Plans for the future use or redevelopment of Filton Airfield need to be resolved by the end of 2011 so that they can feed into the Council’s main plan for the District – the South Gloucestershire Core Strategy – early in 2012.

The Council has already undertaken some initial consultation as a basis for informing Core Strategy policy.

Two main points of view have been expressed to date.

1. That the Airfield is vital to the future of the aerospace industries at Filton.

2. That the aerospace sector and centre of excellence at Filton can flourish and expand without the Airfield and that its release would open up new development and employment opportunities.

While there has been some initial consultation, the Council has not made any decisions yet on how the Airfield might be redeveloped if it closes.

The Council remains very keen to listen to what local people have to say about the proposed closure of the Airfield and the options for its redevelopment.
Filton Airfield

About the Airfield - Some facts

The Airfield is owned and operated by BAE Systems.

- The airfield site is about 141 hectares in size and the runway is 2,300 m long
- The Brabazon hangar is outside of the 141 hectares Airfield site. It is currently not used by BAE Systems or Airbus and is being marketed
- The listed hangars are the older buildings on the north side of the runway
- Aircraft movements peaked at 33,000 in 2001 and were down to around 24,000 in 2010 - a decline of about 27%
- About two thirds of aircraft movements are training and private flights
- BAE Systems and Airbus make limited use of the runway
- Rolls Royce and The Royal Mail depot no longer use the Airfield
- The helicopters of the Great Western Ambulance Charity and Police Air Operations are based on the north side of the runway
- While two small hangars are listed; the runway receives no special protection from closure. Neither Parliamentary approval nor planning permission is required to close the Airfield but planning permission would be required for redevelopment

BAE Systems decision to close the Airfield

The planned closure is a commercial decision by BAE Systems.

The decision has been made following lengthy discussion with Airbus and following a thorough examination of other potential aviation uses for the site. Arrangements will ensure that the closure will not adversely affect jobs at Airbus or elsewhere in the aerospace cluster.

BAE Systems endorse the view that Filton is a world centre of excellence for the aerospace industry and that the jobs it supports are fundamental to the local economy. However, BAE Systems considers that the current airfield operations are not viable owing to:

- A decrease in aircraft movements and users and extremely limited demonstrable demand
- The inability to attract sufficient new business
- The runway is no longer required for use by Airbus, the Airfield’s main commercial user
- Change within the UK aviation industry which means that the runway is no longer needed to serve the aerospace sector

Options considered for aviation use have included:

- A commercial low cost passenger airport
- High cost (business) passenger operation
- Development for air freight
- Aircraft maintenance and servicing
- Additional training flights

These alternative aviation options have commercial and environmental constraints, or there is a lack of demand to make them viable.

BAE Systems considers that the Airfield should be shown within the Council’s Core Strategy as an allocated development site with opportunities to secure investment in the aerospace cluster and help to meet local employment and housing needs as part of a sustainable community.
South Gloucestershire Council’s position

The Council recognises the continuing importance of the cluster of aerospace companies and jobs at Filton to the local and regional economies. Current planning policies seek to protect the operation of Filton Airfield and to resist development which would affect it.

The Council has to consider:

- Whether there is any reasonable prospect of BAE Systems or an alternative operator keeping the airfield open now or in the future
- Whether the loss of the runway would fundamentally compromise the future of the aerospace sector
- Whether to recognise the planned closure and start to consider options for the redevelopment of the Airfield

The Council cannot expect the Airfield to be kept open if there is no clear evidence of need now or for the future.

This is such an important issue that it will need to be resolved and reflected in the Council’s Core Strategy.

Initial consultation

The Council published an Airfield Position Statement consultation paper in June 2011. The paper invited comment on issues for the Core Strategy arising from BAE Systems decision to close the Airfield. It outlined policy considerations for the Core Strategy and invited comment on three broad options:

**OPTION 1 – No Change To The Core Strategy**

Defer consideration of the development potential of the Airfield site until a future review of the Core Strategy.

**OPTION 2 – Add as a contingency site in the Core Strategy**

Recognise the Airfield as a contingency site in the Core Strategy that is suitable for development should additional land be required.

**OPTION 3 – Identify as a development opportunity in the Core Strategy**

Recognise the Airfield as a new development site that should be integrated with the Cribbs/Patchway New Neighbourhood.

The Council received 125 responses to the Position Statement, of which about two thirds were from members of the public. The responses fall into 5 categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Core Strategy

In early 2012 an independent Planning Inspector will examine the Council’s Core Strategy and consider whether it is ‘sound’.

The Airfield closure would see the potential release of a significant amount of land in a location of strategic importance to the District and to the delivery of the Core Strategy.

The Core Strategy Inspector has indicated that:

- A decision on the redevelopment of the Airfield ought not to be delayed to future plans
- Additional work should be undertaken now to give more direction and detail to a development proposal which will need to be set out in the Core Strategy
- The Council’s approach to the use of the Airfield, for whatever purpose, should relate to Bristol City Council’s Core Strategy
- The future use of the Airfield should be resolved before, not at, the Examination in Public to be held in early 2012

Further Consultation

There has been widespread support for further public consultation on proposals for the Airfield, and for this to include the communities within Bristol, specifically Southmead, Henbury and Brentry.
Arguments against closure

43% of those responding to the Council were opposed to the closure of the Airfield. This Board reviews the arguments put forward for keeping the Airfield open.

Key points raised were:

- The lack of evidence from BAE Systems on the long-term viability of the Airfield and a failure to show that every effort has been made to find a new owner or commercial operator
- Closure would cause irreversible harm to the local aerospace sector, jobs and the wider economy
- Closure would impact on other users notably the Air Ambulance and Police helicopters

Further to the Council’s initial consultation questions, concerns were also raised at two public meetings with BAE Systems held in Filton on 8 July and 19 September. Issues raised included:

- Whether it would be practicable to take wings out by road
- BAE Systems has not done enough to attract new business – other airfields are viable and expanding
- The Core Strategy should take a long-term view of need for the Airfield
- Loss of the Airfield would take the heart out of Filton

The Save Filton Airfield Campaign Group has also formed. It is not proposing a commercial airport but a varied and balanced use of the site which they believe would be a viable proposition. The Group hopes to persuade BAE Systems to lease the Airfield to a not for profit trust at commercial rates. They suggest that there is potential in:

- Logistics – development as a freight terminal
- Composites – development of composite materials leading to the testing of a fully composite aircraft which would benefit from a runway
- Tourism – a museum of static and working displays coupled to the runway and sightseeing flights
- Airshows
- Business Commuters
- Private Flights

BAE Systems response

BAE Systems has commissioned a report which seeks to address concerns raised and explain the review process which has led to the decision to close the Airfield. It has been prepared with input from local aerospace companies.

The report summarises the current issues of viability and the options considered to generate new business.

The Aviation report commissioned by BAE Systems indicates that:

- The Airfield is not viable given existing and projected demand
- Airbus is the main commercial user of the Airfield but it no longer requires use of it for the movement of staff or equipment. This results in a further loss of a key revenue stream and removes the need to keep the Airfield open
- BAE Systems has for ten years tried to attract new business but with limited success
- The historic use for aviation test flights is no longer needed
- Military movements are now limited and non-essential
- A passenger airport is ruled out by previous planning decisions. In 1996 a Planning Inspector ruled that this would have unacceptable impacts on the local area
- An air freight operation would be constrained by restrictions on night flights and the noise and disturbance to residential properties from aircraft and HGV activity would be at an unacceptable level
- Other options have commercial and environmental concerns or there is insufficient demand to make the Airfield viable
- BAE Systems has consulted with Airbus, GKN and Rolls Royce and all remain committed to the area and do not see the loss of the Airfield as an obstacle to their operations and future plans
- Airbus is making a major investment in its Filton site in full knowledge of the decision to close the Airfield

Full copies of the BAE Systems report and of ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ are available to view on request.
Arguments for Closure and Redevelopment

Approximately 30% of those responding to the consultation thought that the Core Strategy should pro-actively address issues arising from the closure of the Airfield. Two main types of comment were made:

1. Potential impact on existing interests at and around the Airfield.
2. Suggestions for alternative uses.

1. Impacts on existing operations
   a) Would closure result in the decline of the local aerospace sector?
      BAE Systems has discussed the plans for closure with Airbus, Rolls Royce and other companies who are continuing to invest locally in full knowledge of the likely closure. BAE Systems therefore consider that closure will not hamper the Aerospace sector but, in making additional land available for new businesses and technologies, should help it to grow.
   b) What will happen to the Air Ambulance and Police helicopters?
      BAE Systems has held constructive discussions with the Air Ambulance Service and Police. Assurances have been given to accommodate their needs within any redevelopment.
   c) Will an Aerospace Heritage Museum be considered?
      BAE Systems recognise the heritage of the aerospace sector at Filton, the listed hangars and desire for a museum to house Concorde.
      BAE Systems is in discussion with the Concorde Trust and other heritage interest groups and intends to respond positively to their reasonable requirements.
   d) What can be done to ensure the ‘Brabazon Hangar’ is better used?
      BAE Systems reports that the aircraft maintenance company that was using the hangar found it difficult to run its business competitively. As a consequence, the Brabazon Hangar is currently up for sale or rent to an alternative employment user.

2. Suggestions for alternative uses

A number of suggestions have already been made for land-uses to be provided in any redevelopment of the Airfield. These include:

- Employment – some argue that the main use of the airfield should be employment.
  - Provide for high quality jobs, engineering and manufacturing opportunities to enhance the existing aerospace centre of excellence
  - Airfield not appropriate for large scale manufacturing or warehousing

- Housing – some argue that the main use of the Airfield should be for housing.
  - Opportunity to provide affordable housing

- Other Uses
  Development of:
  - A green infrastructure network to create and enhance open spaces and woodlands
  - An exhibition/concert venue
  - Renewable energy generation
  - A park and ride site
  - An air transportation research laboratory
  - An aviation heritage museum to house both Concorde and the Bristol Aero Collection
  - A walking link across the site between Bristol and The Mall
  - Passenger services on the Avonmouth – Henbury line and other rail improvements

The need to take account of the impact on existing communities including Southmead, Henbury and Brentry was also made.
Summary

BAE Systems concludes that Filton does not have a viable future as an airfield but could be redeveloped to meet other needs.

The Council must decide how to respond to the proposed closure by the end of 2011. Decisions must be based on sound evidence.

While there has been some initial consultation, the Council has not made any decisions yet on how the Airfield might be redeveloped if it closes. It has started to explore the options and issues.

The Council must review policies for the Airfield and the wider area and form a new vision and strategy for inclusion in its Core Strategy.

Decisions on the Airfield are central to shaping the future of a much wider area.

The Council will work with Bristol City Council and other interested parties to ensure that as far as possible all options are evaluated and implications considered.

What happens next?

This is a further opportunity to give us your views and any new evidence affecting the future of Filton Airfield.

If no new evidence is brought forward the Council will have to assume that BAE Systems will close the Airfield and start to consider options for redevelopment.

The comments we receive will be used to inform future policy and visions for the area.

- Deadline for comments is 24 October 2011
- The Council will review comments made and prepare a summary report
- The Council will work with Bristol City Council and other interested parties to inform future policy for the Airfield and wider area
- The Council will make changes to the Core Strategy
- Public consultation on the Core Strategy changes will be held in December 2011 – January 2012
- Draft policies will be considered by the Core Strategy Inspector in early 2012

Your comments are important and we would like to hear from you. Please take the opportunity to talk to staff and use a response form for your comments.