

# Filton Airfield Consultation – October 2011

## Frequently Asked Questions

In April 2011 BAE Systems announced its decision to close Filton Airfield at the end of 2012.

Since the announcement there have been two public meetings in Filton (8<sup>th</sup> July and 19<sup>th</sup> September) at which local people raised a number of issues. South Gloucestershire Council also invited comment on an Airfield Position Statement consultation paper which outlined issues and options for the Council's Core Strategy if the Airfield were to close. That consultation also prompted a number of key questions and comments.

Most of the issues raised can be grouped to reflect key themes.

1. Why does BAE Systems consider that the Airfield is no longer viable or needed?
2. Can anyone stop the closure? Are any permissions required?
3. What scrutiny will the Council give to BAE Systems decision?
4. What are the implications of closure for the future of the local aerospace sector and jobs?
5. What would the impact of closure be on current users of the Airfield – e.g. Police and Air Ambulance Helicopters?
6. What are the implications of closure on the character and vitality of the wider area?
7. How would the site be re-used if the Airfield closes?
8. How would the heritage interests of Listed Buildings, Concorde and the Bristol Aero collection be protected?
9. What process will be followed in deciding the future of the Airfield?

Some of these questions are addressed to BAE Systems and some to the Council.

The following tables set out brief responses. BAE Systems responses draw from a separate report on Aviation Issues which can be viewed at: [www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk](http://www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk)

The Council is consulting on the future of the Airfield during October 2011. Further details of the Consultation can be found at:

<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/NR/exeres/b971e920-bcbe-4811-b6b5-b94ac44f4711>

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## Key messages from BAE Systems and South Gloucestershire Council

### BAE Systems – Key Messages

- The airfield has no economic future – it has been running at loss for a decade
- Exhaustive studies have outlined the lack of a viable market of airfield users
- Development will provide much greater benefit for Filton and the wider area
- The company is committed to consulting with local organisations and people to consider opportunities such as businesses and mixed housing
- BAE Systems has good experience in this area having successfully developed other sites at Chorley and Bishopston
- The company is committed to supporting the preservation of heritage assets at Filton and is in close discussions with the Concorde Trust and Bristol Aero Collection.
- A report has been prepared to summarise the process which has led BAE Systems to reach these conclusions.
- The report is available online at [www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk](http://www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk) and has been undertaken on behalf of BAE Systems by planning consultants Terence O'Rourke Ltd and aviation specialists Mott MacDonald.

### South Gloucestershire Council - Key Messages

- The Council has to decide later this year how to respond to the proposed Airfield closure
- No decisions have been taken on this yet.
- Planning permission is not required to close the Airfield but would be required for redevelopment.
- The Council will need to reach an agreed position by the end of the year and address that in its plan for the area – the Core Strategy.
- The Council is keen to listen to the views of local people and invite new evidence.
- We are particularly interested to hear what you think about the following questions and it would be helpful if responses were structured in this way:

**1) Do you accept that the closure of Filton Airfield is the only realistic option?  
Yes / No**

**2) If No to 1) above, what would you suggest as a way to keep the Airfield viable? Do you have any information to support this?**

**3) If Yes to 1) above, how do you think the Airfield should be reused/redeveloped? What would you wish to see included in the redevelopment?**

# Filton Airfield Consultation – October 2011

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why does BAE Systems consider that the Airfield is no longer viable or needed?	
<p><b>a) How was the decision to close the airfield arrived at?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>BAE Systems issued a statement in April 2011 that the airfield was no longer viable and would therefore be closing at the end of 2012. The runway has been operating at a loss over many years. The decision to close the runway has been made following lengthy discussion with the main user 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 or business at Airbus or elsewhere in the aerospace cluster.</p> <p>The current airfield operations are not viable owing to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A decrease in aircraft movements and users and extremely limited demonstrable demand</li> <li>• The inability to attract sufficient new business which is limited by pre-existing planning, environmental and operational concerns</li> <li>• The runway is no longer an integral requirement of the Airbus business operation</li> <li>• Changes within the UK aviation industry mean that the runway is no longer needed to serve the aerospace sector.</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) What is the current extent of the airfield's operation – who are the users?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>Use of the runway has decreased significantly in recent years. Over the past decade, total aircraft movements have decreased by approximately 27%.</p> <p>Movements peaked in 2001 at 33,000 and have since declined to 24,000 in 2010. The trend has been a continuous one of decline despite the economic context and highlights a lack of demand for the runway.</p> <p>The remaining users of the airfield include, Airbus, BAE Systems (limited staff shuttle services from Filton), Great Western Air Ambulance, Avon and Somerset Police, the Bristol Aero Club (training school) and a small number of independent recreational / business users.</p> <p>A small number of independent occupiers also lease hangar space but on the whole do not use the runway.</p> <p>Rolls Royce and Royal Mail no longer use the runway and military movements are very limited and non-essential.</p> <p>Airbus is now the only significant aerospace user of the airfield and its use has diminished significantly to limited logistic transportation in association with manufacturing processes and shuttle services for staff. A plan is in place to mitigate these requirements by the time of closure.</p>

<p><b>c) Has BAE Systems been actively seeking new business to keep the runway operational?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>There has been little commercial interest from other operators. The aviation industry is small and Filton has promoted itself via a dedicated website <a href="http://www.bristolfilton.co.uk">www.bristolfilton.co.uk</a>, marketing literature and industry networking for a number of years.</p> <p>It is important to note that there are limitations to the hours of operation at Filton which has precluded for example, night time freight movements.</p> <p>The detail of this planning context and other limitations to Filton's operation is discussed in a report available at <a href="http://www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk">www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk</a> but it has been a significant impediment to the marketability of the airfield.</p> <p>The decision to close the airfield was not taken lightly and all options considered and explored including actively seeking new commercial opportunities.</p> <p>Unfortunately our investigations and advisors have concluded that the airfield is no longer commercially viable and that Filton and the wider region will receive greater economic benefit from the development of the airfield.</p>
<p><b>d) Have other aviation options been explored to secure the future viability of the Airfield.</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>In the mid 1990's BAE Systems promoted Filton as a commercial airfield and this resulted in a planning appeal which was ultimately refused. In 1993 it also set up its own maintenance and conversion business but due to continuing adverse market conditions this was progressively run down from 2002 and closed soon after. Several small private maintenance businesses have set up at Filton since, one closed in 2009 and another in 2010. In the last 3 years, interest from at least 4 other operators who considered Filton as a possible base, led to limited ad hoc use by one, but ultimately they all chose not to pursue Filton as permanent option.</p> <p>Mott MacDonald on behalf of BAE Systems has investigated the following options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a commercial low cost passenger airport,</li> <li>• high cost (business) passenger option,</li> <li>• development for air freight,</li> <li>• aircraft maintenance and servicing,</li> <li>• additional training flights.</li> </ul> <p>These alternative aviation options have commercial and environmental constraints, or there is a lack of demand to make them viable.</p>

<p><b>e) Why can't you just mothball the airfield?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>Studies lead us to conclude that sadly there is no long term future for the airfield at Filton and its full inclusion in South Gloucestershire's Core Strategic plan will offer it the best future in terms of a substantial economic contribution to the area. Today we find ourselves in agreement with one of the findings of the Secretaries of State for Environment and Transport in 1996 ,at the time of the Commercial Airport Planning Appeal, i.e. that likely employment gains and direct and indirect economic benefits for Filton (and the wider region) will be far greater through commercial/business use of the airfield site,</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>The Council could not expect the airfield to be kept open, or retained for future use, if there is no clear evidence of need now or for the future. Even then the decision to close rests with BAE Systems. That is why the Council is seeking a full explanation of the reasons for the proposed closure. If no new evidence of need comes forward the Council will have little choice but to plan positively for redevelopment.</p>
<p><b>f) Are you selling the airfield?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>The airfield is not up for sale.</p> <p>It will be developed by BAE Systems in consultation with Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Local Town Councils and local residents. This will ensure the views of all stakeholders are properly considered.</p> <p>A website to share plans has been developed at <a href="http://www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk">www.filtonairfielddevelopment.co.uk</a></p>

<p><b>2. Can anyone stop the closure? Are any permissions required?</b></p>	
<p><b>a) The airfield is a national strategic asset – surely it requires an act of parliament to close?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>The airfield is in private ownership. It is not a national strategic asset, nor are there any covenants in place that would prevent closure. Planning permission is not required for the closure of the airfield, nor an Act of Parliament required.</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>The Council is not in a position to stop the planned closure but will have to respond to the changing circumstances.</p> <p>Planning permission would be required for redevelopment.</p>

<b>3. What scrutiny will the Council give to BAE Systems decision?</b>	
<p><b>a) Will the Council take Independent advice on BAEs Decision to close the Airfield?</b></p>	<p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>The Council will listen to views from the public, Bristol City Council and the business community.</p> <p>It will look closely at the evidence for closure put forward by BAE Systems and any other relevant reports and technical evidence. This may include independent review of some of the more technical material.</p> <p>The Council will then consider the need for changes to the draft Core Strategy.</p> <p>It is not for the Council to decide whether the Airfield will close or not. It has to react to the decisions of others.</p>

<b>4. What are the implications of closure for the future of the local aerospace sector and jobs?</b>	
<p><b>a) Surely the airfield is fundamental to the continued growth of the Aerospace cluster?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>We would challenge this. BAE Systems has consulted with those in the aerospace cluster and wider industry. Contrary to this claim, BAE Systems believes that the Aerospace cluster will benefit from the development of the airfield.</p> <p>The use of the runway by the aerospace industry is actually very limited but operational flight safety requirements impose development constraints on adjacent developments by businesses such as Airbus and Rolls Royce. Relaxation of these constraints may in fact enhance and facilitate growth</p> <p>After consultation with the other parties, there is no suggestion that closure of the airfield will impact on employment or have any detrimental impact on the existing and future business requirements of the aerospace cluster</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>Discussions with Airbus indicate that there will be investment in the local aerospace sector with or without an Airfield.</p> <p>Planning permission has recently been approved for major new investment in its Filton site in the full knowledge of BAE Systems decision to close the Airfield.</p>

<b>5. What would the impact of closure be on current users of the Airfield – e.g. Police and Air Ambulance Helicopters?</b>	
<p><b>a) Have the future intentions of existing users of the runway and aerospace cluster been considered?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>Yes - see answer above regarding consultations with Airbus, which apart from BAE Systems use for its own staff communications flights, is the only remaining industrial user and customer within the aerospace cluster.</p> <p>In addition BAE Systems has entered discussions with the major users of the airfield, Great Western Air Ambulance and the Police Helicopter Unit, to establish their future intentions and is committed to agreeing a solution that permits their continued operation from within the perimeter of the current airfield if they wish.</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>The Council welcomes BAE Systems commitment to ongoing liaison with users of the Airfield.</p>
<p><b>b) What will happen to the Great Western Air Ambulance (GWAA)?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>BAE Systems are committed to working with both the GWAA and the police-operated helicopters to enable continued operations from within the current Airfield boundary</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>The Council welcomes BAE Systems commitment to retain scope for the Air Ambulance service within the Airfield site.</p>

<b>6. What are the implications of closure on the character and vitality of the wider area?</b>	
<p><b>a) Will the loss of the Airfield take the heart out of Filton and result in economic decline.</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>BAE Systems is committed to the future of the aerospace industry in Britain and Filton, its heritage and the thriving aerospace cluster that exists there today. Indeed it is proud of the role it played as the British partner in Airbus until recent years, when it took a leading role in positioning that business to create a single integrated Airbus company – a move which has helped to ensure its growth into the future. BAE Systems is also proud of its shared heritage with Rolls-Royce as well as ongoing programmes and shared supply chains. Consequently Filton's continue success, where it will continue to own industrial property and employ a small workforce, remains a key objective for BAE Systems as well as for the local community of which it is part.</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>The Council will be keen to ensure that whether the Airfield remains open or not that there is continued investment in a wide range of local employment opportunities.</p> <p>The history of the local economy is based on technological adaptation and innovation. The Council will work to ensure that the area remains at the forefront of technological innovation.</p> <p>The Airfield site is within Priority Neighbourhoods. The need for economic prosperity, new jobs and training opportunities is fully recognised.</p>

**7. How would the site be re-used if the Airfield closes?**

<p><b>a) Why is the site being used for the development of a large housing estate?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>Despite recent press reports the airfield’s potential future uses have not been decided. BAE Systems is committed to ensuring that any future scenario is strategically planned in dialogue with South Gloucestershire Council, Bristol City Council, Local Town Councils, local residents and other key stakeholders. This will ensure the views of all stakeholders are properly considered.</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>No decisions have been taken. The initial consultation carried in the summer was in response to the announcement to close the Airfield and the Council invited views on how this would impact on its plan for the area – The Core Strategy. Strategic Options were outlined and views invited.</p> <p>The working assumption of the initial consultation was that, if redeveloped, the Airfield could provide for a mixture of jobs, houses and other land uses - but this was without any commitment to any particular outcome except to highlight the need to safeguard Concorde and the operational needs of the emergency services.</p> <p>The Council cannot delay its response indefinitely – there must be a clear way forward by the end of the Year for inclusion in the Core Strategy.</p> <p>If the Airfield is not addressed in the Core Strategy it would leave open the risk of speculative planning applications with little effective local control or influence.</p>
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**8. How would the heritage interests of Listed Buildings, Concorde and the Bristol Aero Collection be protected?**

<p><b>a) What will happen to the heritage of the Airfield?</b></p>	<p><b>BAE Systems Response</b></p> <p>BAE Systems is committed to supporting the preservation of heritage assets at Filton Airfield.</p> <p>Discussions are ongoing with the Concorde Trust and Bristol Aero Collection regarding support and provision for this on the site. When these discussions are concluded to the satisfaction of all parties a formal announcement will be made.</p> <p><b>SGC Response</b></p> <p>The Council is very supportive of safeguarding the future of Concorde whether or not the Airfield is closed.</p> <p>Likewise the Council would welcome commitment to retention and re-use of the Listed hangars on the north side of the Airfield.</p> <p>While there have been some calls for other assets of the Airfield to be protected this would be a matter for English Heritage to consider and Listing would need to meet its criteria.</p>
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## 9. What process will be followed in deciding the future of the Airfield?

### **BAE Systems Response**

See SGC response below.

### **SGC Response**

BAE Systems has announced its decision to close.

On behalf of local communities the Council has asked BAE Systems to further explain and justify its decision. The current consultation is part of that process and provides opportunities for public comment.

In parallel with the ongoing consultation the Council will review inputs from technical studies, stakeholder workshops, Bristol City Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and others before considering how the Core Strategy should change.

The conclusions will need to be considered alongside other work that the Core Strategy Inspector has requested for the wider District including reconsideration of housing and Green Belt issues.

Once any further revisions to the Core Strategy are made the Council will consult for a period of six weeks before sending to the Core Strategy Inspector for his consideration.

The aim is to complete this process early in 2012.