Southampton Airport Focus groups

July 2019

Contents

Objectives and methodology

Southampton Airport and BECG commissioned ComRes to conduct 3 focus groups with residents in a 20 mile radius of the airport. The objectives were to:

- Understand levels of awareness of the need for airspace change and of the process for it.

- Increase understanding about the need for airspace change and of the process for it.

- Provide an opportunity for participants to comment on / influence draft design principles and advise on the relative priority of the principles.

Group:	1	2	3
Location:	Southampton	Southampton	Salisbury
Category:	Live under flight paths	Live under flight paths	Potentially affected area
Date:	3rd July	3rd July	9th July

Location of participants
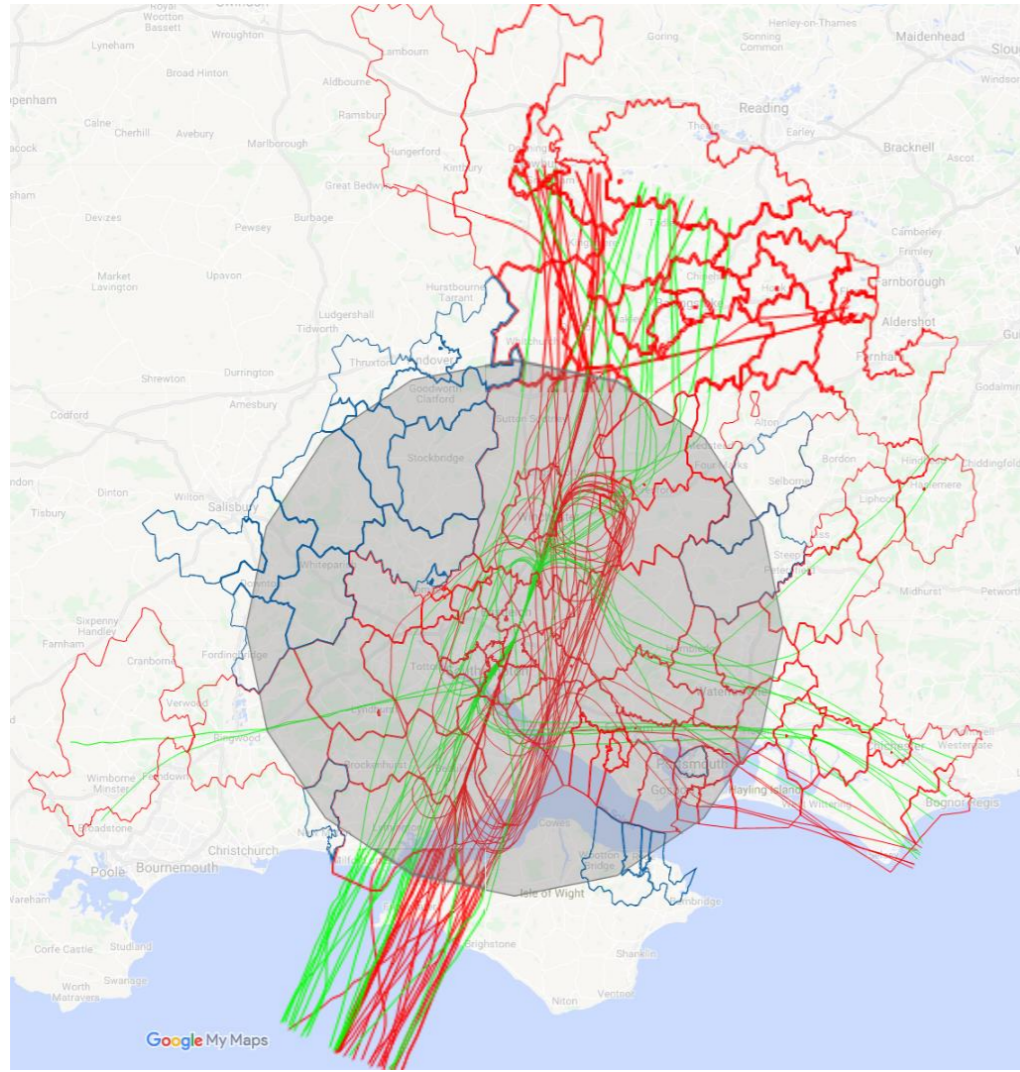
Two groups were conducted with people who currently live under SOU flight paths and one group with people who live in potentially affected areas.

We divided the location by postcode areas, with postcodes in the accompanying map that are red represent an area where flight paths pass over. Postcodes in blue are within the Civil Aviation Authority's potentially affected area radius, but do not have flights passing over-head.

Participants in groups 1 and 2 were from the red areas and participants in group 3 were from the blue areas.

Executive summary

The environment	Environmental concerns top the list for the focus group participants. Waste emissions have the highest priority and participants are concerned about an increase in flights leading to increased emissions.
Noise	Noise is not considered to be a huge issue for participants who live under flight paths. Those in potentially affected areas are somewhat concerned by this and there is likely to be a small minority that is very concerned.
Airspace modernisation	Participants do not fully understand the difference between airspace modernisation and airport expansion. This leads to conflation of issues and increased hesitancy about possible changes.
Southampton first	Participants are keen that Southampton is the primary beneficiary for any changes. They want to see infrastructure built to accommodate the increase in flights and possible traffic.

Section 1

Living near an airport

Four personas

Across the three groups 4 personas emerged with different realms of concern:

Global level: the Environmentalist

These participants are likely to speak about the environmental impact of changes to UK airspace; the common thread being that without looking after the environment, humanity might not last long enough to make use of these changes.

Local level: Southampton to the Core

These participants are likely to have lived most of their lives in Southampton and thus think about local factors first and foremost. Whether in environmental terms or economically, Southampton is at the heart of their stories.

National level: the Economist

These participants are likely to speak about the economic impact of making changes to SOU airspace. They thought about the local economy and employment as well Southampton in the context of the UK. For these participants, sacrifices could be made for the betterment of the economy.

Individual level: the Nimby

These participants are likely to speak about the impact to themselves of UK airspace changes. Either having already experienced a negative impact regarding the airport, or fearing a future impact, their aim is to make sure that they are not adversely affected going forwards.

Realms of concern

Environmentalist

Economist

Southampton to the core

Nimby
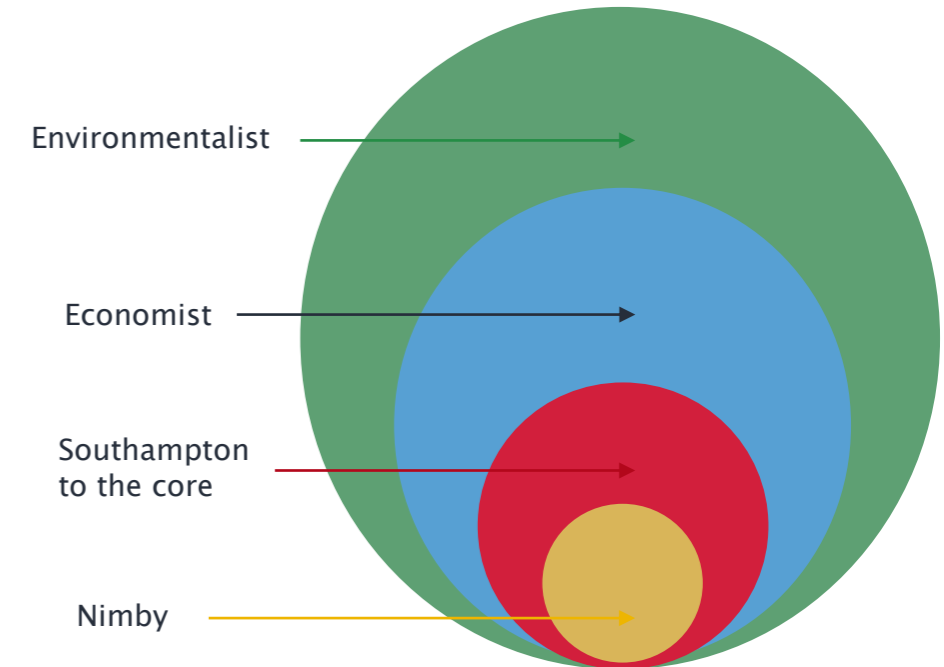
Overall themes: Living near Southampton airport

Noise

The dominant view is that increased noise would not be a hugely detrimental factor in day to day living, as it is assumed that people would become accustomed to the noise. However, there are a small number of participants who show considerable concern about hearing noise overhead.

Cost

The convenience of Southampton is viewed as limited due to the low number of destinations offered and high cost of flights. People who live near the airport sometimes find it cheaper and easier to drive to airports further afield including Gatwick, Bournemouth and even Birmingham.

Impact on the surrounding area

Traffic and increased road inconvenience is seen as a major downside of living near an airport. On the other hand, an airport is also seen as economically beneficial to the local area including through provision of jobs and tourism.

Convenience

The local factor is an important point for all groups. As SOU is smaller than the big London airports, it offers faster check in and commuting times. However, a point brought up on multiple occasions is the removal of SOU's free 5 minute drop off parking.

Key benefits of living near an airport

Convenience

Convenience is overwhelmingly the biggest benefit raised by participants. Having an airport nearby means participants can easily and quickly travel. Almost all participants have used the airport and see it as a key benefit.

"It's very convenient if you live in this area."

"It's great not to have to go up to London Heathrow or Gatwick. Brilliant. Just the convenience of having it so close."

Economy

Job opportunities, boosts to local businesses and tourist opportunities were all raised by two of the groups as additional benefits of living near an airport.

"I think it's quite good living near the airport, in terms of how well connected this area is. It attracts a lot of business to the area, as a result of the airport."

"If you've got more business travellers and holiday makers coming into the area, then they're going to be spending money in the local area which helps to fuel the economy."

Key downsides of living near the airport

Pollution

The impact on the local environment of airplanes is seen as a key downside by participants. This includes air pollution, fuel dumping and the impact on wildlife.

"The emissions are a big issue."

"As the air quality gets worse is that then going to have a knock on effect for your local NHS."
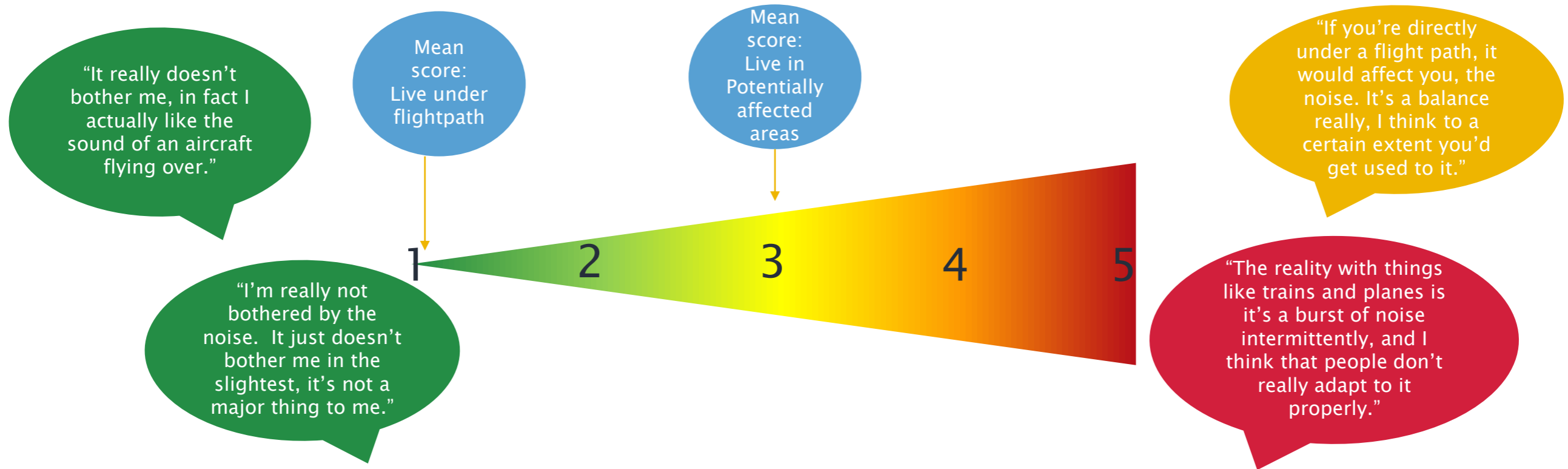
Noise

Noise is frequently raised as a potential downside of living near an airport, especially by those who do not currently live under a flight path.

"We used to be on the flight path, which if you're in a garden it was a bit annoying. That's the only disadvantage."

"I seem to be on the flightpath for the helicopters, any helicopters come in, come in very low over my property. They come in at a different angle. So, they really do create, you know, a lot of noise. Yes, it is constant all day."

How bothered by noise are people?

"It really doesn't bother me, in fact I actually like the sound of an aircraft flying over."

Mean score: Live under flightpath

Mean score: Live in Potentially affected areas

"If you're directly under a flight path, it would affect you, the noise. It's a balance really, I think to a certain extent you'd get used to it."

1   2   3   4   5

"I'm really not bothered by the noise. It just doesn't bother me in the slightest, it's not a major thing to me."

"The reality with things like trains and planes is it's a burst of noise intermittently, and I think that people don't really adapt to it properly."

When asked about their personal experiences of aircraft noise and how bothered they are by it on a scale where **1 is not at all bothered** and **5 is very bothered**, the focus groups with those who live under flight path give the lowest scores, with everyone in group 2 saying 1 (least bothered). Those who do not live under a flight path are more bothered and give an average score of 3. This could imply that over time, those that do not live under flight paths could adapt to it and have their fears allayed, if the noise does turn out to be not as severe or detrimental as they currently fear.

Section 2

Airspace Modernisation

Overall themes: Airspace modernisation

Confusion

Overall, most participants are positive about the concept of modernisation and making the best use of technology. However, there are some difficulties in understanding the differences between airspace modernisation and airport expansion, with most conflating the two.

The environment

Participants are very supportive of the idea of benefiting the environment through more efficient routes and better use of technology. There is some scepticism, however, with many seeing the changes as likely to increase the number of flights and therefore overall have a worse effect on the environment.

Flight paths

Although some participants are concerned about the potential for flight paths to change, the majority see this as an inevitable and believe it to be fairest for these to be spread across a wider area.

More efficient routes is seen as the biggest benefit of airspace modernisation

Across the groups, more efficient routes is seen as a key potential benefit of airspace modernisation. People see a dual impact here: firstly on an improved environmental impact and secondly on quicker flights.

There is some scepticism about the benefits, including fears that modernisation will mean more and bigger planes and therefore a worse environmental impact.

Participants are particularly sceptical about the idea of quicker ascents and descents, with fears this will increase noise for those closest to the airports, and result in fearful plane journeys.

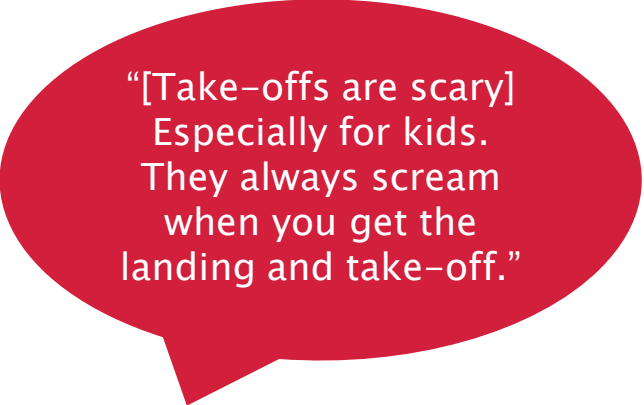
AIRSPACE MODERNISATION
BENEFITS

- INCREASED CAPACITY OF UK AIRSPACE
- REDUCED NOISE AWAY FROM AIRPORTS BY ALLOWING QUICKER ASCENTS AND DESCENTS
- MORE EFFICIENT ROUTES THAT SAVE FUEL AND REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
- AVOIDANCE OF INCREASING DELAYS FOR PASSENGERS AT AIRPORTS AS PASSENGER NUMBERS GROW

"If they can save fuel and reduce the impact on the environment, that has got to be a good thing."

"If you're saying what will benefit me and my family, yes the avoidance of increasing delays."

"[Take-offs are scary] Especially for kids. They always scream when you get the landing and take-off."

The focus groups are split as to what they think is the biggest negative of airspace modernisation

There is division among residents as to which of the potential negative consequences of airspace modernisation is the worst. In the first group, the biggest concern is that people who are already affected by living right by the airport may be even worse affected. For the second group, the potential for delays and inconvenience is a particular worry, especially if this is to go on for a long time. New areas having planes flying overhead for the first time is the biggest concern for those who do not currently live under flight paths.

AIRSPACE MODERNISATION
NEGATIVES

- NEW AREAS HAVING FLYING PLANES OVERHEAD FOR THE FIRST TIME 3rd Group
- SOME PEOPLE EXPERIENCING AN INCREASE IN AIRCRAFT NOISE 1st group
- INCREASED DELAYS AND FLIGHT CONGESTION WHILE THE CHANGE IS TAKING PLACE 2nd group

"If you've bought a house that isn't in the flight path and then all of a sudden you are on the flight path it could devalue lots of things. So that would be the biggest issue and concern that I would have."

"That particular flight might be reducing the environmental impact, but if you've got more planes up, that's going to be worse isn't it?"

"Increased delays and flight congestion [are the worst], because it's something that's not going to happen overnight, it's going to essentially take years."

There is a consistent confusion between the concepts of airspace modernisation and airport expansion in each group

Participants in every group tend to conflate the issue of airspace modernisation with airport expansion, even when given a clear briefing on what airspace modernisation would entail. For example, participants express concerns about runway building or the destruction of small villages via CPOs.

A clear visualisation of the difference may help the public to understand how the two are connected but separate in order to improve engagement.

Potential visualisation of the difference between airspace modernisation and airport expansion

AIRSPACE MODERNISATION

AIRPORT EXPANSION

Weighing up the benefits and drawbacks of airspace modernisation

"I think the benefits personally far outweigh the downsides, because of the ability to travel and tourism and trade. I think that planes do need to be more efficient and get quieter, but I don't think we can turn back the clock in terms of people's ability to travel."

Group 3

"It's progress, and if it makes it more efficient, safer, a little bit greener, and if it can make it a little bit cheaper as well, happy days."

Group 2

"I'm doing a fair bit of train travel and if they put more flights on and got me back for midday, I would definitely get the flight and therefore use the airport more."

Group 1

"I think the closer you live to the airport, obviously, you're going to probably experience more of the downsides than the upsides."

Group 1

"It might even devalue houses because of the noise and that. People might not want to live around here because it's too noisy. "

Group 2

"Depends which way you want to look at it really, I would say maybe the negatives outweigh the benefits based on the noise."

"Increase capacity, I don't think that's a benefit, to me that's a negative."

Group 3

"If I had a house and it wasn't over the flightpath, or it was but there weren't a lot of flights so it didn't cause me an inconvenience and then over time that started to change, I personally, don't think I would like that. That would make me think about moving."

Group 1

Section 3

Design Principle Themes

Design principle theme priorities

The environment

Every group sees the environmental implications of airspace change as the biggest theme that SOU should prioritise. Emissions are of key concern. However, when asked to choose, many participants would prefer improved convenience or would like to see airports find a way to provide both environmental benefits and convenience for passengers.

Safety and security

A key concern across the groups is that safety and security should be prioritised. Residents raise a number of news stories (both recent and older) about aviation disasters. There is a concern that technology can fail and potentially result in safety incidents.

Infrastructure

A key feature in modernising airspace will be the potential for airport growth. Participants understand that this will mean infrastructure changes with the potential for positive and negative changes. They would like to see improvements to roads and parking locally.

Southampton's economy

The economic benefits for Southampton and the surrounding area are seen as important. If the changes will happen participants want to see local benefits to offset any inconveniences. They would also like to see Southampton and the local area put first ahead of coordinating nationally.

The environment

The environment emerges as the key design principle in each of the focus groups, supported by many residents. This is articulated through both local concerns such as on air quality and local wildlife, and global concerns such as climate change and human extinction. Despite this, when asked to choose, many participants choose the convenience of making flying easier and quicker over improving the environment. Residents see it as the airport and airlines' responsibility to ensure both principles are met.

"We are destroying local habitats which we can't recreate."

"We're in our nice little bubble, as a rich country, and people who do get to take nice holidays. I need to stop putting my head in the sand and know that, when I take my two weeks in Spain, is that having an effect on somebody on the other side of the planet? We think we need to start thinking about that now."

"I love the idea of being able to fly to New York from Southampton, but I think we need the cold, hard truth on the table, and to actually see that, if you do that, how do you offset that somewhere else?"

Safety and security

Safety and security is a key area that participants would like to see as a top design principle theme. Although excited about the potential of technology to make airspace more efficient, some are concerned about the drawbacks of relying on technology that can fail. Another security theme is around the potential for increased international flights to result in increased terrorism threats.

"More traffic in the air equals more to go wrong."

"Rest assured I've been out in some nasty conditions where the GPS has gone down, and it's a little bit nerve-wracking to think that you've got things being guided from 25 miles up, they are fallible."

"Obviously, they're going to be aware of their safety and their security, but then, by the same token, you had that whole thing at Gatwick with the drone. One drone that couldn't be brought down for an entire day, one drone."

Local infrastructure

Local infrastructure was seen as a high priority for the two groups recruited from under existing flight paths. Participants are generally unable to separate airport expansion from airspace modernisation, seeing the former as an inevitable result of the latter. As such, improvements to access roads, parking and other local facilities is seen as a key design principle.

"When an airport is considering change, it is essential to assess the impacts of the access roads surrounding the airport and the potential benefits and pitfalls of this."

"If access to the airport is increased, this could have a negative impact on traffic to the local area and needs to be considered."

"Access, because the roads are built for the amount of flights now. That would affect local people as well, the access roads, because that would be heavier."

Economic benefits

Participants would like to see airspace modernisation resulting in significant economic benefits to the Southampton area. Several of the groups see airspace modernisation as an opportunity for increased regionalisation of the UK economy, pulling both pressure and economic benefit away from London and towards the regions. When asked to choose, most participants believe that Southampton and the surrounding area should be prioritised over co-ordinating with other airports and regions of the UK.

"I would say London is certainly overheating. So, if you're looking at it from a national point of view, you know, I'd say there's certain benefits from expanding regional airports compared to London."

"Things like the Northern Powerhouse investment or investing generally in local airports helps to offset that historical domination."

Impact on local residents

Participants across the three groups agree that there should be extra consideration for mitigating impact for those closest to the airport, who might be most adversely affected by airspace changes. When asked to choose, participants would prefer that the impact of changes in flight paths and airspace be spread among a wider group of people rather than concentrated on smaller numbers of people.

"These people that live there, and they may have lived there their entire lives, there's no need to put them through even more, just because you want to expand, and sod the little man. It's not fair."

"It's not really fair for it all to be on a focused, concentrated group."

"Why should just a few people who are unfortunate that they can't afford anything in the better regions suffer it? If people have to suffer, share it."

Section 4

Conclusions and recommendations

THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment is the key design principle for participants and they would like to see airports and the government put considerable effort into ensuring any changes to not negatively affect the local and global environment. At the same time, many participants are unwilling to pay the price themselves in terms of impact on convenience.

NAVIGATING CONFUSION

Participants struggle to differentiate between airspace modernisation and airport expansion. Southampton Airport should aim to address this misunderstanding in its communications and engagement with stakeholders and local residents.
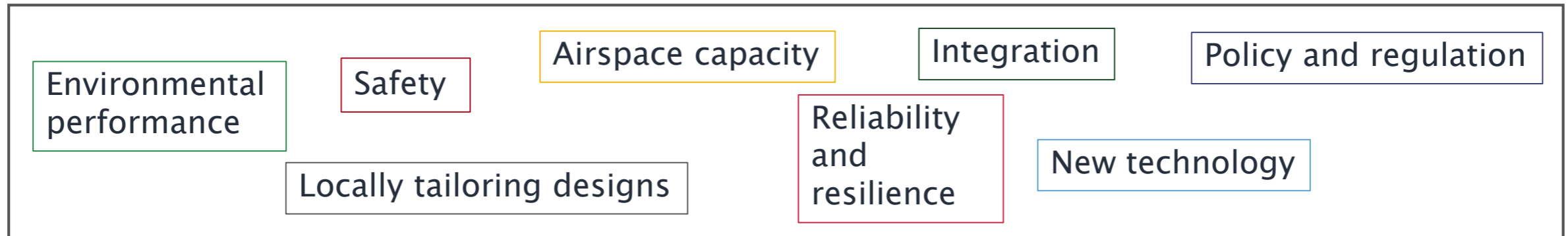
PRIORITISING SOUTHAMPTON

Participants would like to see attention paid to the local residents and infrastructure around Southampton airport. While the benefits of co-ordinating nationally are understood, residents would like Southampton as an area to be prioritised.

Design principle prioritisation

Top   Bottom (not raised)

Environmental performance

Safety

Airspace capacity

Integration

Policy and regulation

Locally tailoring designs

Reliability and resilience

New technology

Appendix

What did the focus groups learn about airspace?

The airport is going to be more busy

How airspace is managed!

I didn't realise that there were so many issues to consider about increasing the capacity to an airport

The idea of using airspace more efficiently

Most people in our group like hearing an occasional plane.

Our airspace will be changing?

Environmental factors are becoming a bigger thought for most people

I learned that there are plans to improve the airspace around us

One of the biggest takeaways from the focus groups is that participants often had never considered the airspace above them and how much of an impact it could have on their lives.
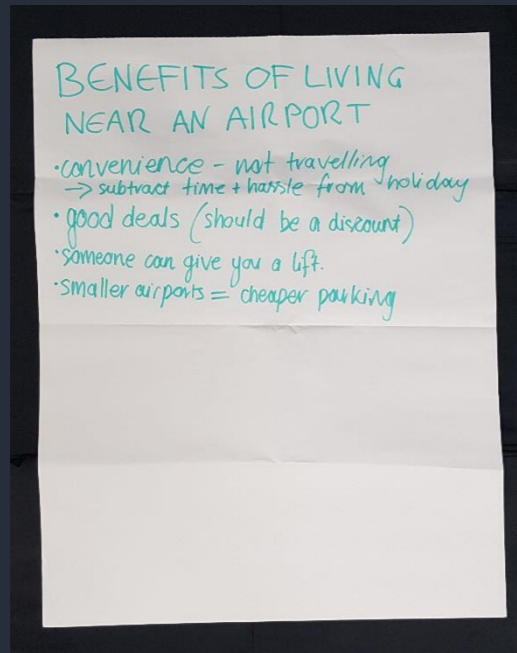
Flights that cost more at a local airport discourage people from using said airport so people travel in cars across England, increasing carbon emissions.

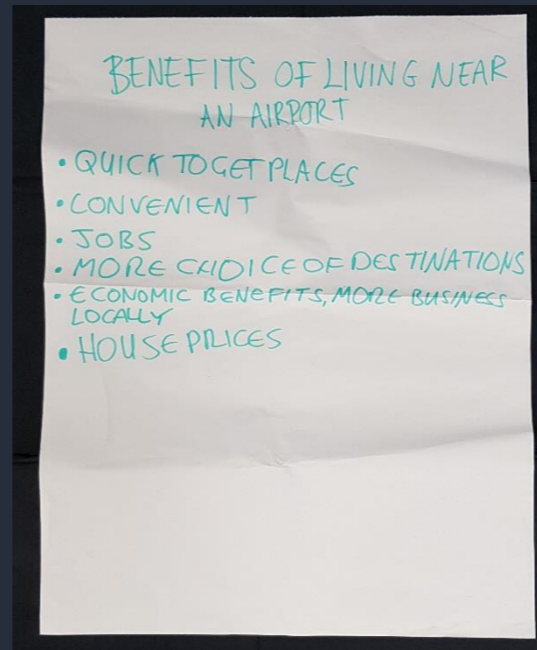Generally people are interested in the bigger picture. We do need to look after our planet!

Didn't even know what airspace was.
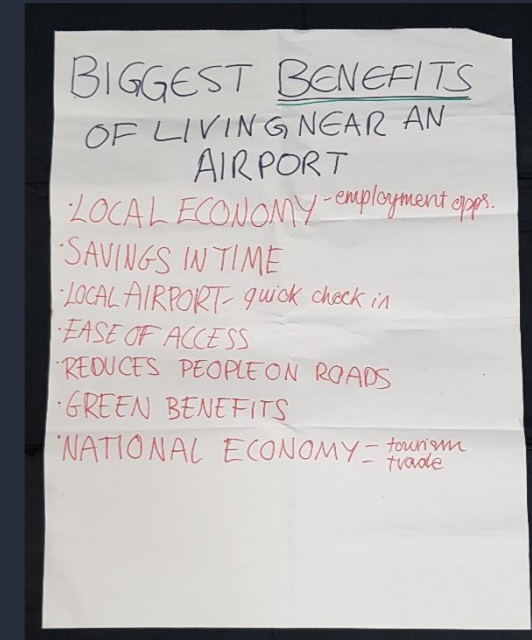
Benefits of living near an airport
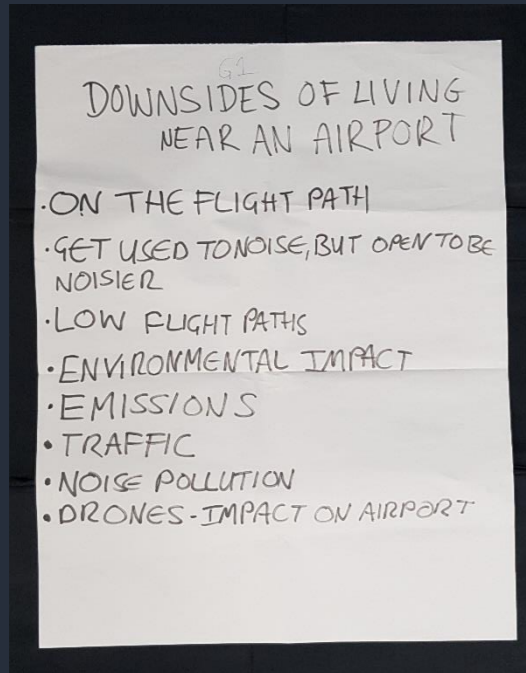
Group 1 – Under flight paths

BENEFITS OF LIVING
NEAR AN AIRPORT
- Convenience – not travelling
  → subtract time + hassle from holiday
- good deals (should be a discount)
- Someone can give you a lift.
- Smaller airports = cheaper parking

Group 2 – Under flight paths

BENEFITS OF LIVING NEAR
AN AIRPORT
- QUICK TO GET PLACES
- CONVENIENT
- JOBS
- MORE CHOICE OF DESTINATIONS
- ECONOMIC BENEFITS, MORE BUSINESS LOCALLY
- HOUSE PRICES

Group 3 – Potentially affected area

BIGGEST BENEFITS
OF LIVING NEAR AN
AIRPORT
- LOCAL ECONOMY – employment opps.
- SAVINGS IN TIME
- LOCAL AIRPORT – quick check in
- EASE OF ACCESS
- REDUCES PEOPLE ON ROADS
- GREEN BENEFITS
- NATIONAL ECONOMY – tourism + trade

Downsides of living near an airport

Group 1 – Under flight paths

DOWNSIDES OF LIVING NEAR AN AIRPORT
- ON THE FLIGHT PATH
- GET USED TO NOISE, BUT OPEN TO BE NOISIER
- LOW FLIGHT PATHS
- ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
- EMISSIONS
- TRAFFIC
- NOISE POLLUTION
- DRONES - IMPACT ON AIRPORT

Group 2 – Under flight paths

DOWNSIDES OF LIVING NEAR AN AIRPORT
- Nothing?
- Noise
- Car traffic
- Area too focused on flyers (eg. no parking)
- No more free pick-up/drop-off
- Impact on young children
- Environment / pollution

Group 3 – Potentially affected area

BIGGEST DOWNSIDES OF LIVING NEAR AN AIRPORT
- AIR POLLUTION
- NOISE POLLUTION
- TRAFFIC
- INCREASED SECURITY RISKS
- NOISE AT UNSOCIABLE HOURS
- POSSIBILITY OF DISASTER — falling out of planes, planes hitting motorways
- PROTESTERS
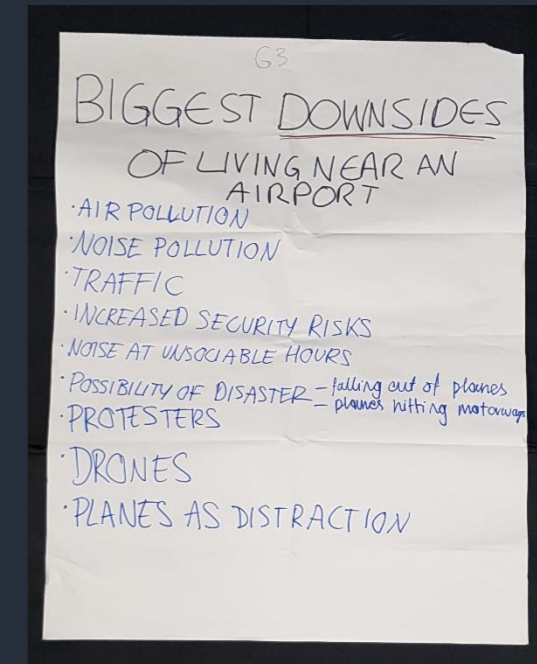- DRONES
- PLANES AS DISTRACTION
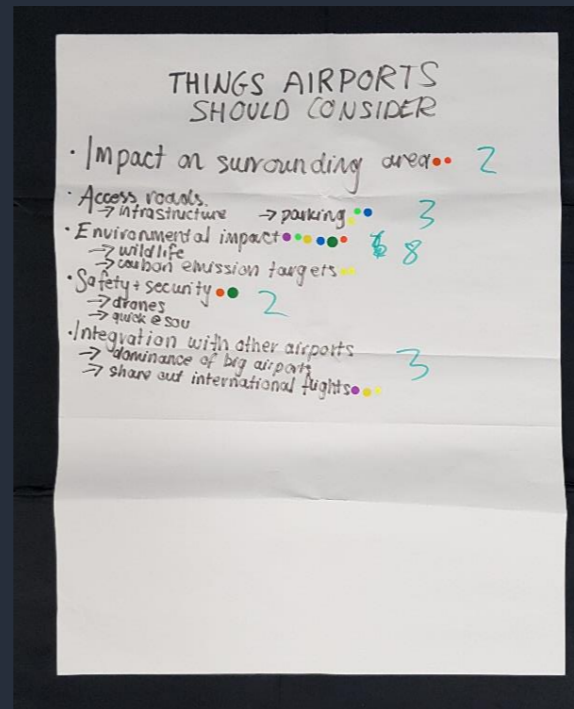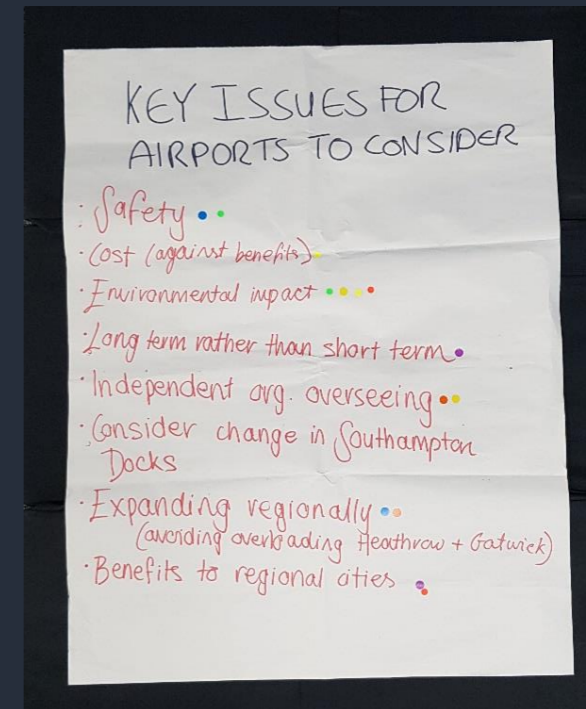
Design principle themes

Group 1 – Under flight paths
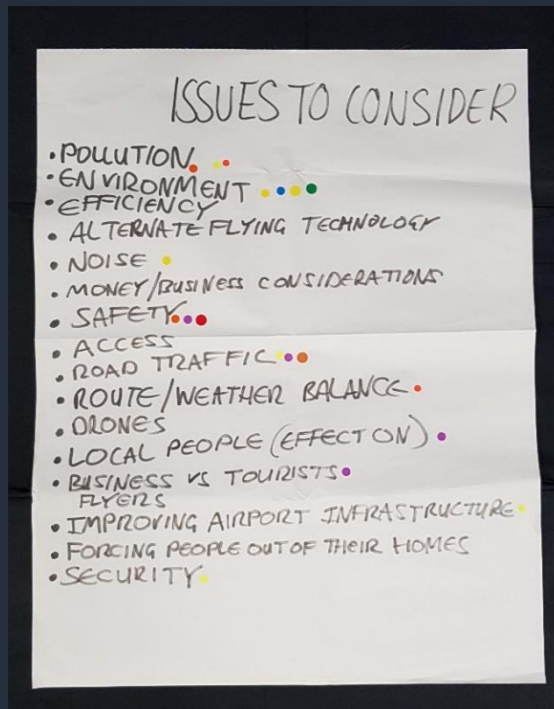
Group 2 – Under flight paths

Group 3 – Potentially affected area

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