

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012175

Date/Time: 30 Dec 2012 0853Z (Sunday)

Position: 5110N 00003W (5nm FIN APP
RW26L Gatwick - elev 203ft)

Airspace: CTR (Class: D)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: B777-200 2 x Untraced
objects

Operator: CAT NK

Alt/FL: 1500ft↓ (QNH) (NK)

Weather: VMC NR NK

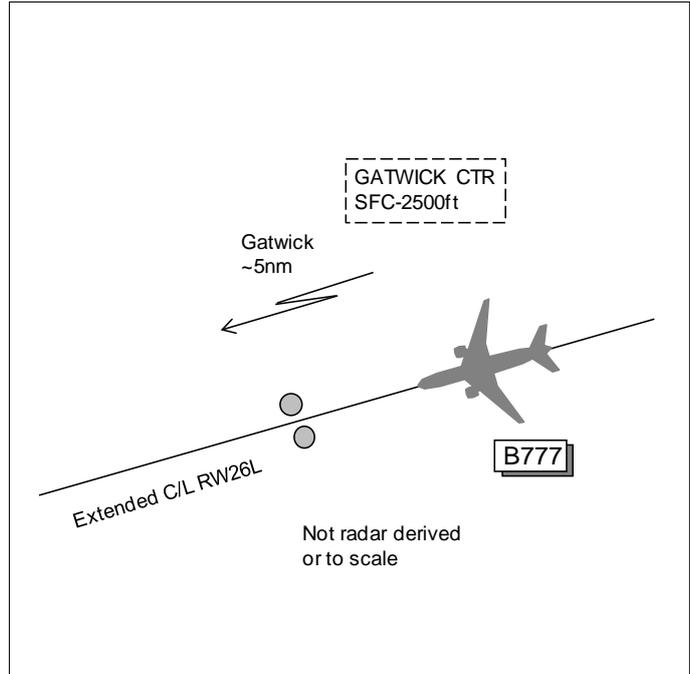
Visibility: >10km

Reported Separation:

100-200ft V

Recorded Separation:

NR



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE B777 PILOT reports inbound to Gatwick, IFR and in communication with Gatwick Tower, squawking an assigned code with Modes S and C. About 4-5nm from touchdown RW26L heading 260° at 140kt and descending through 1500ft QNH, P2 spotted, and then drew his attention to, 2 flat silver discs ahead, 1 either side of the C/L and below their flightpath; these objects appeared to be very slow moving or stationary. All 3 pilots on the flightdeck saw the objects, which passed 100-200ft below; the crews in 2 subsequent ac also saw the objects. They informed ATC of incident and he assessed the risk as low.

RAC MIL reports tracing action did not reveal the identity of the reported objects. Looking at possible sources, there are no registered radio-controlled model flying clubs listed in the area. Maps show many open fields under the RW26 approach where persons could operate remote control ac. There are saucer-shaped or blimp-shaped model ac, up to 4ft in diameter, on sale to the public.

THE GATWICK WATCH MANAGER reports the B777 crew reported seeing 2 man-made objects, possibly toys, passing under their ac approximately 5-6nm on final. Further details from the crew, and from the crew of a following B767, added the objects were 2 white or silver discs at approximately 1000-1500ft. Details of the incident were passed to the local Police Authority and to LTCC Group Supervisor.

ATSI reports that the Airprox was reported by the pilot of a B777 inbound to Gatwick when 2 objects were observed to pass beneath the ac. The report below contains only a factual history of all available information as the identity and origin of the observed objects could not be determined.

The B777 was an IFR flight squawking Mode A 4456 and in receipt of an ACS from Gatwick Tower on 124.255MHz. The Gatwick Tower frequency was reviewed between 0850 and 0904 UTC. RT loading was reasonably constant during this period.

The Gatwick METAR was EGKK 300850Z 23009KT 9999 FEW040 06/02 Q1011=

The B777 flight called Tower at 0850:35 passing 3200ft at 11.5nm from touchdown and was instructed to continue approach.

Figure 1 is taken from the Gatwick 10cm radar replay at 0852:16 when a primary position indication symbol appeared on the outskirts of East Grinstead in the B777's 11 o'clock range 3.4nm. The return disappeared on the next update of the replay.

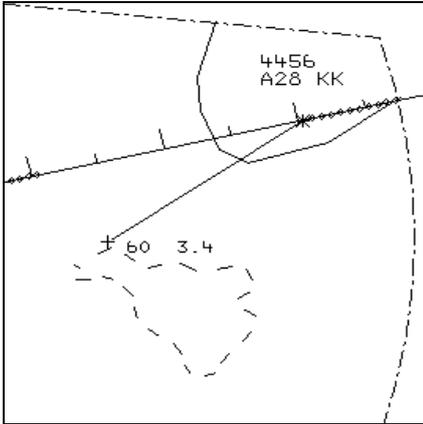


Figure 1: Gatwick 10cm: 0852:16 UTC

At 0853:02 the Gatwick 10cm replay showed the B777 at 6.4nm from touchdown, passing 2200ft and at this time another primary position indication symbol appears 0.1nm behind the B772 (Figure 2). The unknown target disappeared on the next update of the replay.

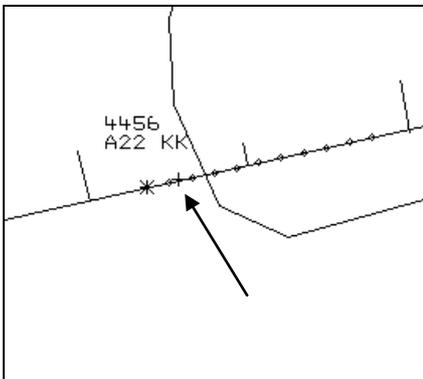


Figure 2: Gatwick 10cm: 0853:03 UTC

The B777 passed 6nm from touchdown at 0853:12 as it descended through 2100ft. The B777 passed 5nm from touchdown at 0853:43 as it descended through 1800ft.

The next ac inbound to RW26L, a B767 flight (Mode A 3243) called Tower at 0854:32 passing 2900ft at 10.5nm from touchdown and was instructed to continue approach.

At 0855:11 a primary position indication symbol appeared at 5.3nm on the approach and offset to the north by 0.1nm. The B767 was at 9.1nm passing 2900ft. The target disappeared on the next update of the replay.

The surface wind (230/08KT) was passed to the B777 flight and it was cleared to land at 0856:16. After the read back the pilot stated that, at between 5–6nm from touchdown, a couple of man-made objects had passed underneath the ac. These were described as 'some sort of toy'. The report was acknowledged by the controller. At this time the B767 was at 6.3nm from touchdown passing through 2300ft.

As the B767 approached 6nm from touchdown (passing 2200ft) the Gatwick 10cm replay showed a sequence of 6 primary position indication symbols moving E'bound approximately 1nm N of the FAT (Figure 3).

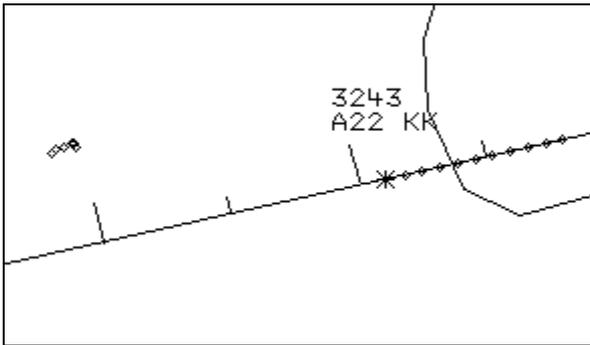


Figure 3: Gatwick 10cm: 0856:37 UTC

At 0857:17 the next inbound ac, an A319 called Tower, with 11nm to run and passing through 3000ft.

The B767 and A319 landed. There was no further mention, by pilots or controller, on the Tower frequency of the previously reported objects.

The controller and pilot reports subsequently indicated that the unknown objects were '2 white or silver discs at 1000–1500ft, which appeared to be very slow moving or stationary'. ATSI did not record the ground frequencies in use, where any further discussion of the objects may have taken place between ATC and the pilots of the 3 landing ac.

The incident was reported to the Police and London Terminal Control; however the nature of the objects has not been resolved.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the B777 crew, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar video recordings, reports from the air traffic Supervisor and reports from the appropriate ATC authorities.

The CAA FOI Advisor informed Members that the CAA is regularly approached with enquiries regarding various devices, including balloons/kites, to be used as camera platforms. Regulations require operators of model ac/UAVs with a mass greater than 7kg to seek approval for flight in an ATZ or CAS or above 400ft (ANO Article 166) and other limitations apply to surveillance ac (ANO Article 167). For platforms less than 7kg, the operator has to be satisfied that the flight is safe without endangering an ac, person or property (ANO Articles 137 and 138). Model flying clubs are well regulated but other flying can take place anywhere else. There was no doubt that the B777 crew, and 2 subsequent flights, had seen a couple of objects, reported by the B777 crew as man-made and toy-like. However, with the dearth of other information available to the Board and with the objects sighted remaining untraced, the Board elected to classify this incident as a sighting report on final approach; the risk was deemed unassessable.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Sighting report on final approach.

Degree of Risk: D.