

CAA Environmental Sustainability Panel Meeting Minutes

16 July 2026 | 10:30–15:30

1. Chair's Welcome and Updates

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for their support during her first month as Panel Chair.

The minutes from the 14 May 2026 meeting were approved.

In terms of actions outstanding, the Panel discussed the need to:

- Finalise the Panel's annual report for the 2025/2026 year.
- Review its progress against the current two-year work programme.
- Begin planning for the next Panel conference and future work programme.

2. Strategic Context and Role of the Panel

The Chair provided reflections from her introductory meetings including with:

- CAA Chief Executive Officer
- CAA Consumer Panel
- CAA Chair
- CAA Sustainability Portfolio Board

The Chair emphasised the importance of understanding more about how the Panel's advice contributes to CAA strategic decision-making and the need to focus advice on where the CAA could drive change and have influence. SH noted that the CAA Board Chair is developing the CAA to be an 'enabling regulator', to have a substantial influence on sustainability as this is such a critical issue for the future of the sector.

Panel members discussed:

- Whether and how environmental sustainability is considered within the CAA's strategic priorities and risk appetite, alongside its other areas of responsibility.
- Concerns that environmental outcomes appear to be considered primarily through a consumer lens relating to cost or in terms of safety, creating a disconnect with the fundamental need for an environment to be a priority and have value outside of consumer. Members discussed concerns that environmental sustainability risks appear to be primarily framed through their impact on consumers, particularly ticket prices, rather than as fundamental risks to the long-term viability of aviation and the environment on which the sector depends. The Panel noted the importance of ensuring environmental considerations are recognised as strategic issues.
- The importance of the Panel's role in identifying emerging risks to the CAA and challenging existing assumptions.
- Opportunities to strengthen engagement between the Panel and the CAA Board.

The Panel Manager confirmed that the CAA Board values the Panel's input, that there is interest in improving visibility of Panel views within Board papers and further engagement between the Panel and the Board Risk Team would be welcomed. CAA's Senior Economist reinforced the increasing importance of systems thinking, innovation and emerging technologies in responding to environmental challenges and the value of the Panel's expertise in informing Board and decisions.

3. Environmental Sustainability Strategy Update

The Head of Sustainability provided an update on the CAA's sustainability programme delivery, including:

- New Sustainability Team members, including a Head of Government Relations and Strategic Influence, a Head of Sustainability Research and a Head of Climate Adaptation.
- The CAA's H8 programme of work. The Panel supported the CAA's request for stronger evidence to justify environmental sustainability expenditure proposals submitted by Heathrow. Members noted that environmental investment cases should be supported by clear evidence of benefits and outcomes. The Panel emphasised the importance of balancing robust economic regulation with the timely delivery of environmental and community benefits.
- Members noted that the environmental benefits expected from the Airspace Modernisation Strategy remain insufficiently defined. The Panel encouraged the CAA to develop a clearer articulation of the environmental outcomes that the programme is expected to deliver, particularly in relation to noise, air quality and emissions
- CAA's consideration of the Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS), including the upcoming Transport Committee inquiry. The Panel discussed the four tests proposed within the policy framework (including the existing environmental policies that guide these tests), equality considerations and implications for other airports, and the Panel's role in providing scientific advice to the CAA. The Panel agreed that its role was not to determine planning outcomes but to provide independent scientific and evidence-based advice to support CAA consideration of environmental issues associated with Heathrow expansion. Members agreed that a short advice note highlighting key environmental risks and evidence gaps would be valuable.

Actions

- Panel Member to coordinate delivery of a Panel advice note to the CAA on issues associated with the four tests set out in the Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS), by mid-September. To be agreed at the September Panel meeting.
 - Panel member to coordinate a Panel advice note to the CAA on greenhouse gas removals and aviation decarbonisation issues by the end of the year. To be agreed at the January Panel meeting.
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4. Aviation Environmental Review (AER) 2026

The Head of Environmental Reporting provided an update on development of the AER 2026, including plans to:

- Create a more accessible and public-facing report.
- Improve use of narrative and explanatory content.
- Introduce clearer comparisons and practical examples for readers.
- Include climate adaptation as a dedicated reporting pillar.

Panel feedback was sought on the draft recommendations to be included in the AER 2026.

The Panel:

- Welcomed greater transparency, airport-level accountability and inclusion of metrics reflecting community experiences.
- Strongly supported the use of practical comparators to improve accessibility.
- Supported the importance of acknowledging non-CO₂ impacts within the report, even if robust quantification remains challenging at this point.

On the draft recommendations, the Panel suggested:

- That increased use of operational and actual fuel burn data would materially improve modelling accuracy.
- The value of greater transparency and access to operational data from industry where feasible, noting that improved data sharing could strengthen future emissions modelling and evidence-based decision-making, while recognising commercial sensitivities.

5. Strategic CAA Update

Chief of Staff & Director of Communications provided an overview of developments of wider strategic significance to the CAA, including:

- Recent changes to Government and the potential implications for transport, science and sustainability priorities;
- Progress of the Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement consultation, and the CAA's decisions regarding early expansion costs;
- Progress of the Aviation Bill, including enhanced consumer enforcement powers for the CAA and environmental-related discussions during the Bill's progress;
- Changes in senior CAA positions.

6. Environmental Metrics / NR28 Environmental Incentives

Senior Economist set out the CAA's work on the development of a coherent approach to measuring environmental performance as part of the NR28 programme of work.

The Panel discussed how environmental metrics are currently used within the CAA and the role they could play in supporting broader sustainability objectives. Discussion focused on the value of creating a more coherent and consistent framework for environmental metrics.

The Members highlighted the importance of ensuring any future metrics appropriately capture environmental outcomes and support evidence-based decision making.

7. Ultrafine Particles (UFPs)

A Panel Member delivered a presentation about the current state of scientific evidence on aviation-related ultrafine particles (UFPs). While evidence continues to develop, growing research suggests potential associations between UFP exposure and adverse health outcomes. However, monitoring approaches, exposure assessment methods and regulatory frameworks remain less developed than those for PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀. It also flagged that monitoring and measurement of UFPs remains inconsistent across the sector, creating challenges in establishing robust evidence bases and making comparisons between locations.

The Panel discussed:

- While evidence continues to develop, there may be opportunities for the CAA to play a role in improving understanding of UFP emissions and exposure pathways associated with aviation.
- The relationship between UFPs and existing air quality metrics, noting that current regulatory frameworks largely focus on PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀ and nitrogen oxides rather than UFP.
- The availability of monitoring data around UK airports and the extent to which existing evidence can be used to understand local community exposure.

8. Closure of meeting

The Chair thanked Panel members, CAA colleagues and presenters for their contributions throughout the meeting. Thanks were extended to HA, BB, TJ, JC and AN for their presentations and engagement with the Panel.

The Chair confirmed that the Secretariat would circulate the action log and coordinate follow-up activity arising from the meeting. The next meeting is being held on the 12th of August and will be an interim, on-line meeting.

The meeting closed at 15:30.