AIRPROX Insight

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE October 2025

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Time and motion

Photo for illustrative purposes: Shutterstock: Richard P Long

Do you really have the right tools for proper pre-flight planning and enough time for it?

I have often spoken in these monthly newsletters about the importance of proper pre-flight planning, and part of that preparation is using the correct tools to do the job.

While it might perhaps seem odd to suggest that pre-flight planning can be an aid to avoiding an airprox in the wider skies, the choice of where we fly, which agency we talk to and the tools we use can bolster our defences to a loss of separation with another aircraft.

So while the advent of electronic navigation software applications has made planning much easier, are really we sure the one we use is showing us everything we need to take account of and do we make enough time to use it properly? This edition's 'Airprox of the Month' demonstrates quite well what can happen if we don't have the right information with which to make a sound plan for the flight.

Airprox 2025093 took place about a mile north of Nympsfield glider site, between a Discus glider and a Wildcat helicopter. The glider pilot had returned from a cross-country flight and just started their circuit to land at Nympsfield, while the Wildcat pilot was transiting southbound, returning from an overnight task, and was in a bit of a hurry due to the impending closure of their destination airfield.

Both aircraft were equipped with electronic conspicuity equipment but, unfortunately, there was no compatibility between the glider's equipment and that carried by the Wildcat, so neither pilot received any prior warning of the other aircraft.

On top of this, the Wildcat pilot was on a Basic Service from London Information so would not have received any information regarding the presence of the glider (see the September 2025 Insight article for more background on a Basic Service from London Information).

Ultimately, the Discus pilot spotted the Wildcat as it approached from the north and didn't feel that any avoiding action was necessary, but the Wildcat pilot did actually fly through the circuit pattern of the Discus without ever seeing the glider. The closest point of approach was recorded as less than 0.1 miles laterally and 370ft vertically.

You might be wondering why this has anything to do with pre-flight planning. Well, there's little else that the Discus pilot could have done to avoid this Airprox – they had returned from their cross-country flight and had been preparing to land. However, the Wildcat pilot (and their crew) had found themselves in the unenviable position of being away from base and on a task where the timings had changed. This had necessitated a fairly rapid re-plan, without all the support and resources they would usually have available to them.

The Wildcat crew elected to use a widely available software application so that they would have access to the latest NOTAM information, but the mapping on these applications does not depict glider sites in the same manner as a standard military or civilian VFR aeronautical chart, which show glider sites as a 'G' with a circle of 1nm radius around them (see my June 2025 Insight article for more about that).

As glider sites are not displayed as prominently on these software applications the crew didn't notice the presence of the glider site and planned to fly through its area at 1000ft agl. The pilot reported mistaking the glider site for a minor aerodrome and so was keeping a good lookout for other aircraft when they noticed the presence of gliders on the airfield. At that point, the planning error became apparent, but it was too late to avoid the direct overflight of the site itself, and the crew never saw the Discus in the circuit.

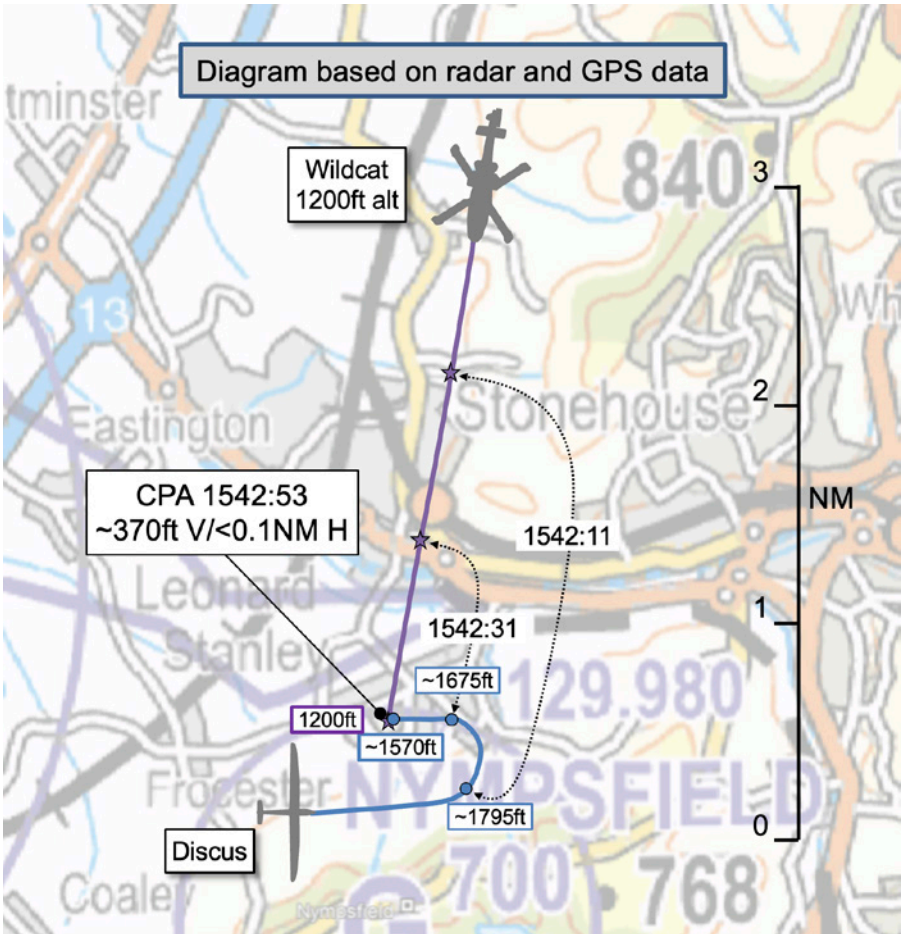
There are a few things we can all learn from this Airprox. Firstly, to ensure that there is enough time to complete the flight planning. In this case, the helicopter crew had a choice – wait at an enroute refuelling stop for about an hour to make a pre-booked late arrival time, or launch as quickly as possible to make it back within the airfield's normal operating hours. The crew chose the latter course, which put pressure on them to complete their re-plan. It might have been better in this case to have taken the extra hour on the ground to conduct a thorough, and un-rushed, pre-flight preparation.

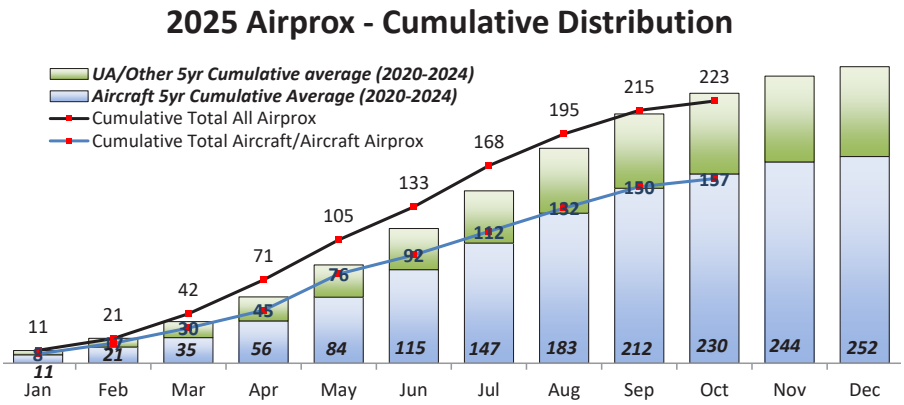
Secondly, make sure you are familiar with the planning tools you intend to use. In this case, the crew was using a software application that wasn't their normal method of pre-flight preparation and which didn't depict certain aeronautical information in the same manner as the charts (digital and hard copy) that they were used to. To complicate matters, there was also a NOTAM affecting their preferred route, so they had to manipulate it in-flight using the same, unfamiliar, navigation software. This led to the misidentification of Nympsfield glider site as a minor – and inactive – aerodrome.

Finally, a brief word about the Rules of the Air. (UK)SERA.3225 – Operation on and in the vicinity of an aerodrome, paragraph (b), states that '*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*'.

This means that, perhaps rather obviously, if there is no traffic in the circuit then we are not obliged to avoid it. However, if there is traffic in the circuit, we must either conform with the pattern or avoid it – whether or not we actually see the aircraft in the pattern.

With this in mind, it's perhaps more prudent to try to avoid minor aerodromes (and glider sites) where possible, either laterally or vertically, or both, to ensure we don't inadvertently stumble into the circuit. In this Airprox, the Wildcat pilot was transiting at 1000ft agl – circuit height at most minor aerodromes in the UK.





BOARD SUMMARY

This month, the Board evaluated 30 Airprox, including ten UA/Other events, all of which were reported by the piloted aircraft. Of the 20 full evaluations, nine were classified as risk-bearing – two as category A and seven as category B.

The Board made two Safety Recommendations at the October Board meeting following an Airprox between a Cirrus SR22 and Robin DR400 glider tug in the vicinity of Lasham (**Airprox 2025099**).

The Robin was equipped with a transponder that was apparently not operating – it might have been that it wasn't working or that the pilot had forgotten to select it to 'on'. Either way, what this essentially meant was that the TAS equipment on the Cirrus couldn't detect the Robin and also the Robin wasn't standing out on the Farnborough radar screen, which potentially denied two opportunities for the Airprox to have been avoided.

The Board recommended that Lasham gliding club consider introducing a start-of-day transponder check, and also that the BGA consider issuing guidance to clubs regarding the verification of the serviceability of tug aircraft SSR transponders.

Lastly, a quick word about the level of Airprox reporting so far this year. It's clear from the graph above that the number of reports we have received to date in 2025 is pretty much on the five-year average. However, the average includes 2020, where there were significant restrictions on GA flying (and, to a lesser extent, 2021) which realistically means we are actually seeing a slight decline. This is positive news, and I hope that we can see this continue into 2026.