

AIRPROX REPORT No 2014068

Date/Time: 18 May 2014 1413Z (Sunday)

Position: 5229N 00005E
(Chatteris)

Airspace: LON FIR (Class: G)

Aircraft 1 Aircraft 2

Type: Parachutist PA46

Operator: Civ Club Unknown

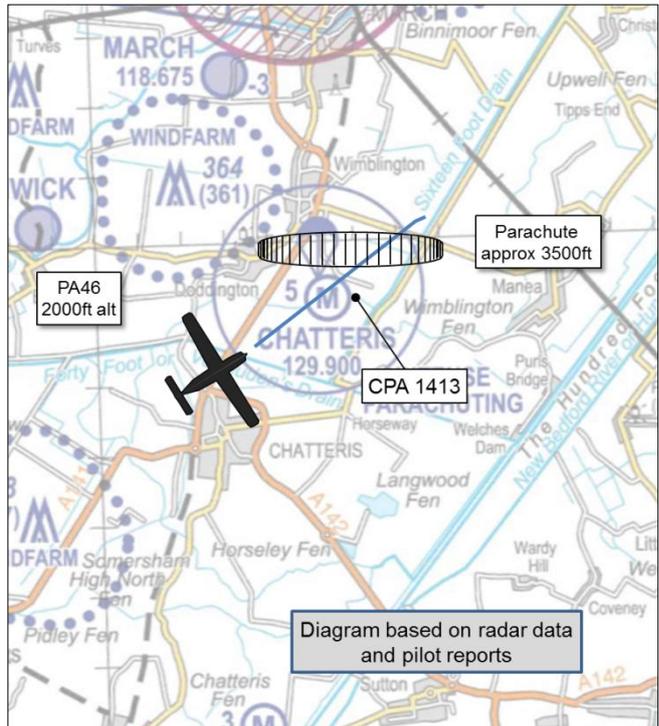
Alt/FL: 3500ft 2000ft
QNH

Conditions: VMC VMC

Visibility: >10k 10K

Reported Separation:
500ft V/0ft H NK

Recorded Separation:
NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE CHATTERIS PARACHUTIST reports conducting a tandem parachute descent from 10,000ft overhead Chatteris. Having completed a number of free-fall turns he deployed his chute at 5000ft. At approximately 3500ft an aircraft flew 500ft directly beneath him on a north-easterly direction. He described the aircraft as white, single engine, low-wing and noted that it didn't change course at all, leading him to believe that the pilot had not seen him.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

THE PA46 PILOT reports flying a predominately white aircraft with SSR modes 3A, C and S selected and TCAS fitted. He was making blind calls on the Marham LARS frequency but was not receiving an ATS. He did not recall the incident and his two passengers did not see anything.

[UKAB note : Marham is normally closed on Sundays]

Factual Background

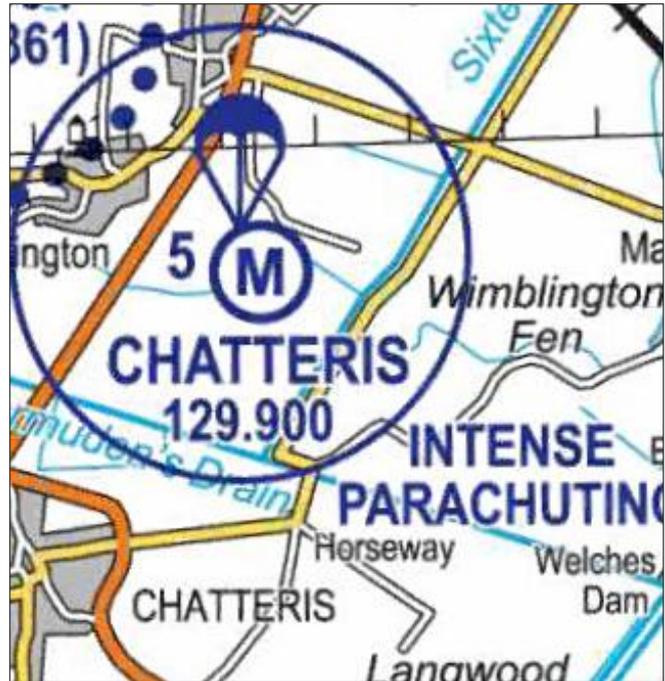
The weather at Cambridge was recorded as:

METAR EGSC 181350Z 14009KT 090V200 9999 FEW048 23/10 Q1010

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

Chatteris is displayed on the 1:250,000 chart (Edition 18) and the AIDU 'Minor Aerodromes' booklet notes that it is open sunrise to sunset; that there is intensive free-fall parachuting up to FL150; and advises contacting London ACC for further information. Chatteris Skydiving Club operate most days and notify various local operators of their activities each day, including, but not exclusively, Marham (when open), Lakenheath, Wyton, Swanwick(Mil) and LATCC. Additionally, the frequency 129.9 Mhz is monitored by the dropping aircraft and a drop-zone controller on the ground.



A parachutist is not considered to be an aircraft for the purposes of the Rules of the Air 2007 and as such, general flight rules pertaining to avoidance of collisions, flight in the vicinity of aerodromes etc do not apply.

The requirement to give way is therefore governed by normal airmanship considerations and the requirement of Article 138 of the Air Navigation Order 2009 (ANO), which states:

'A person must not recklessly or negligently cause or permit an aircraft to endanger any person or property.'

Although the common term for a parachute-jumping site is 'Drop Zone', there is no 'zone' of regulated or controlled airspace associated with a parachute site as such (other than if a site happens to be located within other control zones). The purpose of the 3nm diameter circular marking associated with parachute-jumping sites on the ½ million scale VFR charts is purely to highlight the existence and location of a site at which activity takes place that a passing aircraft could pose a threat to and vice versa. The circle does not denote the existence of a control zone as defined in the ANO.

Summary

An Airprox was reported on 18th May at 1413 between a parachutist dropping at Chatteris and passing approximately 3500ft, and a PA46, not receiving an ATS, who flew beneath the parachutist and overhead Chatteris at 2000ft.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilot and the parachutist, and radar photographs/video recordings.

The Board discussed the actions of the PA46 and thought that his routing, directly through a promulgated parachute dropping site, probably indicated a lack of flight planning prior to getting airborne. The drop-zone frequency was clearly displayed on the chart, and the Chatteris para-dropping club confirmed that both the dropping aircraft and the DZ controller were monitoring this frequency and so coordination could have been achieved. Additionally, his choice of remaining on the Marham LARS frequency, despite Marham normally being closed on a Sunday, also meant that he had limited his chances of receiving pertinent flight information as he passed the site.

The Board discussed at some length the status of parachutists within Rules of the Air given that, unlike paragliders, they don't fit into a category of their own regarding right of way or duty to avoid. Whilst some members thought that they should be given specific protection, others argued that they were sufficiently protected under Article 138 of the ANO. In the end, the Board stopped short of making a recommendation that the CAA reviews the issue, but noted that there had been a number of recent Airprox events (including Airprox 2014072 during this Board meeting) where parachutists had been involved, and, in particular, where aircraft had flown through parachute dropping sites. Members recognised that a parachutist does not have the same degree of control and manoeuvrability as a paraglider pilot for example, and has a substantially higher rate of descent when in free-fall. Given the likelihood of such high rates of descent at some point in the drop profile, Board members agreed that a pilot would most likely not visually acquire a parachutist on a collision course in free-fall and, depending on the geometry of the encounter, might struggle to visually acquire one even under a canopy. Therefore, the best course of action was to remain clear of promulgated and active sites.

In turning to the cause, the Board agreed that the Airprox occurred because the PA46 pilot had flown through a promulgated and active parachuting site and close enough to cause the parachutist concern. Notwithstanding, judging from the parachutist's own assessment of altitude (approximately 3500ft), the PA46's altitude of 2000ft, and the visually estimated height separation of 500ft, this seemed to be a relatively benign encounter given the low rate of descent of a parachute, and so the risk was judged to be Category C.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The PA46 pilot flew through a promulgated and active parachuting site, close enough to cause the parachutist concern.

Degree of Risk: C

ERC Score¹: 20

¹ Although the Event Risk Classification (ERC) trial had been formally terminated for future development at the time of the Board, for data continuity and consistency purposes, Director UKAB and the UKAB Secretariat provided a shadow assessment of ERC.