

Proposed Penzance Heliport

Sloane Helicopters: Operator Site Requirements

Open Letter dated 30th October 2017

Sloane Helicopters agreed to work together with Penzance Heliport in 2016 to investigate re-establishing a helicopter service to the Isles of Scilly. The purpose of re-introducing a helicopter service to the islands was to provide the Isles of Scilly with access to a reliable year-round mode of air transport, for which there was clearly strong demand.

As part of our studies into selecting a suitable base for the helicopter, a variety of locations were considered, ranging from Newquay through to Perranporth, Portreath, Land's End and a location close to the former heliport site at Penzance.

The single most important criteria for us was identifying a site that would:

- support the most consistent level of service and reliability
- have the least possible vulnerability to weather impact

This would determine the long-term commercial viability of the service.

Each of the possible locations had their merits, but Penzance was identified as by far the best operational option. A suitable site had been identified close to the previous heliport at Penzance but agreements and planning consents meant that operations could not start there for some time.

The key criteria that were used to determine the most appropriate site were:

1. Weather – least vulnerable to adverse impacts of poor weather
2. Location – as close as possible to the Isles of Scilly but also close to main transport hubs, accommodation and other facilities
3. Commercial – the greatest possible security of the long-term tenure of a site that could support the required substantial investment into helicopters for the service, and where costs could be the most predictable and competitive

The closest potential sites to the Isles of Scilly are the heliport site at Penzance and Land's End Airport, at respectively 32 miles and 27 nautical miles from St Marys Airport in the Isles of Scilly, and therefore our studies focused most intensely on these two sites. Sites further to the east and north were considered commercially marginal for a sustainable service.



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In addition to our own assessment, we attach Annex A, which is an overview prepared by an independent industry Company, Pildo Wessex Ltd, which also clearly demonstrates the factual argument in favour of operations from Penzance as opposed to Land's End Airport.

1. Weather Impact

West Cornwall has a history of poor visibility problems from fog and low cloud, particularly on higher ground close to the coast. It was therefore essential to find a site with the least vulnerability to these factors. All the current and historical airports in Cornwall within a practical distance of Scilly are on high ground. The heliport site in Penzance represents the only low-level site that we have identified in West Cornwall that could suit the construction of a reliable heliport and is close to sea level.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)/European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) sets highly complex rules for aircraft, which define the minimum cloud height above the ground and the minimum forward visibility that must be available for an aircraft to be able to land, using either a Visual Approach, in suitably clear weather, or an Instrument Approach on occasions when the weather is not suitable for a visual approach as long as the aircraft, pilot and operator have the necessary approvals for such a landing.

In an area prone to low cloud, the height of the airport or heliport is a key factor in determining resilience to poor weather. More detailed explanations and comparisons are set out in Annex B but below we have summarised the key impacts in words and graphically.

Visual Approaches:

Where the meteorological conditions permit flight under visual rules the aircraft will transit and then make an approach to the airfield using visual means. The rules are complex and not easily summarised but, in essence, iaw CAA Official Record Series 4 Number 1067, fixed and rotary wing aircraft require 1500 m visibility. In line with EASA Part CAT, helicopters also require a cloud base of 600 feet in order to operate visually when out of sight of land. This means that helicopter operations, when the cloud base is at 600 feet, could continue visually to and from Penzance. However, as Lands' End is approximately 400 feet above mean sea level (AMSL), the aircraft would have to carry out an instrument flight rules (IFR) procedure with the potential of the aircraft having to divert. The rules also require a flight to take place no closer than 500 feet to people or structures unless landing or for take-off and clearly a cloud base of 500 feet would not permit this when transiting from the coast to the airfield.

The diagram below in Example 1 illustrates the approximate different descent altitudes in visual approach conditions based on a cloud ceiling of 1000 feet.