AIRPROX REPORT No 2025200

Date: 10 Sep 2025 Time: 1418Z Position: 5248N 00042W Location: 2NM SE Saltby

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	DR400	EC135
Operator	Civ FW	Civ Comm
Airspace	London FIR	London FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	VFR
Service	None	Listening Out
Provider	N/A	Wittering/E Mids
Altitude/FL	FL014	FL015
Transponder	A, C	A, C, S
Reported		
Colours	Blue, White	Yellow
Lighting	Nav, Landing	Landing, Nav, HISL
Conditions	VMC	VMC
Visibility	5-10km	5-10km
Altitude/FL	1400ft	1770ft (740ft agl)
Altimeter	QFE (980hPa)	QNH
Heading	110°	284°
Speed	75kt	120kt
ACAS/TAS	SkyEcho	SkyEcho, TAS
Alert	Information	None
Separation at CPA		
Reported	0ft V/0.5NM H	30ft V/500ft H
Recorded	100ft V/0.1NM H	

THE DR400 PILOT reports that, having departed Saltby glider site with a glider under tow, at approximately 1300-1400ft they saw a helicopter at 11 o'clock relative to the towplane and glider. The helicopter was spotted about 10-15sec before passing abeam on the right side. The helicopter had landing/bright lights on which enabled early recognition to avoid. The helicopter was tracking westbound at the same level. They took avoiding action by turning to put the helicopter in the 1 o'clock position via a left turn, whilst simultaneously calling on Saltby glider common frequency to the glider under tow. The manoeuvre was completed successfully, without the need for excessive bank or glider release. The helicopter showed no sign of recognition of the towplane and glider passing down its right side, and did not appear to alter course. Without the avoiding action, the helicopter was on a constant bearing at 11 o'clock, so the risk would have been higher. The weather was likely a contributory factor as many showers were located to the east of Saltby and the helicopter was heading towards the showers. Sunlight was also contrasting between very bright and dark cloud/rain shade. They were able to adjust course with a 15-20° banked turn with the glider on tow, but the helicopter passed close enough that they were able to read the wording painted on its side easily. The helicopter was very close to the glider site, below published winch-launch height.

The pilot assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

THE EC135 PILOT reports that they were tasked to a patrol in the Crowland area and, on completion, were returning to [base]. A call to Saltby had been made earlier when passing, with no response, and a "nothing heard" transmitted. They were therefore with Wittering, East Midlands and Nottingham for the return flight, remaining outside the Saltby Zone. When seen, the aircraft were on a reciprocal course to the north of their track inside Saltby area. They were not converging and not considered a threat. There was no TAS alert and the crew did not consider this to be an Airprox due to the lack of convergence with aircraft that appeared to be operating inside their zone [sic] with their aircraft outside it.

The pilot assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

Factual Background

The weather at RAF Cranwell was recorded as follows:

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METAR EGYD 101350Z 16014KT 9999 FEW030 18/14 Q0998 TEMPO 7000 SHRA RMK BLU TEMPO WHT=
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Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

An analysis of the NATS radar replay was undertaken, the EC135 could be seen and identified using Mode S data, squawking 0036 (powerline inspection) and indicating FL015. The DR400 did not appear on the radar until just before the Airprox at 1418:06, but could be identified using Mode S data, and was squawking 0034 (glider towing) and indicating FL012, see Figure 1. When assessing ADS-B data sources, information on the EC135 was available throughout, however the DR400 did not show on ADS-B until after the event.

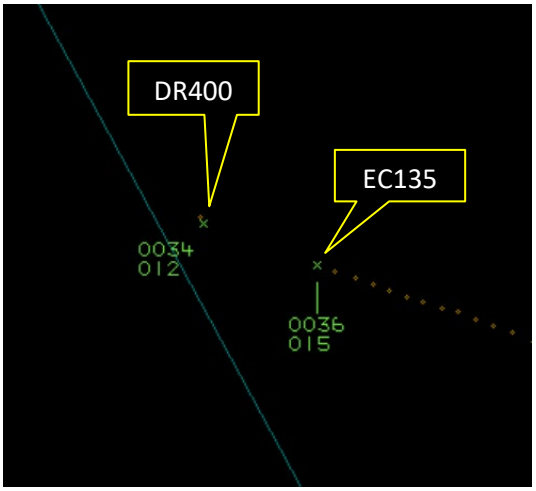


Figure 1 – 1408:06, the DR400 first appeared on the NATS radar replay.

Fortunately, the DR400 pilot provided GPS track data for their flight and the diagram at the top of the report could be compiled by using the radar replay data and the GPS data. CPA was between data points and was therefore just after 1418:22, at this point the radar data indicated 100ft and 0.1NM separation. Comparing the GPS data with the radar data for the EC135 gave a similar CPA of approximately 0.15NM and approximately 100ft.

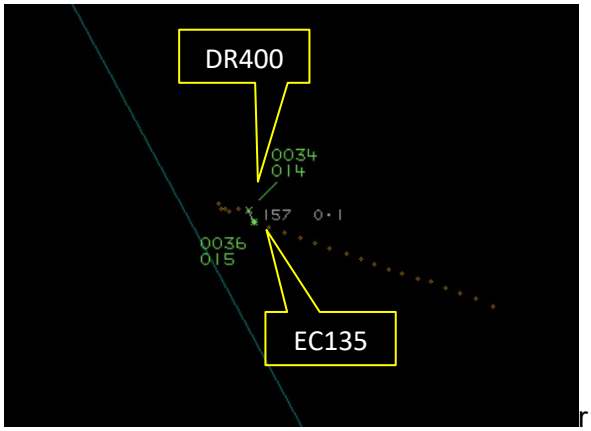


Figure 2 – CPA 1418:22

The DR400 and EC135 pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard.[1] If the incident geometry is considered as head-on or nearly so then both pilots were required to turn to the right.[2]

Comments

BGA

Saltby is one of about 80 permanent gliding sites listed in UK AIP ENR 5.5 and labelled on CAA VFR charts by a letter "G" inside a 1NM radius circle (as shown in the chart segment in Part A). However, this circle is not an airspace or zone boundary, nor is there any specific active radius for a gliding site. A greater density of gliders (and aircraft towing gliders) may be expected nearby at any time during daylight hours, and at any altitude up to cloudbase, accompanied by high-tensile-strength winch-launch cables overhead the site at up to 3000ft AAL (3500ft AMSL).

Pilots of gliders and glider tugs operating from Saltby may broadcast their intentions on the notified VHF radio channel (see ENR 5.5 and VFR charts) to aid situational awareness, using "Unattended Aerodrome" phraseology (CAP 413 §4.162 et seq). The EC135 pilot is to be commended for also broadcasting their intentions on this channel during their earlier transit through the area. However, reception of such radio calls cannot be guaranteed, and in any case, according to CAP 413 §4.165, "No reply to an unattended aerodrome report shall be transmitted".

Both pilots are also to be commended for using their forward-pointing high-intensity landing lights in full daylight to aid visual conspicuity in this direction. The EC135's illuminated landing lights may have assisted its visual acquisition by the DR400 pilot.

Both aircraft were equipped with compatible Low-Power ADS-B Transceivers (LPATs) which should have alerted each pilot to the other aircraft's presence. However, the EC135 pilot does not report receiving such information via their LPAT. It would be useful to understand why.

Glider/Tug aerotow combinations have limited manoeuvrability, and are best given a wide berth.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a DR400 and an EC135 flew into proximity 2NM southeast of Saltby at 1418Z on Wednesday 10th September 2025. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC. Neither pilot was in receipt of an ATS.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from both pilots, radar photographs/video recordings and GPS track data for the DR400. Relevant contributory factors mentioned during the Board's discussions are highlighted within the text in bold, with the numbers referring to the Contributory Factors table displayed in Part C.

The Board first discussed the actions of the DR400 pilot. They had been towing a glider when they had spotted the EC135 transiting to the south of them in the opposite direction. Members noted that the pilot reported receiving generic information from their EWS (**CF2**). Gliding members reminded the Board that, as a tug and glider combination, the pilot would have had limited manoeuvring options as they would have been cognisant of the glider behind and that this may have given the pilot heightened awareness of the positioning of the EC135. Members noted that the DR400 pilot had seen the EC135 with enough time to make a turn without having to release the glider. Even so, the pilot had been concerned by the proximity of the helicopter (**CF4**).

[1] (UK) SERA.3205 Proximity.
[2] (UK) SERA.3210 Right-of-way (c)(1) Approaching head-on.

Turning to the actions of the EC135 pilot, members observed that the pilot had routed past Saltby earlier in the day and had made a call on the frequency, but had not received an answer, so had not called on the return trip. Members were reminded that gliding sites are usually operated without any formal air to ground service and that, as such, the gliding community was not permitted to respond to calls on the radio, furthermore, that the Board had previously recommended to the CAA that this situation be reviewed.[3] Pilots could sometimes receive an acknowledgment from any pilots on frequency who possessed a FRTOL, but this was not guaranteed, and so pilots should not expect to receive an answer when calling on the frequency of an unattended glider site, meaning that the absence of a reply does not necessarily mean the absence of activity at the site. Nevertheless, members agreed that, where possible, pilots should try to give a radio call when transiting close by. Although the DR400 pilot reported receiving information on the EC135 from their EWS, the EC135 pilot, who had the same system, reported no such reciprocal information (**CF3**), and members were uncertain as to why that should be the case, surmising that it had possibly been due to aerial blanking. The EC135 pilot therefore had only generic information that there may have been gliders in the vicinity (**CF2**). Members then discussed whether the EC135 pilot could have requested a LARS, with those familiar with the area noting that East Midlands would usually have provided a LARS in the area (**CF1**), although the height of the helicopter may have prevented the pilot from receiving a Traffic Service. The Board agreed that the EC135 pilot had probably become visual with the DR400 after the other pilot had taken avoiding action, and so had been comfortable with the separation and had not thought the encounter to have been an Airprox, although some members opined that, ideally, there would have been a greater separation between the two aircraft.

When determining the risk, the Board considered the reports from both pilots together with the radar replay and GPS data. They unanimously agreed that the DR400 pilot had taken early action to avert the risk of collision, but assessed that the final separation, at around 100ft and 0.1NM, meant that safety had been degraded, Risk Category C.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND RISK

Contributory Factors:

	2025200			
CF	**Factor**	**Description**	**ECCAIRS Amplification**	**UKAB Amplification**
	Flight Elements			
	• Tactical Planning and Execution			
1	Human Factors	• Communications by Flight Crew with ANS	An event related to the communications between the flight crew and the air navigation service.	Pilot did not request appropriate ATS service or communicate with appropriate provider
	• Situational Awareness of the Conflicting Aircraft and Action			
2	Contextual	• Situational Awareness and Sensory Events	Events involving a flight crew's awareness and perception of situations	Pilot had no, late, inaccurate or only generic, Situational Awareness
	• Electronic Warning System Operation and Compliance			
3	Human Factors	• Response to Warning System	An event involving the incorrect response of flight crew following the operation of an aircraft warning system	CWS misinterpreted, not optimally actioned or CWS alert expected but none reported
	• See and Avoid			
4	Human Factors	• Perception of Visual Information	Events involving flight crew incorrectly perceiving a situation visually and then taking the wrong course of action or path of movement	Pilot was concerned by the proximity of the other aircraft

Degree of Risk: C.

[3] Airprox 2025153

Safety Barrier Assessment[4]

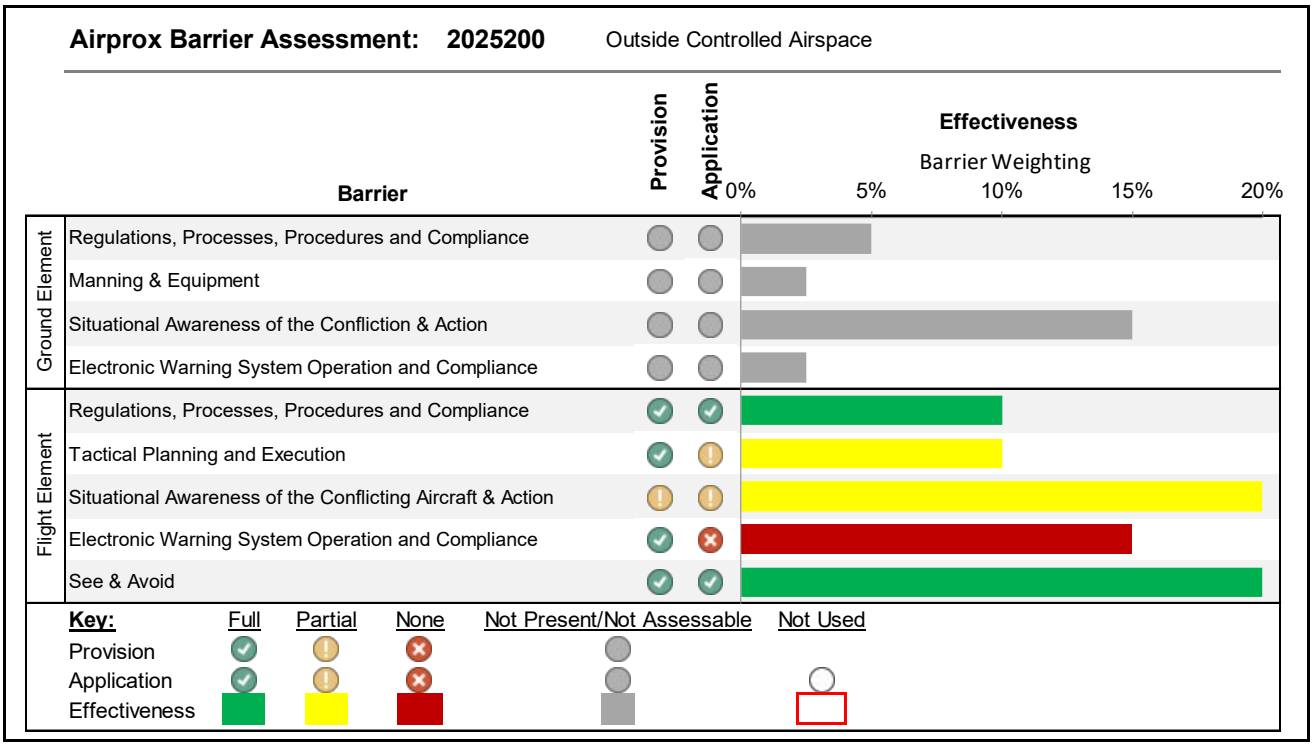
In assessing the effectiveness of the safety barriers associated with this incident, the Board concluded that the key factors had been that:

Flight Elements:

Tactical Planning and Execution was assessed as **partially effective** because the EC135 pilot could have called an ATSU for a LARS.

Situational Awareness of the Conflicting Aircraft and Action were assessed as **partially effective** because the EC135 pilot had generic situational awareness that gliders would be operating in the area, and the DR400 pilot had generic situational awareness on the EC135 from their EWS.

Electronic Warning System Operation and Compliance were assessed as **ineffective** because the EWS on the EC135 did not alert when one would have been expected.



[4] The UK Airprox Board scheme for assessing the Availability, Functionality and Effectiveness of safety barriers can be found on the UKAB Website.