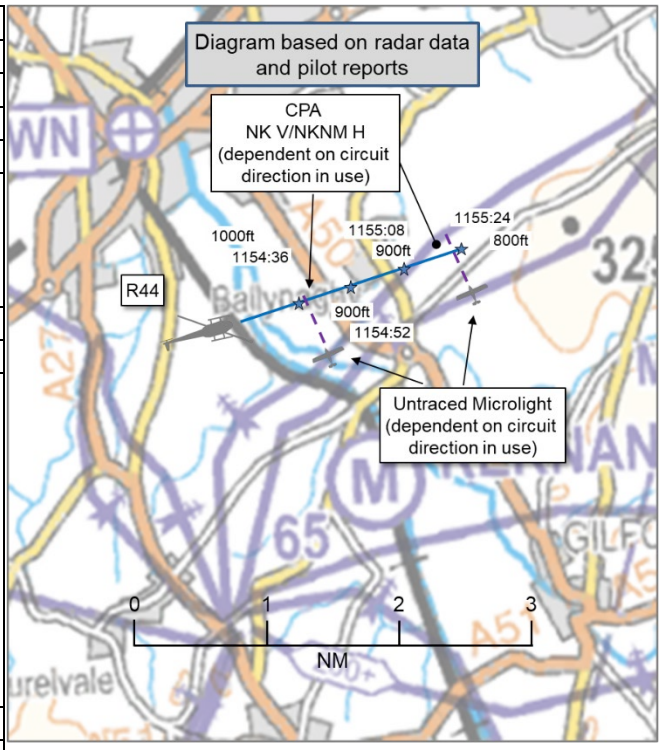
AIRPROX REPORT No 2026002

Date: 07 Jan 2026 Time: ~1155Z Position: 5424N 00622W Location: 3NM east of Portadown

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	R44	Untraced m'light
Operator	Civ Comm	Unknown
Airspace	Scottish FIR	Scottish FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	NK
Service	Basic	
Provider	Aldergrove Radar	
Altitude/FL	800ft	
Transponder	A, C, S+	None
Reported		
Colours	Blue	NK
Lighting	Nav, HISL	
Conditions	VMC	
Visibility	>10km	
Altitude/FL	1300ft	
Altimeter	QNH (1006hPa)	
Heading	060°	
Speed	110kt	
ACAS/TAS	FLARM	
Alert	None	
	Separation at CPA	
Reported	250ft V/500ft H	NK
Recorded	NK	



THE R44 PILOT reports that they had been en-route from […] to […] whilst conducting a gas pipeline survey. They observed a C42 microlight aircraft at a similar height travelling towards them from their right-hand side. They immediately took evasive action and passed below and behind the microlight at a distance of no more than 500ft. In the past, Aldergrove Radar had given traffic warnings in this area, even whilst in receipt of a Basic Service, but no such warnings were given on this occasion.

The pilot assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE PILOT of the unknown microlight could not be traced (there was no response to enquiries made by the UKAB Secretariat).

THE ALDERGROVE RADAR CONTROLLER reports that this was a retrospective report following the report of an Airprox […]. The Airprox had been reported involving [R44 c/s], [the controller] was unaware if it was [R44 c/s] or the other aircraft [pilot] that reported the Airprox. During the period they had been the Belfast/Aldergrove Radar controller. No report of an Airprox [had been made] at the time from any pilot on frequency. Belfast/Aldergrove had been operating SSR-only and, from their recollection, no other return was observed on the radar display in the vicinity of [R44 c/s].

Factual Background

The weather at Belfast Airport was recorded as follows:

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METAR EGAA 071150Z AUTO 27008KT 9999 NCD 04/01 Q1006=
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Analysis and Investigation

NATS Safety Investigation

Investigation:

The event was notified to Belfast Aldergrove via a phone call, from a flying instructor at Kernan, received by the duty Operational Support Staff; phone call received 1223 on 7th January 2026.

An instructor from Kernan called to report that they had been flying in the Kernan circuit with a student and they had to take avoiding action due to an R44 helicopter flying across their path. They avoided the R44 and landed safely. The student pilot had been quite shaken up. The R44 pilot was not broadcasting on the Kernan radio frequency.

The instructor had called Aldergrove to advise of the incident but did not require Aldergrove to take any action. They said they would consider submitting a report on the incident.

[R44 c/s] was conducting a pipeline survey, the route for which took the aircraft from Dungannon to Portadown and then eastbound towards Holywood. The crew called Aldergrove Radar and requested a Basic Service. This was provided and the aircraft subsequently identified. The aircraft continued eastbound, passing about 0.75NM north of Kernan, and was then transferred to Belfast Radar. No other radar contact was observed in the vicinity of [R44 c/s] at any time. [At the time of this incident] there had been no primary radar coverage at any unit in Northern Ireland.

Description of event

An event was reported [by telephone to Belfast Aldergrove] by the (instructor) pilot of a microlight. Their aircraft was in the circuit at Kernan Airfield when they saw a helicopter fly in close proximity, to the extent that they took avoiding action. No report/comment was made by the pilot of [R44 c/s].

Risk assessment: currently no primary radar coverage at any Unit in Northern Ireland.

CAA ATSI

ATSI asked Belfast if, within the relevant MATS Pt2, there is any requirement for ATCOs to remind pilots about the possibility of activity at Kernan when intending to overfly or pass within the vicinity, or perhaps a best practice?

NATS (Belfast) responded as follows: No, there's no such requirement, or best practice, for warning aircraft on a Basic Service about being in the vicinity of any such unlicensed aerodrome outside CAS (there are a few). If [there had been] PSR in service, and noticed activity, or saw a 7000 code in the area, and had previously identified the aircraft (despite being on a Basic Service) or they had announced their intentions to operate in that vicinity, most ATCOs would offer a generic warning. On this occasion though, with no indication of activity on radar, the ATCO would simply have been telling the pilot information that's available on their VFR chart.

UKAB Secretariat

The R44 was tracked by radar and identified through Mode S data. The microlight did not appear on radar or any of the tracking tools available to the UKAB Secretariat.

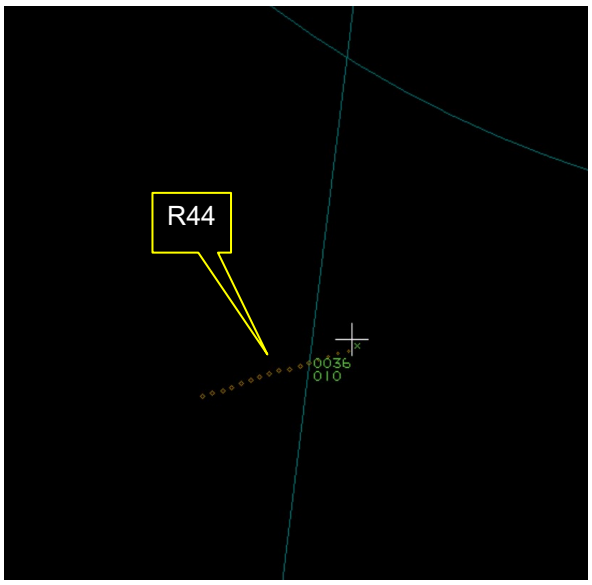


Figure 1: R44 approach track to position of reported Airprox

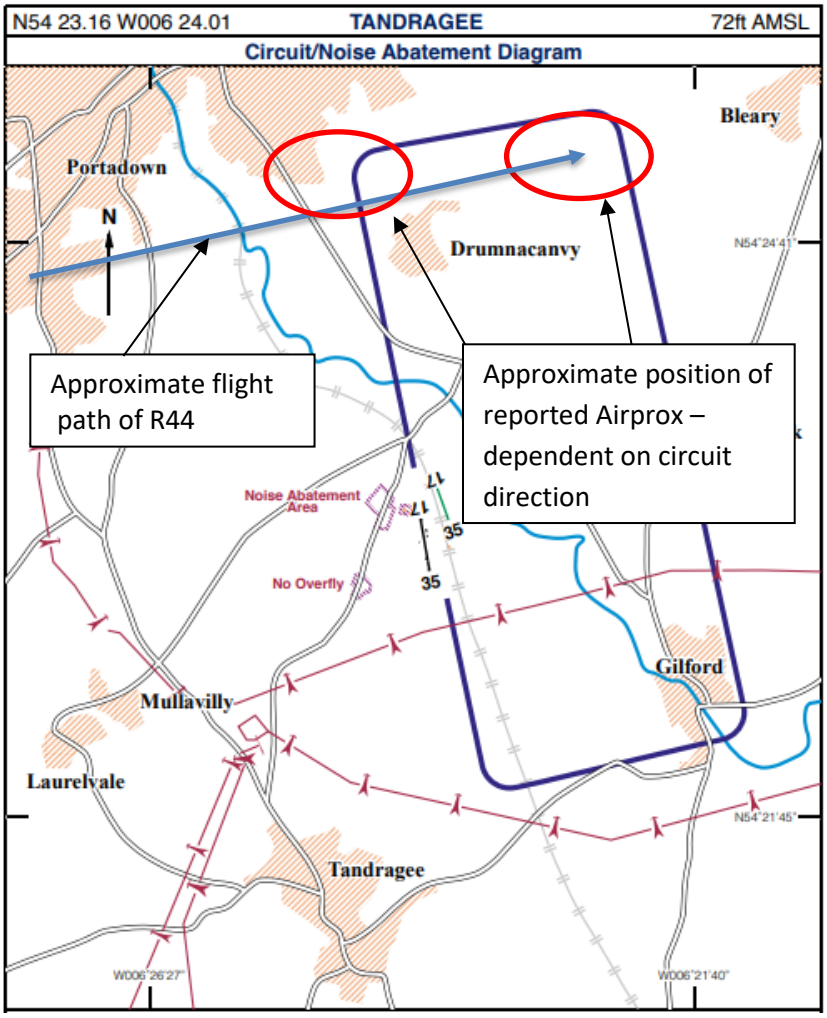


Figure 2: Tandragee (Kernan) circuit diagram (reproduced from Pooley's Flight Guide)

The R44 and untraced microlight pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard.[1] An aircraft operated on or in the vicinity of an aerodrome shall conform with or avoid the pattern of traffic formed by other aircraft in operation.[2]

Summary

An Airprox was reported when an R44 and an untraced microlight flew into proximity at Kernan at approximately 1155Z on Wednesday 7th January 2026. The R44 pilot was operating under VFR in VMC in receipt of a Basic Service from Aldergrove Radar. The microlight pilot could not be traced.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of a report from the R44 pilot, radar photographs/video recordings, a report from the air traffic controller involved and a report from the appropriate operating authority. Relevant contributory factors mentioned during the Board's discussions are highlighted within the text in bold, with the numbers referring to the Contributory Factors table displayed in Part C.

The Board firstly discussed the actions of the R44 pilot, noting that they had been conducting a task that requires lateral and vertical precision. The pilot had been in receipt of a Basic Service from Aldergrove which had not been able to alert them to the presence of the untraced microlight due to a combination of no access to primary radar and no apparent transponder having been carried by the untraced microlight. The R44 had been equipped with an electronic conspicuity unit which had unfortunately registered no electronic emissions from the microlight (**CF6**). The Board agreed that these factors had meant that the R44 pilot had been left only with the generic situational awareness of a microlight site marked on their chart within their operating area (**CF5**). Members acknowledged that the R44 pilot had been operating with a Basic Service from Aldergrove and that this, under normal circumstances, can be adequate for situational awareness contribution but suggested that, if possible, an information call to minor airfields as approached can help others develop their own situational awareness of passing traffic (**CF3**) as they operate within their own circuit pattern. Members agreed that, on visually acquiring the untraced microlight, the R44 pilot had initiated an avoidance manoeuvre (**CF7**) and thereby further reduced the risk of collision.

In reviewing the role of the untraced microlight pilot, members noted that the aircraft had apparently carried no transponder or electronic conspicuity (EC) equipment. The Board wished to recommend to all operators that situational awareness can be gained through either EC means or RT. As the untraced microlight pilot appears to have been operating within the circuit at Kernan it was deemed unlikely that they had been monitoring anything other than the Kernan/Tandragee Air/Ground frequency and, as the R44 pilot had been on a Basic Service with Aldergrove, the opportunity for the untraced microlight pilot to have developed any situational awareness of the proximity of the R44 had been negated.

Turning to the actions of the Aldergrove Radar controller, members noted that the R44 pilot had requested and been given a Basic Service with its known limitations (**CF2**) prior to their passage to the north of Kernan/Tandragee. The controller records that no mention had been made of an Airprox at the time of the event and there had been no other traffic identified in the area. Board members recognised that there had been no primary radar provision at that time (**CF1**) and this had precluded any opportunity for the controller to have potentially reported non-squawking traffic to the R44 pilot.

The Board then considered the issue of frequency monitoring for those in the vicinity of Kernan airfield and its relationship to the R44 pilot's passage through that area. They noted that the UK AIP refers to Kernan (ENR 5.3), whereas the website refers to 'Tandragee Radio' as the appropriate Air/Ground callsign. This difference in nomenclature is further developed in other available flight reference guides and, as the frequency is not printed on the chart, could lead to some confusion for pilots in their planning and flight preparation. The Board therefore elected to raise a recommendation that: *The Kernan*

[1] (UK) SERA.3205 Proximity.
[2] (UK) SERA.3225 Operation on and in the Vicinity of an Aerodrome.

(Tandragee) aerodrome operator reviews the entry for Kernan (Tandragee) aerodrome in the UK AIP to ensure coherence with the information provided on the Kernan Valley Flying Club website and other published materials, including airfield nomenclature.

Concluding their discussion, members summarised their thoughts. It was agreed that the pilot of the R44 had been established on a task, had been in receipt of a service which itself had been subject to limitations and had flown through the circuit pattern of a minor airfield (**CF4**). They acknowledged that the R44 pilot had been focussed on their task and that the chart and flight planning material offered the opportunity for some confusion regarding that minor airfield. However, it was also agreed that the pilot of the R44 had sighted the untraced microlight in time to initiate an avoidance manoeuvre which had resolved the encounter. Members were in agreement that safety standards had been degraded, however, were satisfied that there had not been a risk of collision. The Board assigned Risk Category C to this event.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND RISK

Contributory Factors:

	2026002			
CF	**Factor**	**Description**	**ECCAIRS Amplification**	**UKAB Amplification**
	Ground Elements			
	• Manning and Equipment			
1	Technical	• Radar Coverage	Radar Coverage	Non-functional or unavailable
	• Situational Awareness and Action			
2	Contextual	• ANS Flight Information Provision	Provision of ANS flight information	The ATCO/FISO was not required to monitor the flight under a Basic Service
	Flight Elements			
	• Tactical Planning and Execution			
3	Human Factors	• Accuracy of Communication	Events involving flight crew using inaccurate communication - wrong or incomplete information provided	Ineffective communication of intentions
4	Human Factors	• Monitoring of Environment	Events involving flight crew not to appropriately monitoring the environment	Did not avoid/conform with the pattern of traffic already formed
	• Situational Awareness of the Conflicting Aircraft and Action			
5	Contextual	• Situational Awareness and Sensory Events	Events involving a flight crew's awareness and perception of situations	Pilot had no, late, inaccurate or only generic, Situational Awareness
	• Electronic Warning System Operation and Compliance			
6	Technical	• ACAS/TCAS System Failure	An event involving the system which provides information to determine aircraft position and is primarily independent of ground installations	Incompatible CWS equipment
	• See and Avoid			
7	Human Factors	• Perception of Visual Information	Events involving flight crew incorrectly perceiving a situation visually and then taking the wrong course of action or path of movement	Pilot was concerned by the proximity of the other aircraft

Degree of Risk: C.

Recommendation: The Kernan (Tandragee) aerodrome operator reviews the entry for Kernan (Tandragee) aerodrome in the UK AIP to ensure coherence with the information provided on the Kernan Valley Flying Club website and other published materials, including airfield nomenclature.

Safety Barrier Assessment[3]

In assessing the effectiveness of the safety barriers associated with this incident, the Board concluded that the key factors had been that:

Ground Elements:

Manning and Equipment were assessed as **partially effective** because there had been no primary radar available to the Aldergrove Radar controller.

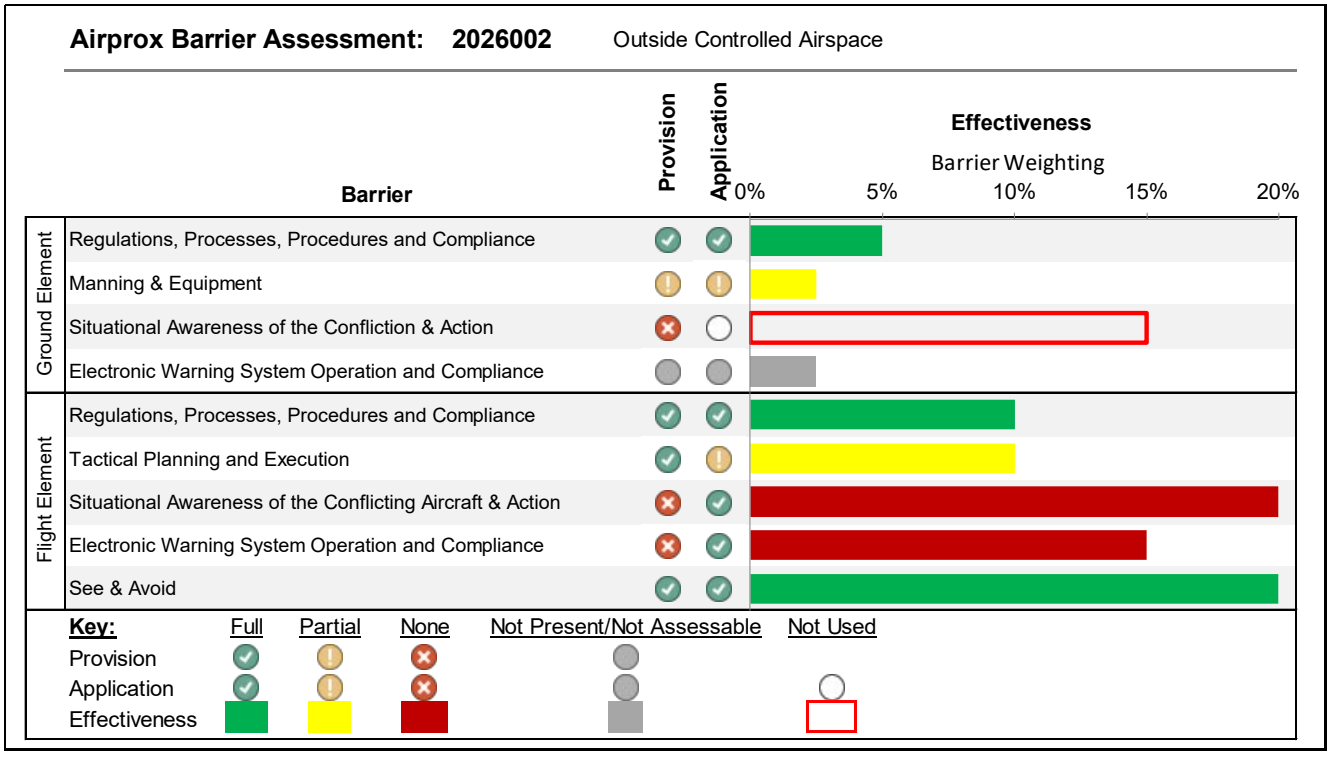
Situational Awareness of the Confliction and Action were assessed as **not used** because there had been no requirement for the Aldergrove Radar controller to monitor the R44 under the terms of a Basic Service.

Flight Elements:

Tactical Planning and Execution was assessed as **partially effective** because the R44 pilot could have considered adjusting their operating altitude as they had passed through the area or made an RT information call on the Kernan airfield frequency.

Situational Awareness of the Conflicting Aircraft and Action were assessed as **ineffective** because the R44 pilot had only generic situational awareness of other aircraft activity in the area.

Electronic Warning System Operation and Compliance were assessed as **ineffective** because the equipment carried by the R44 had not registered any electronic emissions from the untraced microlight.



[3] The UK Airprox Board scheme for assessing the Availability, Functionality and Effectiveness of safety barriers can be found on the UKAB Website.