

10 June 2021



Police Commissioner Cressida Dick CBE
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Dear Commissioner Dick

Proposed Relocation of Police Air-Support Helicopters to Lippitts Hill – Epping Forest

We are writing on behalf of the residents of Epping Forest District. We wish to draw your attention to our serious concerns regarding the proposed relocation of air-support helicopters from your current base with the National Police Air Service – NPAS – at North Weald Airfield. Plans have emerged for the Metropolitan Police to sever its ties with NPAS and return to a stand-alone facility in the heart of Epping Forest at Lippitts Hill, High Beach.

We strongly oppose the proposed relocation and appeal to you to reconsider the decision.

Epping Forest District lies on the borders of London in the County of Essex. Today, the district is served by the Essex Police Service, but parts of the district have long historic ties with the Metropolitan Police. At one time the Met served areas of our district including Chigwell, Loughton and Buckhurst Hill.

There are a number of historic legacies associated with our connection, including the former helicopter base at Lippitts Hill.

Lippitts Hill lies within the heart of Epping Forest. The Forest is a sensitive and delicate natural environment. It is a Special Area of Conservation of global significance, being one of the few remaining areas of original deciduous woodland left in the UK. The delicate eco-system of Epping Forest including special and rare species, plants and fungi is particularly vulnerable to air pollution.

The Forest is a source of great pride and concern to our local residents. Statutory regulations and strict oversight by the Corporation of London are designed to protect and preserve it, not only for the people of Essex. It is a place of peace and wellbeing enjoyed equally by our close neighbours in London. However, the environmental pressures on the Forest are severe. Pollution levels are too high. The District Council, working in conjunction with local residents, the Corporation of London and other stakeholders is doing all we can to protect and preserve our Forest for future generations.

The environmental impact of helicopter operations speaks for itself.

The current NPAS base at North Weald is at a long-established airfield shared with other notable aviation operators including the Herts and Essex Air-Ambulance. The airfield is owned by Epping Forest District Council and we have worked in partnership with NPAS to support the construction of a brand new helicopter facility. While our major concerns are not financial in this case, NPAS has a long lease with the Council and will continue to provide air support for other police forces. It cannot be good value for the tax paying residents of either London or Essex, for the Metropolitan Police to leave such a recently delivered new facility.

Our other main concern is for those residents living near Lippitts Hill within Epping Forest, High Beach and Waltham Abbey.

It is one thing to buy a new house or home next to an existing airfield – you know what you are getting with aircraft coming and going before you purchase. However, many of the residents in and around Lippitts Hill have had no such choice. Many will have bought their homes in good faith and the understanding that helicopter operations had ceased with no reason to expect a return.

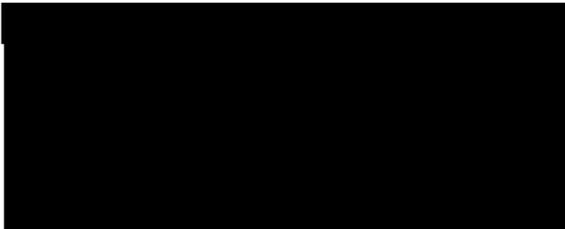
The consequential noise, pollution and general disturbance associated with these helicopters at Lippitts Hill would be very hard to justify.

If the historic legacy did not exist, it is almost inconceivable that anyone would consider Epping Forest to be a suitable location. If planning permission was required, the District Council, supported by the Corporation of London, environmental groups, other stakeholders and local residents would almost certainly turn any application down. As such the Metropolitan Police has an ethical and moral duty as well as a legal ability to consider in taking this decision.

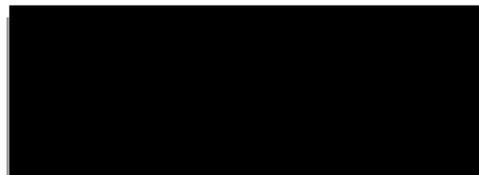
We do not presume to advise you on the operational requirements of the Metropolitan Police Service. As a district council we have a strong and active partnership with the Essex Police Service. We actively fund additional police officers and provide accommodation along with day to day support. We fully support the difficult and sometimes dangerous role the police perform in maintaining our safety, rights and freedoms. However, if the operational requirements of the Metropolitan Police require a better alternative to North Weald, we respectfully say that Lippitts Hill is not the answer. There are many other potential aviation locations both in and around London that would serve the Metropolitan Police Service just as well if not better than Lippitts Hill.

If you are determined to find an alternative, please take a closer look at some of the other alternatives and help us to protect and preserve Epping Forest now and for the future.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Chris Whitbread
Leader of Council



Georgina Blakemore
Chief Executive