

Press release

The real impact on mental health and wellbeing of low-flying flights over London's largest National Nature Reserve

Conservation charity calls for Park visitors to make objections in consultation

With proposed new Heathrow flight paths starting in 2021, Richmond Park could see arriving aircraft at under 1,500 ft generating noise levels up to 80 dB. Local psychologist and mental health and nature campaigner Dr Alison Greenwood states: “...the impact of the loss of the peace and tranquillity in this much-loved natural space cannot be overstated”.

As London's largest park, a National Nature Reserve, Site of Special Scientific Interest and a cherished, tranquil space, Richmond Park is visited by 5.5 million people each year coming from many parts of London and beyond.

A specialist in treating mental health problems with “nature prescriptions”, Dr Greenwood practises locally and is alarmed by the prospect of loud aircraft noise shattering the tranquillity of Richmond Park. She has written an article published today on <https://www.frp.org.uk/heathrows-proposed-expansion-and-richmond-park/> in which she says:

“I regularly walk or sit in Richmond Park with people suffering from all kinds of mental distress, and I see first-hand the powerful healing qualities of being in such a magnificent natural setting, with clients visibly relaxing, smiling, and expressing a sense of freedom, release, connection, optimism and meaning. And when I ask my clients to describe what it is they most appreciate about spending time in the Park, adjectives such as “tranquil”, “quiet”, and “peaceful” are amongst the most frequently used..”



Richmond Park is London's largest National Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is London's quietest and, at night, darkest places and a haven for wildlife. Over 5.5 m visitors come to the Park to enjoy its peace and tranquillity as well as its special flora and fauna.

In her article, Dr Greenwood cites numerous, detailed and respected research studies, concluding:

“The science then is unequivocal: natural spaces are a precious resource in addressing our

current mental health crisis; noise pollution has a significant negative impact on our mental health; and noise pollution that destroys the restorative properties of our natural spaces is clearly damaging on both fronts.”

Many countries' governments are increasingly realising the importance of the relationship between good mental health and natural spaces and even the UK Government's (Defra) own '25 Year Environment Plan' states: "Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression."

"It seems irrational then", writes Dr Greenwood, "that the government is allowing Heathrow, as part of its plans for the third runway, to propose routing, for the first time, 47 low-flying arrivals an hour as well as between 17 and 47 extra departures an hour directly over Richmond Park, London's largest open space, a National Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest and a unique place for wildlife."

Friends of Richmond Park (FRP) Chairman Ron Crompton says: "Dr Greenwood's article clearly demonstrates how devastating the noise generated by low flight arrivals directly over Richmond Park will be, particularly for mental health and wellbeing. Millions of visitors come from all over London and beyond to appreciate the Park's rich biodiversity and tranquillity and this will be shattered by the new flight paths proposal."

Heathrow's next statutory consultation on its expansion plans will commence tomorrow, 18 June ending 13 September. As part of its objections to the expansion and proposed flights over Richmond Park, FRP will be submitting Dr Greenwood's article with all relevant research references. Over the next weeks, FRP will be producing further strong evidence objecting to the flights.

"As we produce high quality, up-to-date research and evidence on how the new and increased number of flights will impact on all Park users and the Park's fragile ecology, we hope Londoners will use these to object to the expansion. We urge as many people as possible to respond to Heathrow's consultation using our evidence to illustrate the real threats of the expansion."

Details of how people can read and comment on the next consultation when it is published on 18 June will be available on our website www.frp.org.uk. However, information should be available on the Heathrow Expansion website <https://www.heathrowexpansion.com>.

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