

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012002

Date/Time: 8 Jan 2012 1403Z (Sunday)

Position: 5143N 00009E (RW20 North Weald - elev 321ft)

Airspace: LFIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: C150 Model a/c

Operator: Civ Pte Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 50ft↑ NR
aal agl

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC NR

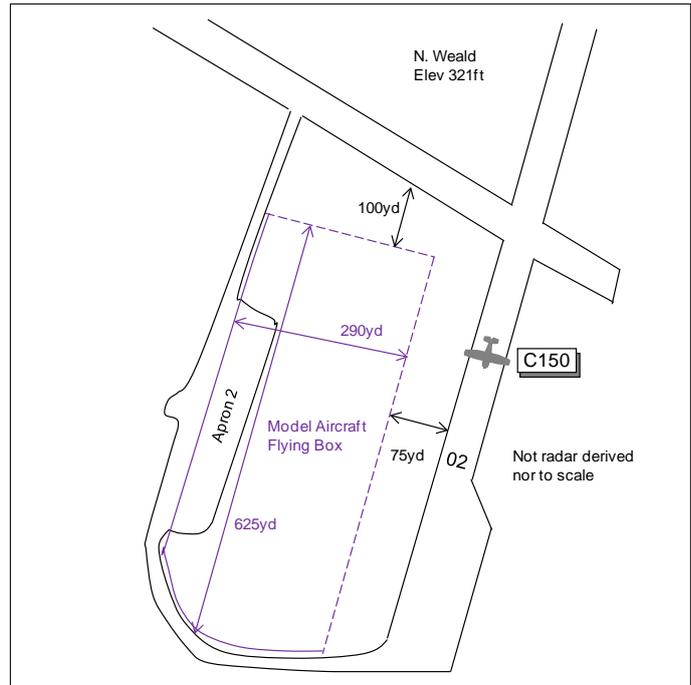
Visibility: >10km NR

Reported Separation:

4m V/30m H Not seen

Recorded Separation:

NR



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE C150 PILOT reports on departure from N Weald RW20 and in receipt of an A/G service from N Weald Radio on 123.525MHz, squawking 7010 with Mode C. The visibility was >10km flying clear below cloud in VMC and the ac was coloured white/red; lighting was not reported. Heading 200° at 70kt climbing straight ahead through 50ft aal he saw a model ac moving fast towards his flightpath in his 1-2 o'clock range 50m at roughly the same height. The model then turned sharply to port 180° and flew away from the RW. Although he didn't have time to react he believed that it was about 30m at its closest point. He did not declare an Airprox at the time and he assessed the risk of collision as none.

The model involved was a low-wing single-engine type with about 4-5ft wingspan. He opined that model ac should not be flying so close to an active RW, believing that had the operator lost control then he may not be here today. A colleague of his also commented on how close model ac were being flown to an active RW when there is a lot more space available that would not cause a problem. A published Flight Guide shows the area for model ac [apron W of RW02 threshold] though there is nothing which shows the limits that they should stay within or that model ac will be flying when ac are arriving or departing. He felt that model flying should not carry on at its present location when the RW is active.

UKAB Note (1): The AIDU Minor Aerodromes and Microlight Sites publication also shows that model ac fly from an apron to the W of RW02 threshold. Local Hazards include model flying on the A/D during daylight hours.

THE MODEL A/C OPERATOR reports flying an 88in wingspan model YAK54 between 1400 and 1515hr but did not recall at any point being in conflict with a C150. Throughout his flights he had adhered to the 'model flying box' at N Weald; the 'box' is limited airspace that is strictly policed by both his own club members and the ground control at the airfield. He was not made aware that rules on this or any other matter had been breached. To offer a safe system of operations, the Model Flying Club (MFC), airfield ATC and Operations use a ground to ground radio system that is manned at all times during their flying sessions. An aerial photo of N Weald with the Flying Box superimposed was provided as well as the flight pattern flown.

THE MODEL FLYING CLUB COMMITTEE reports the model ac operator was believed to be identified correctly from the timing and description of the model given by the C150 pilot. What the committee believes has happened is a mis-sighting due to perspective. The model in question has a wingspan of 2.23m (>7ft) and what the C150 pilot saw was not a 4ft wingspan model at 50yd converging to approximately 30yd but the larger 7ft wingspan model further away converging but within the RW02/20 airspace box allocated to model flying. The C150 pilot may have been a visitor and not familiar with model flying on Apron 2. Local pilots are aware of their presence and are invariably told by 'ATC' when they are active whilst ac are taking-off or are on short final on RW20/02. If full size ac need to enter the airspace box in an emergency, model flyers are advised by ATC and stand down. The flying members are situated on Apron 2 in the centre to the W side, adjacent to but not on the perimeter track. All models are flown looking E, irrespective of wind direction. The maximum height allowed is 400ft QFE. They also maintain a full-time member who monitors the height and location of models within the boundaries and approaching full size ac, at or below 400ft, who may not have been advised by ATC that models are active. On this occasion the spotter did not see any conflict with a C150. The committee could not understand why the C150 pilot did not radio ATC at the time of the alleged Airprox and left the reporting until the end of his flight. Had he done so, ATC would have contacted the model flyers immediately on the ground radio and it would have been possible to get a more accurate fix on the model alleged to have been involved. They received no advice whatsoever nor were they advised that one of their models had encroached outside the 'box'. Following a discussion with the Aerodrome Manager it was found that the flying box (625yd N-S and 290yd E-W, E boundary 75 yd from W edge of RW02/20) agreed with ATC Operations in June 2010 and incorporated in the MFC Licence and Lease had not been included into the Aerodrome Operation Manual (AOM). The AOM will be updated later in 2012.

THE BMFA reports the club operate under the terms of a well defined set of practices and protocols which have been agreed with the aerodrome management. A significant aspect of this arrangement is the requirement for model flyers to be in contact with Tower at all times through a handheld radio and in addition to this a 'spotter' is required at all flying sessions. In the majority of cases where model flying takes place on a full size active aerodrome it is only outside the notified hours of operation. However there are a few where the 2 activities co-exist with no problems whatsoever, North Weald is a good example of this. Modern radio equipment has become spectacularly reliable so the days of interference generated 'shootdowns' are in reality a thing of the past. In addition to this all radio controlled model ac are legally required to be fitted with a failsafe that upon loss or corruption of the signal brings the throttle to closed or idle. Also, as with the club based at North Weald, clubs that operate in close proximity to full size aviation activity generally set a minimum standard of pilot certification along with the implementation of additional measures such as the requirement for a 'spotter' at all flying sessions. Acting as second pair of eyes, the 'spotter' would obtain the most accurate view of the flying area 'infringements' from a location in line with the edge of the box however by the nature of the role the 'spotter' needs to be located with the pilot in order that communication takes place throughout the flight. At the distances involved it would be apparent from the pilot's box (by the spotter) when an ac was flying on close proximity to the edge of the defined flying area. This of course relies on a degree of competency and experience on the part of both the spotter and the pilot, hence the certification requirements specified in the club rules.

UKAB Note (1): The N Weald Aerodrome Manager provided a copy of the AOM which included detailed procedures to be followed by the MFC and 2 graphics; the first depicting 3 areas set aside on the aerodrome for model flying and the second showing prohibited areas i.e. 'no-fly' zones to models. However, neither of these graphics correlated with the graphic provided by the MFC Committee. The Aerodrome Manager met with the MFC Committee and agreed the 'Flying Box' portrayed in the graphic provided by the MFC was correct and that he will ensure that the information available to pilots contained within relevant flight guides and the AOM regarding model flying will be amended accordingly.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac and reports from the appropriate operating authorities.

It was clear that the C150 pilot was surprised by the proximity of the model ac while on departure. Without accurate information as to the dimensions and position of the 'flying box', the C150 pilot was unaware that model ac could be flying to within 75yd of the RW edge during normal operations. The model was seen an estimated 50m away and to have turned sharply away at a distance of 30m. Members agreed with the suggestion in the Model Flying Club Committee's report that the model ac's large size - a 7ft wingspan and not 4-5ft - may have created the impression that it was closer than it appeared and the actual separation distances would have been greater than those estimated. A Member questioned whether flying a model towards an active RW with an ac climbing out was best practice. The Flt Ops Advisor confirmed that from his perspective nothing illegal had occurred with the model ac flying in accordance with BMFA procedures; however, he agreed that any manoeuvre towards an active RW could give rise for concern from pilots arriving or departing. Members believed that this incident 'boiled down' to a perception issue, with the C150 pilot unaware of the model flying box, concerned with the model ac's proximity and perceiving a conflict. From the information available, the Board believed that in the end this had been a benign event where normal procedures, safety standards and parameters were not breached.

Given that normal ac and model flying operations routinely occur concurrently but there had been lack of information available to the C150 pilot, Members agreed that the North Weald Aerodrome Operator should update the AOM and ensure the relevant Flight Guides reflect this update.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Pilot perceived conflict.

Degree of Risk: E.

Recommendation: The North Weald Aerodrome Operator is recommended to update the Aerodrome Operating Manual and ensure the relevant Flight Guides reflect the update.