



20 January 2010

Planning Service HQ,  
Millenium House  
17-25 Great Victoria Street  
Belfast

Dear Sir

Re: Former Bishopscourt Airfield, Co. Down

We are now in the third decade since this extensive airfield was abandoned by the RAF. It has been divided into areas on which motor racing takes place as follows:

A. The larger part fronting onto the main Ballyhornan-Downpatrick road, which may be described as the "official" site, in that it has been the subject of several Planning Appeals etc. Over the year I, in common with other concerned residents, have written numerous letters to the Department in Downpatrick and Belfast about the noise from this track.

Some sort of status quo appears to have been reached, in that the current operator of this part of the track seems to keep within the restrictions applied by successive Planning Commissions, and to run an operation where the vehicles are properly tuned, fitted with exhausts, etc. and where presumably official health and safety regulations are observed. Although the noise is at times loud to the point where it dominates the whole atmosphere of this very rural situation, we have become used to it, and are happy that the controls are effective.

B. A second part, or parts, fronting onto the Ardglass Road, which is quite definitely unofficial; we are unclear as to who currently owns this part of the airfield, and under whose auspices (if any) racing goes on here.

The abuse - increasing -of this unofficial section gives great cause for concern. Some form of racing or testing goes on almost every weekend, on both Saturday and Sunday, starting on both days as early as 9 am sometimes, and there have been occasions (not recently) where the police have been called when racing of some sort goes on up to almost midnight.

The type of event which is conducted on this section seems to involve "bangers" - drag-racing, etc: The vehicles appear largely untuned, with little or no exhausts, and the consequent noise of backfiring, squealing tyres, etc etc is infinitely worse than anything the "official" side has produced. Often there seem to be one or two bikes, in the same condition as above, using the area for hours on end, on days when there is no "event". Advertising for this place used to be surreptitious, now it is quite overt. I imagine there is no safety supervision or official presence of any kind. The area is almost always windy, and this intensifies the problem.

**All this the Planning Service has been made aware of repeatedly over many years, and two local residents have kept, and provided, detailed diaries of the instances of use. We feel that absolutely no progress has been made.**

I would summarise the points we wish to make as follows:

1. The official site applies for planning permission, objections are made, and lengthy and expensive efforts are required of both parties: the unofficial site operates entirely outside the law, such as it is. (This of course, mirrors exactly the experience of householders who submit themselves to the planning process, while their neighbours don't - we know!)
2. Planning authorities seem to regard it as acceptable that evidence for the abuse of the unofficial track should be provided by concerned residents - there seems to be no provision for the official monitoring of anything at weekends; the abuser thus has virtual carte blanche to do what he likes.

3. The arrangements for enforcing planning legislation appear either non-existent or entirely inadequate, and there seems to be no appetite for pursuing anyone who chooses not to let the planners know what he intends; thus, as in 1 above the conscientious are liable to penalty, while the evaders continue to evade.

4. Laws continue to be made which should make excessive noise in rural areas illegal; but who is going to put them into effect?

There is clearly an urgent need a) to address effectively this specific and increasingly intrusive problem, and b) to overhaul the whole planning situation so that the service is enabled to deal actively with those who choose to operate in breach of the planning law.

I have ended many letters to the Department with the hope that some progress can at last be made; I do so again.

Yours faithfully

