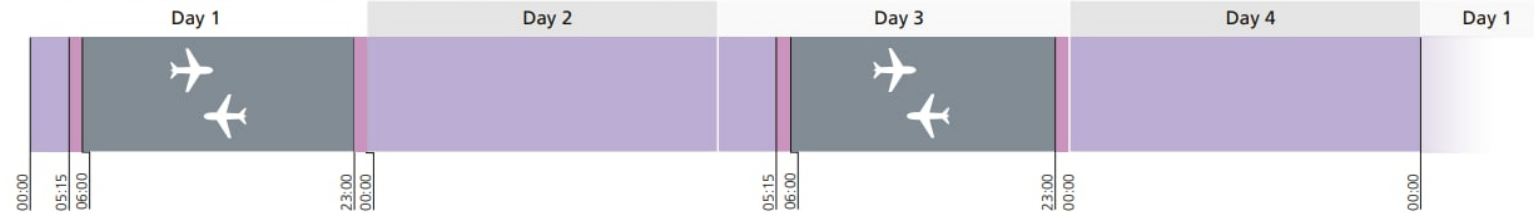


Overflight and respite for future operations examples:
Communities B – Colnbrook, Poyle, Datchet and Horton

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

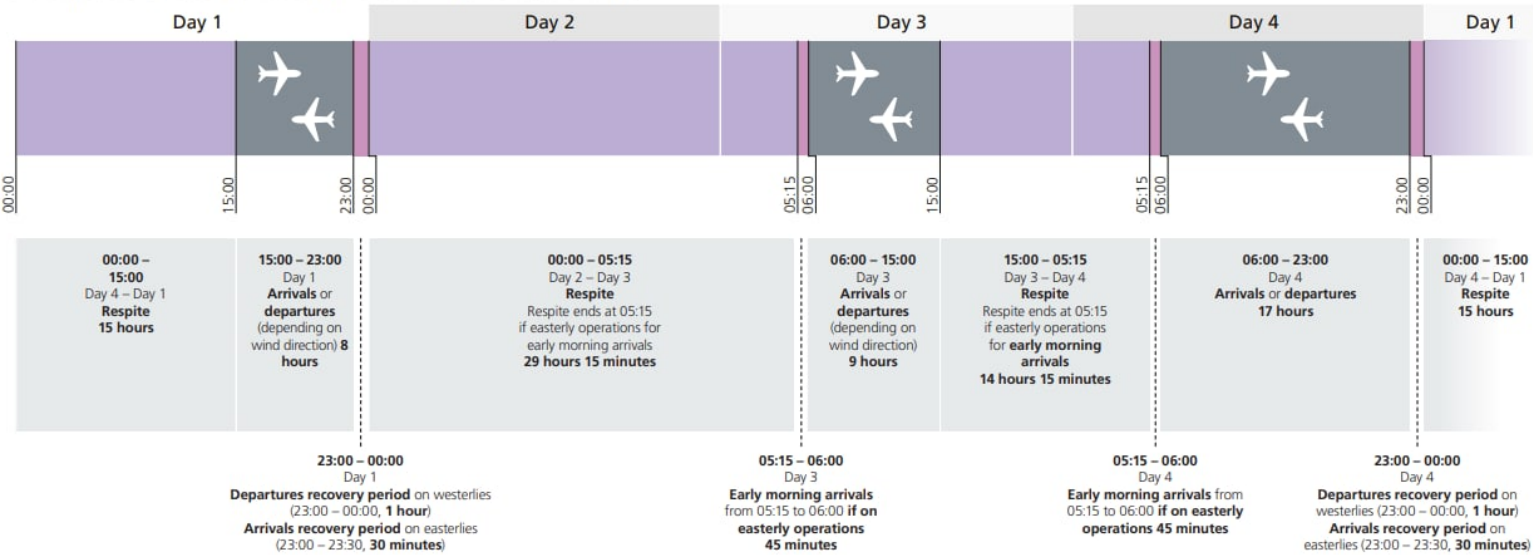
Early morning arrivals or recovery period

Planned overflight by arrivals or departures



Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:
Communities B – Colnbrook, Poyle, Datchet and Horton

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

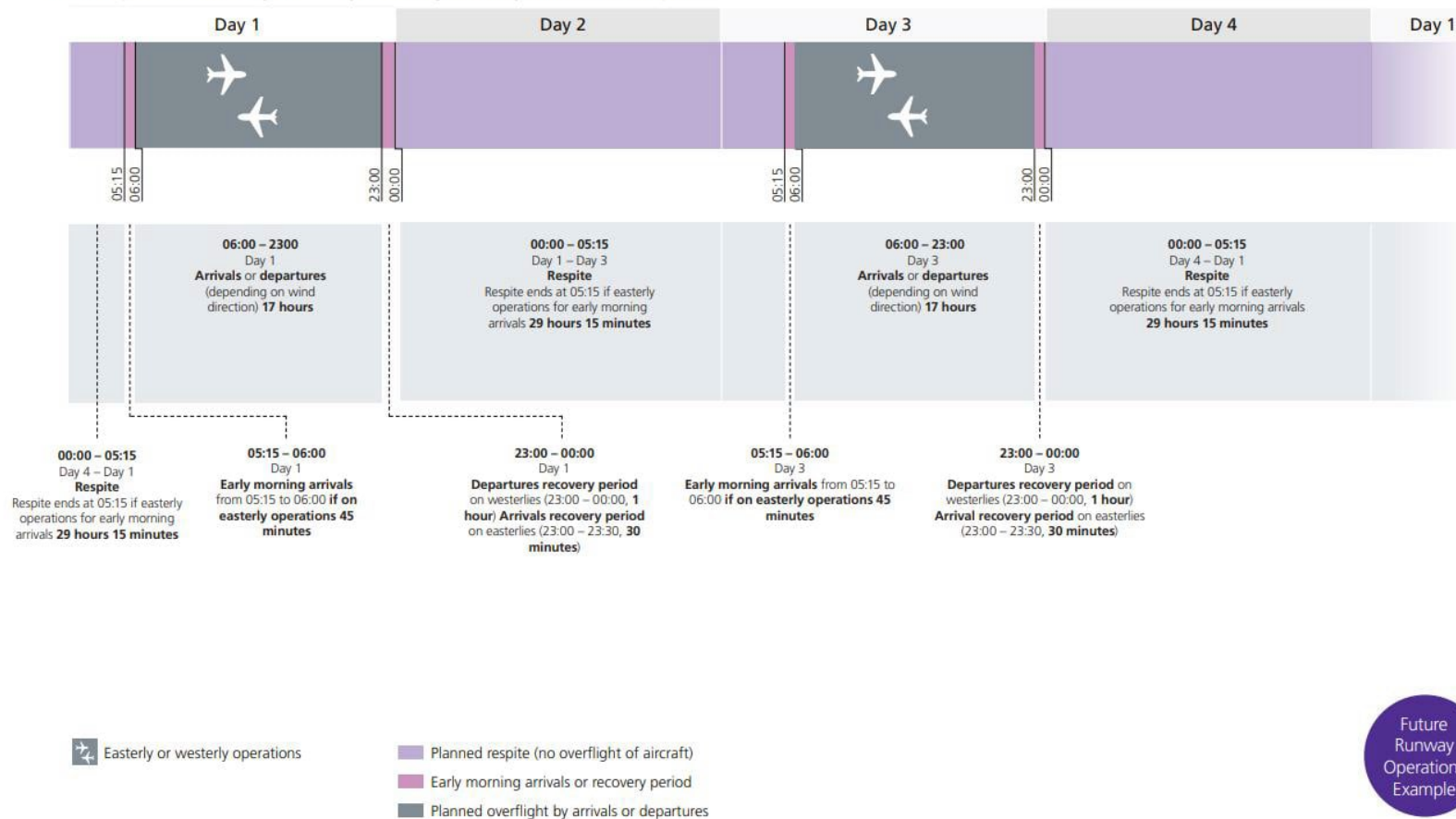
- Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)
- Early morning arrivals or recovery period
- Planned overflight by arrivals or departures



Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

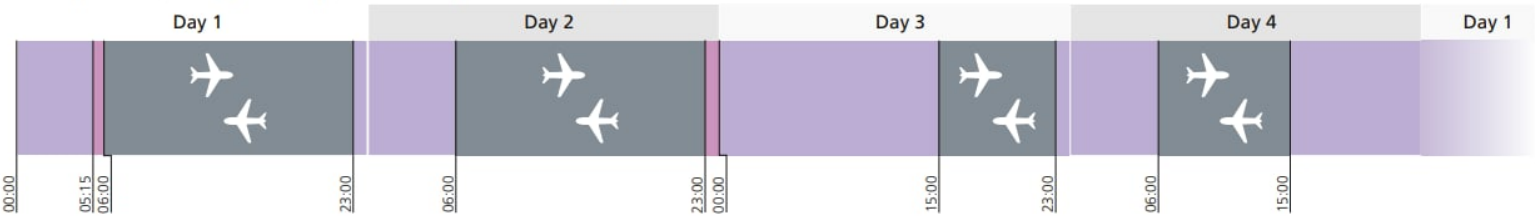
Communities B – Colnbrook, Poyle, Datchet and Horton

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example

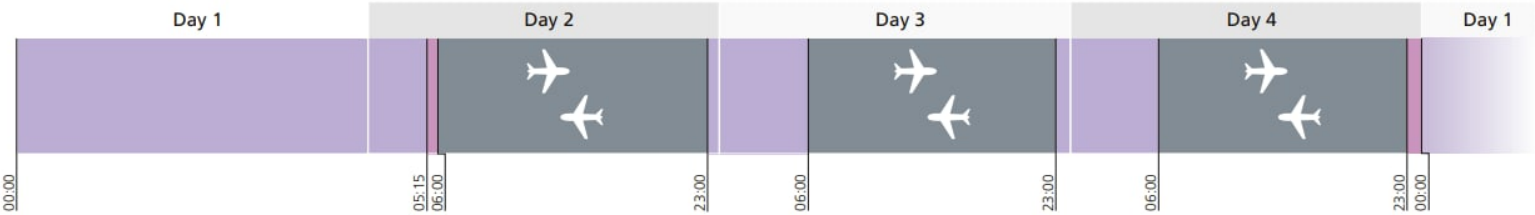


Overflight and respite for future operations examples:
Communities C – Stanwell Moor, Wraysbury and Old Windsor

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

Early morning arrivals or recovery period

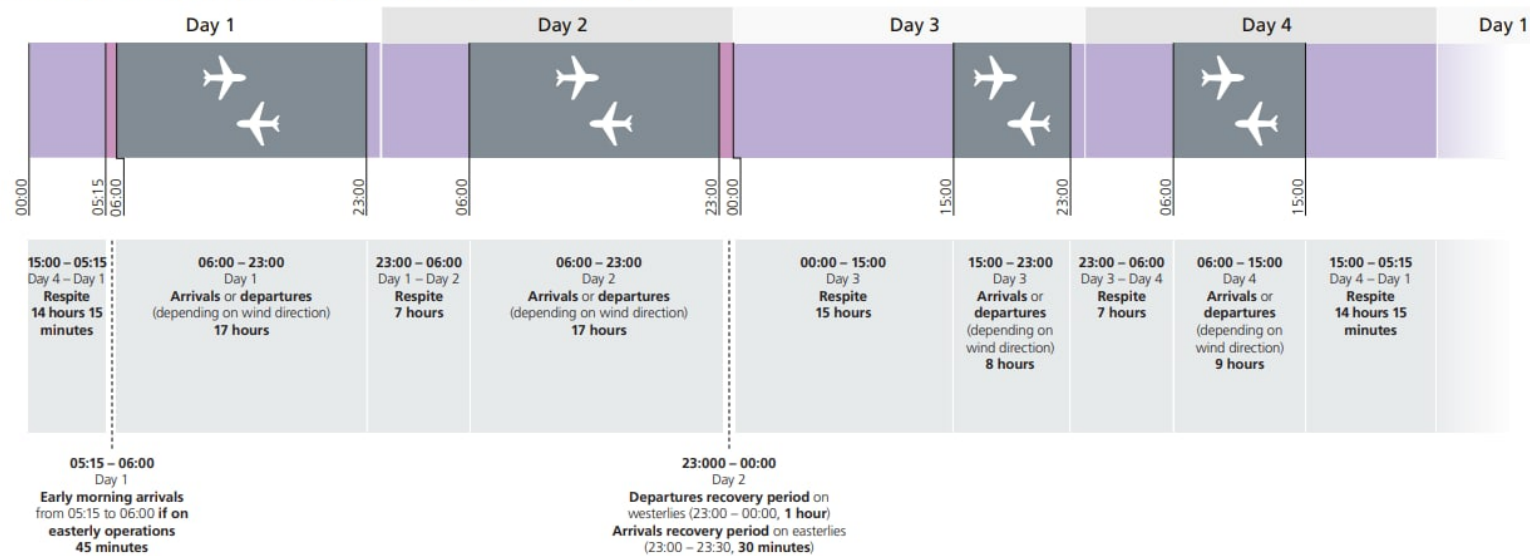
Planned overflight by arrivals or departures



Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

Communities C – Stanwell Moor, Wraysbury and Old Windsor

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

Early morning arrivals or recovery period

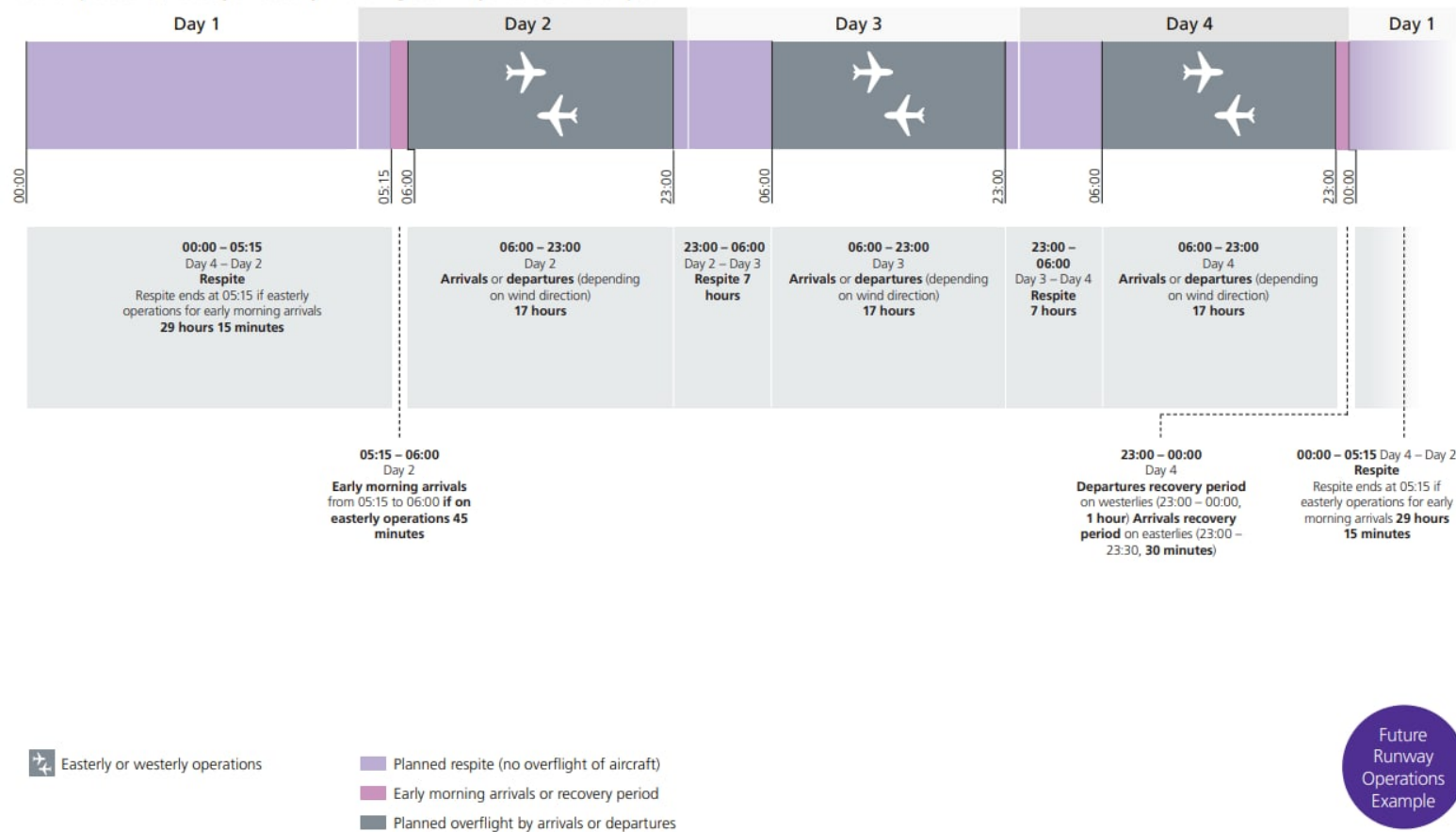
Planned overflight by arrivals or departures

Future
Runway
Operations
Example

Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

Communities C – Stanwell Moor, Wraysbury and Old Windsor

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example

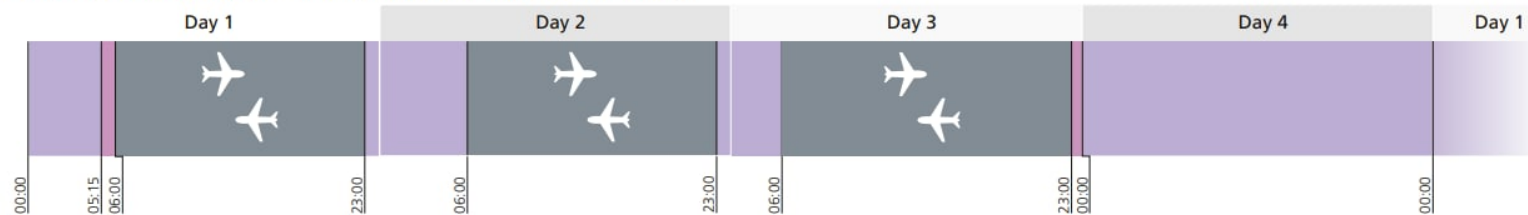


Overflight and respite for future operations examples:
Communities D – Sipson, Harlington and North Heston

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example

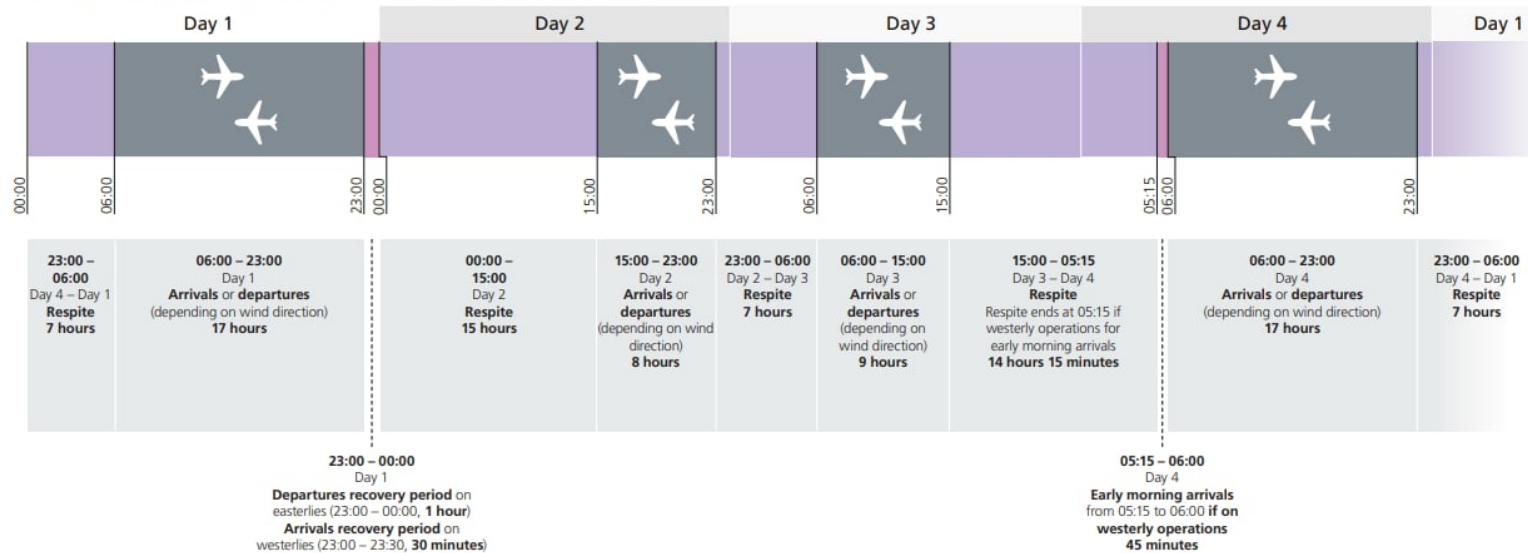


- Easterly or westerly operations
- Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)
- Early morning arrivals or recovery period
- Planned overflight by arrivals or departures

Future
Runway
Operations
Example

Future respite and overflight example, with explanation: Communities D – Sipson, Harlington and North Heston

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

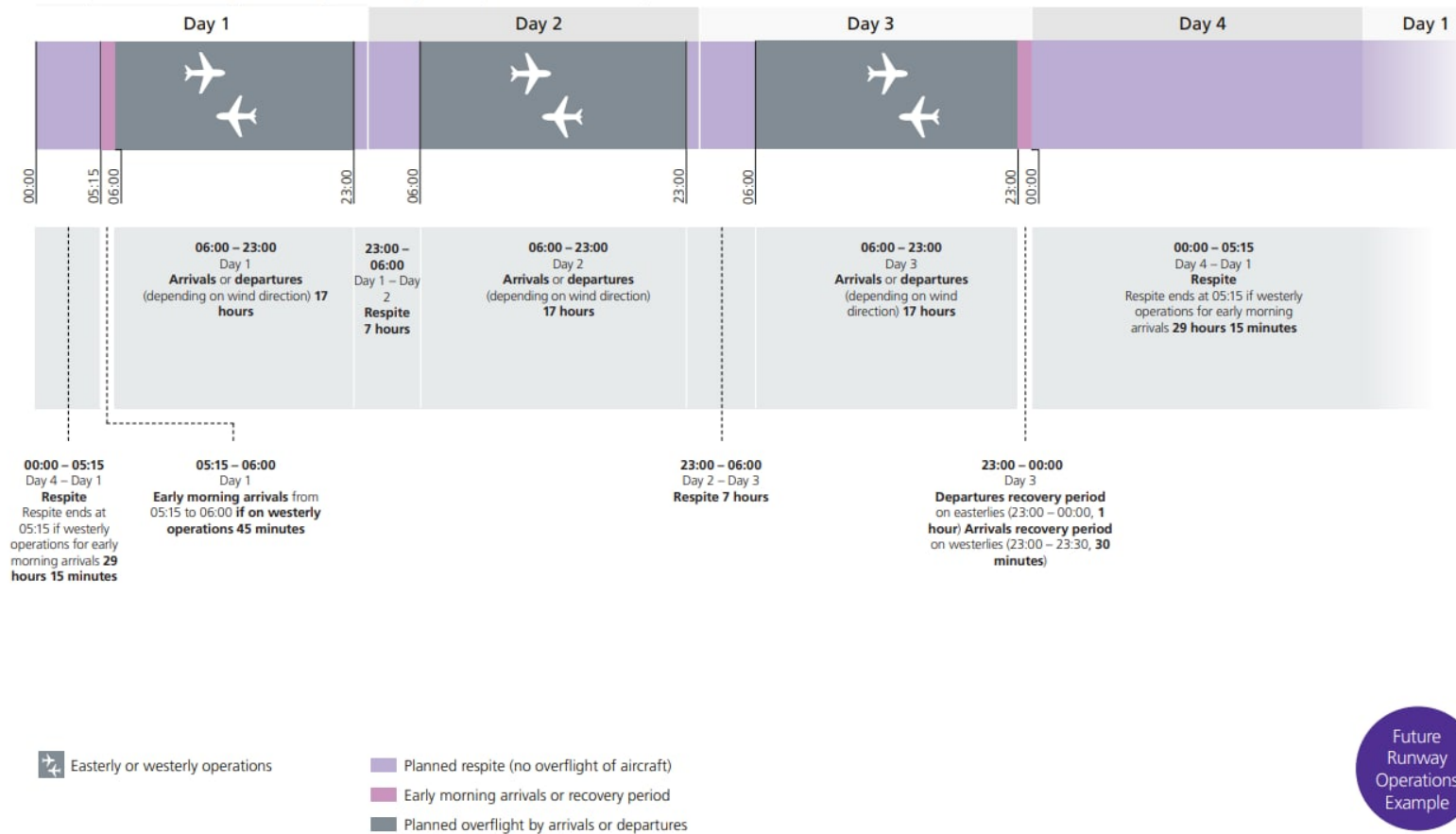
Early morning arrivals or recovery period

Planned overflight by arrivals or departures



Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:
Communities D – Sipson, Harlington and North Heston

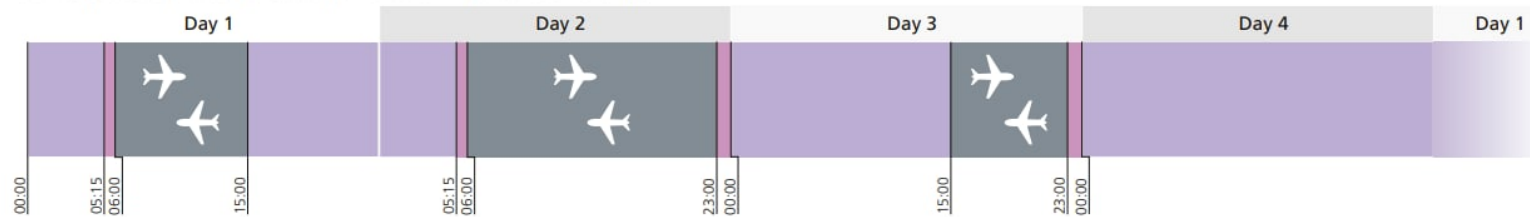
Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



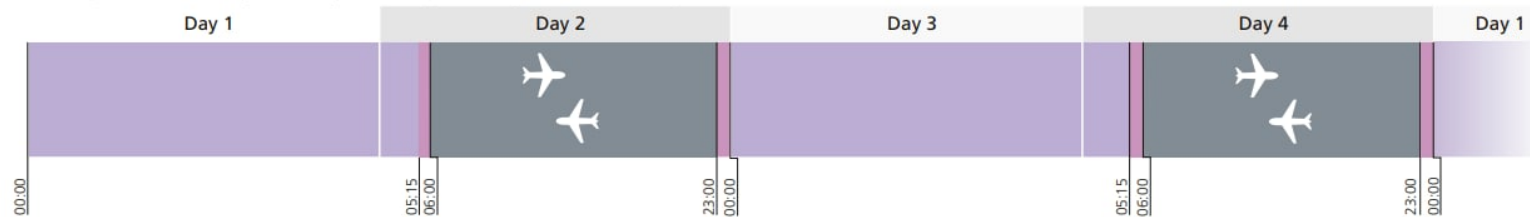
Overflight and respite for future operations examples:

Communities E – Cranford and South Heston

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

Early morning arrivals or recovery period

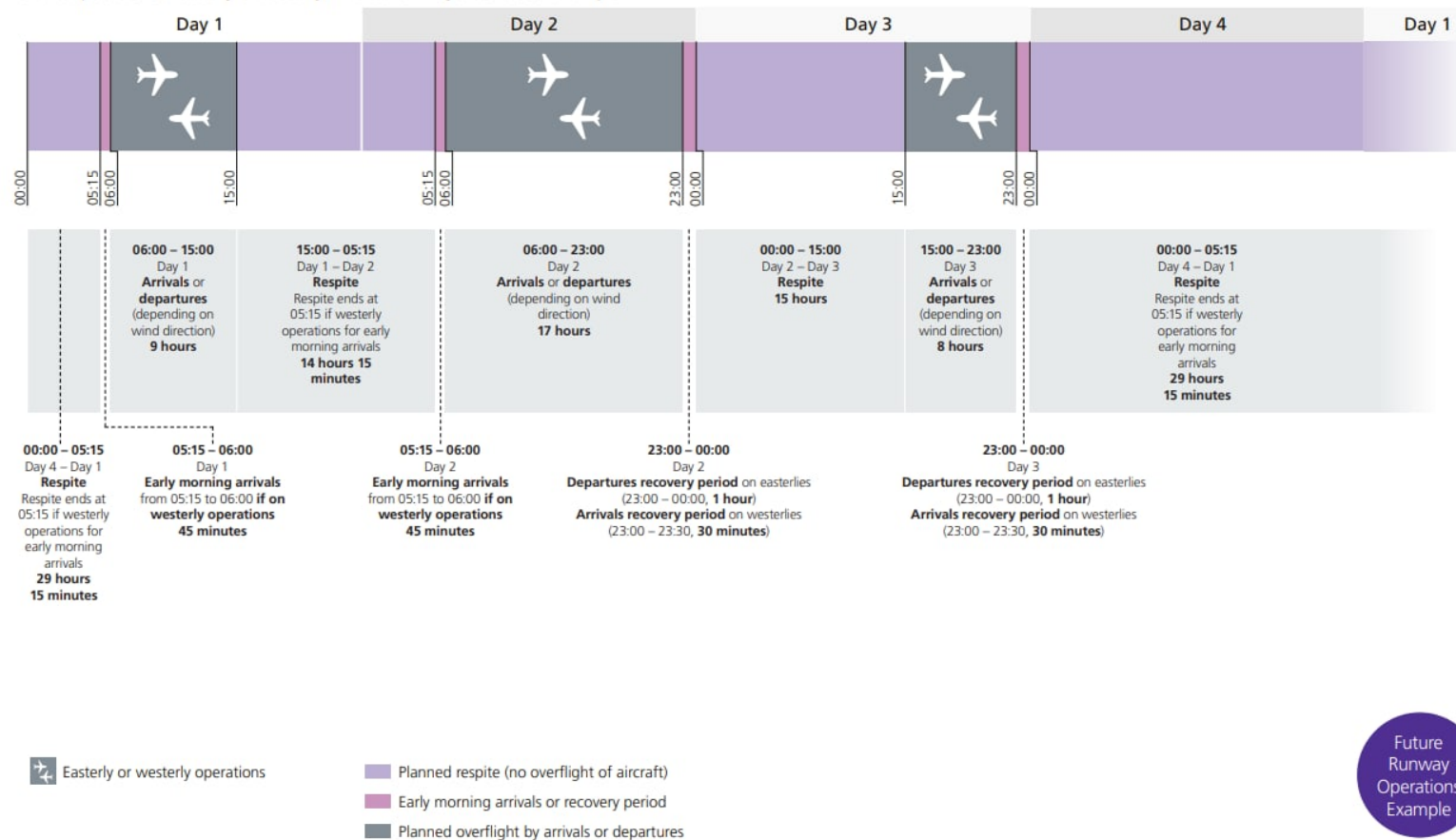
Planned overflight by arrivals or departures

Future
Runway
Operations
Example

Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

Communities E – Cranford and South Heston

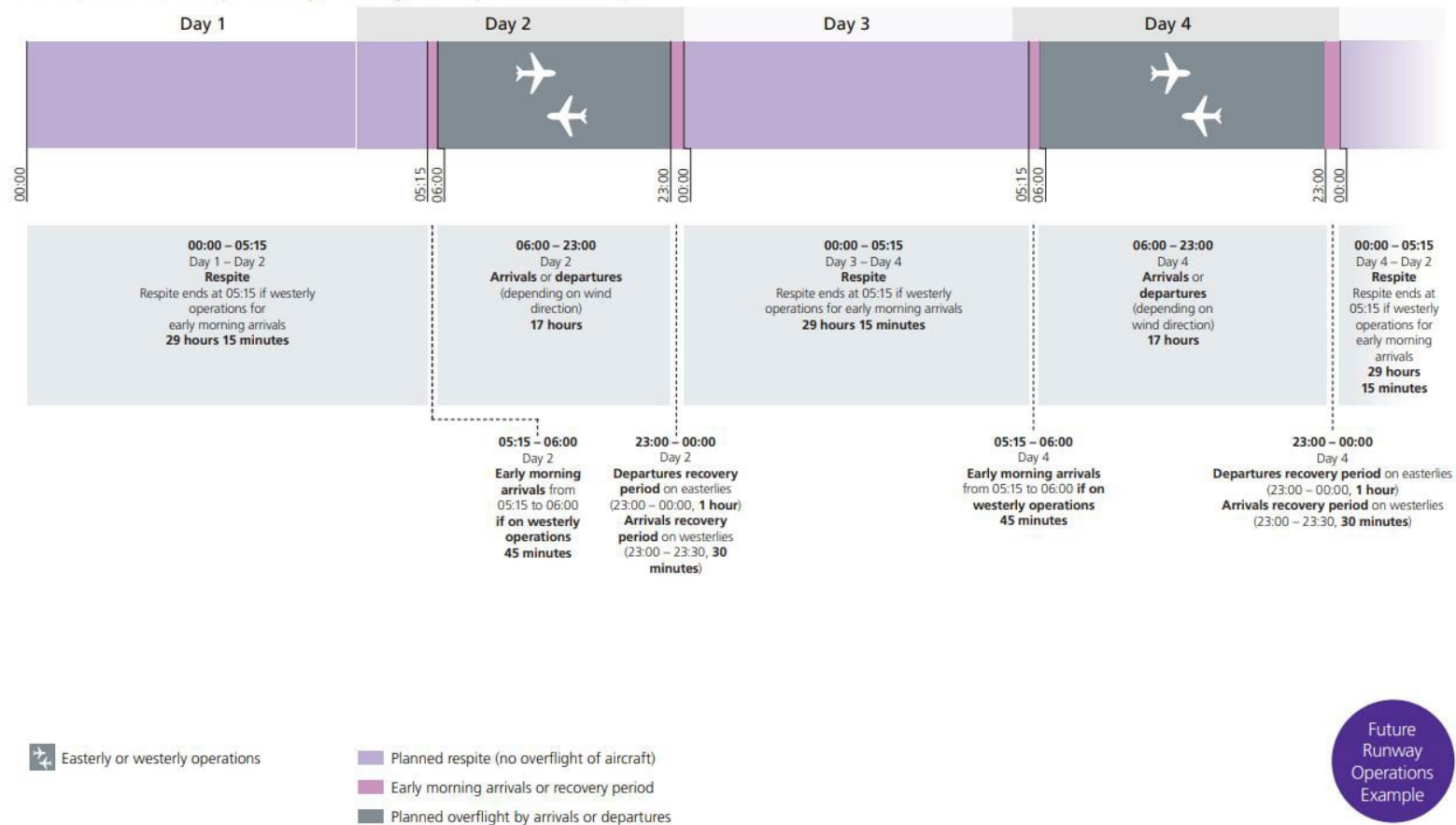
Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

Communities E – Cranford and South Heston

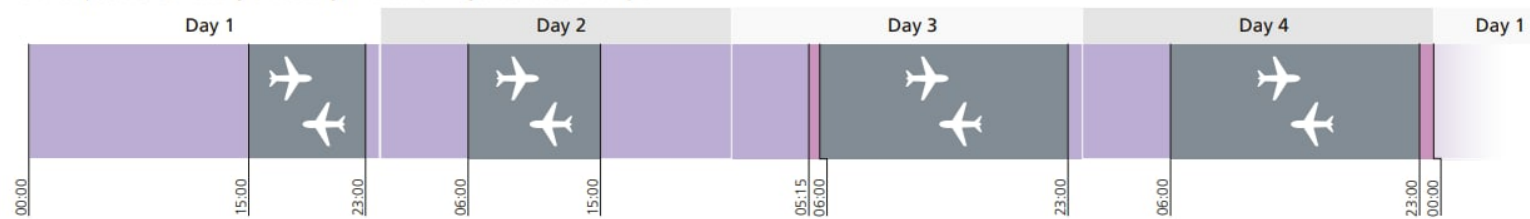
Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



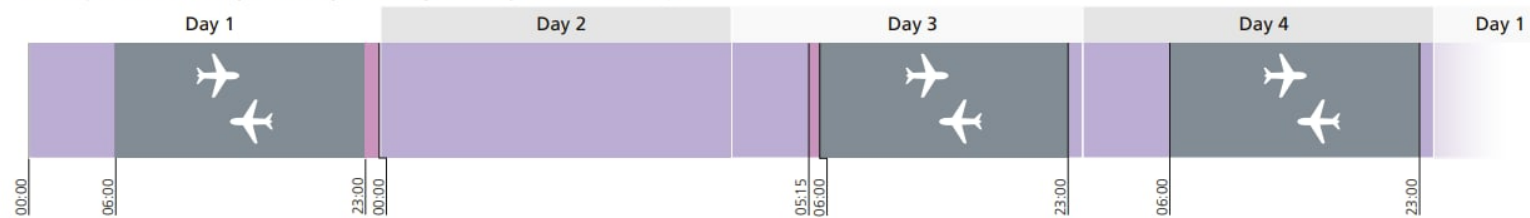
Overflight and respite for future operations examples:

Communities F – Hatton and Feltham

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

Early morning arrivals or recovery period

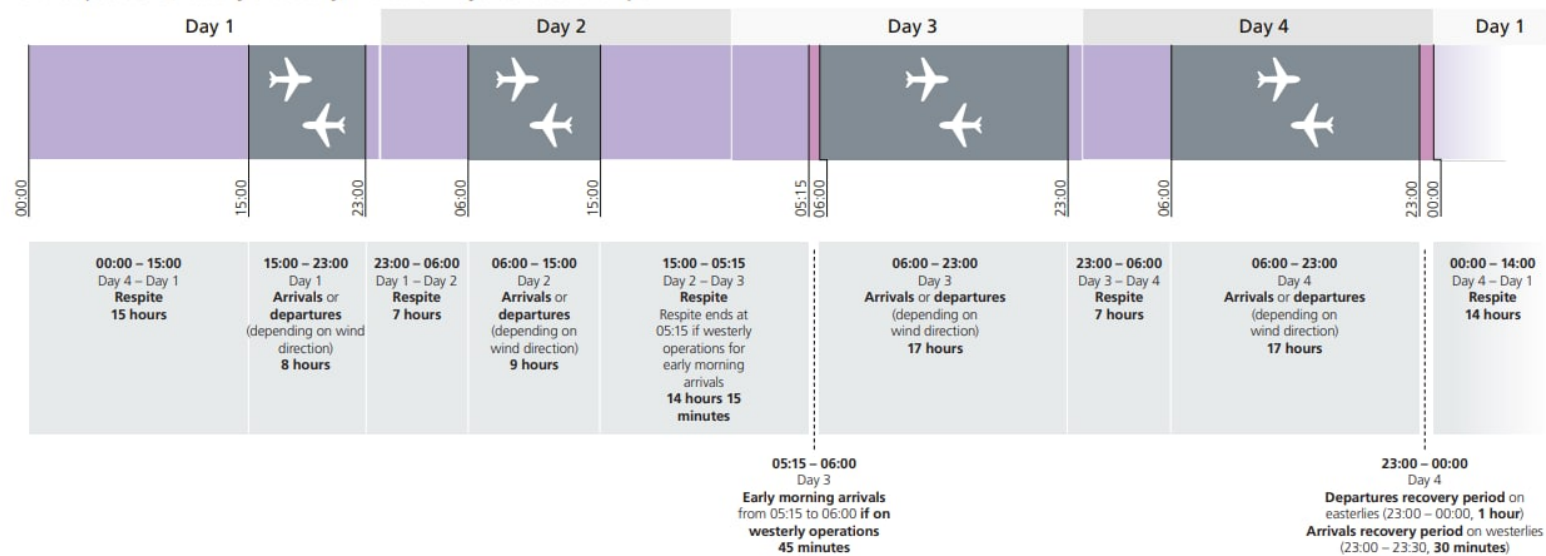
Planned overflight by arrivals or departures



Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

Communities F – Hatton and Feltham

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – 15:00 runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

Early morning arrivals or recovery period

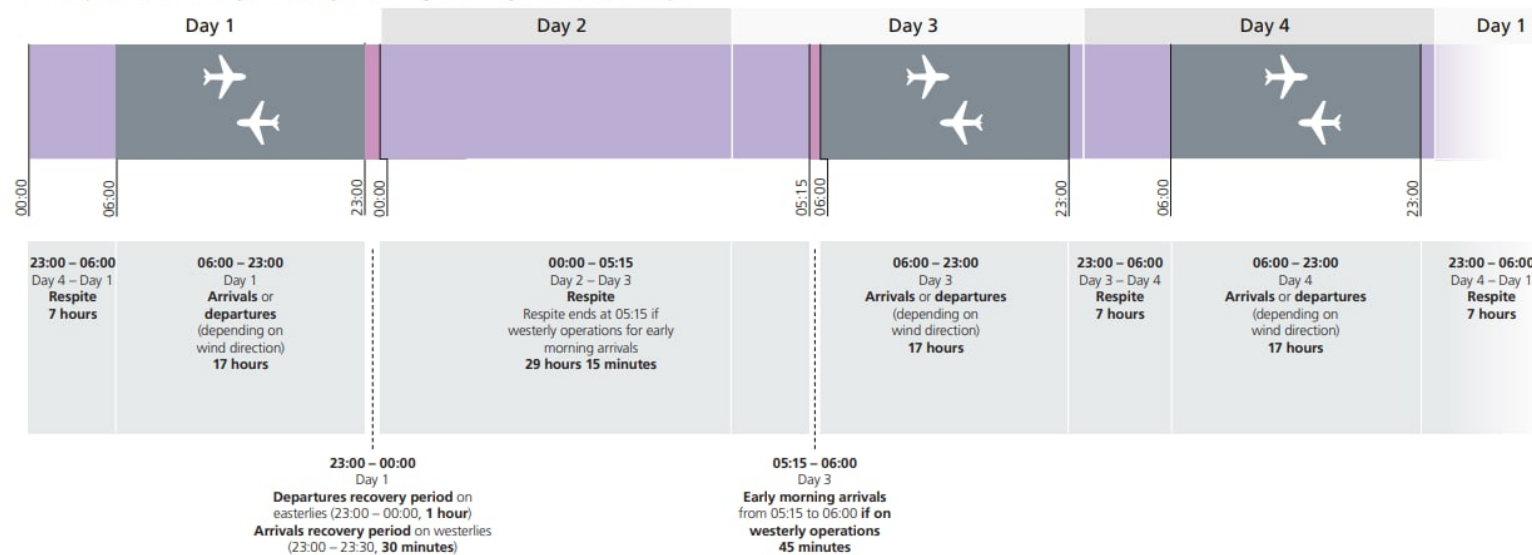
Planned overflight by arrivals or departures

Future
Runway
Operations
Example

Future respite and overflight example, with explanation:

Communities F – Hatton and Feltham

Future operations (westerly or easterly) – Overnight runway alternation example



Easterly or westerly operations

Planned respite (no overflight of aircraft)

Early morning arrivals or recovery period

Planned overflight by arrivals or departures



