Guidance on the Preparation of Airport Master Plans
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The Preparation of Airport Master Plans

Introduction

1. The White Paper The Future of Air Transport (Cm 6046, December 2003) states:

   “Airport operators are recommended to maintain a master plan document detailing development proposals. An airport master plan does not have development plan status, but the level of detail contained within it is essential to inform the content of the Local Development Framework. We will expect airport operators to produce master plans or, where appropriate, to update existing master plans to take account of the conclusions on future development set out in this White Paper.” (paragraphs 12.7, 12.8)

2. It goes on to say that:

   “airport operators should begin this process immediately, with a view to the production of new or revised master plans as soon as possible, and preferably within the next twelve months.” (paragraph 12.9)

3. It then sets out in the programme of action for 2004, that:

   “we expect all major airports to produce or update existing master plans, as appropriate, to take account of the conclusions in this White Paper.” (page 146)

4. Feedback from a range of stakeholders has confirmed the Government’s view that it would be helpful to provide a clear indication of its expectations of how these statements in the White Paper should be taken forward. Particular issues considered in need of clarification include:

   - the purpose of master plans;
   - which airports should produce them;
   - the timetable for preparing them;
   - the scope of master plans and their integration with Local Development Frameworks1; and
   - the process for preparing them and keeping them up to date.

5. This document accordingly outlines the Government’s view on what it would like to see in master plans and offers good practice advice on their production. It is for airports to take this into account in the preparation of their own plans. The guidance has been prepared following informal soundings with the Devolved Administrations, airport operators, airlines, local government representatives and environmental groups.

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1 A development brief within a local development plan in Scotland, an area plan in Northern Ireland and a unitary or local development plan in Wales.
6. The guidance has been published jointly with the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Regional Development for Northern Ireland, and accordingly applies to airports in all parts of the United Kingdom.

The purpose of master plans

7. The Air Transport White Paper set out for the first time in nearly twenty years a comprehensive view of future airport requirements in the UK. This was provided in the context of a framework of broader policy, which seeks to balance airport growth against the need to minimise impacts on those who live nearby and on the natural environment. Master plans provide a mechanism for airport operators to explain how they propose to take forward this strategic framework in the form of airport-specific proposals, designed to help inform the regional and local planning processes and facilitate engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

8. Master plans will not have any statutory basis unless they are subject to the relevant plan-making provisions in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004\(^2\). The absence of an approved master plan should therefore not be relied upon by local planning authorities as grounds for refusal to consider planning applications. But the Government envisages that a master plan should provide a clear statement of intent on the part of an airport operator that will enable future development of the airport to be given due consideration in local and regional planning processes.

9. It will normally be for airport operators to take the lead in preparing a master plan, and to describe how they expect their airport to develop over time. If, however, a master plan is to be fully integrated into a Local Development Framework, likely to be in the form of an Area Action Plan, the airport operator should work closely with the local planning authority from an early stage, as the latter body will need to take ownership of the process and take it through the appropriate stages set out in the 2004 Act.

10. The Government believes that the preparation of airport master plans will offer a range of wider potential benefits in addition to their value in informing the planning process:-

- they will provide an indication of an airport operator’s plans for infrastructure development in the light of the high-level strategic policy framework for each airport in the White Paper, and therefore bring greater clarity and certainty for all those affected or with an interest;
- they will inform long-term resource planning for local and regional players, particularly in the preparation of strategies and local plans;
- they will make a useful tool for communicating to a range of stakeholders, including airlines, funding institutions, local authority and other local interests, to allow them to make well informed investment decisions;
- they will help airport operators to make clear at an early stage the key milestones of their development project such as the submission of a planning application, construction and opening;

\(^2\) In England and Wales.
- they will provide a consistent and publicly recognised vehicle for the Government, Devolved Administrations and their agencies to assess progress being made in delivering the White Paper at each airport;
- they will demonstrate the range of costs and benefits of airport growth; and
- they will enable airport operators and others to assess local social and environmental impacts (including those arising from landtake and habitat loss) and provide an opportunity to develop preliminary proposals on how those impacts could be mitigated.

11. Many airport operators already produce master plans. However, the approach set out in each is different. Some bring together comprehensive evidence sets on specific proposals for development, whereas others provide a more general statement on operational issues with little underpinning analysis.

12. The Government feels that airport operators should use their master plans to explain their plans for development. In doing so they should reflect the broad scope of the White Paper and the balanced, evidence-based and open approach to airport planning which it advocates. In order for the document to be in step with the different requirements of the regional and local planning processes in England and the devolved areas of the UK, the substantive document including supporting evidence should be ready by the end of 2005. This should enable master plans to inform the preparation of Local Development Frameworks3.

13. Airport master plans will be an important reference source in the planning and development process for individual airports and those affected by them. This guidance therefore indicates how master plans should be developed to build on White Paper conclusions. It sets out the core issues that master plans should cover and those that are optional. It establishes some underlying principles that reflect the needs of wider stakeholder interests. But importantly, it also recognises the flexibility that will be needed to reflect the circumstances of different airports.

Which airports should produce master plans?

14. In addition to those airports at which significant development proposals such as new or extended terminals and runways are supported in the White Paper, there are a number of others which are already of sufficient scale to be considered major transport infrastructure facilities and where proposals for substantial incremental development are likely to be brought forward. It is important that such proposals should be highlighted so that they may inform the regional and local planning process. We believe it would be appropriate for those airports where the White Paper supports specific major developments or which are forecast to handle 20,000 air transport movements annually by 2030, to prepare master plans along the lines suggested in this guidance. A list of those airports included under these criteria is in the Appendix.

3 See footnote 1.
15. Other airports which have aspirations to achieve annual air transport movement throughputs in excess of the above threshold, or where the future level of impact might cause concern, or which believe their development proposals would benefit from the considerations set out in paragraphs 6 and 7 may also wish to consider preparing master plans.

**Timetable for preparing master plans**

16. The White Paper indicates that airport operators should produce a master plan preferably by the end of this year or as soon possible thereafter. Although some airports who already have master plans in preparation, or for whom the work involved is not particularly demanding, may be able to meet this timetable, informal discussions with airport operators suggest that for many this is a challenging timetable. By the end of this year, therefore, airports are expected either to have produced a full master plan or, where this is impracticable, an outline master plan in the form of a high level statement of intent, to be followed by the end of 2005 by a fuller master plan; unless there are very good reasons for a later date. All master plans would thereafter be reviewed quinquennially.

17. The Air Transport White Paper has set out the broad long-term framework for the development of the United Kingdom’s airports; the Government believes that master plans have a significant role to play as operators take development forward within that framework. It is important in the public interest, therefore, that these timescales are met.

**The scope of master plans**

18. Airports are major developments that can have major impacts (both positive and negative) on their surroundings. It is important, therefore, that airport operators bring forward as soon as possible proposals setting out their response to the provisions of the White Paper, so that the potential form and impacts of prospective airport development can be clearly understood. However, the dynamic nature of the airports sector also requires flexibility to be retained in medium and long-term planning so that infrastructure proposals and operating regimes can respond to market requirements within the broad framework of policy provided by the White Paper. The approach suggested in this guidance is designed to balance these two requirements.

19. For development proposals that are likely to be brought forward in the time horizon of strategic and local land use and transport plans, especially where a significant planning application is expected in the near term (ie the next 5 – 10 years), the White Paper makes clear a fuller treatment is expected. But for the period from 2016 to 2030, only indicative land use plans are needed. This acknowledges that proposals which will come to fruition so far in the future are likely to bring with them considerable uncertainties and that consequently there is likely to be little value in working them up in any degree of detail.

20. Airports with relatively limited development proposals within the timescale of their regional spatial strategy and local development framework (typically 2015 or 2016), might therefore reasonably adopt a lighter approach, while utilising the same basic master plan structure as those with major development programmes. For instance, should an airport operator propose to submit a planning application for a runway extension after say 2020, it need not include assessment of the scheme in the current round of master plan preparation to be carried out this year. But if it were planned for 2010 then assessment of the proposal along the lines suggested below should be undertaken.
21. Airport operators may also find it particularly valuable in preparing their master plans to indicate the degree of certainty attached to particular development proposals, including the timescale. This should allow freedom to review schemes as they evolve over time and avoid future developments being inappropriately circumscribed too far in advance.

22. We anticipate that many airports will already have to hand a significant amount of relevant material, although some may require updating. Consequently, new work may need to be commissioned and, in a small number of cases, airports may need to start from scratch. However, a great deal of the work involved in preparing a master plan will be necessary in working up development proposals to the point where a development plan submission or planning application can be made. Carrying out this work at an earlier stage as part of the master plan process should assist with the early identification of potential problem areas, milestones and trigger points and in the longer term is likely to improve the efficiency of the planning process.

23. It will be desirable to review and update master plans at regular intervals to ensure that they continue to reflect revisions to regional and local plans, the continuing evolution of airport development proposals and other relevant issues. We propose that this should take place at roughly five yearly intervals. We judge that circumstances will have changed sufficiently during a five-year period to justify this exercise, but that the frequency is not so great as to impose an excessive burden in terms of effort and resources. It should then also correspond to the development plan cycle.

Content

24. As indicated in the introduction to this guidance, master plans were identified as the key tool through which airport operators should explain how they propose to take forward the strategic policy framework for their airport(s) set out in the Air Transport White Paper. By presenting airport specific proposals reflecting the balanced, evidence based and open approach to airport planning that it advocates their key purpose is to help inform the statutory regional and local planning processes across the United Kingdom and facilitate engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

25. With this in mind, the more ground covered in a master plan and the more extensive the consultation which has informed its preparation, the greater its value in informing future land use, transport and economic planning processes, and in supporting prospective planning applications. We would anticipate that, in the case of most airports, master plans will address the following ‘core’ areas:

- forecasts
- infrastructure proposals
- safeguarding and land/property take
- surface access initiatives
- impact on people and the natural environment
- proposals to minimise and mitigate impacts.
26. But airport operators may also find it useful to cover within the master plan a range of other material. This includes options for particular parts of the master plan where it has not yet been possible to come to any firm conclusions or where further discussion with stakeholders is considered necessary. And it may be helpful to include more detailed material on the appraisal of environmental impacts and the way in which the operator plans to assess the options for reducing and mitigating those impacts, together with a wider range of impacts relevant to the land use planning process.

**Forecasts**

27. It would be helpful for airport operators to provide an introduction to the forecasts on which the master plan is based in the form of an up-to-date breakdown of current traffic (daytime and night-time, passenger, cargo and air transport movements). An explanation of this data in relation to historic trends and expected market developments would provide important context.

28. The Government’s forecasts for the UK’s principal airports prepared using the Department for Transport traffic forecasting model are in the White Paper and in a supporting document. If airport operators intend to use traffic forecasts that disagree with these to underpin their master plans, it would be helpful if their proposed approach could be discussed with the Department at an early stage. Forecasts should be presented for 2030, but figures for 2010 and 2015 or 2020 will also be important, depending on the planning horizon being worked to for more detailed assessment and would ideally include sensitivity tests, particularly if forecasts are materially different from the Department’s.

29. Busy day scheduling modelling, passenger profiles and potentially simulation modelling could be used as background for major infrastructure projects. But for smaller projects, particularly those not required for some years to come, industry ‘ready reckoners’ should be sufficient to scope, for example, terminal extensions.

**Infrastructure proposals**

30. A good deal of information on existing airside and terminal infrastructure at UK airports was set out in the consultation documents preceding the White Paper. It would be helpful for this to be updated in the master plan as the basis for analysis outlining prospective capacity constraints and when they might arise (dates and key thresholds – runway, terminal, apron, taxiway, landside etc) under a range of sensitivities. In doing so, it would also be appropriate to identify where constraints are expected to arise and the factors which could affect them (e.g. traffic build-up, aircraft size, scheduling, land availability, environmental and safety issues).

31. To help recipients of the master plan, it may be helpful if airports were to include a statement of their adopted planning standards. These would include issues such as gate utilisation and queue lengths for normal throughput, average and maximum delay criteria for landings and take-offs and how these impact on their proposals.

32. The White Paper makes clear that airports should seek to make best use of existing capacity before undertaking further development. The master plan might usefully explain how this has been done as a precursor to setting out future development proposals. These should take

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4 Passenger Forecasts: Additional Analysis (www.dft.gov.uk/aviation/whitepaper/supporting/pdf/passenger_forecasts_additional_analysis.pdf)
5 Further airport specific breakdown of outputs from the DfT model can be obtained by contacting the DfT’s consultant Mark Judd at Scott Wilson (Mark.Judd@scottwilson.com)
the form of layout plans for the period up to 2015-16 and less detailed block land use plans for the period beyond up to 2030-31 with accompanying descriptive text and tables highlighting key features. An outline investment plan identifying important milestones and capital expenditure plans over the next 10 years (ie to 2015-16) should form part of the supporting written statement.

33. The plans are not expected to take the form of detailed engineering or architectural drawings such as those that might accompany a planning application, but to be of value they ought to contain sufficient information, including drawings where appropriate, so that they may be clearly understood by laymen as well as professionals. In addition to airside and terminal development and surface access infrastructure, plans for the next 10 years might usefully include landside development (eg car parking, servicing and support areas, environmental features, landscaping and other mitigation measures), clearly identifying what is new from what already exists. They should also show airport boundaries and highlight any additional properties or land that may need to be taken. Maps showing safety surfaces and Public Safety Zones (PSZs) can be provided separately (see below).

34. In some circumstances it will be important to place airport proposals in their broader context and show how they will be integrated with adjacent land uses. This would be appropriate where the airport is located close to sensitive neighbours such as residential or important environmental areas or is in a location where major development is anticipated over the lifetime of the master plan in surrounding areas. The broader context will also be important to be able to show integration with and impact on the wider transport infrastructure programme.

**Safeguarding and land/property take**

35. Perhaps one of the most important issues master plans should seek to address is what the long-term land requirements are for future airport development and whether this requires changes to airport boundaries. Where it does, the additional land and property involved, including those associated with PSZs and safety surfaces, should be clearly identified to minimise long-term uncertainty and non-statutory blight.

36. The process of preparing an airport master plan should enable current or interim safety surfaces and PSZs to be updated, as required by the White Paper, so that relevant areas within and outside the airport boundary can be shown on an updated safeguarding map and notified to the appropriate local planning authorities. Mapping, based on the DfT\(^6\) and CAA\(^7\) guidance might be provided as an insert to the master plan or separately where this is more appropriate.

**Surface access**

37. As the White Paper set out, for larger airports in particular surface access is likely to be a major issue over the period of the master plans. The associated infrastructure can be a major consumer of land and money. It therefore needs to be carefully planned as part of an integrated approach to the development of the airport. Airports are already required to produce Airport Surface Access Strategies\(^8\), but master plans will require development or revision of short and long-term strategies to take forward the planning horizon for surface

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\(^7\) CAP738: Safeguarding of Aerodromes, and Advice Note 1: Safeguarding – an Overview

\(^8\) Guidance on Airport Transport Forums and Airport Surface Access Strategies (www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_aviation/documents/page/dft_aviation_503313.hcsp#P47_13523)
access to 2030-31. A more detailed assessment focused on the period covered by regional transport and land use strategies and local transport plans and development frameworks will also be needed. The White Paper set out some preliminary conclusions on future surface access needs but identified this as an area for further work, making its consideration as part of airport master plan preparations even more important.

38. The split between use of public (including heavy and light rail, coach, bus and shared taxi) and private transport by air passengers and those working at the airport will affect the scale of any new investment in surface access that is required to accompany proposed airport expansion. The extent to which transport infrastructure used to access airports is also shared by other users (eg commuters or adjacent development provision) can also be a major influence, particularly where road and rail networks are already, or will become, heavily congested. An airport’s catchment area may be very large and its surface access impact thereby extensive. This issue will require close working with a range of stakeholders.

39. To understand current and future mode split, the potential impact of forecast airport growth and extent of any new surface access investment that is needed, airports may wish to employ appropriate analytical techniques. For those airports where there are complex issues surrounding adequate surface access provision, this may require the use of appropriate transport models. For most airports, however, simple manual assignment techniques should suffice; the approach should in each case be agreed with key stakeholders.

40. We recognise that surface access in particular is a complex area. In the initial stages of master plan preparation, it may be possible to do little more than adopt a simplified approach which describes the relevant schemes in broad terms, while identifying subsequent areas of work which will need to be taken forward over the course of the following year.

41. The Department for Transport (DfT) and its agencies, Devolved Administrations and Government Offices and in some cases Passenger Transport Executives and local authorities have extant models that may be useful. It would be helpful if these key stakeholders could also be kept informed throughout the assessment process and particularly once there are emerging conclusions and specific proposals. Their continuing engagement will be particularly important in facilitating the early assessment of proposals that might require public expenditure.

Mitigation

42. An important component of master plans will be proposals for mitigation measures across the major impact areas identified earlier (eg emission controls, noise abatement measures, sound insulation, surface access schemes and traffic management and measures to address landscape and biodiversity impacts).

43. It will be appropriate for master plans to address any proposals for compensation measures that may be required where the scale of impacts is such that they cannot adequately be mitigated. Such measures might include appropriate voluntary purchase schemes and assistance with relocation costs where the extent of property and land take is clear, as discussed in Chapter 3 of the White Paper. There is also an expectation that those airports where new runways are supported in the White Paper will bring forward schemes to address non-statutory blight, and these might helpfully be reflected in master plans.

9 See paragraphs 12.18 to 12.24 and 12.30 of the White Paper.
44. Where appropriate the master plan should then seek to identify and quantify the residual impacts, both positive and negative, which will remain after the measures outlined above have been taken into account.

Options
45. In some cases where there is more than one possible approach to the development of part of the airport, airport operators may find it helpful to consult on options when preparing master plans. However, in doing so they should bear in mind the Government’s views on various options for major infrastructure development set out in the White Paper.

46. The inclusion of options in the final master plan proposals may also provide a useful approach where an airport needs to retain a degree of flexibility in respect of a particular scheme or part of the airport – for example where it is dependent on other decisions or future developments. An alternative approach would be to identify a ‘reference case’ that outlines the ‘preferred option’ in the master plan. Supporting text would need to explain that the design of the scheme was not finalised, but that any subsequent variations will seek to be not materially worse than the reference case, and any differences will be clearly explained.

Appraisal of proposals
47. There is no requirement for master plans to contain a detailed appraisal of development proposals along the lines of the appraisal frameworks developed for the SERAS and RASCO studies.

48. We would anticipate, however, that airports will want to consider reporting in their master plans the following key impacts of their major development projects in the current and subsequent five-yearly periods:

- noise impacts (daytime/night noise/ground running) - Airports to which EU Directive 2002/49/EC will apply will be required to produce noise maps by 2007 in the form prescribed in the Directive. DEFRA will shortly be going out to public consultation on the precise way in which the Directive will be transposed into UK law, but the key requirements of the Directive are clear;
- air quality impacts, (where material) – Plans for airport developments must be able to demonstrate how compliance with the mandatory air quality limit values set down in EU Directive 1999/30/EC, transposed into domestic law by The Air Quality Limit Values Regulations 2003, will be achieved;
- surface access implications – including impacts on local and wider transport infrastructure;
- local, and in the case of larger airports, regional economic, housing and employment implications – of the proposed development;
- the extent of property and land take – where appropriate.

49. In preparing their master plans airport operators should also consider the effect, if any, of Directive 2001/42/EC (the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive).
50. It is not considered necessary to produce a Health Impact Assessment as part of the master plan process. This should instead accompany formal planning applications for qualifying developments set out in the master plan.

51. We recommend that operators discuss the range of their coverage within any master plan steering group, with a view to agreement. The depth of treatment should be appropriate to the extent to which particular schemes or parts of the master plan have been worked up.

52. In many cases, the particular circumstances of the area will make a number of other matters relevant. These include biodiversity, heritage and landscape impacts, possible birdstrike hazards and possible airspace conflicts and changes. Airport operators are encouraged to address these topics where there are local concerns or constraints (e.g. Special Areas of Conservation and Ramsar sites) or where there are important issues to be considered in the design of mitigation proposals (e.g. new stacks and noise preferential routes).

53. Applications for public financial support will need to follow the guidance of DfT, other Government Departments and Devolved Administrations as appropriate. Such applications, whether for airport or surface access infrastructure, are not expected to form part of the master plan, although it might helpfully flag where they might be in prospect. The applications should instead be made separately, following relevant procedures and including the required financial, quantified economic and other appraisal information.

**Process**

54. The White Paper places great emphasis on a process of airport planning, which seeks to ensure that airports do not develop in isolation and that development proposals incorporate safeguards to minimise their adverse impact on the local environment. It will be important that airports should seek to involve local stakeholders during the preparation of their master plan as well as formally consulting them on its outcome. Key parties to include would be representatives of the principal airline users, the Government Office or Devolved Administration (as appropriate), the Regional Development Agency, the local planning authorities, the local representatives of the statutory environmental agencies (where their statutory duties are likely to be engaged) and key surface access providers (local highway authority, Highways Agency, Strategic Rail Authority and Passenger Transport Executive) where appropriate. For larger airports, there may be development impacts outside the region in which the airport is located; in those cases, consultation should involve similar key parties in the other affected region(s).

55. It will be advantageous for airport operators to undertake a full-scale public consultation, especially where there are proposals for major infrastructure development. The more extensive the consultation the better informed and received the final master plan proposals are likely to be. This will be the case whether the master plan is used to provide a formal input to strategic and local land use plans or is submitted in support of a planning application. However, it will be important to make clear to consultees that their views are being sought on the specific proposals in the draft master plan, not on the overall direction of development at the airport as set out in the White Paper.
56. In some circumstances, given the sensitivity of the issues, it may not be possible for agreement to be reached with all stakeholders on the process or content of a master plan. In these circumstances, the ultimate responsibility for the final content of any plan should lie with the airport operator.

57. The appropriate Devolved Administration or Government Office should be kept informed of progress throughout the process of preparing the master plan (perhaps through membership of a master plan steering group). At airports where:

- proposals for major infrastructure development were supported in the White Paper,
- complex issues arise that could affect national policy, or where
- the master plan will bring forward proposals that may not be in line with the White Paper,

the Department for Transport would also expect to be kept informed.

58. Otherwise the Department should be consulted alongside other stakeholders before individual master plans are finalised (see below). However, because a master plan does not have development plan status and is not a statutory document subject to formal approval, neither DfT nor a Devolved Administration can formally endorse or ‘sign-off’ the proposals they contain. This can only be achieved through the normal statutory planning processes.

**Post master plan**

59. In England and Wales, once the master plan has been finalised it should be published and otherwise disseminated to all relevant authorities. Then airport operators should liaise with the relevant regional and local authorities and agencies (ie Government Offices, Regional Assemblies and Development Agencies, in Wales the Welsh Assembly Government, and planning authorities), on the timetable and process for preparation of statutory plans. These include the Regional Spatial Strategy (in Wales the Wales Spatial Plan) and Local Development Framework (in Wales the local or unitary development plan), the Regional Transport and Economic Strategies and the Local Transport Plan. It is in the interests of airport operators to seek to ensure, through producing a well informed master plan, that their proposals are taken into account during the preparation of these documents.

60. In Scotland, once master plans have been completed and published, airport operators should liaise with the Scottish Executive and planning authorities affected on the timetable and process for preparation of the relevant Structure Plan (where applicable), Local Development Plan and the Regional Transport Strategy. All parties involved should seek to ensure that the contents of a well informed master plan are taken into account during the preparation of these documents. In Northern Ireland liaison should be with the Departments of Environment and Regional Development.

61. Airport operators should also look to agree with key agencies and stakeholders a process for future liaison on the monitoring and review of their master plans.
The following 30 airports that have either been identified in the White Paper for significant development, or are forecast to have a minimum of 20,000 air transport movements in 2030.

Aberdeen  Leeds Bradford
Belfast City  Liverpool John Lennon
Belfast International  London City
Birmingham  London Gatwick
Blackpool  London Heathrow
Bournemouth  London Luton
Bristol International  London Stansted
Cardiff  Manchester
Robin Hood Airport Doncaster Sheffield  Newcastle
Edinburgh  Newquay
Exeter  Norwich
Glasgow  Nottingham East Midlands
Glasgow Prestwick  Plymouth City
Humberside  Southampton
Inverness  Teesside