

Steps to be taken to reduce impact of fighter jet flypasts over Edinburgh

A new register could allow concerned locals to be notified before fighter jet flypasts over the capital.

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo told councillors at a meeting on Monday that they would take further steps to reduce the impacts of flypasts on the capital – but insisted they would continue.

The move followed a call by Green councillor Dan Heap to ban fighter jet flyovers over the city outright.

That was rejected by councillors, as officers warned that the city could not legally restrict them through licensing law.

But councillors did vote to have the Regulatory Committee convenor, Liberal Democrat councillor Neil Ross, write to the relevant UK Government minister about the issue.

Cllr Heap's motion was originally heard at May's full Edinburgh Council meeting, but was referred to the city's Regulatory Committee.

It cited the environmental impact of flypasts, as well as the noise impacts it had – especially on people fleeing war – in the city as reasons for banning the events.

He said: "It is disappointing the Regulatory Committee didn't feel the need to look at what powers we might have to end the

flypasts.

“But I welcome the Tattoo’s recognition in the meeting today of the concerns raised, and offer to explore a better notification system, so that residents can sign-up to be notified when they will happen, so they can take steps to protect themselves.”

Most flypasts over the capital happen as a part of the tattoo’s shows at Edinburgh Castle throughout the month of August.

Around five of them are scheduled to happen during every year of the tattoo, but they are sometimes cancelled due to poor weather conditions.

Jason Barrett, chief executive of the tattoo, told councillors: “It was notable to us just how significant this issue is to many. It’s with that we look at this with care and consideration.

“We wouldn’t be the tattoo if we didn’t have [the flypasts] there. The RAF is something that’s been part of the fabric of the tattoo for 75 years.

“It is a spectacle. It is a part of the spectacle for our tattoo. Part of that spectacle is the flypast. There are not many, typically there are about five.”

Barrett also told the committee that the tattoo had recently taken steps to reduce the impact of flypasts on Edinburgh residents.

This included reducing the number of fighter jets used in flyovers, with two-thirds of the planes used in flypasts being other kinds of aircraft, like cargo and anti-submarine jets.

He further said that the tattoo would explore having the jets fly higher, and that it was in talks with the RAF on seeing if the jets could use sustainable aviation fuel.

Conservative councillor Jo Mowat asked Barrett: "On communication with residents, obviously those people who struggle with the sound of jets will know that they are, but we don't know they are."

"Is there a sign-on system so they can get a notification when we publish that schedule?"

He replied that it was something the tattoo would explore, suggesting that a system could be established where concerned residents could sign up on its website.

Green co-convener, councillor Susan Rae, asked: "Is it entirely necessary, given that the tattoo has evolved over decades, is a flypast actually necessary to add to that spectacle?"

"What is it that a flypast does? Do we need to have that? We have from 5,000 to 7,500 refugees in this city. And that's just one cohort of people that find this disturbing."

He replied: "The short answer is, no, probably not. But I think you can apply that to other parts of the tattoo."

"I think it's a slippery slope at that point, in terms of what is and what isn't necessary. If they went away, would the tattoo continue? Yes."

"But would it be as exciting, as thrilling? No, it probably wouldn't be as good."

Cllr Ross put forward an amendment to the motion that said the council could not legally take action on the issue, but which tasked him with writing to the relevant UK Government minister about aircraft flypasts.

The amended version of the motion won out over the original, by a vote of five to four.

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter