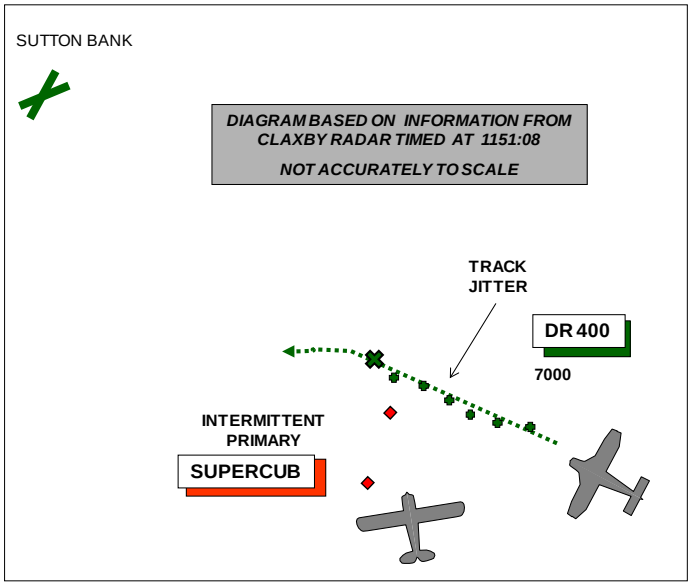
AIRPROX REPORT No 2012006

Date/Time:	14 Jan 2012 1151Z (Saturday)	
Position:	5410N 00110W (3nm SE Sutton Bank)	
Airspace:	Lon FIR	(*Class: G*)
	Reporting Ac	*Reporting Ac*
Type:	Robin DR400	Piper Supercub
Operator:	Civ Pte	Civ Trg
Alt/FL:	NK QFE (995hPa)	1300ft QFE
Weather:	VMC Haze	VMC CLBC
Visibility:	30km	10km
Reported Separation:	NK	15ft V/0ft H
Recorded Separation:	NR	



BOTH PILOTS FILED

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE ROBIN DR400 PILOT reports flying a white, blue and orange ac with strobes switched on, on a private flight under VFR inbound to Sutton Bank; he was squawking 7000 but Modes C and S were not fitted. He had contacted Sutton Bank by telephone to ensure that he was clear to 'fly in' as he is very familiar with the site and procedures as he is a current gliding instructor, tug pilot and competition glider pilot and partakes in a gliding competition at Sutton Bank every August. He was informed [on the telephone] that the RW in use was 24 for the aerotow/glider only operations and informed them that he would land on RW20 which the tugs and gliders would also use; he gave them an ETA of 1130-1200 and said he would call on their operating frequency of 129.975.

He left Pocklington at 1135 and climbed to 2000ft at 100kt on Pockington QFE. When passing Castle Howard he changed to Sutton Bank, calculated their QFE and climbed to 1500ft (QFE) and changed course to a W'ly heading to remain clear of Sutton Bank operations by about 3nm to the S to position to the W of the airfield for a RH cct to RW20; this enabled him to observe the operation and also to merge safely with any tug/glider traffic in cct.

At about 7nm he made a call to Sutton Bank on 129.975 to inform them that he was approaching from the SE and would join RH for RW20 but there was no response from ground or from any other ac. A short while later he increased his speed to 120kt to descend to cct height, intending to join at about 1000ft. During this time he believes that both he and his passenger were maintaining a good lookout and the visibility was good in the direction of flight and to the N (down sun) although it was misty to the S into sun with an inversion at about 600ft. He made a second call when he was 3nm S of the airfield heading 270º, again stating his intentions but he heard only a slightly garbled reply from the PA18 Supercub indicating that they had had a 'near miss'.

Neither he nor his passenger saw the PA18 and it was only after discussion with the checking instructor/examiner in the PA18 that he realised the proximity of the two ac [reported by the other pilot as 10-15ft] and that the Robin had passed directly overhead the PA18 on a converging course.

Although he did not see the other ac below him as it was obscured by the fuselage and wing, he assessed the risk as being high.

THE PIPER SUPERCUB PILOT reports that he was conducting a VFR, bi-annual instruction with a gliding club tug pilot from Sutton Bank in a red and grey ac and was listening on 129.975; SSR was not fitted but FLARM was. They had just completed a practice forced-landing exercise, had climbed to 1300ft (Sutton Bank QFE) and had been cruising straight and level, heading 340° at 70kt for about 50-60sec when a Robin DR400 was seen through the roof Perspex passing from R to L about 10-15ft directly above them from their 3-4 o'clock. The Robin subsequently was seen to be heading about 280° and eventually landed at Sutton Bank on RW20. He reported the incident on the frequency in use and assessed the risk as being high; he thought that the ac had been hidden by the Supercub's high wing.

THE SUPERCUB CLUB CFI commented that the Supercub was fitted with FLARM; had the Robin (a tug from another club) been similarly fitted, the Airprox would probably not have occurred.

UKAB NOTE (1): The Great Dun Fell Radar was under long-term maintenance but the Claxby Radar recording provided some useful information. The DR400, squawking 7000 with no Mode C showed throughout the incident tracking about 280°. Although the Supercub did not show, a primary only contact appeared twice in the vicinity of the Airprox; it was not possible, however, to determine its track or the CPA. No altitude information was available. From the information available, it was deduced that the CPA was at about 1151.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, radar recordings and a comment from the Gliding Club CFI.

A pilot Member familiar with both ac informed the Board that unlike the DR400 where the visibility from the cockpit is very good, it is limited from the Supercub (except directly upwards and from the front seat directly ahead).

The DR400 pilot had, in the Board's view, taken all reasonable measures to ensure notification of his flight and his safe arrival at Sutton Bank; however, arrivals at busy hilltop gliding sites in light ac is not easy or straightforward and requires great care. Members reasoned from the available information that the Supercub had recovered, climbing away from the PFL from the low ground to the S of Sutton Bank and would not have been visible to the DR400 pilot below the ac. Although the DR400 would have been above the Supercub, it had most likely been obscured to its crew by the wing. Another Member opined that during their recovery, both pilots had probably been concentrating their lookout in the vicinity of Sutton Bank looking for gliders and tugs and positioning to join the cct.

A gliding pilot Member pointed out that although FLARM is not recommended by the CAA for GA use or universally fitted, he agreed with the CFI that in this case it would probably have enabled the pilots to see the opposing ac in time to avoid them.

Both ac were operating legitimately in Class G airspace where 'see and avoid' is the principal method of collision avoidance. That neither pilot saw the opposing ac was most likely due to the geometry of the encounter and the poor visibility from the PA18.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A non-sighting by the DR400 pilot and effectively a non-sighting by the PA18 pilot.

Degree of Risk: A.