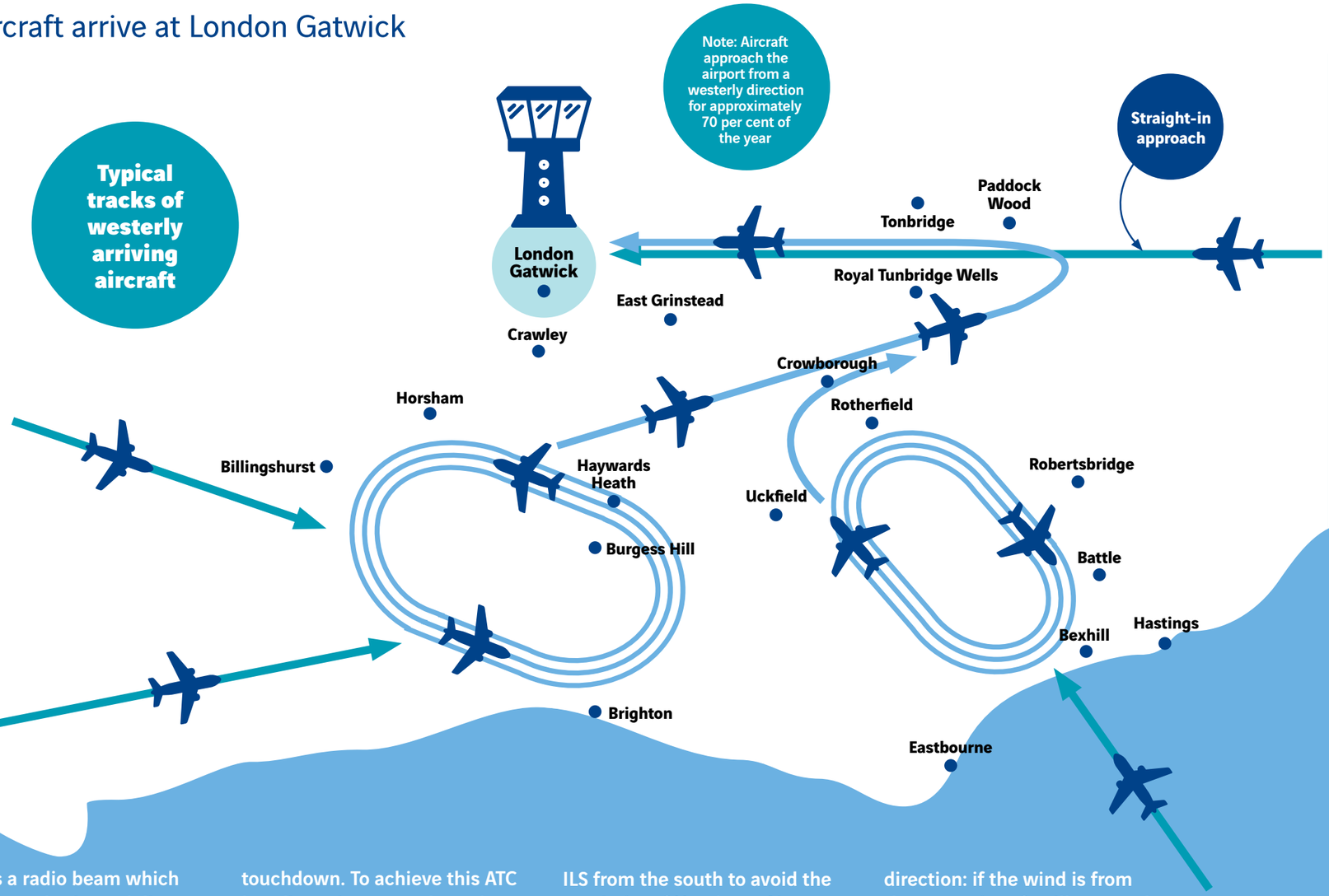
Arrivals

Information on how aircraft arrive at London Gatwick

Unlike the initial stages of flight for departing aircraft, there are no set routes to follow for inbound aircraft, nor are there noise limits or fixed heights. This is because inbound aircraft arrive into UK airspace in a random pattern, and need to be managed by Air Traffic Control (ATC). When the airport is busy, arriving aircraft may be put into an airborne hold by ATC before being cleared to make their final approach. ATC also sequence the aircraft for safe separation by providing speed and direction instructions to join the Instrument Landing System (ILS).



This map is a graphical representation, actual flight tracks may vary

The ILS is a radio beam which extends out a horizontal distance of 25 nautical miles (nm) from the runway threshold and is aligned with the runway centreline to guide aircraft to land. Landing is a very busy and critical stage of the flight so it's vital that aircraft are set up for landing (with flaps correctly configured) and at the right speed some distance from touchdown. To achieve this ATC has discretion over where they direct aircraft to join the ILS in the interests of both safety and separation. This means any area beneath the ILS will have arriving aircraft flying over as well as areas to the side as aircraft are directed on to the ILS. Note that aircraft arriving at London Gatwick will usually join the ILS from the south to avoid the proximity of Heathrow Airport to the north.

To operate safely aircraft must land and take-off into wind. This is to help create the lift necessary for landing (and taking off) and to control speed on landing. The direction the airport operates in is therefore driven by wind direction: if the wind is from the west, aircraft will approach London Gatwick from the east and depart, initially, towards the west. This is called 'westerly operations' (as shown above). If the wind is from the east, aircraft will approach from the west and depart towards the east which is called 'easterly operations' (as shown on the next page).

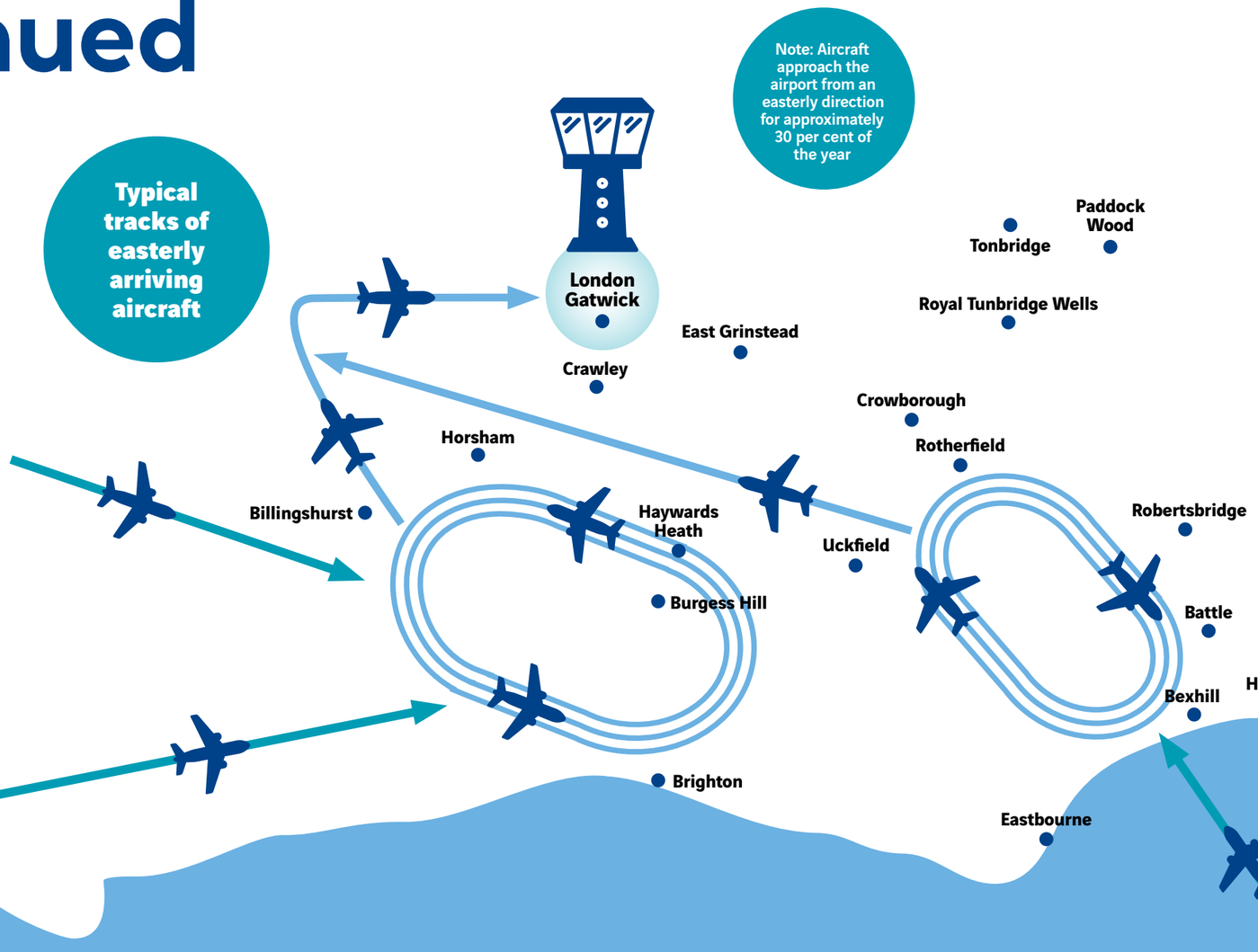
Over the last decade, on average, around 70% of aircraft operations have been in a westerly direction, although this does fluctuate, and weather conditions may mean a prolonged period of one direction over another. The direction of operations is decided by ATC sometimes with the help from pilot reports. ATC must take into account wind at airfield level and at 1,000 and 2,000ft which are the initial stages of take-off and final stages of approach. Wind speed at 2,000ft is much faster than that on the ground and can vary in direction. The wind direction you may experience at home or see on local weather reports won't necessarily determine in which direction London Gatwick will be operating. You can track the current operational direction of the airport using our flight tracking website.

Flight tracking:
webtrak.emsbk.com/lgw2
Gatwick website:
www.gatwickairport.com/noise

Although there are no noise limits for arriving aircraft, there are noise abatement procedures to reduce the impact on the community. These are published in an Arrivals Code of Practice (ACoP) were created by representatives from airlines, ATC, Civil Aviation Authority and Government representatives. You can read this at:
https://tinyurl.com/SustainACoP

Arrivals Continued

One of the main noise reduction measures, subject to safety requirements, is Continuous Descent Approach (CDA) which involves aircraft avoiding prolonged periods of level flight, which tend to be noisier than gradual controlled descent.



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CDA requires that the pilot continuously descend to join the ILS at the correct height. This avoids the need for long periods of level flight and means the aircraft can stay higher for longer. Not only does CDA help with noise reduction, but it also reduces fuel burn, so cutting emissions. At London Gatwick we measure CDA performance from 7,000ft and report our performance in our quarterly and annual Airspace Office reports available on our website: **www.gatwickairport.com/noise**

In recent years around 90% of aircraft performed a CDA during the 24-hour period. There are other long-standing procedures to reduce noise. These apply to night-time operations where we aim to keep aircraft as high as possible for as long as possible. For example, between 23:30 and 06:00 aircraft must join the ILS at no less than 3,000ft and not within 10nm of the airport.

There are also restrictions around reverse thrust which is a way of slowing aircraft down once they've landed. Pilots have been asked to avoid using reverse thrust between 23:30 and 06:00 local time unless required for safety reasons, such as if the runway is wet.

We also charge noisier aircraft more to land as an incentive to airlines to introduce quieter fleets. The Independent Arrivals Review, published in January 2016, recommended a charge to encourage airlines operating A320 family aircraft to modify their aircraft to reduce a high-pitched whining noise on approach. Since introducing the charge on 1 January 2018, 99 per cent of A320 family aircraft operating from London Gatwick have been modified.

This is just one part of London Gatwick's comprehensive Noise Action Plan. Now in its fourth iteration, having commenced in 2024, the five-year plan contains 42 actions to manage noise at the airport. You can read more about this plan and progress towards its implementation on our website: **www.gatwickairport.com/noise**

London Gatwick is committed to reducing airport noise as much as it practically can for the local community. All procedures are monitored by a noise and track keeping system and any non-compliance is reported to ATC and the airlines. Performance is also reported at the bi-monthly meetings of our Flight Operations Performance & Safety Committee. This group was established to ensure the development of best practice by airline operators using London Gatwick and is made up of airport representatives, ATC and airlines operating at the airport.