



# AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

July 2024



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## AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

# Two into one doesn't go

## Airfield arrival and circuit integration – it should be easy, shouldn't it...?

Last year, following an unusual number of Airprox in the vicinity of aerodromes, I wrote a couple of Insight articles (**June** and **July**) discussing the ins and outs of arrivals and joining procedures.

At this July's Board meeting a number of reports under discussion involved aircraft conducting arrivals, departures or joining the circuit. Although the events took place in February-March, early in the traditional 'flying season', now seems an opportune moment to revisit some of the considerations mentioned in those previous two articles.

We could have looked at a number of Airprox from the meeting to illustrate some of the lessons I'd like to draw out, but the one I've selected is **Airprox 2024044**, an interesting one that involved a PA-28 and an EV97 in Welshpool's ATZ.

The PA-28 pilot had conducted a standard (for Welshpool, at 2500ft) overhead join and was crosswind when they heard another pilot announce that they were joining on a long final for the runway in use. The EV97 pilot was arriving from the north-east and had been flying in company

with a C42 (which had been ahead on a similar approach). Only the EV97 had been carrying any form of additional electronic conspicuity equipment, but this didn't warn the pilot about the PA-28. Both aircraft ended up on short final in close proximity.

Welshpool is served by an Air-to-Ground Communications Service (AGCS); an Air Ground Operator (AGO) is not permitted to issue instructions to pilots but can pass information on other traffic that is relevant. In this case, the AGO had informed the PA-28 pilot of the traffic ahead, but the PA-28 pilot had only sighted the C42 as it landed and had assumed that was the traffic to which the AGO was referring. Although the PA-28 pilot visually checked up the approach before turning final, they did not see the EV97 on approach and consequently turned on to final slightly behind and above the EV97. Fortunately, the C42 pilot (who had vacated the runway ahead of the approaching aircraft) spotted the conflict between the two on short final and radioed the EV97 pilot to continue to land with an aircraft above, and the PA-28 pilot to discontinue their approach with an aircraft below.

It was extremely fortuitous that the C42 pilot witnessed the event and had the presence of mind to get on the radio and be directive with the pilots to ensure a safe outcome. But what if they hadn't been there? It would be easy to suggest that the PA-28 pilot should have sighted the EV97 on approach, but we all know that we don't always see everything that's there and, given the proximity of the two, it's likely that the EV97 was hidden from view underneath the PA28's nose.

But what about other means of gaining situational awareness? According to the EV97 pilot, they had made a number of positional calls while on the extended centreline, culminating in their 'short final' call that was almost coincident with the same call from the PA-28 pilot.

The lesson here is that a radio call doesn't guarantee it will be heard by everyone else on the frequency, so continued lookout is essential (appreciating that a pilot naturally concentrates on the runway in the final stages of an approach).

What would you have done had you been the pilot of one of the aircraft involved and the first point that you were aware

you might be in close proximity to another aircraft was on short final? There's no easy answer as every situation will have a different context, but what the Board applauded in this case was the initiative of the C42 pilot and their subsequent direction to the two pilots – a simple warning to both that there were two aircraft on short final would probably not have resolved the conflict in as safe a manner as was achieved.

Probably the best option for a pilot who finds themselves in this situation is to announce their own intentions on the radio so at least the other pilot has the information they need to support their own decision-making; directing another pilot to do something is not always a good idea because we can't know what the other pilot will be able to achieve in terms of manoeuvring.

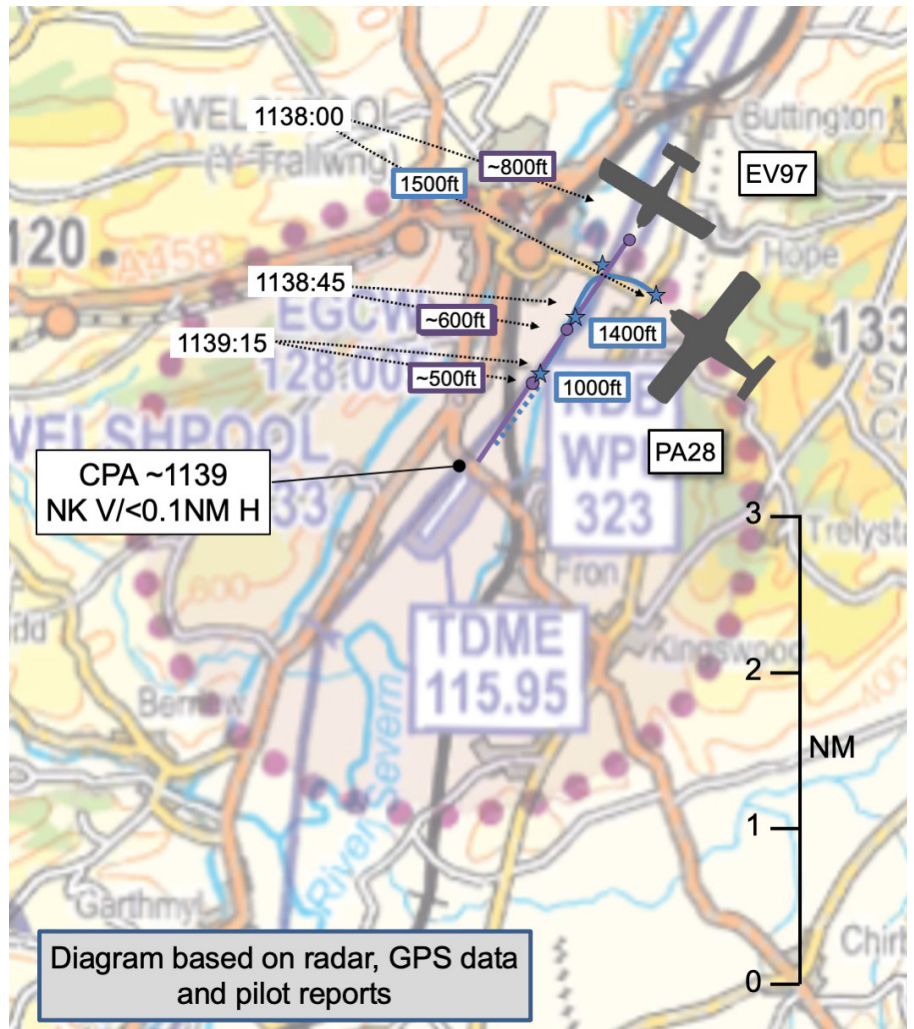
The final consideration I'd like to raise is the type of arrival chosen by the individual pilots. The CAA recommends overhead joins to airfields because it gives the opportunity to assess traffic levels and provide options (such as orbiting in the overhead) for ensuring a safe integration into the visual circuit.

At Welshpool, the overhead join is conducted at 2500ft due to the high terrain on either side of the airfield. This might not feel like the most expeditious join if arriving from the north-east for runway 22, but consider what will be lost – in terms of situational awareness of the circuit traffic – if you choose to conduct a different type of join. Add to this the fact that it is an AGCS at Welshpool – where the AGO can only pass traffic information to pilots based on what pilots have told them – then our situational awareness can actually be quite inaccurate.

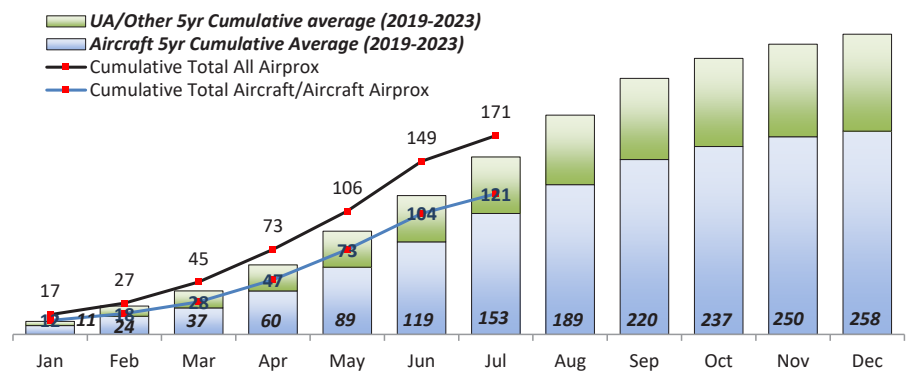
For every decision we make while flying, we should be asking ourselves 'what if this doesn't work out?' and 'I know the rules say I can, but is it the most sensible course of action?' Of course, there are many factors to consider when making a plan for an arrival or departure and there is often no right or wrong answer, but do consider the implications on others of your chosen plan.

**UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP**

This month the Board evaluated 31 Airprox, including ten UA/Other events, nine of which were reported by the piloted aircraft and one by the drone operator. Of the 22 full evaluations, 11 were classified as risk-bearing – one as category A and ten as category B. The Board didn't make any Safety Recommendations, although there



**2024 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution**



were lengthy discussions regarding airfield procedures for arrivals and departures (unsurprisingly, given the number of Airprox this month that featured arrivals, departures, and circuit traffic). The big takeaway is probably this – ensure you know what the airfield procedures are before you arrive/depart and follow them; if you want to do something different, get on the radio and inform other users.

Airprox reporting continues to be higher so far in 2024 than we would have expected, as can be seen from the graph above. Even

with the poor weather we had in the early part of July, we're on course to exceed the number of Airprox reported in 2023. So, a challenge to you all – is there anything you can change about the way you prepare and execute your flights to reduce the likelihood of you adding to these statistics?

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