

Addendum to Inverness Airport – Airspace Change Proposal

Since Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL), the owner and operator of Inverness Airport, submitted an Airspace Change Proposal (ACP), to modernise and improve the procedures and arrangements in the immediate airspace surrounding the airport, the world has gone through an unprecedented event that has had far reaching implications for many industries, aviation included. This has meant that HIAL felt it necessary to review the ACP and communicate those steps taken to ensure that this ACP is still relevant and justified in the situation the aviation industry finds itself in today, in a post-Brexit and Covid coping world.

When the ACP was first proposed its purpose was to ensure future efficient use of surrounding airspace and that current effectiveness was preserved for all aircraft. The popularity of Unmanned Aerial Systems, fuelled by the versatility of their uses, from recreational to support in emergency and life saving situations, continues apace. Alongside this, and other emerging technologies, more traditional aviation participants, such as glider and general aviation pilots, are still enjoying all that the Highlands has to offer. It is imperative that any airspace improvements that HIAL seeks to implement are sensitive to all airspace stakeholders both aviation and non-aviation.

The original proposal stated that Inverness airport handled more than 800,000 passengers in 2016. In 2017 and 2018 the airport handled more than 870,000 and in 2019, the last year of representative data prior to the pandemic, over 900,000 passengers utilised the connectivity that Inverness Airport brings to the region. Whilst the pandemic has obviously impacted aviation worldwide, initial data would suggest that the domestic aviation market is recovering faster than the international, and HIAL believes that the recovery will fully justify the steps that are being taken to improve safety and ensure efficient use of airspace. Furthermore, Inverness Airport will have direct rail connectivity from December 2022, as the project to deliver a two-platform station on the Aberdeen-Inverness line with step-free access, via a footbridge with lifts, is due for completion.

Additionally, HIAL has proposed an improvement in the application and utilisation of the proposed airspace change to allow for a more flexible use of this airspace. This will allow for safety of all users to remain paramount whilst allowing the airspace to be allocated to other users, other than aircraft operating under the control of Inverness Airport Air Traffic Controllers. The Flexible Use of Airspace (FUA) procedures will be utilised at pre-notified and agreed times and will ensure that other airspace stakeholders can continue to operate unimpeded by the change, thus guaranteeing airspace effectiveness is preserved. Continuing the theme of minimising impact on others, HIAL will ensure that the hours that controlled airspace is activated will be reviewed to reflect both demand and seasonality and that the airspace will only be active when the airport is open.

HIAL can also confirm that procedures that allow for aircraft that are required to hold whilst en-route to Inverness Airport will not change with the proposed implementation of controlled airspace. This ensures that the volume of airspace proposed remains as small as is practicable to provide safety benefits without impeding other airspace users unnecessarily.