

Heathrow Airport Expansion Proposals

Councillor Briefing Note: Autumn 2026

Purpose of this briefing note

This briefing note provides Councillors with an overview of the Heathrow Airport expansion proposals, and how these will be assessed against national and local policy. Presently, there are two separate scheme promoters: Heathrow Airport Limited and Heathrow West Limited.

Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) expansion proposals

- HAL's proposal is for a third runway of 3,500m.
- The project is privately financed with an estimated total scheme value of £49 billion (including wider Airport upgrades).
- The proposals include a new runway, new terminal capacity, cargo facilities, M25 realignment, additional car parking and an expanded public transport interchange.
- On full implementation, annual flight movements would increase from 480,000 to 756,000, with passenger capacity increasing to around 150 million per year.
- The third runway would be operational by 2039, with the full project delivered over 25–30 years.
- The project is at pre-application stage.
- An application for development consent for the proposals is expected in November 2027.

Heathrow West Limited (HWL) expansion proposals

- HWL's proposal is for a third runway of 2,400m with potential to extend to 3,500m as Phase 2.
- The project is privately financed with an estimated total scheme value of £23 billion.
- The proposals include a new runway, new terminal, surface access improvements, new car parks, and enhanced travel routes.
- On full implementation, annual flight movements would increase from 480,000 to 756,000, with passenger capacity increasing initially to 120 million, eventually to around 150 million per year if Phase 2 is delivered over the M25.
- The shorter 2,400m runway could be operational by 2035, with an extended runway option revisited after 2034 if aviation demand requires it.
- The project is at pre-application stage.
- An application for development consent for the proposals is expected in November 2027.

National policy context

The Department for Transport has consulted on an updated Airports National Policy Statement, to be renamed the Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement. Once finalised (expected in early 2027) this will provide the national planning policy framework against which any Heathrow expansion application will be assessed.

Local policy context

The adopted Local Plan provides the Council's planning policy framework. Policy SP7: Heathrow Airport states that the Council will support future expansion if it is undertaken in a sustainable and integrated way. The policy recognises potential economic benefits but makes clear that support depends on effective mitigation of impacts on communities, businesses, services and the environment.

Decision-making process

Heathrow expansion is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), and proposals will therefore be considered through the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. Applications to expand the Airport will be considered by an Examining Authority with the final decision on the proposals made by the Secretary of State, not by the Council. The Council's role as an 'interested party' is therefore to influence the proposals through constructive engagement, responding to consultation exercises, and providing evidence from technical officers, enabling us to help secure the best possible outcomes for residents and communities.

Key messages

- The Council is not the decision-maker; the final decision sits with the Secretary of State.
- Early and constructive engagement with expansion promoters is fundamental because this is the stage at which we have the greatest opportunity to influence the process and present our key concerns and asks before formal submission of the DCO application.
- The Council's position is that any proposal to expand the Airport must be accompanied by appropriate mitigation measures and community benefits.
- Stanwell Moor and Stanwell will remain central to the Council's position because they are likely to be most directly affected, but the Council will continue to champion the case for the wider area given the swathe of impacts that will occur locally.
- Policy SP7 of the Local Plan is the adopted policy basis for assessing whether the proposals are sustainable, integrated and acceptable at the local level.

Key considerations for Spelthorne

- Noise, air quality and wider environmental impacts.
- Surface access, road congestion and public transport improvements.
- Impacts on Stanwell Moor, Stanwell, and other affected communities.
- Community compensation, mitigation, and local benefit packages.
- Construction impacts over a long delivery period.
- How the Council can maximise influence through the DCO process.

Summary position

Spelthorne Council has historically acknowledged the case for Heathrow expansion; however, the Council's position is that any expansion must be sustainable and accompanied by comprehensive mitigation and benefits for those impacted, particularly the communities of Stanwell Moor and Stanwell.

Next steps

An All-Member briefing is being arranged with HAL. A period of community consultation by HAL starts on 27th October 2026, running until 22nd December 2026. Meanwhile, Officers will continue to engage with HAL on technical matters.

The alternative HWL scheme has published its Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report and anticipates community consultation on its scheme in May 2027.