



# AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

October 2024



Photo for illustrative purposes - Jesus Frances Lopez

**AIRPROX OF THE MONTH**

## D for dilemma

### Flying through Class D airspace where gliders operate – Part 2

Last month we discussed an Airprox between a Viking glider that had just released from a winch-launch at Kirknewton in the Edinburgh CTR when it encountered a PA-28 making a VFR crossing of the same airspace.

In that article I referred to the arrangement between Dunstable Downs gliding site and Luton Airport for gliding operations within the Luton CTR and CTA, mentioning that the dimensions of the gliding area can be found in the UK AIP entry for Luton Airport. Who'd have thought, then, that at the next Board meeting there would be an Airprox to assess between a tug/glider combination and a Partenavia P.68 that took place in the Luton CTR?

Consequently, I've chosen **Airprox 2024096** this month to continue the discussion on Airprox between aircraft operating under VFR in Class D airspace.

The glider tug involved was a Robin DR400 which was towing a glider to join others already in a thermal. Meanwhile, the pilot of the transiting P.68 had requested a CTR crossing through the airport overhead, however the controller, due to other IFR

traffic and to avoid a delay for the P.68 pilot, could only offer them a crossing to the west of Dunstable Downs gliding site, not above 2000ft QNH.

The P.68 was not fitted with any additional electronic conspicuity (EC) equipment and, while the DR400 pilot did not report whether they were carrying any additional EC equipment, it does seem likely they would have been equipped with at least a FLARM device, given that they continually operate in close proximity to gliders.

The P.68 pilot had chosen to route about two miles to the west of the gliding site and followed the Luton controller's instructions to maintain their altitude below 2000ft. Unfortunately, this routeing took them right through the area where aerotows from Dunstable Downs usually take place.

The P.68 pilot did receive generic information from the controller regarding gliding activity from Dunstable Downs, and then more specific information regarding what turned out to be the glider tug (although it was an intermittent primary-only radar contact at the time of the Airprox), but this was quite late and at about the

same time as the P.68 pilot spotted the combination. The DR400 pilot, meanwhile, sighted the P.68 at a range of a few hundred metres and turned right to stay clear of it.

There are several lessons to take away from this encounter, in addition to those I discussed in my last Airprox Insight. Once it became clear that the P.68 pilot's preferred routeing through the Luton overhead was going to be subject to a delay or re-route they could, by their own admission, have routed clear of the Luton CTR altogether.

Of course, passing through the narrow band of Class G airspace between the Luton CTR and the Halton ATZ, and below the portion of the Luton CTA where the base of controlled airspace (CAS) is 2500ft, could have brought them into proximity with other aircraft wishing to avoid the ATZ and Luton's CAS, but this might have been a better option than trying to negotiate an area known to be busy with gliders (which are notoriously difficult to see!).

What about EC? The UK Airprox Board has long advocated the carriage of additional EC equipment and, in this case, it might well have given the P.68 pilot an earlier

warning of the presence of the tug/glider combination (notwithstanding we can't be certain that the DR400 was fitted with additional EC because this wasn't reported).

There is also the question of transponder operation – it transpired that the DR400 was fitted with a transponder but it hadn't been turned on. The Regulations regarding transponder operation ((UK)SERA.13001) are quite clear – if an aircraft has a transponder it must be operated to the fullest extent possible (unless the aircraft in question doesn't have a sufficient electrical power supply, such as a glider), and the Letter of Agreement (LoA) between Luton and the gliding club also states that transponders must be operated by aircraft operating under the terms of the LoA, which the DR400 undoubtedly was.

Had the DR400's transponder been switched on, it's highly likely the Luton controller would have detected the aircraft much earlier and could therefore have passed earlier traffic information to the P.68 pilot, perhaps even offering a heading to keep the aircraft clear.

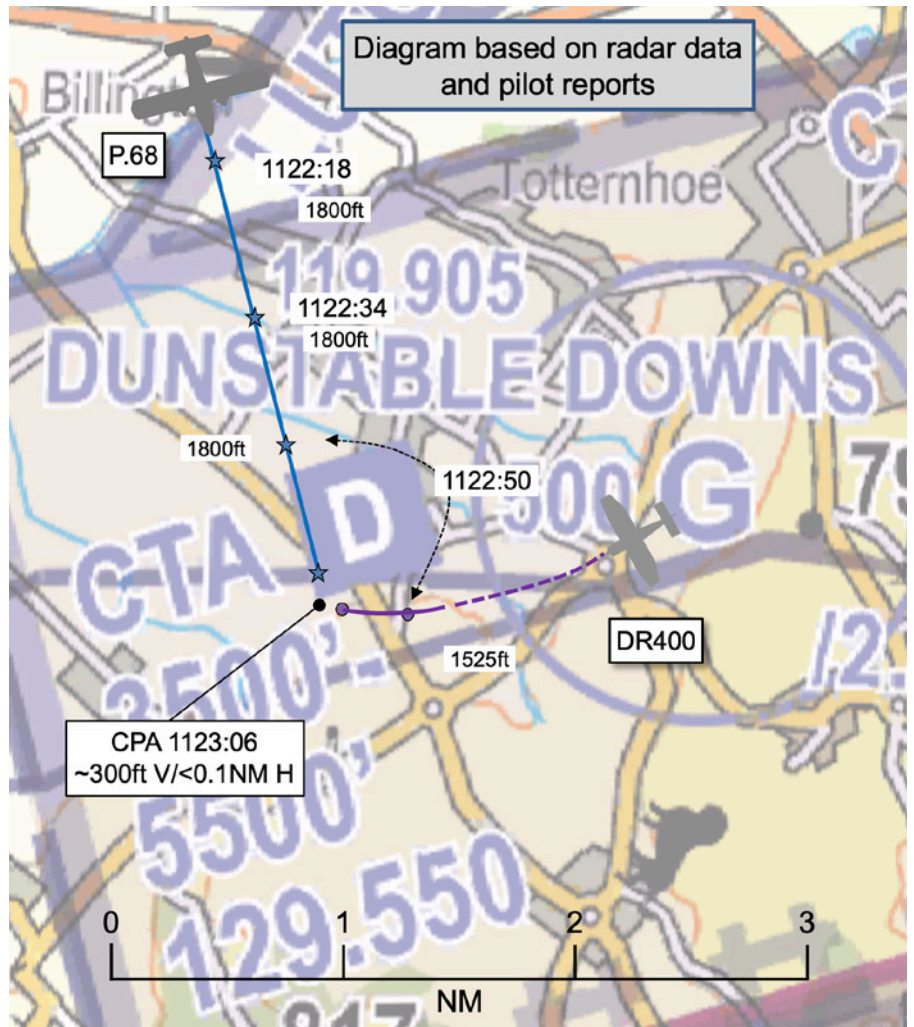
There is no doubt that a transit through Class D airspace can be trickier than cruising along in Class G airspace, not least because your aircraft will be under Radar Control. However, under VFR this doesn't mean that the controller will 'drive you around the sky' and there are often preferred routings and altitudes through Class D airspace.

In this example, routing a couple of miles to the west of the gliding site offers little more benefit than avoiding the CAS altogether (although, as I have said, this might put you and your aircraft into a more dense traffic environment due to the proximity of other restrictions) and this is exactly the kind of thing that can be considered before getting airborne.

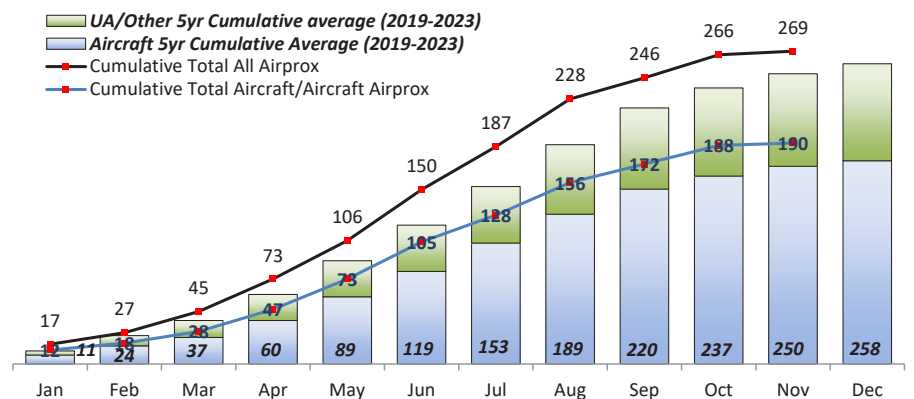
In addition, before take-off get to know as much as you can about the airspace you want to transit through or operate in – although there are gliding areas agreed with Luton ATC where the glider and tug pilots do not have to talk to the Luton controllers, this does not make that airspace Class G and it is beholden on us all to operate in accordance with the locally agreed procedures for the safety of everyone involved.

**UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP**

This month the Board evaluated 34 Airprox, including 12 UA/Other events, ten of which were reported by the piloted aircraft and two by the RPAS operator. Of the 24



**2024 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution**



full evaluations, eight were classified as risk-bearing – one as category A and 7 as category B. The Board did not make any Safety Recommendations this month.

Despite some fairly inclement weather during October, Airprox reporting is still higher than would normally be expected at this time of year, although it is very similar to the reporting levels seen back in 2022. With fewer GA flights taking place in the winter months reporting usually tails off, but we are still on track for a 'bumper year' and I wouldn't be surprised if we topped

200 aircraft-to-aircraft incidents by the end of December (which has only happened once in the last ten years).

So, what to do over the winter? Why not take a look back at some of the Insight articles on our [website](#) and see if there's anything you might want to learn from them to take forward into the New Year.

Download the **new Airprox app**

