UK Civil Aviation Authority

Modernising the way we do airspace design

CAP 3156 Third edition



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Civil Aviation Authority
Aviation House
Beehive Ring Road
Crawley
West Sussex
RH6 0YR

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Enquiries regarding the content of this publication should be addressed to:
airspace.modernisation@caa.co.uk

Under Review

The latest version of this document is available in electronic format at: www.caa.co.uk/CAP3156

Contents

Contents **3**
Revision History **4**
Purpose of this document **5**
Chapter 1 Background **7**
Airspace modernisation 7
A new means to deliver modernised airspace design 7
Consultation on the UKADS concept 9
New or revised DfT and CAA policy documents 9
More information 11
Chapter 2 Information common to all documents **12**
Introduction 12
Government policy on airport expansion and capacity 12
Planning decisions and airspace design decisions 13
Government policy and CAA processes and decisions: the legal and policy framework 14
The current approach to changes to airspace design 15
UKADS as an additional model to develop airspace change proposals 16
UKACS as a revised model to coordinate airspace change proposals 17
Guidance for and oversight of NERL's new licence obligation to provide the UKADS and UKACS 17
Overall summary of the different future models for developing airspace change proposals 18
Airspace Design Support Fund 19
Relationship between the NERL air traffic services licence and related policy documents 19
Summary of NERL's new airspace change roles 20
Chapter 3 New or revised DfT and CAA policy documents **21**
Introduction 21
DfT documents 21
DfT and CAA document 22
CAA documents 22
Annex A Relationship between airspace change and the legal/policy framework **25**

Under Review

Revision History

1st edition **September 2025**

This publication 'signposts' stakeholders of airspace modernisation to changes that are planned, or to be consulted on, in autumn 2025. Respondents to each consultation are encouraged to read this publication so that they have access to the background and further information it contains.

2nd edition **November 2025**

As anticipated in the first edition, we are publishing a second edition of this document to coincide with the publication of some documents that it refers to. The revisions in this second edition consider:

- documents that have been published since the first edition was published
- statements from government clarifying or providing further information on aspects of relevant government policy
- developments in DfT or CAA policy proposals that are reflected in documents or consultations published at the same time as this second edition (or due to be published shortly after it).

3rd edition **March 2026**

We are publishing a third edition of this document to coincide with the publication of final versions of some of the documents referred to in earlier editions (following the conclusion of consultations). The revisions in this third edition provide information on the decisions that have been made since the second edition and their effect.

All revisions to the second edition are marked with red underline.

Under Review

Purpose of this document

1. In March 2025 the Government decided to reform the UK's approach to modernising the design of UK airspace by introducing a **UK Airspace Design Service ("UKADS")** provided by **NATS (En Route) plc ("NERL")**.

2. The **Department for Transport ("DfT")** and the UK CAA proposed to give the task of providing the UKADS to NERL through modifications to its **air traffic services licence ("NERL's licence").**

3. Proposals to task NERL to provide a **UK Airspace Coordination Service ("UKACS")** and to administer an **Airspace Design Support Fund** were also made.

4. The modifications that the CAA proposed to make to NERL's licence were subject to consultations[1] by the CAA and the CAA has now made its decision.[2] In addition, the CAA published for consultation guidance documents relating to the new services it proposed NERL would be required to provide. Final versions have now been published.[3] The Licence modifications and the guidance documents will come into effect on 6 May 2026.[4]

5. In addition to its published Strategic Objectives for NERL when carrying out these new services[5], the DfT published for consultation policy documents relating to the design of UK airspace.[6] DfT's consultations have closed, and feedback received is being analysed. Publication of final versions is expected later in 2026.

6. This document sets out each of the documents that have been or will be published with a short summary of what each involves and where you can find more information. It also explains:

Under Review

1 UKADS – licence proposals | UK Civil Aviation Authority

2 CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

3 CAP 3219: Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services | UK Civil Aviation Authority and CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority

4 Following the publication of the Licence modification decision notice, certain stakeholders have six weeks in which they can apply to the Competition and Markets Authority for permission to appeal the CAA decision.

5 UKADS and UKACS licence obligations: strategic objectives | Department for Transport

6 Changes to the air navigation directions and air navigation guidance | Department for Transport

- the background common to all these proposed documents, including the regulatory and policy framework; and
- why these new documents (or revised documents) are necessary.

7. Earlier versions of this document were incorporated by reference into each of the separate CAA consultation documents. This edition is referred to in some of the CAA consultation response documents that accompany our March 2026 decisions and publications.

8. We may publish further editions of this document. If applicable, later versions of this document will identify any amendments and when they were made. In due course we will make clear when this document will no longer be updated.

9. For the latest news about the UKADS please visit www.caa.co.uk/ukads.

Under Review

Chapter 1
Background

Airspace modernisation

1.1 Modernisation of UK airspace is essential to ensure that it is fit for purpose in the future. Modernising airspace will make it more efficient and flexible, reduce bottlenecks, help UK aviation to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, and better manage aviation's noise impact. Furthermore, it will increase the resilience of flights to disruption, giving consumers confidence in the network and reducing airline costs. Airspace re-design is a key aspect of modernisation.

1.2 Aligned with the Airspace Modernisation Strategy[7], modernisation will be delivered by industry. It will enable increased airspace capacity, making possible:

- new flights and destinations, providing more choice and better value for passengers and shippers, and potentially wider benefits to the UK economy;
- the integration of new types of airspace user, facilitating innovation[8]; and
- facilitating the requirements of the Military and General Aviation, including recreational flyers.

A new means to deliver modernised airspace design

1.3 Any proposal to change the design of airspace (which is generally shortened to *airspace change proposal*) must follow the CAA's CAP 1616 airspace change process and guidance.[9] The current model for changing airspace design, under which a change sponsor (usually an airport or air navigation service provider) proposes and funds a new airspace change proposal that meets their needs, has not delivered the optimal system for airspace design required for the modernisation of UK airspace. Modernised designs must enable capacity, deliver benefits such as system resilience and consider the government's environmental objectives while also being compatible and coordinated with changes proposed for neighbouring airports. By way of example, the airspace around London is particularly complex, with interdependent airspace change proposals relating to

Under Review

7 About the strategy. Information about the Airspace Modernisation Strategy | UK Civil Aviation Authority

8 Supporting the Government's priority to realise the economic growth benefits of new technologies and the joint DfT and CAA future of flight strategy including CAP 3182: Future of Flight BVLOS Roadmap | UK Civil Aviation Authority

9 Airspace change process. Guidance on changes to the use or classification of UK airspace | UK Civil Aviation Authority

at least 11 airports, each under separate sponsorship and with their own independent operational objectives.

1.4 In 2018, a new initiative was implemented. The DfT and CAA commissioned NERL to set up the **Airspace Change Organising Group ("ACOG")** to produce an airspace change "masterplan" (that is, a single coordinated implementation plan for airspace changes in the UK up to 2040). Since 2018, this has been the main methodology being used, aiming to better achieve coordinated system-wide airspace modernisation.[10]

1.5 The masterplan has been produced in a series of iterations, including 18 strategically important UK airports, divided into four geographical 'clusters': London, Scottish, Manchester and West.

1.6 Airspace change sponsors within each cluster develop individual airspace change proposals and together with ACOG are required to coordinate their development into a coordinated masterplan for each cluster.

1.7 In 2025 the Government announced proposals[11] which will boost the delivery of much-needed airspace modernisation by:

- **introducing an additional model under which a single entity is responsible for designing a block of UK airspace that covers the area of airspace managed by more than one airport[12]: this will be the 'UK Airspace Design Service'**. NERL as the UKADS provider will be the "guiding mind" sponsoring the airspace change proposal in any area it is required to provide the UKADS to deliver the holistic, modernised airspace design envisaged by the Airspace Modernisation Strategy; and
- requiring NERL to continue to coordinate other strategically important interdependent airspace change proposals where the UKADS is not being provided.

1.8 As set out below, the decisions made by the DfT and the decisions the CAA has made and published in March 2026[13] mean that there will be three models for

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10 Airspace change masterplan. Information on the masterplan | UK Civil Aviation Authority. Note that the future of the masterplan will be affected by some of the plans referred to in this document.

11 Government announcement 17 March 2025 | HM Treasury and DfT statement 2 June 2025 | Department for Transport

12 Or air navigation service provider.

13 CAP 3219: Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services | UK Civil Aviation Authority; CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority; CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

Under Review

developing the airspace change proposals that are needed to modernise UK airspace design. These are set out below.

Consultation on the UKADS concept

1.9 The DfT and CAA consulted[14] on the UKADS concept in the autumn of 2024.

1.10 The CAA's Chief Executive, Rob Bishton, wrote to the Prime Minister on 15 January 2025[15] setting out what the CAA can do to further enable UK economic growth and investment. That letter identified measures to improve confidence in the delivery of airspace modernisation and included a commitment to support any government decision to establish a UKADS to accelerate and enhance the airspace changes that are vital to achieving airspace modernisation.

1.11 In its announcements (as well as in the UKADS consultation response document[16]) the Government confirmed that:

- it would establish a UKADS and (for some airports outside the initial scope of the UKADS or where the UKADS is not being provided) an Airspace Design Support Fund, and that both would be funded by a proposed new UK Airspace Design Charge.
- NERL would continue to provide a coordination service for strategically important interdependent airspace change proposals where it is not providing the UKADS (but those airspace change proposals would continue to be sponsored by their existing change sponsors); and
- the DfT and CAA (respectively) would consult on a package of new (or amended) policy and process for airspace design, which would retain the important principles of a transparent, evidence-based process that will involve all stakeholders.

1.12 The UKADS consultation response document referred to above contains more information on the emerging proposals at that time.[17]

New or revised DfT and CAA policy documents

1.13 The UKADS consultation response document committed to establishing the initial UKADS operating model, to be provided by NERL, as soon as possible.

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14 Airspace modernisation - consultation on a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

15 CAP3085: Letter from the Prime Minister, December 2024: Supporting Growth | UK Civil Aviation Authority and CAP3085A: Letter from the office of the Chief Executive to the Prime Minister, January 2025: Supporting Growth | UK Civil Aviation Authority

16 CAP3106: Airspace modernisation: Outcome of the consultation on a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority and UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

17 Superseded DfT/CAA policy papers UKADS 25/1 to UKADS 25/4

Under Review

1.14 The modifications to NERL's licence, including in relation to the UK Airspace Design Charge, to implement the policy decisions required specific consultation and decisions in accordance with the statutory processes provided for in the Transport Act 2000. These included:

- the laying of two Statutory Instruments relating to the Transport Act 2000 to enable the necessary modifications to NERL's licence[18];
- a DfT consultation on modifying certain "terms" in NERL's licence to authorise NERL to carry out the activities of the UKADS and a subsequent DfT decision on those terms[19]; and
- a CAA consultation on Initial Proposals[20], subsequent statutory consultation on Final Proposals[21] and a subsequent CAA decision[22] for modifications to the "conditions" of NERL's licence to require NERL to provide the UKADS and provide for how it should be financed. The CAA's decision will come into force on 6 May 2026.

1.15 The DfT has published[23] and consulted[24] on documents to update the overarching government policy documents that impact on airspace design to reflect up-to-date government policy. The DfT has said that it will publish final versions of the documents it has consulted on or intends to consult on[25] later this year. (See Chapter 3 for more information.)

1.16 The CAA has published final versions of the NERL Licence modifications and two guidance documents[26] (which will all come into force on 6 May 2026) in order to:

- implement the new model under which a single entity (NERL as the UKADS provider) is responsible for designing a block of UK airspace that covers the

Under Review

18 The Transport Act 2000 (Air Traffic Services) (Amendment) Order 2025 and The Transport Act 2000 (Air Traffic Services) (Prescribed Terms) Regulations 2025

19 UK airspace design service: modifications to NERL licence terms | Department for Transport

20 CAP 3121: Economic Regulation of NERL: Initial Proposals for modifying the Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

21 CAP 3164 Economic Regulation of NERL: Final proposals for modifying the Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service

22 CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

23 UKADS and UKACS licence obligations: strategic objectives | Department for Transport

24 Changes to the air navigation directions and air navigation guidance | Department for Transport

25 Review of the Airports National Policy Statement engagement update: February 2026 - GOV.UK

26 CAP 3219: Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services | UK Civil Aviation Authority and CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority

area of airspace managed by more than one airport (or air navigation service provider) and proposing that as an airspace change proposal to the CAA;

- amend the approach to NERL's coordination of some airspace change proposals (in place of the service currently provided by NERL through ACOG). This is the UKACS.

1.17 The CAA has consulted on proposals to update and rationalise the airspace change process and guidance for all airspace change proposals to ensure the regulatory requirements remain proportionate, while supporting the CAA to make informed, evidence based, transparent decisions. The CAA is currently analysing responses and will publish a final version of those updates later in 2026.

1.18 A diagram (and associated description) of all these documents and their relationship to one another is published in Annex A.

More information

1.19 For information and the latest news about the UKADS please visit www.caa.co.uk/ukads.

Under Review

Chapter 2

Information common to all documents

Introduction

2.1 The diagram in Annex A describes the inter-relationship between airspace change proposals, the policy documents referred to in Chapter 3 and the legal and policy framework. We have grouped the information under the following headings:

- government policy on airport expansion and capacity
- planning decisions and airspace design decisions
- government policy and CAA processes and decisions: the legal and policy framework
- the current approach to changes to airspace design
- UKADS as an additional model for developing airspace change proposals
- UKACS as a revised model to coordinate airspace change proposals
- guidance for and oversight of NERL's new licence obligation to provide UKADS and UKACS
- overall summary of the different models for developing airspace change proposals
- Airspace Design Support Fund
- relationship between NERL's Licence and related policy documents
- summary of NERL's new airspace change roles.

Government policy on airport expansion and capacity

2.2 The Government believes that aviation can make a key contribution to achievement of economic growth, increasing the prosperity of the whole country.[27] Government policies on aviation infrastructure are set out in the "Making Better Use of Existing Runways" policy statement[28] and the **Airports National Policy Statement ("ANPS")**[29] approved by Parliament and designated

Under Review

27 Government update on airport expansion | Department for Transport

28 Aviation strategy: making best use of existing runways | Department for Transport

29 Airports National Policy Statement | Department for Transport; *The Government has said **the Airports***

by the Secretary of State. In summary, those provide that new runway capacity is to be built at Heathrow Airport and that all airports and aerodromes are to make best use of their existing runways, thereby maximising the UK's overall aviation capacity and consequently the possible number of air traffic movements in UK airspace.

2.3 The DfT launched a review of the ANPS on 22 October 2025[30] and identified the scheme promoted by Heathrow Airport Ltd as the scheme to take forward in informing that ongoing review.[31] The Government also said that it is committed to making a decision on a third runway at Heathrow within this Parliament, and that if the ANPS review concludes that amendments are needed, it will consult on an amended policy statement by summer 2026.

2.4 Noting the need for modernised airspace to deliver the scheme on time, the Government has said that the UKADS *would "initially prioritise airspace design for the London region supporting both Heathrow and the wider network*". To reflect that decision, the Government has published **Strategic Objectives for NERL's provision of its UKADS and UKACS obligations.**[32] NERL's Licence requires it to have due regard to the strategic objectives.

2.5 The Government aims to facilitate growth in aviation capacity within its legally binding environmental and climate obligations and said it will be seeking the independent opinion of the Climate Change Committee.

2.6 Although total carbon emissions from aviation are expected to rise as a proportion of total UK emissions, airspace modernisation aims to decrease carbon emissions per flight.

Planning decisions and airspace design decisions

2.7 The Minister for State, Department for Transport confirmed (in the House of Lords on 14 July 2025): "…airspace modernisation is about better managing our airspace, not seeking permission for new flights. The number of flights operating from UK airports, including those facilitated by a new runway, is determined not by modernisation but rather through the planning process…".[33]

Under Review

NPS will be reviewed "at speed" *if and when it receives new expansion proposals, and that it is possible that the Airports NPS might need to be amended if any proposals are substantially different from those envisaged in 2018*; Heathrow airport expansion: 2025 proposals - House of Commons Library. A link to that consultation once published will be added to Annex A and the CAA website.

30 Realising the benefits of expansion at Heathrow Airport | Department for Transport

31 Next steps for Heathrow Airport Limited and the Arora Group/Heathrow West Limited - GOV.UK

32 UKADS and UKACS licence obligations: strategic objectives | Department for Transport

33 Transport Act 2000 (Air Traffic Services) (Prescribed Terms) Regulations 2025

2.8 As the UK's specialist aviation safety regulator, and the body charged by the Secretary of State with taking airspace change decisions, the CAA has a key role to play in the implementation of the Government's aims by ensuring the safe and efficient design of airspace to respond to the growth in capacity delivered by the Government's policies and the planning system.

2.9 Airports and aerodromes provide the means for the majority of aviation activity to take place. This ground infrastructure is the primary enabler of aviation activity. The CAA's functions do not include policy-making or decision-taking about the amount of ground infrastructure or where it is located.

2.10 Policies and decisions about the construction and any limits on operation of airports and aerodromes are primarily within the ambit of the planning system and taken forward through planning applications and applications for development consent orders under the Planning Act 2008. Planning decisions determine whether new infrastructure may be constructed in a particular location and may include conditions limiting the scale of operations. In its recent statement[34] during its progress through Parliament the Government noted that the Planning Infrastructure Act 2025[35] will "streamline the delivery of major infrastructure, including Heathrow. This includes faster consenting routes and more proportionate consultations".

2.11 Such planning decisions consider the total capacity for air traffic movements to and from UK airports, and the first-order environmental effects of those movements (such as the overall amount of noise and carbon emissions they generate).

2.12 Those decisions are guided, among other things, by Government policies including the "Making Better Use of Existing Runways" policy statement and (in the case of Heathrow) the ANPS referred to above.

2.13 Airspace modernisation is an important part of enabling any new capacity to be utilised once it has been approved by any planning consents.

Government policy and CAA processes and decisions: the legal and policy framework

2.14 In accordance with the Transport Act 2000, the Secretary of State gives the CAA its airspace functions in the **Air Navigation Directions**. Under section 70(1) of the Transport Act 2000, the CAA's primary duty when carrying out such airspace functions is to maintain a high standard of safety. Subject always to that overriding duty, the CAA has a duty under section 70(2) to consider eight other

34 Realising the benefits of expansion at Heathrow Airport | Department for Transport

35 Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

Under Review

factors, including a duty to take account of any guidance on environmental objectives given to the CAA by the Secretary of State (section 70(2)(d)).

2.15 That guidance is known as the **Air Navigation Guidance**. It sets out the Government's environmental objectives that the CAA must seek to achieve in the exercise of its air navigation functions and gives the CAA guidance on how it is to achieve these objectives in the context of its duties under section 70 of the Transport Act 2000. That includes guidance on how environmental objectives fit alongside the other factors listed in section 70(2) when the CAA is considering how best to give effect to the listed factors as a whole under section 70(3).

2.16 The Government consulted on amendments to the Air Navigation Directions and Guidance in November 2025, is currently analysing responses and has said it will publish final versions later in 2026.[36]

2.17 The CAA's airspace functions include to maintain and keep under review an Airspace Modernisation Strategy that gives effect to Government policies in relation to UK airspace and to create and to maintain an overall UK airspace design that enables the safe operation of the capacity permitted by the planning system.

2.18 CAA decisions on the design of airspace are primarily concerned with maintaining a high standard of safety, but must also consider matters such as the distribution of noise experienced on the ground in the vicinity of airports and the use of navigation techniques to improve flight efficiency and thus reduce emissions. Conversely, decisions taken in the planning system are not concerned with the detailed design of airspace.

2.19 Appendix B of the Airspace Modernisation Strategy and the CAA's website[37] set out more information about the current legal and policy framework.

The current approach to changes to airspace design

2.20 As explained in Chapter 1, until now, changes to airspace design have generally been sponsored by those responsible for managing airspace. Some airspace change proposals are considered strategically important because they are needed to deliver airspace modernisation. Where these are also interdependent, NERL (through ACOG) has been required to coordinate them, in a series of four regional clusters.[38]

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36 Changes to the air navigation directions and air navigation guidance | Department for Transport

37 Legislative framework to airspace change | UK Civil Aviation Authority

38 Until now these have been represented in a masterplan, divided into regional clusters. As a result of the decisions described in this document there will no longer be masterplans. However, we have published CAP 3220 and will keep up to date a published list of clusters and the strategically important interdependent airspace changes each cluster contains.

Under Review

UKADS as an additional model to develop airspace change proposals

2.21 The key elements of the Government's decision to create the UKADS and the CAA's decisions referred to in this document are that:

- NERL will be required to provide the UKADS through a new obligation in its licence; and
- the funding of some airspace change proposals will be reformed by creating a new UK Airspace Design Charge[39] to be levied on relevant airspace users, where this charge:
  - allows the recovery of the efficient costs of NERL in providing the UKADS; and
  - enables the creation of an Airspace Design Support Fund (see below).

2.22 NERL, as the UKADS provider, will 'hold the pen' on an airspace change proposal in relation to each UKADS 'delivery focus area' set out in the Secretary of State's strategic objectives[40] for NERL's UKADS and UKACS licence obligations. These state that NERL's first priority delivery focus area is to provide the UKADS in the London TMA region and to implement the relevant deployments by 2035. The strategic objectives also require the airspace change proposal to:

- prioritise maintaining a high standard of safety; and
- be consistent with the Airspace Modernisation Strategy, secure system-wide benefits and overall network optimisation that results in the most efficient and resilient airspace network possible whilst taking account of government guidance made under section 70(2)(d) of the Transport Act 2000.[41]

2.23 Any design to modernise the complex airspace around London to be prepared by the UKADS will include changes to the design required for a third runway at Heathrow.

2.24 The airspace change proposal to be prepared by NERL as the UKADS provider must follow the CAA's airspace change process and guidance.

2.25 In each delivery focus area, the airspace change proposal to be prepared by NERL as the UKADS provider will supersede the current approach of individual

39 CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

40 UKADS and UKACS licence obligations: strategic objectives | Department for Transport

41 Note the textual modification to the mandate that was published in CAP 3106, the UKADS consultation response document (footnote 12).

Under Review

change sponsors preparing multiple airspace change proposals (coordinated by ACOG) in a cluster.

UKACS as a revised model to coordinate airspace change proposals

2.26 Additionally, the decisions made by the Government[42] and the CAA[43] and the guidance published by the CAA[44] (see section below) mean NERL will provide a replacement coordination role for the strategically important interdependent airspace change proposals within the remaining clusters[45] outside the area(s) of the UKADS: the **UK Airspace Coordination Service ("UKACS")**. NERL will monitor the need for clusters and the appropriate airspace changes to include in clusters and provide that as advice to the DfT and CAA. Together, the DfT and CAA will determine the continuance and constituents of any cluster. NERL will not be required to operate the UKACS from an impartial unit and the service will continue to be funded from the existing ACOG provision in the NR23 price control decision.[46]

Guidance for and oversight of NERL's new licence obligation to provide the UKADS and UKACS

2.27 The CAA has also published final requirements for NERL's UKACS as well as guidance for NERL's UKADS and UKACS including how NERL will create its strategic delivery plan, its stakeholder engagement plan and appoint an Advisory Board. Day-to-day governance by the DfT and CAA of NERL's UKADS and UKACS will be achieved by:

- provision of information and reports by NERL to the DfT and CAA; and
- including oversight of UKADS and UKACS activities within the existing Airspace Modernisation Strategy governance structure

(noting that ultimately NERL's UKADS and UKACS obligations can be enforced via existing Licence enforcement mechanisms).

Under Review

42 UK airspace design service: modifications to NERL licence terms | Department for Transport

43 CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

44 CAP 3219: Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services | UK Civil Aviation Authority and CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority

45 No masterplan will be required for a delivery focus area, clusters or at all.

46 Current price control NR23 (2023-2027) | UK Civil Aviation Authority

2.28 The CAA's requirements for the UKACS and associated guidance[47] explains what is meant by a strategically important interdependent airspace change.

Overall summary of the different future models for developing airspace change proposals

2.29 As a result of the introduction of the UKADS and UKACS, from 6 May 2026 there will be three models for developing airspace change proposals in the UK:

- UKADS: strategically important interdependent airspace changes which will be combined into an airspace change proposal for a specified, delivery focus area(s) sponsored by NERL, as the UKADS provider. NERL will be responsible for determining the contents of the proposal that is put forward to the CAA for decision;
- UKACS: strategically important interdependent airspace change proposals where the UKADS is not being provided and therefore sponsored by an airport or air navigation service provider that manages the airspace, coordinated by NERL as the UKACS provider. Each change sponsor remains responsible for progressing all aspects of the airspace change proposal, including submission to the CAA for decision; and
- all other airspace changes (where the change sponsor is wholly responsible for proposing the contents of the proposal that is put forward to the CAA for decision).

2.30 For any given geographical area, airspace change proposals may therefore comprise either:

- an airspace change proposal developed and sponsored by NERL as the UKADS provider;
- a UKACS-coordinated cluster of strategically important interdependent airspace change proposals (sponsored by or on behalf of individual airports or air navigation service providers); or
- an airspace change proposal developed and sponsored solely by an individual sponsor.

2.31 Whichever model is being used to develop a particular airspace change proposal, all must take account of the statutory guidance in the Government's Air Navigation Guidance, adhere to the CAA's airspace change processes and guidance and work together with the rest of the overall UK airspace design.

Under Review

47 CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority

Airspace Design Support Fund

2.32 As noted above, the Government has also decided to set up an Airspace Design Support Fund. As a result of the decisions first by the Government, and then by the CAA in March 2026, this will be funded through the UK Airspace Design Charge, which will be levied on airspace users who also pay the existing UK en route charge. The DfT has published the final fund rules and eligibility criteria[48] which determine who can apply for the fund and what costs the fund covers.[49] The CAA will decide whether an application for funding meets the eligibility criteria. The application process will be published by the CAA by 7 April 2026 and applications can be made from 6 May 2026 (the date the published Licence modifications come into force). NERL will be responsible for administering (and disbursing funds from) the Airspace Design Support Fund as directed by the CAA.

Relationship between the NERL air traffic services licence and related policy documents

2.33 From 6 May 2026, when the modifications come into force, NERL will be required by conditions of its licence to provide the UKADS and UKACS (and to administer the Airspace Design Support Fund, as directed by the CAA).

2.34 The modifications to NERL's Licence[50] set out how NERL should respond to the strategic objectives[51] published by the Secretary of State and guidance for the UKADS and UKACS published by the CAA.[52] Any amendments to the strategic objectives and CAA guidance will be subject to consultation.

Under Review

48 UK Airspace Design Support Fund rules and eligibility criteria | Department for Transport

49 Information will be published on the subsidy database by 7 April 2026 (Subsidy Database | GOV.UK). The subsidy database holds information on subsidy schemes and subsidy awards given to businesses by public authorities under the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

50 CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

51 UKADS and UKACS licence obligations: strategic objectives | Department for Transport

52 CAP 3219: Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services | UK Civil Aviation Authority and CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority

Summary of NERL's new airspace change roles

2.35 Figure 2.1 below shows the different roles for NERL relating specifically to airspace change (once its licence modifications come into effect).[53] It shows:

- NERL's function of considering necessary airspace change proposals for en route airspace design;
- NERL's function, as UKADS provider, of creating an airspace change proposal for airspace in the delivery focus areas (as prioritised by the Secretary of State);
- NERL's amended function, as UKACS provider, of providing a coordination service for the airspace change proposals of strategically important interdependent airspace change proposals where the UKADS is not being provided, grouped into geographic clusters; and
- NERL's function to administer the Airspace Design Support Fund in accordance with eligibility criteria published by the DfT and as directed by the CAA.

Review

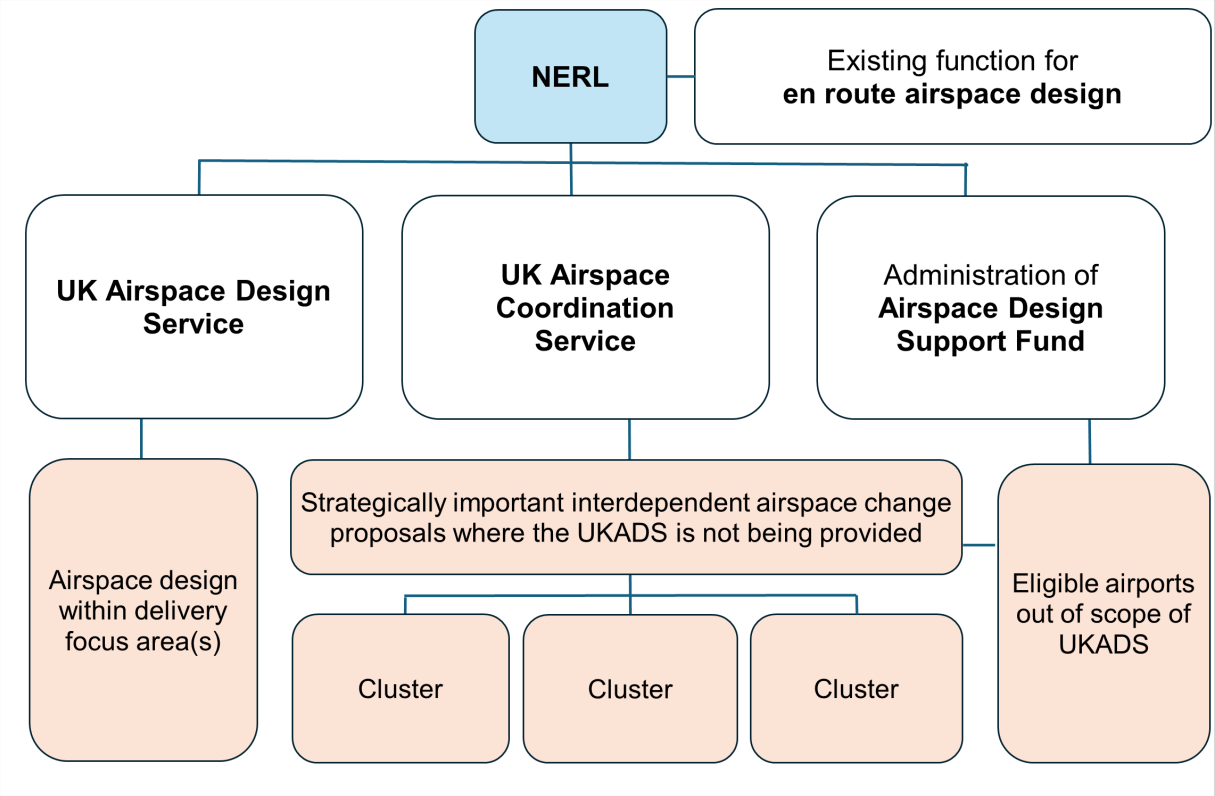


Figure 2.1: NERL functions relating to airspace change

[53] These airspace change roles are in addition to NERL's core role to provide en route air traffic services and associated obligations, set out in its Licence.

Chapter 3

New or revised DfT and CAA policy documents

Introduction

3.1 This chapter lists the new or amended policy documents that the DfT and the CAA will be publishing, and in some cases consulting on. This chapter may be updated. If applicable, later versions of this document will reflect any amendments.

DfT documents

Airports National Policy Statement (under review)

Current document (2017): Airports National Policy Statement | Department for Transport

Purpose: Sets out the UK's policy framework for expansion at Heathrow Airport and is the primary basis for decision-making on any development consent application for a new runway.

Revision: Currently under review.

Air Navigation Directions (revision)

Current document (2023): The Civil Aviation Authority (Air Navigation) Directions 2023

Purpose: Provision of duties (referred to in this document as functions) and powers to the CAA by the Secretary of State under the Transport Act 2000.

Revision: DfT Consultation dated November 2025 now closed. DfT analysing responses. Changes to the air navigation directions and air navigation guidance | Department for Transport. DfT proposing to publish final version later in 2026.

Air Navigation Guidance (revision)

Current document (2017): UK Air Navigation Guidance 2017 | Department for Transport

Purpose: Sets the Government's environmental objectives that the CAA must seek to achieve in the exercise of its air navigation functions and gives the CAA guidance on how it is to achieve these objectives in the context of its duties under section 70 of the Transport Act 2000.

Revision: DfT Consultation dated November 2025 now closed. DfT analysing responses Changes to the air navigation directions and air navigation guidance | Department for Transport. DfT proposing to publish final version later in 2026.

Under Review

UK Airspace Design Support Fund rules and eligibility criteria

Current document: Published 20 March 2026. UK Airspace Design Support Fund rules and eligibility criteria | Department for Transport

Purpose: The rules and eligibility criteria for the Airspace Design Support Fund.

Strategic objectives for NERL's UKADS and UKACS licence obligations

Current document: Published November 2025. UKADS and UKACS licence obligations: strategic objectives | Department for Transport

Purpose: To establish the delivery focus areas for NERL's provision of the UKADS and what the airspace design must achieve. To set the area where NERL must provide the proposed UKACS.

DfT and CAA document

NERL's Licence

Current document: NERL Licence December 2025

Purpose: Creating new obligations for NERL to provide the UKADS, the UKACS and to administer the Airspace Design Support Fund, and related amendments to existing obligations.

Revision: DfT decision to modify licence terms published November 2025 UK airspace design service: modifications to NERL licence terms | Department for Transport. CAA decision to modify NERL's licence conditions published March 2026. CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority. A consolidated version of NERL's licence will be published here when the condition modifications come into effect.

CAA documents

CAP 1616 airspace change process and guidance

Current document: CAP 1616 Airspace change process | UK Civil Aviation Authority.

Purpose: The process (and its guidance) that an airspace change proposal (to make a change to the airspace design) must follow.[54] Decisions on the proposal are taken by the CAA (or by the Secretary of State where a proposal has been 'called in').

Revision: Consultation Autumn 2025 Consultation on the airspace change process | UK Civil Aviation Authority. Any revised CAP 1616 will be published later in 2026.

[54] Sponsors of airspace change proposals that are onboarded to the UKADS through the onboarding process (for the London cluster, this is CAP 3129) become partners of the UKADS.

Under Review

CAP 3129 Onboarding process for the UKADS provider for the London cluster

Current document: Published 1 September 2025 CAP3129: Onboarding Process for the UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) Provider for the London TMA Region | UK Civil Aviation Authority.

Purpose: To set out how existing airspace change proposals within the London cluster of the airspace change masterplan will be transferred to enable NERL as the UKADS provider to sponsor an airspace change proposal for the London TMA Region.

Onboarding process for the UKADS provider for other areas (if applicable)

Current document: None. Other cluster-specific onboarding processes will be published if required.

Purpose: To set out how existing proposals in a specified cluster of strategically important interdependent airspace change proposals will be transferred to enable NERL as the UKADS provider to sponsor an airspace change proposal for that area.

Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and UK Airspace Coordination Services

Current document: Published 25 March 2026. CAP 3219: Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services | UK Civil Aviation Authority (in force 6 May 2026)

Purpose: To set out how NERL is to provide the UKADS and the UKACS, in particular:

- developing a strategic delivery plan
- the role and function of the Advisory Board
- developing a stakeholder engagement plan

Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service (UKACS) and associated guidance

Current document: Published 25 March 2026. CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority (in force 6 May 2026)

Purpose: To set out the requirements on and associated guidance for NERL and relevant sponsors in relation to the proposed UK Airspace Coordination Service (UKACS).

Under Review

CAP 1711 Airspace Modernisation Strategy

Current document: CAP 1711 Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2023–2040 Part 1: Strategic objectives and enablers.

Purpose: A coordinated strategy for the use of all UK airspace for air navigation up to 2040 including the Airspace Modernisation Strategy governance structure

Revision: Amendments required to

- take account of revised Government policy in any revised Airports National Policy Statement, Air Navigation Directions or Air Navigation Guidance.
- adapt the mechanisms by which the co-sponsors (DfT and CAA) oversee NERL's provision of the UKACS (formerly ACOG as amended), the new UKADS and the new Airspace Design Support Fund administration.

UK Airspace Design Support Fund application process and guidance

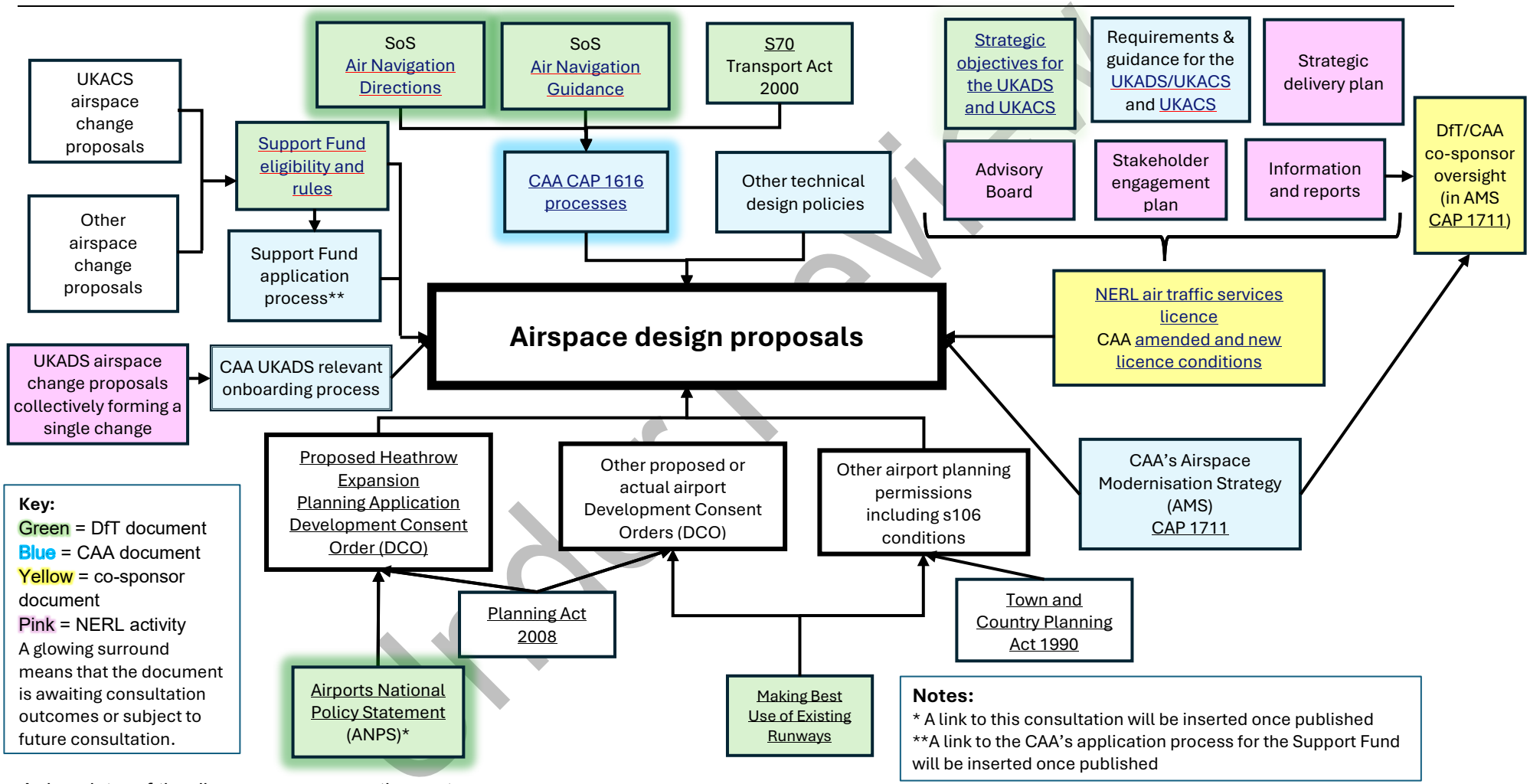
Current document: None. New document. Proposed publication date 7 April 2026

Purpose: The application process and guidance for the UK Airspace Design Support Fund.

Under Review

ANNEX A

Relationship between airspace change and the legal/policy framework



A descriptor of the diagram appears on the next page.

Figure A1: Relationship between airspace change and the legal and policy framework

Descriptor of Figure A1

Summary

A1 The CAA has produced a diagram setting out the inter-relationships between NERL (as the UKADS and UKACS provider, and the Airspace Design Support Fund administrator as directed by the CAA) and the relevant current or potential legal and policy framework. Some documents have yet to be published and will be subject to consultation.

Key to the diagram

- Any box in green is a DfT document.
- Any box in blue is a CAA document.
- Any box in yellow is a co-sponsor (DfT and CAA) document or activity.
- Any box in pink is a NERL activity.
- A coloured glowing surround means that the document is awaiting consultation outcomes or subject to consultation.

Notes to the diagram

- A single asterisk indicates that a link to this consultation will be inserted once published.
- A double asterisk indicates that a link to the CAA's application process for the Airspace Design Support Fund will be inserted once published.

Description of the diagram

A2 **At its heart**, the diagram has airspace design proposals.

A3 The **left section** feeding into this shows three types of airspace change proposal:

- UKACS: Airspace change proposals coordinated by NERL (some funding may be available through the Airspace Design Support Fund, for which there are funding eligibility criteria and rules[55] and an application process that will be published April 2026);
- Other airspace change proposals (some funding may be available through the Airspace Design Support Fund).

Under Review

55 UK Airspace Design Support Fund rules and eligibility criteria | Department for Transport

- UKADS: More than one existing airspace change proposal collectively forming an airspace change proposal (via the relevant CAA UKADS onboarding process, which for the London area is CAP 3129[56]); and

A4 The **right section** shows NERL's licence[57] and various documents mentioned in the CAA's conditions modification Final Decision[58] for the NERL air traffic services licence. These include:

- the DfT's Strategic Objectives[59]
- the CAA's guidance for NERL's provision of the UKADS and UKACS[60]; and
- the CAA's requirements and associated guidance for NERL's provision of the UKACS.[61]

These documents provide more detail on NERL's obligations which are referred to in NERL's Licence. Likewise, through the Licence, NERL will be responsible for a strategic delivery plan, the Advisory Board (terms of reference and formation) and a stakeholder engagement plan. To enable and fund NERL to produce an airspace change proposal as UKADS provider, NERL's Licence was subject to separate DfT and CAA consultations on the licence terms and conditions respectively. NERL's provision of the UKADS will include regular reporting and information provision and will be subject to oversight by the DfT/CAA as co-sponsors through the existing governance mechanism in the Airspace Modernisation Strategy CAP 1711.[62] Like all airspace change proposals, the airspace change proposal developed by NERL, as the UKADS provider, must take account of the CAA's Airspace Modernisation Strategy.

A5 The **top section** outlines other aspects of the airspace legal and policy framework that affect all airspace change proposals: the Secretary of State's Air Navigation Directions and Air Navigation Guidance[63] to the CAA, revisions to which were consulted on in Autumn 2025 (outcome awaited), that together with

Under Review

56 CAP3129: Onboarding Process for the UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) Provider for the London TMA Region | UK Civil Aviation Authority

57 NATS En Route Licence: NATS (En Route) Licence | UK Civil Aviation Authority

58 CAP 3225: Economic Regulation of NERL Decision to modify NERL's Licence to support the implementation of a UK Airspace Design Service | UK Civil Aviation Authority

59 UKADS and UKACS licence obligations: strategic objectives | Department for Transport

60 CAP 3219: Guidance for the UK Airspace Design and Coordination Services | UK Civil Aviation Authority

61 CAP 3220: Requirements for the UK Airspace Coordination Service and associated guidance | UK Civil Aviation Authority

62 CAP1711: Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2023–2040 Part 1: Strategic objectives and enablers | UK Civil Aviation Authority

63 Changes to the air navigation directions and air navigation guidance | Department for Transport

section 70 of the Transport Act 2000[64] and other technical design policies govern the CAA's CAP 1616 airspace change process and guidance[65] that all change sponsors must follow.

A6 The **bottom section** outlines the planning regime. Airspace change proposals must enable the capacity permitted, within the conditions set, by planning permissions granted to the airports concerned. These are:

- the proposed Heathrow Expansion Planning Application Development Consent Order (DCO)[66]; and
- other airport DCOs (e.g. Gatwick or Luton)

all of which are subject to the Planning Act 2008[67]

- other airport planning permissions including section 106 conditions which are subject to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.[68]

A7 In terms of government policy, a planning application in relation to Heathrow is additionally subject to the DfT's Airports National Policy Statement[69] (which the Government confirmed in October 2025 that it will review[70]) while the other airports are subject to the DfT's "Making Best Use of Existing Runways".[71]

Explanatory note supplementing the diagram

A8 Once NERL has the UKADS up and running, it will sponsor an airspace change proposal for the London TMA region airspace through the CAA's airspace change process. There will no longer be the multiple airspace change proposals sponsored by individual airports that formed the London 'cluster'.

A9 Some further government documents need to be consulted on, finalised or published before an airspace change proposal will be developed and proposed by NERL, as the UKADS provider, to the CAA for decision, as described in this document.

Under Review

64 Transport Act 2000

65 Consultation on the airspace change process | UK Civil Aviation Authority

66 Proposed Heathrow Expansion Planning Application Development Consent Order (DCO) | Planning Inspectorate

67 Planning Act 2008. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament is proposing amendments to the Planning Act 2008

68 Town and Country Planning Act 1990

69 Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) | Department for Transport

70 Plans for Heathrow expansion accelerate as Transport Secretary unveils next steps | Department for Transport

71 Making Best Use of Existing Runways | Department for Transport