



26 March 2026

The Great Grid Upgrade
Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire
EN0210007

Dear Sir

Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire

I apologise for this letter being beyond your 2025 Stage 1 Consultation but I write on behalf of the General Aviation Awareness Council which has only recently been alerted to this scheme.

The General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) was formed over twenty years ago to work for the protection of UK airfields from indiscriminate development. It represents the interests of over 30 Associations, including the British Gliding Association (BGA), Aeroplane Owners & Pilots (AOPA), the Light Aircraft Association (LAA), the British Model Flying Association (MFFA) the Honorable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP), the Aerodrome Operators Group (AOG), British Business & GA (BBGA), the Flying Farmers Association (FFA), British Microlight Aircraft Association (BMAA) and ARPAS, the Association of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems. It therefore represents 40,000+ members involved in fixed wing, helicopter, gliding, Microlight, Balloon, Drone and Aeromodeller activities.

Wherever possible, the GAAC works in conjunction with complimentary organisations such as Sport England, the RSPB and CPRE. Since 2018 the GAAC has been closely involved with the All Party Parliamentary Group for General Aviation.

I write on behalf of the British Model Flying Association. We note that your WMEL Corridor Preliminary Routeing and Siting Study (CPRSS) does make reference to aviation – particularly the Buckminster Gliding Club but not to the BMFA Buckminster National Visitor Centre.

For confirmation, the British Model Flying Association (BMFA) National Centre is at Buckminster, Sewstern, Grantham NG33 5RW. As can be seen on Route Section 4, North and South Witham – A607, the Sewstern location is currently within the ‘Emerging Preferred Corridor’. Model aircraft may operate to a height of 120 metres above ground level.

The airspace at Buckminster is permanently notified, as ‘Sewstern Model Aircraft Flying, Leicestershire’, in the AIP (Section 5.5) from the surface to 1500ft AGL. The site elevation is 450 FT AMSL.

At present this scheme would, therefore, severely limit the activities at BMFA Buckminster with unacceptable impact on the viability of the site. The GAAC and BMFA Buckminster object to this Corridor.



To provide more information and context, BMFA Buckminster is the British Model Flying Association National Centre for Model Aircraft Flying. As well as being the BMFA HQ, Buckminster hosts a large number of events throughout the year.

The site occupies 43 acres of open and countryside set within a traditional farming estate and is the ideal location for the sport of model flying to take place. Camping is available, there is a café on site and a shop.

The location represents an important facility for many of the model flying disciplines in the UK and hosts an annual programme of events and competitions as well as the opportunity to just turn up and fly. The site is open all year round and numbers of visitors increases year on year. In 2025 there were some 4,000 visitors. Events include competitions, training, auctions – some being major events held over three days, ‘swapmeets’ and Fly-ins. In 2026, Buckminster is hosting two prestigious events, the IMechE UAS challenge and the FAI F4 Scale World Championships.

Additionally Buckminster provides facilities for education through model aircraft and the opportunity for those who are thinking of trying model flying to participate in a ‘trial lesson experience’.

Model Aircraft Flying is defined as a ‘sport’ by Sport England and is a hugely popular, technical and skilled activity. The BMFA has over 750 affiliated clubs which provide over 1000 flying sites across the UK. The BMFA encourages engagement with model aircraft flying as STEM education as well as a leisure activity. It is also a sport that provides social activity and contacts for all ages. Town and Country Planning Policy gives strong support to all aviation and aviation sport activities.

Our objection to this route is underlined by the strong policy support for aviation activity as set out in the NPPF.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states:

Paragraph: 111: *‘Planning policies should:*

f) recognise the importance of maintaining a national network of general aviation airfields, and their need to adapt and change over time – taking into account their economic value in serving business, leisure, training and emergency service needs, and the General Aviation Strategy,’

As Sport England recognises the British Model Aircraft Association as an ‘air sport’, the activities at Buckminster are also carried out at a ‘sports venue’ in planning policy terms and therefore all of the relevant planning policies as set out in the NPPF to protect Sports Venues apply.

The Buckminster activities are, therefore, in particular, in line with the leisure and training elements of paragraph 111(f) of the NPPF policy.

Paragraph 88: *‘Planning policies and decisions should enable:*

*d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, **sports venues**, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.'*

Paragraph 96: '*Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:...*

*c) enable and support healthy lives, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, **sports facilities**, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.'* [our emphasis]

Undertaking sports activities supports health. Aviation activities either as a spectator or participant provide interest, challenge and often lead to related careers. A regular feature at most General Aviation airfields is young people watching flying activity – which often generates interest and aspiration.

Paragraph 98 if the NPPF states: '*To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:*

*a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, **sports venues**, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;'* [our emphasis]

Paragraph 103 states:

*'Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for **sport** and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, **sport and recreation facilities** (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.'* [our emphasis]

Paragraph 104 underlines the need to retain sports facilities:

*'Existing open space, **sports and recreational buildings and land**, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless:*

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*



- c) *the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.'*

Importantly, paragraph 200 of the NPPF states:


*'Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new development can be integrated effectively with existing businesses and community facilities (such as places of worship, pubs, music venues and **sports clubs**). Existing businesses and facilities should not have unreasonable restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established. Where the operation of an existing business or community facility could have a significant adverse effect on new development (including changes of use) in its vicinity, the applicant (or '**agent of change**') should be required to provide suitable mitigation before the development has been completed.'*

As highlighted, this gives strong support to sports clubs. In addition, this 'agent of change' principle has been specifically applied to aerodromes.

We would request that you arrange to meet with BMFA Buckminster at the earliest opportunity.

If you have any queries on this, or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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cc: David Phipps, Chief Executive BMFA
Matthew Wilkins, Chairman, GAAC