

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012114

Date/Time: 25 Jul 2012 1357Z

Position: 5154N 00042W
(Luton radar pattern DW RW08)

Airspace: Luton CTA (Class: D)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: A320 Untraced Glider

Operator: CAT NK

Alt/FL: 5000ft NK
(QNH 1017hPa) (NK)

Weather: VMC NR NK

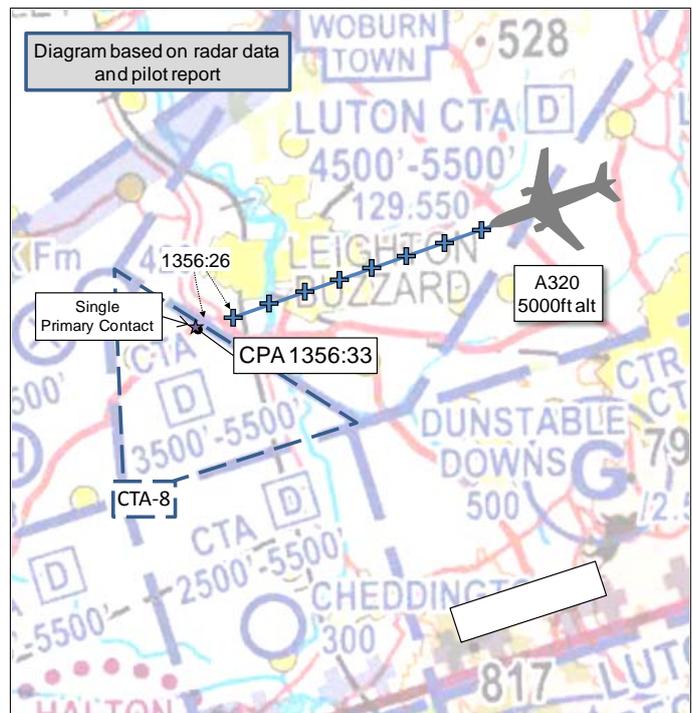
Visibility: NR NK

Reported Separation:

200ft V/300m H NK

Recorded Separation:

NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE A320 PILOT reports reaching the end of the radar pattern downwind leg for RW08, heading 260° at 220kt [altitude 5000ft, QNH 1017hPa]. He was operating in VMC under IFR with an 'approach service' from Luton APP. The SSR transponder was selected on, with Modes A, C and S, as was the TCAS. He was instructed by ATC to turn L on to heading 180° for the base leg. During the turn he saw a white glider 300m off the L wing, about 200ft below him, which he immediately reported to ATC. The response from the controller was that they were 'not in a glider area' and that there was no traffic on the radar.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

[UKAB Note(1): Radar recordings of the area clearly show primary and secondary returns from the A320. The Heathrow 10cm radar shows a single primary return in the reported Airprox position at 13:56:26, with the A319 crossing that position and starting the L turn at 13:56:33. A primary return is then seen just to the S of the Airprox position, as the A320 rolls out on to heading 180°. This contact immediately fades and then reappears at 13:57:28 and tracks to the NE before fading again at 14:00:35, by which point the A320 is at 7nm on final approach to RW08. Regrettably, due to the multitude of pop-up and fading primary returns in the area, it has not been possible to trace the glider pilot.]

ATSI reports that an Airprox was reported by an Airbus A320-232 (A320), in the London Luton Control Area (CTA-8), which comprises Class D airspace from altitude 3500ft to 5500ft, when the A320 came into conflict with a glider.

The A320 was operating IFR on a flight from Prague (Ruzyne) to London Luton and was in receipt of a RCS from Luton Radar [129.550MHz]. The glider has not been identified.

CAA ATSI had access to recordings of RTF from London Luton Radar, area radar recordings and a written report from the pilot of the A320.

The London Luton METARs were reported as follows:

METAR EGGW 251350Z 0000KT CAVOK 26/14 Q1017=
METAR EGGW 251420Z 04005KT 350V080 CAVOK 27/14 Q1017=

At 1349:50 the pilot of the A320 contacted Luton Radar at altitude 5000ft, heading 270°. He was instructed to turn L heading 255°. The heading of the A320 was adjusted to 245° and then back again to 255°.

At 1355:10 the A320 pilot was 'downwind left hand' at altitude 5000ft. Using radar replay of the Heathrow 10cm radar an intermittent primary contact could be seen on L base to Luton RW08; however, on the Multi-Radar Tracking (MRT) no primary contact was visible.

At 1356:39, using the Heathrow 10cm radar, a primary return could be seen just ahead of the track of the A320 although no primary return could be seen using the MRT. The default display for Luton Radar is MRT.

At 1356:40 the pilot of the A320 reported that there was, "*a glider about just two hundred feet below us now on the left wing*" to which the Luton Radar controller replied that nothing was showing on radar and the A320 pilot responded, "*yeah but he was there just er fairly close*". The A320 was vectored for the ILS approach and landed without further incident.

In certain circumstances, when Luton is using RW26, CTA-8 is available for use by RAF Halton and Dunstable Downs gliding sites up to 4500ft. Luton were using RW08 all morning prior to the Airprox report. A section of airspace to the S of CTA-8 is delegated to Dunstable Downs on request during RW08 operations but only up to 3500ft.

Although a primary contact was visible on radar using the Heathrow 10cm radar, there was no primary contact visible using the MRT picture. Even if the primary contact had been visible on the MRT the Luton Radar controller would have assumed that any ac associated with the contact would have been operating below 3500ft, beneath CAS.

An Airprox was reported by an A320 pilot, in the London Luton Control Area (CTA-8) when the A320 came into conflict with a glider.

The Luton Radar controller was unable to provide instructions or advice that would have provided assistance in avoiding the conflict.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included a report from the Reporting Pilot, RTF recordings and radar video recordings.

The Board's discussion was limited by the lack of information available and unsuccessful tracing action on the glider pilot, resulting in much of the Board's deliberation being conjecture. Some Members opined that the conflicting ac was operating below Class D airspace at relatively low altitudes and may therefore have been a motor-glider, based some distance away. Alternatively, Members opined that a glider pilot from the local area would have been acutely aware of the complexity of the local airspace structure and restrictions and offered a number of possible scenarios:

The glider pilot may have been flying with the mistaken belief that Luton was operating on RW26 and used the CTA-8 airspace up to altitude 4500ft iaw local agreements.

The radar picture is subject to error and with an actual Airprox position slightly to the E, the glider pilot could have been flying legally in Class G airspace up to altitude 4500ft.

Given that modern, high-performance gliders can have wing-spans approaching that of short-haul airliners, the A320 pilot may have under-estimated the vertical separation from the glider. In which case, the glider pilot may have been operating legally in Class G airspace below the Luton CTA

In the absence of a report from the glider pilot, or consistent recorded radar data of his track, it was not possible to determine whether this was a benign incident or an infringement of Class D airspace.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Sighting Report.

Degree of Risk: D.