



■ Overhead – a computer-generated image shows a plane flying over Willie Lott's cottage, a prominent landmark in Constable Country. Below, a map of the new flightpaths.

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AN overhaul of flight paths across Essex could see more planes in the skies above West Mersea, but fewer across Constable Country.

A new holding area for planes waiting to land at London City airport will be moved from its position above Southend to an area above Rayleigh.

This means more planes will be coming in over West Mersea from the east en route to the City airport.

National Air Traffic Services (Nats) has launched a consultation on proposed airspace changes across the South-East, in a bid to move flight paths away from populated areas and reduce environmental impact.

The current holding arrangements mean lengthy delays at the airport because it only provides space for two aircraft to hold at 4,000ft and 5,000ft.

The proposed hold has been chosen because there are 40,000 fewer people living under it compared to the Southend hold.

Alan Mogridge, chairman of West Mersea Town Council, said: "I'm unhappy with the proposals. I do fly but I'm not being nimby."

"If we do need a hold area, there is a large sea out there so there's no need to pollute over people's homes."

"The airports do need a holding area but it should be out at sea not over Mersea."

"We have got enough pollution from the Bradwell power station – we have had our fair share in this area."

Colchester councillor Margaret Kimberley, who represents West Mersea, said: "The holding area has to go somewhere for planes coming into the airport."

"I hope that it does not create too much difference but the pollution aspect is undesirable."

"I do have some reservations."

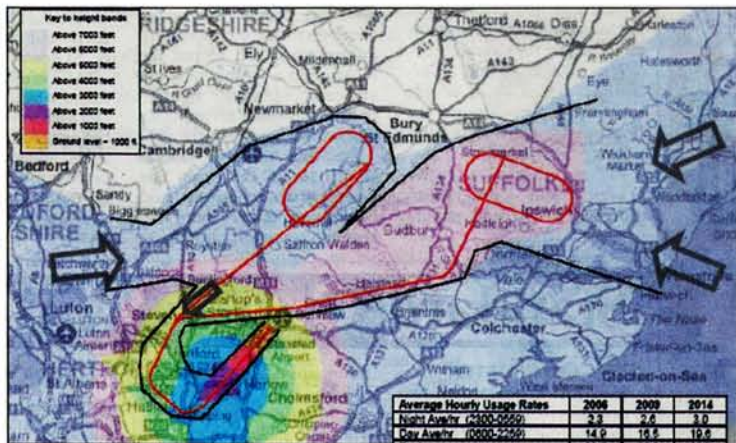
Lee Boulton, airspace planning manager for Nats, said proposed changes aim to reduce delays and help air traffic controllers keep up with future increases in flight numbers.

"This region is the busiest and most complicated region of airspace in Europe, if not the world," he said.

"There will be some real benefits in terms of trying to reduce the environmental impact."

The overhaul will also see fewer planes in the skies over the Dedham Vale Area

Flightpaths plan: winners and losers



of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Mr Boulton said following Civil Aviation Authority guidance flight paths have been moved further north which means arrivals at Stansted airport will be pushed from the Dedham Vale across the Stour and Orwell estuaries towards Ipswich.

The holding area will also be moved from above Sudbury to an area above Stowmarket.

"As a result we are expecting there to be less flights over the Dedham Vale," added Mr Boulton.

In 2006 the Dedham Vale Society brought legal action in the High Court against the Civil Aviation Authority over the nuisance caused by aircraft and an agreement was made to cut flights over the area.

"As part of the judicial review with the Civil Aviation Authority we are taking into account the decision and are abiding by that agreement," said Mr Boulton.

Katherine Blake, project manager of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley

Project, said: "We have made representations saying that the Dedham Vale should not have such a high concentration of flights – it was an unfair concentration."

"Previously planes have been funnelled down the Dedham Vale and we feel it should have been shared."

Wilfrid Tolhurst, chairman of the Dedham Vale Society, said the group will be happy if the result of the consultation is the same as the proposal, but that it was too early for him to comment at this stage.

Martin Peachey chairman of Stop Stansted Expansion's Noise Committee, said: "While we welcome moves to reduce noise impacts, such as proposals for greater use of continuous descent approaches, there will clearly be losers as well as winners across the region since the noise has to go somewhere."

The consultation period closes on May 22 after which the findings will be submitted to the Civil Aviation Authority, which will decide whether they can go ahead.

A website for the consultation has been set up at nats.co.uk/tncconsultation.