

TERESA DOLAN

BHX Flightpath

First, the technical information

Birmingham Airport has one runway that can be used in two directions - called Runway 15 and Runway 33.

Runway 15 is aligned on a heading of 150^o (ie. it operates in a South West direction). When Runway 15 is in use, you will see planes arrive over Sheldon Country Park and take off in the direction of Hampton in Arden/Catherine de Barnes.

Runway 33 lies on a heading of 330^o (ie. it operates in a North East direction). When Runway 33 is used, aircraft will land from the south, crossing over the M42 and the A45, and take off in the direction of The Radleys/Garretts Green.

For obvious reasons, the runway only operates in one direction at any time. Meteorological conditions – primarily wind direction – are deciding factors, as aircraft usually take off and land heading into the wind. Average usage over the year is Runway 33 - 60%, Runway 15 - 40%.

And now, the Grid information

Hidden away at the north end of Sheldon Country Park, is a seating area where members of the public can watch all the arrivals and departures at BHX, free of charge. The benches are positioned just outside the airport's perimeter fence, in a south-westerly direction. The place is a mecca for planespotters, dog walkers and parents of young children.

I visited the viewing area twice in January 2023. The first visit was after several days of biblical rain, meaning the whole area was waterlogged and it wasn't safe to climb some of the earth mounds used as sound buffers. Nevertheless I was able to get a good view of planes taking off over my head (Runway 33 was in use that day).

On the second day, visibility was very poor (the night time runway lights were still on at 10am) and the crosswind was high (not good for planes or long lenses). On that occasion, planes were using Runway 15, so I was able to observe planes coming into land, plus planes getting ready for take off.

The only constant on both days was the sky - overcast, grey and at times, foreboding. The sky matched the grey of the chain link perimeter fence, the flaky, faded paint on the emergency gates plus the mud that was all around. Black & white images therefore seemed appropriate. I'll go back in the Summer in the hope of finding some colour.

The runway is not the only path within the park. On the east side, is the West Coast main line and Marston Green train station. Cutting across the park are two brooks - Westley Brook and Hatchford Brook. And, of course, there are numerous pedestrian paths suitable for walkers, cyclists and the occasional e-scooter.

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