



# AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

March 2025

## AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

# Listening or hearing?



Photo for illustrative purposes: Shutterstock: Sebastian MARIE

## ATC Instructions – Explicit or implicit? Do we really know what's expected of us?

In many reported Airprox there's usually little-to-no involvement from air traffic controllers, FISOs or AGOs because many incidents tend to occur away from airfields and, often, outside the coverage of a Lower Airspace Radar Service (LARS) provider.

That said, this month's Airprox did involve an air traffic controller and was also in the vicinity of an airfield. In this case (**Airprox 2024229**) it was a DHC6 (Twin Otter) and a Robin DR400 inside the Land's End ATZ.

The Twin Otter pilot was operating a scheduled service to the Scilly Isles and was departing from Land's End RW16 VFR; the Robin pilot was flying VFR along the Cornish coast, east-to-west, and was intending to land at Land's End.

As the Robin pilot approached Penzance, they informed the Land's End controller of their intention to route via the coast and were instructed to join right-base for RW07 and to be not below 2000ft. The pilot was also informed of the soon to be departing Twin Otter. However, the Robin pilot wanted to descend to get a better view of the Minack Theatre and had taken the '2000ft' to mean that the departing Twin Otter would not be below 2000ft.

After descending and routeing via the Minack Theatre, the Robin pilot turned

towards the airfield at a relatively low altitude and then had difficulty identifying the correct runway. Eventually, they found themselves in the climbout lane for RW16 and in the path of the departing Twin Otter. Although there was a reasonable amount of vertical separation (480ft) at the closest point, laterally the aircraft were less than 0.1 miles apart.

A few months ago, in my [September 2024 INSIGHT article](#), I wrote about how sometimes an ATC clearance might not be all that clear and, if there is any doubt, then pilots should ask the controller for clarification (and vice versa, if necessary).

In this case, when the controller had passed Traffic Information to the Robin pilot on the departing Twin Otter, they had said "Traffic is a Twin Otter departing Land's End airport shortly on runway 16. Not below altitude 2000ft for co-ordination". The Robin pilot's reply was "Looking out for traffic at 2000ft on 1020". It seems that the controller's intentions were clear – to keep the Robin above the departing Twin Otter. However, the Robin pilot took it to mean that the Twin Otter would be at 2000ft and therefore considered that if they avoided that altitude all would be fine.

There is a specific way in which a controller should enter into an agreement with a pilot regarding maintaining an altitude or course

when in Class G airspace. The Robin pilot was under a Basic Service, so was free to manoeuvre without telling the controller, but it would always be helpful to keep the controller informed.

In this case, no 'formal agreement' between the controller and the Robin pilot was made (although the Land's End controller thought that there was) and so the Robin pilot acted on what they thought was happening with the other aircraft (that the Twin Otter would be at 2000ft), and the controller acted on what they thought the Robin pilot was doing (flying not below 2000ft).

The main lesson from this Airprox is clear, and applies equally to both pilots and controllers – stick to correct CAP413 phraseology to avoid ambiguity. Of course, divergence from that phraseology can and always will happen – the trick is to know when it is safe to do so and when it is best not to do so. In this case, the controller knew what they meant, and the pilot knew what they had been instructed, it was just that those were two different things!

The second big lesson here is that the closer to the ground one flies, the harder navigation becomes. It's absolutely fine to descend to get a better view of something, but there are also considerations –

What if I have a full or partial power loss? Do I have enough glide potential to make a safe landing in a suitable field? Without an in-flight emergency, have I given myself the best chance of making a safe entry into the ATZ and join to the circuit?

In this case it appears that the Robin pilot had probably aimed in the general direction of the airfield, with the intention of finessing their arrival once visual with the runway. However, by flying lower they limited the distance ahead at which they could realistically identify the runway and found themselves flying towards a departing aircraft.

Remember, aviation can be a very unforgiving activity. Often, what seems like a good idea at the time needs careful thought about what considerations need to be made. This is a useful lesson in the knock-on effects of a change in the plan that we can all apply to our everyday flying.

***'It's important for pilots to seek a LARS where they can'***

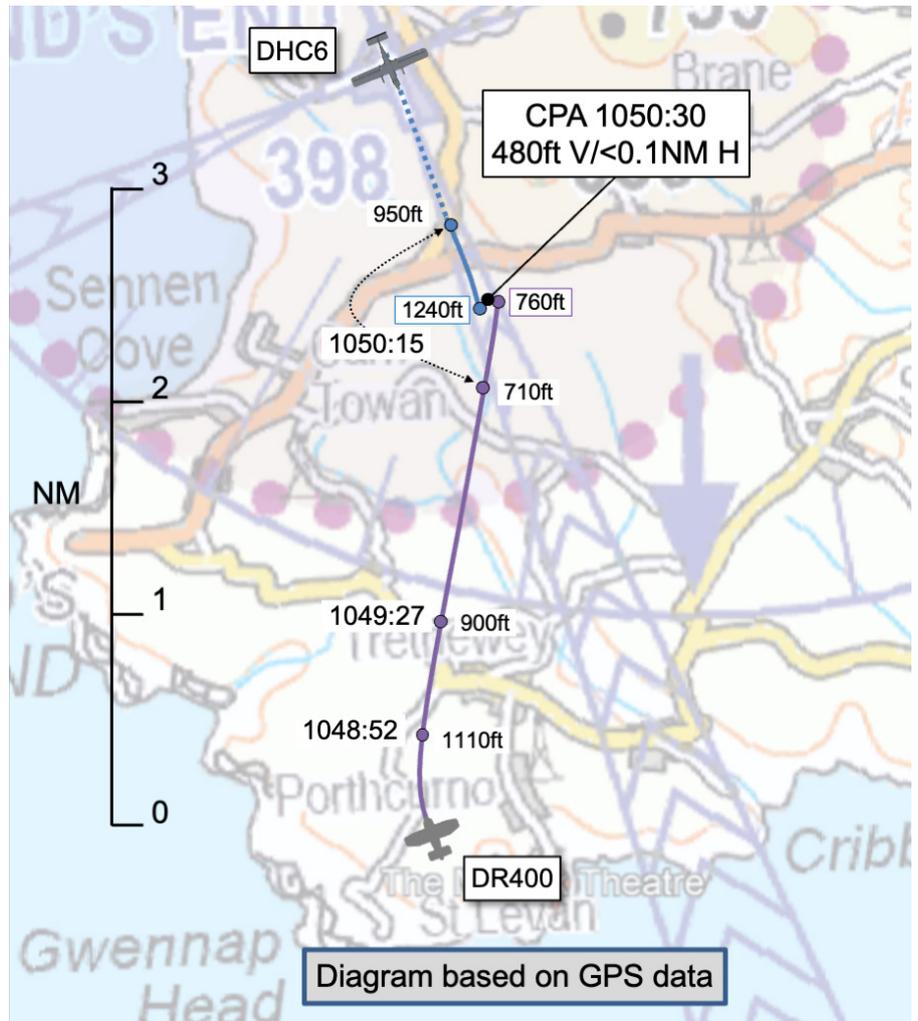
It's also very important to note that Airprox Board members encourage pilots to seek a LARS where they can, and request the highest level of service available – usually a Traffic Service. It's also vital that pilots report occasions where a controller is unable to provide the requested service so that a picture of where there is insufficient capacity to deliver these services can be built.

The form to use on those occasions where the service requested cannot be provided, or where access to airspace is denied (such as a CTR crossing), is [FCS 1522 - UK Airspace Access or Refusal of ATS Report](#). I encourage all of you to request the service that you want (not the one that you think you'll get) and submit a report when you don't get it.

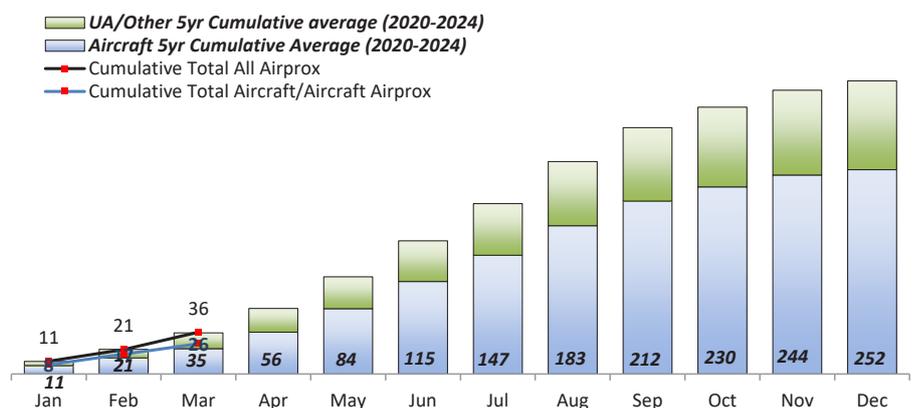
**BOARD SUMMARY**

This month the Board evaluated 23 Airprox, including two UA/Other events, both of which were reported by the piloted aircraft. Of the 21 full evaluations, six were classified as risk-bearing – one as category A and five as category B.

The Board made one Safety Recommendation this month after one of a formation of Prefects conducting a visual run-in and break got close to a Phenom conducting a touch-and-go. The Board acknowledged the need for the military to conduct training appropriate to the



**2025 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution**



aircraft type, but wondered if the standard parameters for the visual run-in and break fully considered the performance of dissimilar types at the same airfield.

The graphic above shows that it has been a fairly typical start to the year in terms of numbers of Airprox reports received. Given the weather that we have seen during the first quarter of this year (and previous years, for that matter) this is probably to be expected.

However, as the weather has improved markedly in recent days, I do expect to see

a growth in the number of Airprox reports. I would be delighted if numbers turn out to be lower than last year, so see if you can contribute to that by having a look back through some of these articles and asking yourself 'what would I do differently?'

Download the **new Airprox app**

