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ACP 2021-048 Future Combat Airspace Interim Solution - 2022

Submission

STEP 4

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References

1. CAP 1616 Airspace Change Process

2. All published documentation related to this airspace change proposal is available on the CAA Airspace Change portal:

Airspace change proposal public view (caa.co.uk)

- 3. CAP 1430 UK ATM Vocabulary
- 4. ACP-2020-042 https://airspacechange.caa.co.uk/PublicProposalArea?pID=253
- 5. ACP-2021-007

Airspace change proposal public view (caa.co.uk)

6. ACP-2020-026

Airspace change proposal public view (caa.co.uk)

7. <u>AIP Supplement 039/2021</u>

Introduction - about this document, scope, background

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has identified a requirement for the generation of new, suitable and safe airspace in the UK to run large scale live exercises, allowing modern military aircraft and systems to integrate with each other and train to their full capabilities.

This proposal is one of a suite of ACPs all launched with the intention of creating segregated airspace within which essential military training can take place:

ACP-2020-042 This trial ran in 2 stages – the first coincident with Ex CRIMSON WARRIOR in Oct-Nov 20 and the second coincident with Ex COBRA WARRIOR in Mar 21.

The airspace trial enabled real time testing of Airspace Management (ASM) concepts as well as finessing the design of the physical airspace structures and air traffic management (ATM) procedures required to deliver and support this change.

ACP-2021-007 This temporary change proposed the use of TDA EG D597 for Exercise COBRA WARRIOR in Sep 21. CAA agreed to extend the 90 day rule to cover the exercise in Mar 22 subject to conditions being met. Feedback from this activation will be shared for this ACP.

ACP-2020-026 This ACP aims to provide a permanent SUA which would be activated for specified exercises. Currently at stage 3 in the CAP 1616 process, the delay to the completion of this ACP necessitated a requirement for temporary airspace activations using TDA EG D597.

ACP-2021-048 (This ACP) is a proposal to activate the previously used TDA EG D597 for two exercises, one each in Aug and Sep 2022. Following this initial statement of need, the MoD requested an extraordinary extension to the 90 day activation period stipulated within Reference A, with the possibility of further activations in Mar, Aug and Sep 23 should ACP-2020-026 be incomplete. A letter from CAA approving this request along with their rationale will be uploaded to the Airspace Change Portal.

What was the statement of need for this proposal?

This request is for a temporary activation of airspace in which to complete large scale military exercises in August and September 2022. If successful, this ACP will also permit activations of the same airspace for specific, named exercises in Mar 23 (Ex Cobra Warrior) and Aug (Ex Storm Warrior) and Sep 23 (Ex Cobra Warrior). ACP-2020-026 is in progress aiming to create a permanently available portion of airspace. Should this be successful prior to these exercises, any temporary structures created by ACP-2021-048 (this ACP) would be withdrawn.

Air Command, on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, has an obligation to provide relevant tactical collective training to its combat and combat support forces to ensure UK Forces are correctly prepared to defend UK interests in line with the UK Defence Strategy. An appropriate airspace that can safely facilitate exercising large forces of modern and future air platforms, in an efficient and representative combat environment is required to meet this need.

With the introduction of 5th generation aircraft into the RAF inventory, larger, rectangular portions of airspace are needed so that crews can participate in realistic training, employing tactics which would be used in a hostile environment. The existing D323 and D613 complexes are suitable for routine flying training, but lack the space required for a full simulated Combat Air Operation involving participants from our NATO allies. These existing areas also lack the overland areas required on which to place targets.

The training our aircrew undertake prepares them for the threats they will face in a hostile environment using scenarios which cannot be recreated in a simulator. A combat operation will not be fought in isolation and will always involve co-operation with a partner nation. The larger airspace allows our RAF crews to train with our North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) partners in large-scale exercises which mimic real-life combat. The overland portion is critical in training our forces to identify and neutralise ground threats.

The purpose of the Royal Air Force is to deliver air and space power to protect the nation. Without the increased amount of airspace afforded by this proposal, the RAF would not be able to meet its key deliverables of having Force Elements at Readiness nor would it be able to meet its air commitments to NATO. Our purpose in the Ministry of Defence is to protect the people of the United Kingdom and our overseas territories, prevent conflict, and be ready to fight our enemies. The importance of suitable airspace in which to conduct flying training cannot be overstated.

Location

Our proposal is for a temporarily segregated portion of airspace, on the East of the UK and suitable for a Large Force Exercise (>10 aircraft in a single package). Minimum dimensions 90nm x 160nm and from FL85-FL660, predominantly based over the sea, to allow for supersonic flight and with an overland portion on the shortest edge on which to place simulated ground based threats and targets. It should avoid CTAs, TMAs and allow all airports connection to the route network.



Figure 1 shows the area (in orange) which the MoD proposes be segregated during exercise serials. Segregation is required because the aircraft within will be executing high energy, unpredictable manoeuvres involving munitions and explosives along with electrical and optical hazards and unmanned aircraft.

The selection of this geographical area considers current aerial activity and the location of ATS routes. This area satisfies the requirement to be within flying distance of the main RAF bases without having to cross busy routes and with a suitable number of diversion airfields available. Figure 2 below highlights those airfields playing an active part in the Exercises.

Figure 2. RAF Locations ssiemouth		
Figure 2. RAF Locations siemouth	RAF Lossiemouth – F35, ISTAR RAF Spadeadam – Electronic Warfare Range RAF Leeming – Adversary Air and foreign visitors Durham Tees – Draken adversary air RAF Waddington – ISTAR, visitors RAF Coningsby – Typhoon RAF Marham – F35	
Brussels Colo Belgium	RAF Lakenheath – USAFE F-15 and F-35	

Proposed dates and times

It is proposed that the segregated airspace be activated on the following dates – stakeholders have been invited to comment on these activations with their feedback contained later in this document:

Aug 2022 – Ex Storm Warrior

Tue 9th and Thu 11th – 2000-2315 UTC Thu 18th, Tue 23rd, Thu 25th – 0800-1115 UTC

Sep 2022* - Ex Cobra Warrior 22-2

Mon 5th - Fri 23rd Sep 22

* There will be a maximum of 8 daytime activations of 4 hours during this period, exact dates and times to be agreed closer to the date.

The following dates have been added to this ACP following liaison between MoD and CAA. It was agreed that the requirement for training airspace is enduring and that factors outside the control of MoD have resulted in a permanent solution being delayed. The MoD commits to pursuing a permanent portion of airspace for exercises through ACP-2020-026 and will commit resources to ensure this reaches completion in the shortest timeframe possible.

In the meantime the CAA has granted extraordinary extension to the 90 days granted under a temporary change in order to cover the following exercises.

Mar 2023 – Ex Cobra Warrior 23-1

A nominal 8 activations of 4 hours during the period 6-24 Mar 23

Aug 2023 – Ex Storm Warrior

Nominally up to 8 activations of 4 hours during the period 7-24 Aug 23.

Sep 2023 – Ex Cobra Warrior 23-2

Nominally 8 activations of 4 hours during the period 4-22 Sep 23.

Bookings will be made via the Military Airspace Management Cell with cancellation of activities undertaken by the Swanwick Military Level 3 Airspace Management (L3M) function via the Updated Usage Plan (UUP) and NOTAM.

TDA EG D597

The airspace solution identified to meet this requirement is TDA EG D597. This evolved following a trial in late 2020/Spring 2021. The current version of the TDA was used for Exercise COBRA WARRIOR in Sep 2021 and was approved for use in March 2022 although this exercise was subsequently cancelled. This TDA has been activated successfully with recognised procedures familiar to all stakeholders. The charts for this airspace are shown below and the SUP published for the Mar 22 activation is at <u>this link</u>. The sponsor will

continue to liaise with NERL over the nomenclature for this portion of airspace which will, until further notice be known by the name TDA EG D597.



Airports and routes affected by this change



Newcastle International Airport

Newcastle Airport is affected the most by this proposal. The routes in red, via CUTEL and RIVOT would be unavailable during activations. This affects those aircraft routing to the Oslo or Copenhagen FIRs. Much of the "bucket and spade" traffic will be unaffected. As part of the design for D597, additional reporting points are available for aircraft to flightplan in order to navigate around the SUA. 78 Sqn will provide an ATS to those aircraft using these reporting points en-route CUTEL. Their

traffic has recovered well and although this proposal involves activations during August, they are low in number and for short periods.

Teesside Airport

Although not affected to the same extent as Newcastle, the impact of the unavailability of routes DCT CUTEL and RIVET would be compensated by alternative reporting points as detailed in Figure 5. Their main affected route would likely be the daily Loganair flight to Edinburgh, (although use of P18 is already temporally restricted). Should there be any

affected routes which would normally route via CUTEL, 78 Sqn would provide an ATS with an alternative routing point used iaw the LoA¹.

Edinburgh Airport



TDA 597 is designed to avoid N864 and P600, connection to the Copenhagen and Oslo FIR is maintained, albeit via an indirect routing. The design also avoids the TMA, ensuring no change to departure and arrival profiles. An alternative reporting point, OFCOT on the North Western corner acts as a pivot for any Upper Airspace Easterly routes in the absence of RIVET and CUTEL.

Aberdeen Airport

Their daily routes between Newcastle, Teesside (both Eastern Airways) and Amsterdam are likely to be affected depending upon activation timings and availability of P18. The TDA has been designed to maintain air routes to the East via RIVET/CUTEL.

This proposal does not affect the Aberdeen CTR and CTA and it is designed to avoid P600 and N864.

Dundee Airport

Dundee have regular flights to London and Belfast. The proposed SUA will not infringe upon N864 therefore their routes and traffic patterns are unlikely to be affected. However any traffic routing DCT SAB would have level restrictions to remain beneath the TDA.



¹ Letter of Agreement between NATS, Newcastle airport and MoD is in draft at time of writing but will be complete by the time of the activation. A draft version will be made available to CAA to inform their decision.

Gliding

The Borders Gliding Club (BGC) is a key stakeholder. They routinely operate up to FL245 when conditions allow and would be detrimentally affected financially with a restriction to their operations. Clear lines of communication have been established during trial and temporary activations and the club have been able to deconflict activity.



Covid-19 impact

A common point raised during engagement has been the impact of C-19 on the aviation industry. The graphic below shows that while the industry has recovered to some extent, the number of flights is still below pre-pandemic levels with forecasts predicting that it will take until 2024 for the number of flights to equal those in 2019.



Figure 10 – Effect of Covid on European flights

In the October 2021 budget, taxes on domestic flights were reduced with the aim of revitalising the passenger airline industry. One of the key stakeholders, Newcastle International airport, has a substantial proportion of their traffic from this segments. Flights between the USA and Europe have only recently been reactivated and are not yet operating at pre-Covid levels. Whilst the sponsor acknowledges that previous data is potentially not representative, the MoD requirement for suitable airspace in which to train is not affected by

Covid-19. The sponsor will continue to engage with stakeholders throughout the lifetime of this ACP to assess the impact that the activation of the airspace has as the industry recovers from COVID.

Feedback from previous activations of TDA EG D597

The TDA and associated protocols has been the subject of continuous improvement since the trial associated with ACP-2020-042. Full (although names are redacted) feedback from the latest activation in September 2021 can be found in the Airspace Change Portal for ACP-2021-007 at <u>this link</u>. For transparency, the main points, both positive and negative, are reproduced below. Feedback will continue to be recorded following all future activations.

Feedback from NATS – 19 Oct 21

No NATS safety reports were submitted in September 2021 relating to the activation of TDA597 and/or Cobra Warrior. As such, the activation of TDA597 in September 2021 did not raise any safety reports or appear to have had any safety impact. There was an increased impact on the operation in relation to the number of en-route aircraft affected by the activation of TDA597.

Analysis provided reports that 277 aircraft were affected this time compared to 98 in Mar 21. This was anticipated due to the regeneration of traffic as a small recovery in aviation has taken place as the Coronavirus pandemic has progressed, as well as the increased days of activation. Analysis also indicates, as was the case in Mar 21, a marginal overall network environmental performance improvement. While traffic levels continue to operate at low levels, NERL operations were able to manage the event due to the operating protocols agreed previously and subsequently updated after the Mar 21 activation.

As traffic continues to recover, these protocols will continue to be a critical part of safely managing the airspace and network to mitigate any cumulative effect of multiple/simultaneous activations of UK Special Use Areas (SUA) and other restrictive activities. The agreed protocols meant that there were no issues relating to the Airspace Management Cell operations. The pre-tactical planning process has worked well.

A letter of agreement (LOA) has been drafted by NATS to replace the existing trial instruction as airspace moves towards a permanent solution. The document details how airspace is activated, prioritises effort for the UK airspace management cell, restates the requirements to support Newcastle International transits, etc. It contains nothing new over the existing trial instruction but is in LOA format with signatories dictated. A draft version will be delivered to MOD in due course for review.

Later activations on Friday (ending ~1500) may impact transatlantic traffic flow. This flow will be to the south of D597 at FL300+. This may impact RTB of aircraft from D597. MoD service providers to note a potential increase in traffic to be accounted for. This observation led to 2 points for action:

92 Sqn will coordinate a post-execute wash-up for each activation. 92 Sqn, 19 Sqn and 78 Sqn will record any observations and distribute to MoD stakeholders.

92 Sqn will include in their in-brief with all crews that all aircraft hold 5 mins fuel prior to exiting airspace and anticipate delays in departing D597 depending on traffic levels and capacity of 78 Sqn and 19 Sqn.

Borders Gliding Club – 21 Oct 21

There were no safety concerns. Gliding operations from Milfield were limited to FL60 and below during the hours when TDA597 was activated. This was only an issue on 10 and 17 Sep 21 as the Gliding Club was not operating on the other dates. Excellent communication both prior and during the activation of TDA 597. Mutual co-operation and co-ordination is essential to avoid future disruption and confliction.

Edinburgh Airport

Edinburgh Airport will continue to be engaged and watch with interest the further trials of D597 and over the projected period. NERL would be able to answer the questions on safety and operational impacts as Edinburgh airport and the Scottish TMA lie just beyond the operational area. Our traffic levels are increasing and should be somewhere near normal next summer so ACP-2021-048 will be observed with interest. Our concern is with our own ACP and the benefits of opening up a departure and possible arrival route to the east and creating an airway routing in and out of Edinburgh with the environmental benefits that would bring. We look forward to further engagement in the future and hope we can create procedures of mutual benefit.

Newcastle Airport

As with our previous correspondence, it is still our considered view that the true impact of these ACPs has not yet been properly evaluated during the previous stages due to the prevailing operating environment created by the Covid-19 pandemic. As stated previously we also have concerns regarding the elongated routing that may be required on occasion by our commercial airline traffic, were this permanent change to be unconditionally approved. We believe the additional fuel burn and costs incurred are likely to make aeronautical connectivity less viable for the North East of England and thereby inhibit regional economic growth. We should also point out that this would also lead to increased environmental impact and therefore directly conflict with the UK's aspirations to lead the way on climate change and for the aviation industry to be at the forefront of this agenda.

During the September activations, we found that on several occasions exercise traffic were requesting an airspace crossing from Newcastle on the way to and from the danger area, with the return journey often being labelled as 'fuel critical'. This adds extra pressure to our team at Newcastle in handling traffic crossing what is becoming an increasingly complex piece of airspace.

MOD Feedback:

There were no safety incidents reported using the Defence Aviation Safety Occurrence Reporting system. Training objectives were fulfilled and training agencies endorsed the use of TDA 597 as their preference for collective training. 78 Sqn provided an ATS to a small number of aircraft routeing to/from Newcastle Airport and stressed that support to exercises prioritises the "Pennine radar" derogated services task.

No feedback was received from any other stakeholder.

Engagement for future activations under this ACP

Targeted engagement took place between the sponsor and those stakeholders affected by this proposal. As this is the fourth ACP, there was some confusion and apathy when asked for a response with some stakeholders duplicating answers to engagement requests for previous ACPs. Stakeholders were specifically targeted following the completion of Ex COBRA WARRIOR in Sep 21.

Key stakeholders for this ACP are NATS En-Route Ltd, 78 Sqn Swanwick, Newcastle International Airport, Teesside Airport, Edinburgh Airport, Aberdeen Airport, Dundee Airport, Borders Gliding Club, British Airline Pilots Association, General Aviation Alliance, Easyjet, Ryanair, Loganair, Eastern Airways. Feedback received from these agencies is summarised below with full (with names redacted) text available on the Airspace Change Portal at this link.

NATS

All processes and constructs to support TDA597 activation remain in place within both our systems and those of the EU Network Manager (NM). Provided that no changes are made (including the name of approved airspace) then there is no technical reason why this interim solution could not be extended. On the assumption that there are no changes to the airspace or operating protocols, there are no new safety concerns highlighted following the September 2021 activity. That said, as traffic regeneration continues and, significantly, the expected increase in transatlantic traffic following the lifting of pandemic travel restrictions, we expect an increased impact on our operations.

Future activations will need to consider this in the planning of the exercises to ensure continued review of any risks. The requested total activations in Aug and Sep 22 are significantly larger than previous exercises, amounting to a total of 21 days. In August 2022 this amounts to most Tuesdays and Thursdays for the whole month and for September 2022, every weekday for the first 3 weeks. **Sponsor comment – There will be 6 activations in August and 8 in September.** This latter half of the summer is peak network activity time. Again, planning will need to consider this and any other major activities in the airspace to deconflict and mitigate any increased cumulative effect of SUA on the network. NATS continues to seek, and welcomes, early planning engagement to explore opportunities for flexibility should network demand require it. We would also seek to ensure there are sufficient safeguards within the agreed airspace construct and procedures to ensure NATS' and our customers' interests are not unduly affected and any negative impacts are mitigated as much as possible. **As noted at the last activations, analysis indicates there is an overall fuel efficiency benefit associated to TDA597 activation**. This is primarily because of suppression of other areas of SUA.

We believe that the temporary protocols (now proven) should be established through a Letter Of Agreement (LoA) and we note that work has started to deliver this. Given the increase in the number of days that are being proposed, anticipated traffic increases and the continuing requirement for military Air Traffic Service (ATS) provision to General Air Traffic (GAT) aircraft operating in and out of Newcastle and Teesside International Airports (in lieu of any connectivity and airspace solution that may come as part of the permanent ACP), we believe that this LoA would ensure any impact can be mitigated as far as possible.

The last activation included a participant planning focus on the procedures agreed which can be assumed to have been effective with a reduction of safety events (to zero) when compared to earlier activations. NATS advocates a similar approach for all future activations. Finally, alongside the previous trial use of TDA597 analysis, MOD should use the planned activation in Mar 22 to assess the impact to the network following the introduction of Free Route Airspace operations in conjunction with any increased traffic. This will enable further insight as to the impact of the airspace and enable refinement of protocols if required.

Newcastle Airport

We note the times as set out in your attachment. We were under the impression that peak traffic times would be avoided yet 4 days appear in the Summer Holidays which is not in line with our expectations. We also specified that 1-2 hours at a time might be more achievable yet the proposals are in excess of 3 hours each.

I've done a study based on the current planned movements and, while there may be an impact to a number of flights in/out of NCL we accept that, currently, the impact is not excessive. Should our commercial position change we may need to revisit this. It should also be pointed out that there are still a number of agreements to be finalised before we remove any objections; such as egress/entry points and the LoA requirements for operating the TDA which have yet to be finalised and signed.

We also note the lack of specific detail for the proposed September dates and as such we have been unable to conduct an impact analysis on the NCL commercial operation. To this end we reserve the right to make comment on the Sept 22 proposals.

We still wait update on the ongoing lack of 78Sqn support to operations (Pennine Radar) which were liked to this proposal in our meeting in December. This concerns me with the proposal to activate TDA597 without the appropriate level of ATC to facilitate safe and effective movements in/out of the exercise area. NCL ATS will be operating to capacity over the Summer and will be highly unlikely to be in a position to offer any FIS to Mil ac involved in any large scale exercise.

Sponsor Response to Newcastle

I totally understand and take on board your concerns. Regarding the August activations, yes, they are in the peak travel period but I did study your flight schedule and I concur with you that much of your seasonal traffic appears to be only slightly affected.

Regarding the length of the activations, the problem arising were we to reduce the length of time for each is that more activations would be required in order to hit all of the training objectives. Once you add the flight-plan buffer to the activation, there are time savings, and fuel saving to be made by having fewer but longer activations.

As soon as I have updated timings for September I will let you know. Along with this decision, the ingress/egress points will also be finalised and we will forward the detail to you. The LoA is still being worked on, have you had a response from NATS to the points you raised?

I met with 78 Sqn (Swanwick Mil) last month to discuss the Pennine radar task vs support to exercise. They are clear that the two tasks are separate and the Pennine radar service is

dependent on their capacity and are aware that the demand increases during the summer months. Support to exercise is a higher priority than the Pennine radar task and they will plan accordingly to make sure they can provide a service to traffic affected by the unavailability of the route DCT CUTEL. To that end there were no refusals of service for your traffic requiring this during the activation in September.

Newcastle Response

All reassuring! One point to note, our full schedules are not yet released (commercially sensitive) and being added to daily as the Civil Aviation industry recovers at quite a rapid pace! We are looking at a 4 fold increase in traffic levels between now and Summer; with potential for more. To that end an examination of our publicly available schedules would be a peek but not a full picture of what we may have.

I understand the need for longer but less activations but we feel this would be better consulted that simply being told. It would allow us to interact with our customers and other departments to fully assess the impacts and feedback.

Borders Gliding Club

Gliding operations from Milfield will be limited to FL60 and below during the hours when TDA597 was activated. This would have been a significant problem had we had not been informed well in advance of the dates that TDA597 will be activated as they coincide with the dates when expeditions and intensive flying weeks are usually planned. Dates have now been deconflicted, but there will still be some disruption on Fridays and at weekends.

Safety Assessment

This section provides a brief, qualitative overview of the impact of this proposal on aviation safety.

The evidence feeding into this safety assessment has been obtained through stakeholder feedback and from the results of a previous activation of TDA 597 in March and September 2021 which identified some lessons.

Currently, route structures are published and airlines plan to route via ATS routes or flight plannable Directs (DCTs). These are deconflicted from active SUAs where necessary using strategic deconfliction methods and published waypoints. The proposal to use TDA EG D597 would result in previously tried and tested waypoints, during the latest activation there were no reported safety occurrences.

High energy manoeuvres would take place during Large Force Exercises which require segregation from GAT for the protection of both military exercise traffic and civil aviation, this is the main driver for this proposal. In later stages of the design process, the proposal should look to incorporate a flightplan buffer zone (FBZ) in addition to a temporal buffer to ensure separation in both time and space. NATS are of the opinion that the FUA processes, flight plan management and FBZ were a success during the trial and temporary activations of TDAs in the geographical area of the proposal and, although this is a new proposal for a permanent SUA, the benefits to safety from using familiar airspace with existing structures and protocols cannot be understated. The SUA, routings and FBZ should be made known to Eurocontrol for network visibility reducing the risk of any late notice route changes to aircraft in flight.

There is potential for an increase in fast jet traffic taking up ATCO workload, infringing controlled airspace or recovering to civil airports in an emergency, but none of this transpired during the March or September 2021 activation. It is, however acknowledged by the sponsor that a robust procedure should be implemented so that traffic routing in and out of Newcastle is provided with an ATS from the appropriate ANSP, the completion of an LoA will confirm the role of 78 Sqn in this.

Next Steps

In order to be in place for the exercises stipulated in this document, the sponsor aims to have the AIP Sup submitted by **Fri 20th May**. Whilst it is expected that this will be broadly similar to previous activations, the sponsor is prepared to make any modifications which may be required as a result of stakeholder engagement. Ongoing liaison will take place between the exercise planners and those affected stakeholders with relation to exact timings/entry and exit points etc.

Organisers of exercise planning meetings and conferences will be instructed by the sponsor to invite key stakeholders. These meetings are the best opportunity for the requirements of all stakeholders to be balanced.

The sponsor will work with the Eurocontrol Network Manager to further understand the impact this will have on civilian traffic with engagement continuing until completion of all named exercises.

The addition of dates in Mar and Aug/Sep 2023 amplifies the requirement for ongoing liaison with all stakeholders. A wash up will be held after each exercise at which all stakeholders will be invited to submit any learning points. Any safety occurrences will be captured at the time and be investigated via the standard processes.

Conclusion

All of the required work to make this airspace volume safe and operationally viable for both military and civil stakeholders has been done already and approved by the CAA. An AIP Supplement has been produced and a letter of agreement between all parties is almost complete and will be uploaded to the Airspace Change Portal. It Is hoped that ACP-2020-026 will provide a permanent solution in order to avoid repeated temporary activations of this airspace.

Ongoing engagement will take place with all stakeholders up to and during the proposed activations with all lessons contributing to the permanent solution.