

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012038

Date/Time: 11 Mar 2012 1442Z (Sunday)

Position: 5338N 00059W (10nm
N Doncaster/Sheffield)

Airspace: Lon FIR (Class: G)
Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Paramotor EC120

Operator: Civ Pte Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 400ft 1000/1500ft
QFE NK

Weather: VMC NR VMC NR

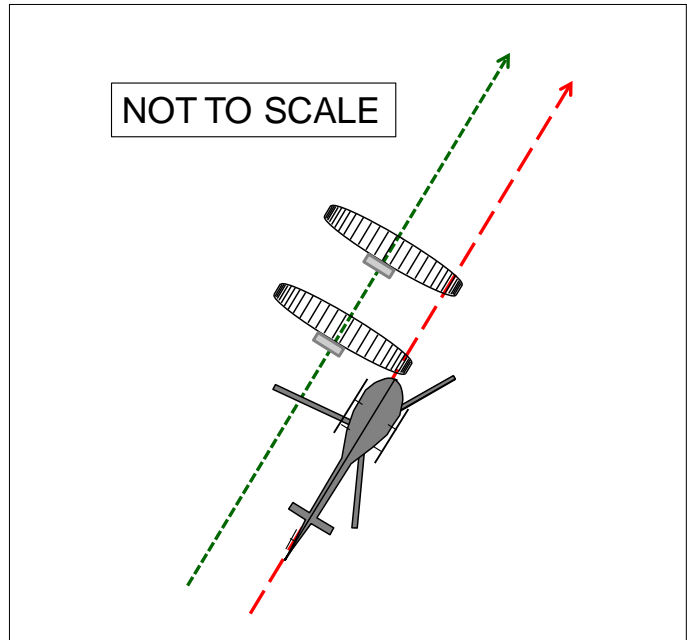
Visibility: 10km >10km

Reported Separation:

200ft V/10ft H Not Seen

Recorded Separation:

(See UKAB Note (1))



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE PARAMOTOR PILOT reports flying an orange and black paramotor with no lights or SSR but he carried a radio. Having taken off from a field into a 5–7mph W'ly breeze he carried out a left turn and proceeded to climb out on a NE heading with the intention of then flying N (parallel with the M18) to Drax Power Station, after he had cleared local farms and houses. During the climb heading 035° at 25kt and at around 400ft agl, he became aware of a fast moving shadow approaching rapidly from behind and at about the same time a pilot on the ground radioed to inform him that a helicopter was behind him. A fellow paramotor pilot was also taking off and was ¼nm behind him and the helicopter passed him slightly to his right with a height clearance of about 250ft.

As the helicopter flew over the top of his wing (about 10ft to his left and parallel to his flight path and about 200ft above him); he felt a slight disturbance similar to that encountered in a thermal gust and braced himself for a sudden deflation however, the wing remained in a stable condition. He was concerned that the helicopter pilot had either not seen the two brightly coloured wings on a clear day or had not altered his flight path to take avoiding action.

The consequences of helicopter down draft affecting flexible paraglider wings would be rapid collapse of the wing with possible fatal results, especially at low level where deployment of an emergency parachute may not be successful.

UKAB Note (1): The Paramotor pilot provided a photograph of the incident taken by a ground observer at the take off point. It showed the identified helicopter passing to the right and above the second paramotor at distances similar to those calculated at UKAB Note (2) below. (Due to the oblique angle of the shot, they could not be estimated accurately).

THE EC120 PILOT provided an incomplete report saying that at the time he was on a private VFR flight with a passenger from a private site near Doncaster, general handling between 1000 and 1500ft agl in good visibility. He did not see any other ac.

UKAB Note (2): The recording of the Claxby radar showed the EC120 throughout. It was positively identified from its Mode S (enhanced) data. During the period the ac tracked 033°, passing 0.32nm (~600m) to the E of the reported position at 1444:38. The position of the incident reported by the paramotor was to 2 decimal places, probably from a GPS and therefore probably accurate; at the time the helicopter was indicating FL002 (Mode C), the Doncaster QNH was 1036hPa and the terrain at the incident position is about 10ft; therefore the EC120 was at 880ft agl. If the Paramotor(s) was/were, as reported at 400ft there would have been about 480ft vertical separation.

ATSI reports that this Airprox was believed to have occurred at 1441:51, about 10nm N of Doncaster Airport in Class G airspace, between a Eurocopter EC120B (EC120) and a Paramotor. The position of the reported Airprox is below the Doncaster Control Area, CTA-5, which has a base alt of 2000ft.

The EC120 was operating VFR from a private site at Edenthorpe 5.6nm NW of Doncaster Airport and the paramotor was operating on a VFR training flight from Wormley Hill, a private site 10nm N of Doncaster Airport.

CAA ATSI had access to the RTF recording, NATS Area Radar recordings and the pilots' written reports. The Doncaster weather was:

METAR EGCN 111420Z 31010KT CAVOK 18/09 Q1036=

At 1441:40 the EC120 helicopter contacted Doncaster Radar and reported leaving CAS from Edenthorpe and heading N; the controller gave the Doncaster QNH 1036, issued a squawk 6160 and agreed to provide a BS outside controlled airspace.

At 1441:57, radar recording first showed the EC120, 5.6nm NW of Doncaster airport, tracking N, indicating minus FL002 (converts to an altitude of 420ft with QNH 1036 and 1mb equal to 27ft). At 1443:50, the EC120 crossed the boundary of CAS, the controller advised the pilot about a gliding site N of the zone and active up to 4500ft and the pilot reported going as far as the M62 before routing back.

The Paramotor pilot's report indicated that after departing from the field at Wormley Hill, he climbed on a NE'ly heading to a height of 400ft agl. (The elevation of Wormley Hill is approximately 15ft). The Paramotor pilot reported that he became aware of a helicopter approaching from behind and around 200ft above.

At 1444:51, radar recording showed the EC120, passing the approximate position of the reported Airprox, indicating FL002 (820ft). Neither, the NATS area radar recording, nor the Doncaster radar recording showed any other ac in the immediate vicinity.

The EC120 then routed N calling for rejoin at 1451:56 via the Thorpe Marsh power station and reported it to be the last flight of the day. The EC120 pilot did not mention the Paramotor or any other aircraft in his close proximity.

ATC were not aware of the Airprox and no report was received from Doncaster ATC.

The Airprox occurred when the Paramotor and EC120 helicopter came into close proximity within Class G airspace. The Paramotor was not shown on the Doncaster radar display and the Doncaster controller would have been unable to pass any warning to the EC120 helicopter in receipt of a BS.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar recordings [the paramotors were not displayed], reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC authorities.

Although Members noted that this incident took place in Class G airspace where the respective pilots had an equal and shared responsibility to 'see and avoid' other ac, since the helicopter was approaching from above and behind the paramotor(s), Members agreed that it would be unreasonable to expect their pilots to see it in time to manoeuvre to avoid it. The paramotor(s) on the other hand, were directly ahead of the helicopter, albeit well below it, and its pilot was in a position to see them and, if he felt it warranted, avoid them by a greater lateral margin. Several Members thought that the vertical separation extant was adequate and the incident had been a 'normal' operation with no risk attached; the same number [five] thought that although there had been no risk of collision, some horizontal separation should have been afforded by the helicopter pilot to positively ensure safety; the Chairman agreed with the latter view. Three Members abstained and another considered that there was not enough information on which to base a decision [Risk D].

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A non-sighting by the EC120 pilot.

Degree of Risk: C.