

Manston Airport Airspace Change Consultation

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Key Terminology

1.1. What is airspace?

Airspace is the 'invisible infrastructure' in the sky which helps aircraft operate safely. It includes the flight paths that aircraft take when arriving and departing from an airport, which are usually the responsibility of an airport up to 7,000ft above ground level. The routes on the airspace network above 7,000ft are the responsibility of the National Air Traffic Services En Route Limited (NERL).

Airspace can be controlled or uncontrolled. In controlled airspace there are restrictions on which aircraft and/or pilots can fly to protect other airspace users such as commercial airliners. To enter most controlled airspace, pilots must get permission from Air Traffic Control. There are different classifications of controlled airspace that have varying requirements.

1.2. What is airspace change?

Airspace Change is the process through which flight paths, routes, controlled airspace boundaries and classifications can be changed. The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for UK aviation policy, including airspace. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) regulates the airspace and manages the Airspace Change Process that all airports must follow when proposing changes.

1.3. What is CAP1616?

The CAA regulates the aviation industry in the UK and ensures that the environmental impact of aviation on local communities is managed through efficient use of airspace. When changes are proposed, an airport must follow the CAA's Airspace Change Proposal (ACP) process, known as CAP 1616

CAP 1616 is a 7-stage process which places great importance on engaging and consulting on proposals with a wide range of stakeholders, including potentially affected communities.

1.4. How does airspace change work?

Airspace Change follows the CAA's CAP1616 process. In stage 1, a sponsor (the organisation proposing the change) produces a Statement of Need explaining why the change is required. Design Principles are then developed with input from stakeholders.

In stage 2, multiple design options are developed and assessed against the agreed Design Principles. Some options may be rejected at this step of the process. The Initial Options Appraisal (IOA) shortlists the best options.

In stage 3, a Full Options Appraisal (FOA) is undertaken on the shortlisted options and these are taken forward for public consultation. This is the stage Manston Airport is in now.

2. Overview

2.1. What is this Airspace Change consultation about?

This is the Manston Airport Airspace Change Proposal (ACP) Consultation, being carried out under the Civil Aviation Authority's national airspace change process known as CAP 1616.

It is specifically about:

- The design of arrival and departure flightpaths for Manston Airport
- Where aircraft will fly over the ground
- What protected airspace is required to enable safe operations

It is **not** about whether Manston Airport should be redeveloped, and it is not a planning consultation. For more information on the details of the proposal under consultation, see section 6. For terminology regarding airspace and flightpaths, see section 1.

2.2. What is being proposed and why?

RSP is proposing to introduce a full set of arrival and departure flight procedures and associated airspace protections to support the airport's reopening.

As Manston is not currently operating as a commercial airport, there are no existing instrument flightpaths or controlled procedures in place. The Airspace Change Proposal therefore establishes, for the first time, the routes aircraft would use to arrive at and depart from the airport, along with the local airspace structures required to manage those flights safely.

The procedures use satellite-based navigation (GNSS) and have been developed under the Civil Aviation Authority's CAP 1616 process. They define how aircraft would operate in the airspace around Manston once the airport reopens. **For more details about our proposals, see Section 3.**

2.3. What is the Manston Airport redevelopment project?

Manston Airport is a disused airport in the Thanet district of Kent. It has one of the longest and widest runways in the UK and is being redeveloped by RiverOak Strategic Partners Limited (RSP) as a hub for international air freight, with the potential to expand to passenger services later.

The redevelopment was approved by Government in August 2022 through a Development Consent Order (DCO).

This consultation is **not** about whether the airport should exist. That decision has already been made. It is a consultation about which flight paths aircraft will use to arrive and depart and what protected airspace is needed to keep aircraft safe.

3. Process

3.1. Who decides the outcome of the Airspace Change Consultation?

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is the independent regulator that will decide whether the airspace proposals can go ahead.

RSP must follow a strict national process (CAP 1616), including public consultation, technical appraisal, and environmental assessment. The CAA has responsibility for

approving or rejecting airspace change proposals put forward by change sponsors, checking that the correct process has been followed at clearly defined gateway points before authorising progress to the next stage.

3.2. Who is making the Airspace Change Proposal application?

RiverOak Strategic Partners Limited (RSP), is a UK-registered company which has acquired all rights and interests and assumed financial and operational responsibility for the Development Consent Order in respect of Manston Airport and the anticipated reopening and operation of the airport.

RSP is responsible for financing, delivering and operating the airport, and is the formal **change sponsor** for the Airspace Change Proposal.

3.3. What does the CAP 1616 process involve?

CAP 1616 is the Civil Aviation Authority's national process for designing and approving changes to UK airspace.

It requires change sponsors to:

- Define a clear need for change
- Develop route options using safety and environmental design principles
- Assess noise, emissions and operational impacts
- Engage with communities, aviation stakeholders and regulators
- Consult publicly
- Submit a final proposal to the CAA for a decision

The process is designed to ensure that any airspace change is safe, proportionate, and transparently developed

3.4. How many steps are involved in the consultation CAP1616 process? What stage is this?

The CAP 1616 process is divided into seven formal stages, with CAA gateway assessments between each stage:

1. Define
2. Develop and Assess
3. Consult
4. Update and Submit Proposal to CAA
5. CAA Decision
6. Implement
7. Post Implementation Review

A proposal cannot move to the next stage unless the CAA is satisfied that all requirements of the previous stage have been met

The Manston Airport Airspace Change Consultation is currently at **Stage 3 – Consult**.

3.5. What happens if the proposal fails CAA approval?

If the Civil Aviation Authority does not approve the Airspace Change Proposal, the proposed flightpaths and airspace design cannot be implemented.

The CAA may:

- Require changes to the design
- Ask for further assessment or consultation
- Or reject the proposal in its current form

If this happens, RSP would need to revise the proposal and re-enter the process before any airspace changes could take place.

What this does not mean:

- It does **not** cancel the Manston Airport redevelopment
- It does **not** revoke the Development Consent Order granting RSP permission to redevelop Manston Airport

It simply means that the current airspace design would need to be changed before it could be approved.

3.6. How will the CAA judge the application?

The CAA assesses proposals at defined gateway stages to ensure that:

- The airspace design is safe and operationally viable
- The correct consultation and engagement has taken place
- Environmental impacts, including noise and emissions, have been properly assessed
- Reasonable alternatives have been considered
- Stakeholder feedback has been taken into account

The CAA does not assess the commercial case for the airport or decide whether the airport should operate. Its role is to determine whether the proposed airspace design meets regulatory requirements.

3.7. Where can I view the Manston Airspace Change Proposal application?

<https://consultations.airspacechange.co.uk/manston-airport/manston-airport-consultation/>

3.8. What is the reference code for the Manston Airspace Change Proposal application?

ACP-2018-75.

4. Scope of the Consultation

4.1. What aspects of the proposal are within the scope of this consultation?

This consultation seeks feedback on the proposed airspace design and flight procedures.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will consider consultation responses when deciding whether the airspace change should be approved.

The CAA's role in this process is to decide whether the airspace design and flight procedures are:

- Safe
- Technically compliant
- Developed through the correct process

- And assessed for their environmental impacts

4.2. Does the CAA assess noise impacts as part of the Airspace Change Proposal?

Yes. Noise impacts are assessed as part of the environmental assessment submitted with the Airspace Change Proposal.

The Civil Aviation Authority considers whether noise and other environmental impacts have been properly assessed and presented in accordance with regulatory requirements. The CAA then takes this information into account when deciding whether the proposed airspace change should be approved.

The CAA does not set limits on noise levels, flight numbers, or airport operations through the airspace change process. Its role is to ensure that environmental impacts, including noise, have been appropriately assessed alongside safety and operational requirements.

4.3. Can the CAA restrict the number of flights or operating hours of the airport?

The Civil Aviation Authority does not control how many flights an airport may operate and this consultation will not set flight numbers or operating hours.

Limits on flight numbers and opening hours, where they exist, come from:

- The Development Consent Order
- Planning conditions
- Environmental permits
- Commercial demand

4.4. Can this consultation change whether the airport is allowed to reopen?

No. The decision to redevelop Manston Airport was approved through the Development Consent Order in 2022. This consultation only concerns airspace design.

4.5. Can this consultation change the airport's business model (freight vs passenger)

No. The ACP does not assess or approve the type of airport operation. It only considers the safe design of airspace and flight procedures.

4.6. Can this consultation influence where the airport is built or what infrastructure is provided?

No. Those matters were decided through the planning process and are not within the scope of the airspace change.

4.7. Can this consultation require environmental mitigation at the airport site?

No. Site-based mitigation is governed by the Development Consent Order. The ACP only considers impacts arising from aircraft operations in the air.

5. Responding to the Consultation and Next Steps

5.1. How do I respond to this stage of the consultation?

You can respond to the consultation by completing the online consultation questionnaire available at <https://consultations.airspacechange.co.uk/manston-airport/consultation> or by submitting written feedback by post using the contact details provided on the consultation website and in the consultation materials. Consultation responses must be submitted before the closing date of 22 June. All responses received within the consultation period will be recorded and considered as part of the Airspace Change Process.

5.2. How will you process feedback?

All consultation responses are logged and reviewed in accordance with the Civil Aviation Authority's CAP 1616 requirements. Feedback is analysed to identify themes, concerns, and suggestions raised by consultees. A Consultation Feedback Report will then be prepared, summarising the responses received and explaining how feedback has been taken into account in developing the updated proposal. Personal data is handled in line with applicable data protection requirements. Further detail is available at <https://consultations.airspacechange.co.uk/manston-airport/consultation>

5.3. What will happen after the consultation?

Following the consultation, RSP will review all feedback received and consider whether changes to the proposed airspace design are required. The proposal will then move to Stage 4 of the CAP 1616 process (Update Proposal), where the design and supporting assessments are refined. The final proposal will subsequently be submitted to the Civil Aviation Authority for assessment and decision at later stages of the process.

5.4. When will I hear back?

A Consultation Feedback Report summarising the responses received and RSP's response to them will be published following the close of the consultation. This is expected Q4 2026, subject to the volume and complexity of responses received. Updates on progress through the Airspace Change Process will be published on the consultation website and the CAA airspace change portal.

