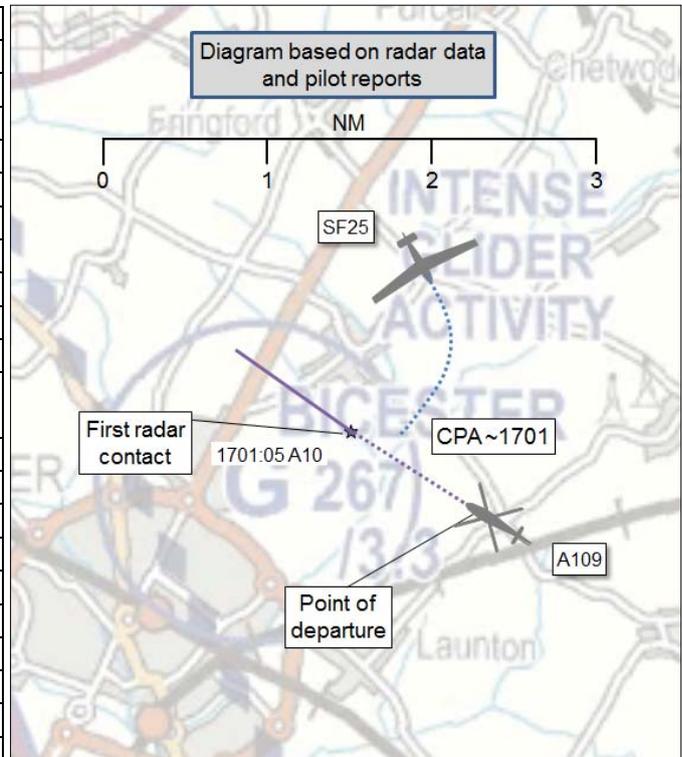


AIRPROX REPORT No 2016047

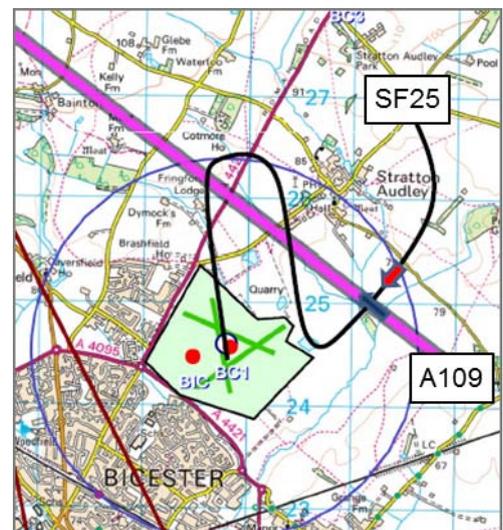
Date: 16 Feb 2016 Time: 1701Z Position: 5155N 00107W Location: Bicester (elev 267ft)

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	SF25	A109
Operator	Civ Trg	Civ Comm
Airspace	London FIR	London FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	VFR
Service	None	None
Altitude/FL	NK	1000ft
Transponder	Not fitted	A, C, S
Reported		
Colours	Red, white	Blue, silver
Lighting	NK	Land/taxi, position, strobes
Conditions	VMC	VMC
Visibility	>10km	>10km
Altitude/FL	1000ft	700ft
Altimeter	QFE (NK hPa)	NK
Heading	240°	315°
Speed	70kt	90kt
ACAS/TAS	FLARM	TAS
Alert	None	None
Separation		
Reported	0ft V/150m H	Not seen
Recorded	NK	



THE SF25 INSTRUCTOR reports that he had completed a local training flight and was joining downwind left-hand for RW18, descending through about 1000ft, when both pilots saw a helicopter about 100-200m ahead. The dark, sleek, helicopter was climbing through the horizon and moving fast from left to right with a flashing red strobe light, clearly visible against a grey cloudy sky (sunset 17:20). The helicopter took off from a local Heliport, where it had stopped to refuel, and was heading straight in a north-westerly direction. The SF25 pilot had positioned just to the east of Stratton Audley at about 1200ft QFE and was descending to circuit height to the south of Stratton Audley, heading southwest, straight or in a gentle right turn, when the helicopter was seen. No avoiding action was taken as there was no risk of collision. The instructor commented that both motor-glider pilots were surprised to see a helicopter passing through the Bicester circuit. No radio call was heard from the helicopter pilot. The SF25 pilot made the usual 'traffic com' radio calls before joining and when in the circuit. The SF25 instructor commented that he had never heard a radio call from helicopters using the local Heliport although he was aware of occasional movements and looked out for them. Usually the helicopters kept well clear of the airfield and circuit. After contacting the local Heliport, the SF25 instructor was contacted by the A109 pilot who said there were no gliders or winch on the airfield so he thought the airfield wasn't active. The SF25 instructor commented that as far as he was aware, his was the only aircraft flying out of Bicester on that late afternoon; there was no gliding taking place and the winch was not out. The SF25 instructor stated that, in his opinion, the A109 pilot was wrong to assume that the circuit was not active because there was no



SF25 instructor depiction of encounter geometry

winch out, that powered aircraft regularly flew in the circuit, especially when there was no gliding, and that they would prefer it if helicopters kept away from the circuit pattern by routeing east of Stratton Audley, which he understood to be normal practice.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'None'.

THE A109 PILOT reports departing from a private site near Bicester. After a good lookout, he departed to the northwest, avoiding Bicester Gliding Site, with which he was 'very familiar'. He continued to the northwest as no other aircraft were seen or were indicated on his TAS. In subsequent correspondence, he stated that the helicopter site operating company do not operate a 'heliport'; it is a private field with helicopters based there and which accommodates visiting aircraft. The operating company are fully aware of the operations conducted at Bicester Gliding site, and make every effort to apply sound airmanship principles to avoid activity in the vicinity of the site.

Factual Background

The weather at Oxford was recorded as follows:

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METAR EGTK 161720Z 20008KT 9999 FEW034 04/00 Q1030=
METAR EGTK 161650Z 20010KT 9999 FEW040 05/00 Q1029=
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Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

The SF25 and A109 pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard¹. If the incident geometry is considered as converging then the A109 pilot was required to give way to the SF25². An aircraft operated on or in the vicinity of an aerodrome shall conform with or avoid the pattern of traffic formed by other aircraft in operation³.

Comments

BGA

Many gliding sites continue to be active after ground equipment has been put away, with gliders and powered aircraft returning up until dark. It would be wise to assume a site is operational unless positively confirmed otherwise.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when an SF25 and an A109 flew into proximity at about 1701 on Tuesday 16th February 2016. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC, neither in receipt of a Flight Information Service.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from both pilots and radar photographs/video recordings.

Members first considered the pilots' actions. Some felt that although the A109 pilot had taken some reasonable precautions before transiting to the northwest, there was little time in which to assess whether aircraft were operating at Bicester and that he was ill advised to transit in such close proximity to a normally busy gliding site without making a radio call on the in-use frequency, even at the time of evening at which the Airprox occurred. Other members noted that the SF25 pilot was not

¹ SERA.3205 Proximity.

² SERA.3210 Right-of-way (c)(2) Converging.

³ SERA.3225 Operation on and in the Vicinity of an Aerodrome.

in the visual circuit when he saw the A109 and that this situation simply amounted to an encounter in Class G airspace where it was for the A109 pilot to give way to traffic on his right. He could not give way to traffic that he did not see, and therefore avoidance of collision rested on the fact that both pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance. Members noted that the SF25 pilot's report indicated that his was a late sighting and that there was very little time available, if at all, in which to increase separation. In the end, members agreed that the cause of the Airprox was a late sighting by the SF25 pilot and a non-sighting by the A109 pilot. Notwithstanding, the SF25 pilot described the risk of collision as 'none', and members were satisfied that although normal safety standards had not pertained, the separation was such that there was no risk of collision.

During the debate, members wondered whether, given the close proximity of the helicopter site and Bicester airfield, some degree of coordination would be helpful, although it was recognised that that was for the appropriate parties to agree on. Members agreed that coordination may not be straight forward, for example it was noted that the SF25 pilot's suggestion that aircraft remain east of Stratton Audley would have resulted in the A109 pilot tracking head-on to the SF25 in this incident. That being said, they also agreed that a routine transmission from the A109 on Bicester's operating frequency would have been appropriate if he intended to route close to the airfield; such a transmission could be made 'blind' even if he thought that the airfield was inactive, thus providing an opportunity to increase the SA of airfield users and himself were they to respond. Members also agreed that although traffic in and around an airfield was afforded some degree of protection under regulation SERA.3225, if Bicester operators considered that their airfield required more protection than this then the most effective mitigation against conflict with other traffic was to apply for the establishment of an ATZ.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A late sighting by the SF25 pilot and a non-sighting by the A109 pilot.

Degree of Risk: C.