



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

June 2024



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AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Weather to – or not to... Sometimes making the decision isn't that straightforward

The importance of pre-flight planning, and thinking through a few contingencies that can be really beneficial once airborne, has been a major thread through the previous few issues of these INSIGHT newsletters — but what about the accuracy of the potential weather information?

While part of the prep for every flight should include a good look at the weather in and around the area of our intended flight to ensure it will be suitable for what we want or need to do, this shouldn't just be the METARs (the latest weather observations, which will be historic as soon as they are issued), but also the TAFs, as they offer an insight into how the weather will be evolving across the period of our flight.

This month I have chosen **Airprox 2024002** to hopefully draw out a few things to think about when it comes to the weather. The event in question involved a Cabri helicopter and a Cessna 152 in the Leicester visual circuit.

The Cabri pilot was conducting circuits to the helicopter landing area (situated in the

triangle formed by the three intersecting runways) with a cloudbase of around 850ft. The C152 pilot was conducting an IR(R) revalidation flight and appears to have been performing a visual circuit to RW28RH, although the pilot couldn't remember much about the flight in question. Only the Cabri was fitted with any form of electronic conspicuity equipment, and this would not have detected the C152 in any case. During their descending turn onto final approach, the C152 pilot flew through the runway centreline and, essentially, into the rotary-wing circuit.

Fixed- and rotary-wing circuits at Leicester are separated by height (1000ft QFE for fixed-wing and 700ft QFE for rotary-wing) and circuit direction (when RW28RH is in use for fixed-wing aircraft, as it was in this case, the circuit direction for rotary-wing aircraft is left-hand), but this relies on pilots flying an accurate final approach track and not crossing the runway centreline. With both aircraft descending on final approach, the height deconfliction that exists for the majority of the circuit was no longer valid

and so not flying through the centreline is essential for maintaining separation from opposing traffic.

So, what happened on this occasion? Well, the Board members looked at the weather recorded at East Midlands Airport (the nearest airfield with weather reporting – about 20 miles north-west of Leicester) around the time of the Airprox – only a METAR was available, showing the cloud to be FEW at 2500ft. However, at Wittering (22 miles east of Leicester) the cloud was being reported as OVC at 1000ft.

It seems likely, then, that the Cabri pilot's estimate of the cloudbase in the circuit could well have been reasonably accurate. If this was the case, then the weather at Leicester would have precluded fixed-wing circuits and there are no published instrument approaches there.

To compound the weather issue, the C152 was not equipped with any additional electronic conspicuity equipment that might have alerted the pilot to the Cabri, and the Cessna pilot reported not hearing any radio calls, so it seems they had no idea

that the Cabri was there. Of course, many aircraft operate without a radio, and often radio calls get missed, so we should always consider that there might be other aircraft around even if we don't hear anything.

If circuit deconfliction requires that we stay on one side of the centreline or the other, then we need to ensure we do so or discontinue the approach if it looks as if we won't be able to.

I think there's little doubt that the weather on the day played a huge part in proceedings for the C152 pilot – perhaps they were in and out of cloud and were having trouble acquiring the runway visually, or perhaps the runway had been intermittently obscured by rain showers. Without having been there it's difficult to tell, but one thing we do know is that the C152 flew through the centreline of the runway and into proximity with the Cabri.

On the face of it, the weather reported at East Midlands Airport says that the visual circuit at Leicester should be fit for VFR circuits. However, the weather reported at Wittering tells us that it won't be. Which one should we believe?

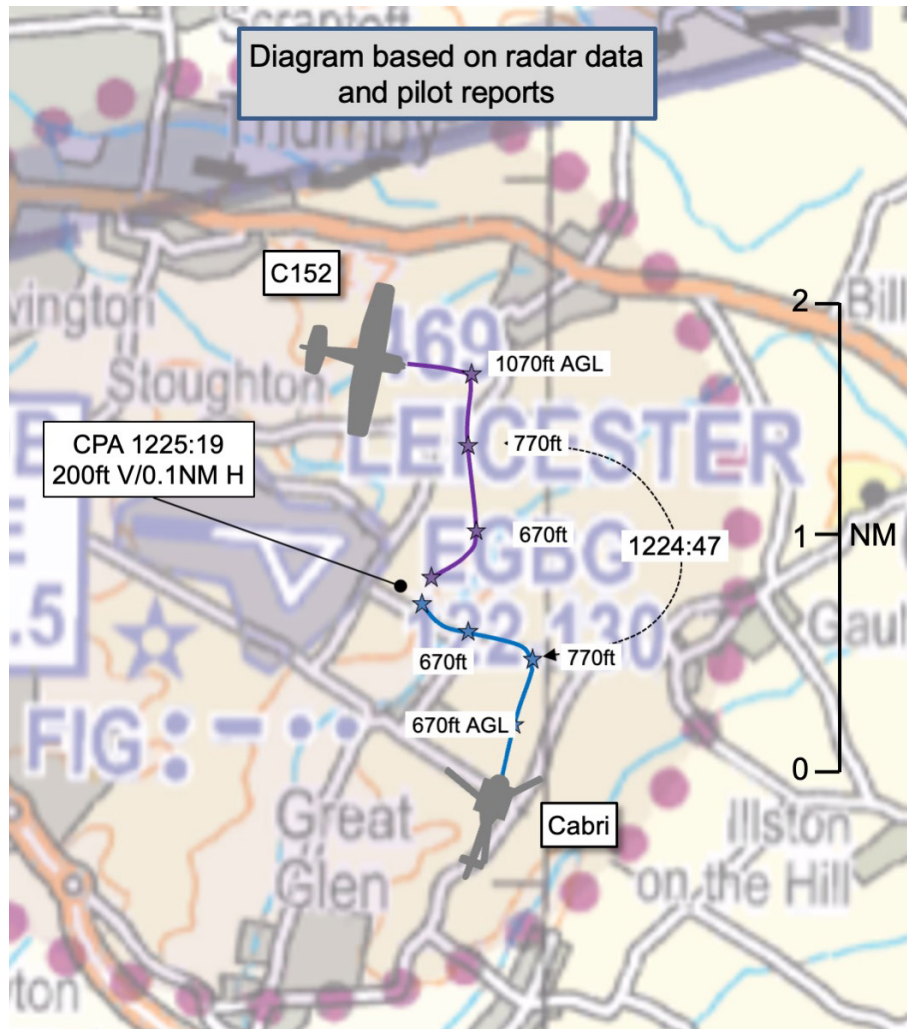
Optimism is probably not the best tool when it comes to Threat and Error Management so, in this case, why not call the airfield before departing to see if somebody there can tell us what the weather is really like? There are also many applications available that can tell us what the weather is doing, including aviation weather forecasts — plus, of course, one can always look at the historic rainfall radar to see which way the nasty weather is heading.

My final point is about decision-making while airborne – even if we're not armed with the very latest (accurate) information before taking to the air, if we arrive somewhere and things are not as expected we need to adjust our plan. Aviation is a particularly unforgiving activity; don't 'press' a poor situation – better to abandon the plan (in the safest manner possible) and come back another day.

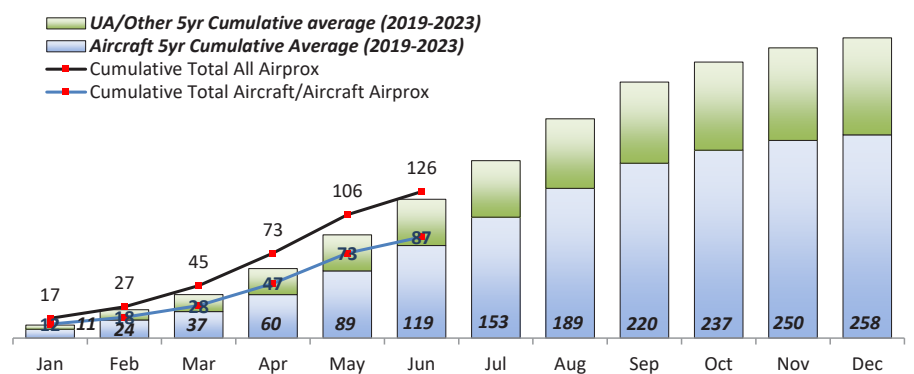
UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

This month the Board evaluated 29 Airprox, including ten UA/Other events, seven of which were reported by the piloted aircraft and three by the drone operator. Of the 22 full evaluations, seven were classified as risk-bearing – one as category A and six as category B.

The Board also made one Safety Recommendation, that 'Leicester Aerodrome Operator reviews circuit procedures with a



2024 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution



view to introducing greater lateral separation between fixed-wing and rotary-wing traffic on final approach.

This Recommendation came from the Board's discussion of this month's Airprox of the Month. Reliance on accurate final approach tracks for opposite circuit deconfliction is potentially risky, and members thought that a simple resolution to the issue of pilots inadvertently flying through the centreline of the runway could be to offset the final approach track for helicopters to afford more lateral separation

in the final stages of the approach.

As I mentioned last month, Airprox reporting has been slightly higher so far in 2024 than we would have expected, and this has not changed in the last month. Now that the summer has finally arrived, I wish you all safe flights, continued good weather and happy landings.

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