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Press release

British International Helicopters (BIH) has today (1 August 2012) confirmed it is to close its domestic helicopter passenger route between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly, effective 1 November 2012.

The company will honour all customer flights booked up until 31 October 2012. Anyone with a flight booked after 1 November will be given a full refund. The closure of the heliport will affect employees and the company has entered a formal redundancy consultation process.

Managing Director Tony Jones, said: "The route has run for 49 years so this is an extremely sad announcement for BIH, its employees and its customers - in fact the whole of West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Unfortunately we had no alternative."

The decision to close the route was finally triggered by legal action taken by Tesco and two private individuals. These legal actions challenge the process undertaken by Cornwall Council and the Secretary of State when planning permission was granted.

These legal challenges at this very late stage of the planning process have prevented BIH from completing the sale of the land to Sainsbury's and created too many uncertainties for the passenger service to continue. BIH has repeatedly stated publicly that the land needed to be sold in a reasonable time frame to release the capital required to continue the service.

The planning application for the redevelopment of the heliport site was submitted in March 2010 and in October 2011 Cornwall Council's Strategic Planning Committee voted to consent planning permission for a store, Park & Ride and business units. The decision was then referred to the Secretary of State as a matter of course. However a challenge was made to that decision which resulted in a delay of six months which BIH could ill-afford.

BIH remained committed to finding a suitable relocation site in West Cornwall. However, at the end of 2011 BIH reluctantly withdrew their application to relocate the heliport to St Erth on the back of mounting public and stakeholder pressure. This application cost over £300,000.

Since starting this process in 2010, financial pressure on the company has been compounded by the falling number of air passenger visitors to the Isles of Scilly. At the same time the majority of costs have risen.

Taking all these factors into account, BIH has no alternative other than to close the route from 1 November 2012. From that date the heliport will be safely secured for the indeterminate future.

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