

Airspace Classification Review – Cotswold Region

Your questions answered

1. What is the role of the Airspace Classification Review team?

The Airspace Classification Review team is a newly established team within the CAA, tasked with carrying out a new function to review the classification of UK airspace. The Secretary of State for Transport, through the Air Navigation Directions, has given the CAA a clear mandate to regularly consider whether airspace classification should be reviewed, to carry out a review in consultation with airspace users, and, where a change to classification might be made, to do so in line with a new procedure. The CAA's procedure for the CAA to review the classification of airspace (CAP 1991), was published in December 2020 and sets out the 3-stage process to achieve this: Consider, Review, Amend.

As well as reviewing the classification of airspace, the airspace classification review procedure also enables the team to consider whether there are other mechanisms and tools available which may help enhance airspace usage. This could include as an example, the facilitation of a new Letter of Agreement between Airspace Control Authorities (ACAs) and/or users.

2. How long will it take to carry out the process laid down in CAP 1991?

The airspace classification review process is a new process to the CAA. As a result, we cannot give a definitive view for the timescale of the process. Similarly, each airspace volume is different and so each review and possible amendment will vary in complexity meaning that the length of each stage will vary according to the airspace.

To help maintain the highest level of transparency, we will provide ongoing updates via our web page and through our regional stakeholder engagement; the engagement plan will also be published. We will regularly attend meetings such as the Airspace Infringement Working Group (AIWG), Local Airspace Infringement Team (LAIT) meetings, Airspace Engagement Group (AEG) and other similar meetings, both to gather information and to update attendees on the status of our work.

3. What are the reasons for filtering out volumes of airspace not suitable for this process?

Some airspace volumes may not be suitable for this process because they are already subject to an ongoing or recent airspace change proposal, or because of the potential impacts that changing the classification might have, for example, on Ministry of Defence (MoD) operations.

The Airspace Change Proposal (ACP) process, delivered through CAP 1616 (formerly CAP 725), is initiated by a Change Sponsor after the identification of either an operational need or a safety issue that needs to be addressed. The airspace in question will be subject to a high degree of scrutiny and investigation, with the process requiring significant levels of engagement and formal consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The ACP process is complex and the involvement of the Airspace Classification Review team into an ongoing change proposal could undermine the work already carried out on it. Similarly, post ACP, there is a period known as the Post Implementation Review period during which the effects of the airspace change need to be observed and understood to determine how the airspace change has performed in relation to the original Statement of Need, design principles and options appraisal. Again, it would not make sense for us to initiate a review of airspace classification while this Review is underway.

Further details on each of the filters and where they may be exceptions to these can be found in CAP 1991.

4. How will you choose which airspace to consider, the UK is a big area?

Much thought has gone into this. The airspace in the UK is complex and very few sectors operate in isolation and so a holistic view is required. However, to look at UK airspace as a whole is not practical given the available resources of the team. As a result, we will divide the airspace into manageable geographical areas.

We will use a regional approach loosely based on existing altimeter setting regions (ASR), with slight alterations to the delineated boundaries to better “fit” the airspace sectors in and around them. It may be, for example, that we choose to extend or contract the boundary to better reflect sectors or airspace that are highly integrated with one another.

See question 5 for explanation regarding selection of current area of focus.

5. Where is your current area of focus and why has this region been chosen?

Our current area of focus is based around the Cotswold altimeter setting region (the “Cotswold Region”) that is depicted on the VFR charts and in the Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP). We have slightly modified the delineated boundary, to better align with airspace sectors and design. Our amended boundary excludes airspace associated with Luton and the area has been expanded to the south west to include airspace associated with Bristol and Cardiff and to the North to include all of the Cotswold CTA Flexible Use airspace and Niton CTA 9.

This region was chosen owing to the high number of responses from the CAA's legacy consultation on airspace volumes for review that took place between December 2019 to March 2020. In addition, it has been highlighted to us as an area of interest by the UK Airprox Board. It contains a wide range of airspace types from which we can gain valuable insight, (for example, flexible use airspace, improving our understanding of how this works and informing decisions regarding recommendations for its use elsewhere) and also, that the level of complexity of the airspace composition, is considered to be appropriate for the first application of this new procedure.

6. Will the Airspace Classification Review Team be called upon to review additional airspace sectors outside of the current area of focus?

Airspace sectors within the UK are highly interdependent on one another and as such it is difficult to look at any small area in isolation. This is one of the reasons that the team will be using a regional approach and as such it is unlikely that additional airspace sectors outside the current area of focus will be looked at.

Should an operational need arise requiring a change to a sector of airspace it is expected that the responsible Airspace Control Authority (ACA) or airport will sponsor an Airspace Change Proposal (ACP) in line with current practices using CAP 1616. If, however, an exceptional case outside of the region under review is presented to the team and it is considered to be a higher priority, assuming resource is available, it could be considered.

7. What information sources are you using to inform your review?

Having the best understanding of how the airspace is used within our selected region is a key requirement for us to effect positive change and as such we are gathering and using information from a wide range of sources.

There will be extensive engagement and consultation with airspace users and stakeholders as well as Airspace Control Authorities (ACAs) and Air Navigation Service providers (ANSPs). We will use safety data such as airspace infringement and airprox data, along with other sources including aircraft movement data using our Airspace Analyser Tool, which utilises Plane Finder data. We will also incorporate data gathered by other user groups (such as A4A).

8. I have information relating to UK airspace, how can I pass that on to you?

We welcome any insight and information relating to airspace in the UK whether it is in our current area of focus or not, especially if it relates to how the airspace is used or constructed (see bullet points below). If your information is in relation to denied access to controlled airspace or the refusal of an air traffic service, please submit a CAA form FCS 1522. By doing this, the information will not only be available to the airspace classification review team but also other departments which have interest in air traffic service provision.

- If the information is related to our current area of focus, please check whether there is any live engagement or consultation in process. If so, follow the instructions associated with that to feed us with the information. Details of current engagement or consultation can be found on our web page. If we are not running any current sessions, please see below.