

AIRPROX REPORT No 2010079

Date/Time: 22 June 2010 (Tuesday) 1310Z

Position: 5043N 00247W
(BRIDPORT)

Airspace: Lon FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reporting Ac

Type: Paraglider Merlin

Operator: Civ Pte HQ JHC

Alt/FL: 400ft 800ft↑
(N/K) (Rad Alt)

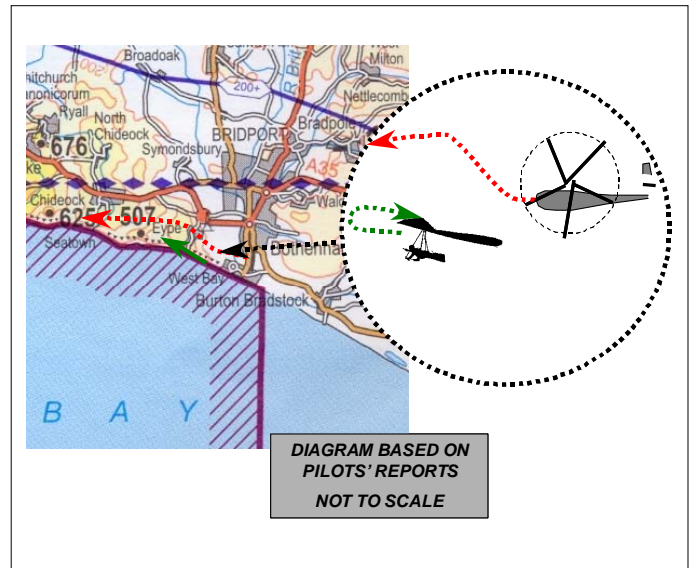
Weather: VMC CAVOK VMC CAVOK

Visibility: 15nm >10km

Reported Separation:

NK 300ft V/ 1nm H

Recorded Separation:



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE PARAGLIDER PILOT reports flying a brightly coloured paraglider with no lights, radio or SSR, cliff-soaring along the S Dorset Coast near Bridport at about 400ft amsl and at 20kt. There were other paragliders in the area. A dark coloured helicopter appeared from his blind area, behind and above. The helicopter may well have judged his rotor downwash would pass well inland of these paragliders but that day the wind strength he experienced above Thornecombe Beacon some 15min earlier was weak and only just significant enough to allow him to reach a maximum height of 600ft (around 70ft above the beacon). The helicopter pilot took some avoiding action but then climbed above several other paragliders and continued in a Westerly direction immediately above the paragliders. He assessed the risk as being Medium and provided a photograph of the event.

He considers that pilots should be advised to avoid paragliders a wide margin downwind and not fly above them where they cannot be seen.

Later on the same day a Lynx helicopter travelling along the coast eastwards saw the paraglider activity and diverted his track to pass well inland, before returning to the cliffs having safely passed them.

THE MERLIN PILOT reports conducting a training flight in a dark green ac with strobes and nav lights switched on. The event occurred during a low level transit to Bodmin Moor in an area where the flight was authorised to 50ft msd in LFA 2. However in that area the Capt elected to maintain 500-1000ft msd in the vicinity of the coast, due to potential bird activity and the high number of built up areas. In the lead up to the event the ac was at 800ft agl and tracking West at 140kt. The paragliding activity was spotted at a distance of about 1.5nm so the Captain elected to climb immediately to well above 1000ft agl and route North (downwind) of the activity. At all times the crew of 5 maintained 'eyes out' and were confident that more than adequate separation was maintained throughout.

The event was not discussed further, as the crew did not consider it to be an Airprox.

UKAB Note (1): The incident took place below the base of recorded radar cover.

UKAB Note (2): The photographs provided show the weather to be CAVOK and the Merlin to be an estimated 250m N of the cliff-line.

UKAB Note (3): The incident took place just on the boundary of DGD012, which was active at the time up to 3000ft. Plymouth Mill provides a DACS but they have no record of any contact with the Paraglider(s). It is understood that it is common for paragliders to operate on the cliff-line in that area and the RN accepts this to be outwith the Danger Area.

HQ JHC comments that it appears that the Merlin pilot was visual with the paragliding activity in sufficient time to take appropriate avoiding action but that it was not deemed adequate by the reporting paraglider. Conversely, the (unverified) avoiding action of the Lynx helicopter was more to the satisfaction of the reporting paraglider. It may be that the size of each helicopter may have influenced the perception of the paraglider. The apparent discrepancy between the actions of the two helicopter pilots may be attributable to a difference in each (helicopter) pilot's perception of the distance required to avoid disturbing the paragliding activity. In both cases there appears to be a low risk of collision.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac and a report from the Merlin operating authority.

The Board noted that paraglider sites are not promulgated on Military Low Flying Charts since paragliding activity can be encountered at almost any suitable hill or cliff location, depending on the weather and wind conditions. This site, like other similar cliff locations, is a location favoured by paragliders when there is an onshore breeze since it generates good 'lift'. Although in this instance, as witnessed by the photograph provided by the paraglider pilot, the Merlin was far enough away (vertically and probably horizontally) for there to be only a minimal risk of the paraglider experiencing any noticeable downwash or wake turbulence, being a large helicopter it was nevertheless close enough to cause the paraglider pilot concern.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The Merlin flew close enough to the paraglider to cause its pilot concern.

Degree of Risk: C.