

Aircraft Noise Action Group

Newcastle International Airport: Environmental social and governance policy 2025: ANAG comments

1. Introduction and background:

Newcastle Airport is a regional airport. Currently its passenger numbers are less than 2% of aviation passenger numbers for the whole of the UK. Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Manchester together account for around 64%.

The Airport plans to increase passenger numbers with a target of 9 million passengers a year by 2040 compared with current levels at around 5.6 million. Aviation right across the UK is seeking to expand so it is not expected that Newcastle's share will necessarily increase as a result of its own expansion.

More passengers will necessarily result in: an increase in flight numbers per annum leading to a significant rise in emissions impacting climate change; more exhaust pollutants being released into the atmosphere and falling to ground level; more frequent aircraft noise including earlier and later flights; more traffic driving to the Airport – plans include a 7000 space car park expansion. Newcastle Airport, in common with other UK Airports, derives a significant percentage of its annual income from car parking charges.

The Airport's core business is built around leisure aviation with an average of around 85% of passengers per flight fitting into this category. The summary below is an ANAG analysis based on Airport's flight guide for Winter 25 – Summer 26.

Overall summary

	By operator/airline				
	Flights p.w.	Leisure	%	Other	%
Summer flights p.w.	522	450	86.2%	72	13.8%
Winter flights p.w.	382	324	84.8%	58	15.2%

Around 75% of the summer leisure passenger capacity is provided by 4 high-volume low-cost operators: Jet2, Ryanair, EasyJet and TUI. All four are primarily holiday flight providers. This drops to 53% in winter as other, smaller leisure operators deliver winter holiday flights.

2. Comments on the Environmental, Social and Governance report 2025:

Our view is that, in common with the Masterplan 2040, the ESG report aims to show the Airport in the most favourable possible light – this is to be expected, this is what businesses do. It's primarily a glossy public relations document and it succeeds in that sense only. However, because it misses out key relevant contextual information, we think the ESG report's credibility is critically damaged as a result.

These include:

- a) **Leisure flights and the local economy:** Newcastle Airport claims to be essential to the local economy. We think this is a false claim. Business use of aviation has declined rapidly in recent years, business has found other ways of meeting and communicating that don't involve flying. In any event, the business market is necessarily limited, opportunities for aviation expansion, where they exist, lie primarily in the leisure market which is exactly the market Newcastle Airport is addressing.

Leisure flights (holidays, city weekends, visiting friends and family, shopping trips etc) now comprise most of the Airport's passenger numbers. This means that the Airport is effectively facilitating the export of vast sums of money from the region via holidaymaker pockets and bank and credit card use abroad. This loss of spend from the region means that the local economy – jobs and businesses – are adversely affected. In 2024, the Office for National Statistics reports that there was a net loss of £47 billion to the UK via outgoing UK nationals on leisure trips abroad. This negative impact is not included in the ESG report, we think it should be if the report is to be credible.

- b) **Climate change emissions and Net Zero:** The airport references its Net Zero Strategy. This is concerned with reducing the climate change impact of its own ground operations only. It has done good work on this but it's the flights that really matter. Even if held at the current level, their emissions impact will effectively overwhelm any benefits from Net Zero gains the Airport might make now and in the future. However, the Airport plans to almost double passenger numbers by 2040 which will inevitably mean many more flights, further minimising the benefits of implementation of the Airport's Net Zero aspirations for its own ground operations. The ESG report does not report the effect of flights compared with its own operations and is therefore misleading in our view.
- c) **Sustainability:** We think that the Airport uses the term "sustainability" carelessly without defining exactly what it means where it is used, in this context it's merely a buzz word that sounds good but means very little but which could press buttons for readers of the report. We think the Airport knows this.
- d) **Aircraft noise:** Aircraft noise is a key impact from aviation, it's the element that people notice most if they live near an airport and it has negative health and wellbeing implications. In 2017, flight paths from and to the Airport became managed by satellite navigation. Aircraft now have to stay within 1 mile either side of the relevant flightpath centreline where up to 5 miles lateral dispersion was previously the standard – the noise was shared and respite was available. This change concentrated noise down much narrower

flightpaths resulting in a massively increased impact on people living under or close to flightpath centre lines. Noise complaints increased rapidly – this was true not just for Newcastle but at multiple airports across the UK that made the change at around the same time. Newcastle Airport's response to each noise complaint is to carry out a technical check to see if the aircraft concerned was breaching rules around position and altitude and to report back accordingly to the complainant.

One of the points of complaining about the noise (or indeed, anything) is to ask that something is done to prevent it from happening again or to get its impact reduced. The Airport has signally failed to do this, all it does is address its own internal technical requirements related to aircraft safety (which, of course, it must do). However, this limitation undermines its claim to regard the mitigation of noise as being important, no significant changes have been made to meaningfully address the noise issue since 2017 (see. More flights as per the Masterplan 2040's aspirations will only worsen this situation. None of this is included in the ESG report which is therefore misleading.

- e) **Changing how noise complaints are made:** Noise complaints have fallen away over time because nothing ever changes (see above; also complaint fatigue) and because of the dynamics of complaining: if you don't have the means of complaining to hand or are occupied with other tasks when the noise event occurs, the evidence is that you are unlikely to complain at all. All this has been reported to the Airport.

The Airport has very recently changed the route for complaining which must now happen via its online WebTrak facility, it won't now accept complaints by any other route. This facility is significantly more difficult and complex to access and use compared with ANAG's simple online complaints from which the Airport has hitherto been getting complaints for a number of years. As a result, this change will almost certainly suppress complaint numbers. It now accepts complaints via this new route only where it used to accept complaints from ANAG's own form as well as by phone, post and email.

ANAG was involved in discussions around this change: we warned that complaints will be suppressed if the new method is adopted but the decision was made to go ahead anyway. We suspect, but can't prove, that the Airport knows full well that complaint numbers will further fall away as a result. The ESG's claim to be a responsible neighbour to the communities around it is clearly compromised by this change even though it has happened since the ESG report was published.