BGA LAWS AND RULES
CROSS COUNTRY AND AIRSPACE GUIDANCE

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1. Background

UK airspace is complex. In part that complexity occurs because of the need to minimise controlled airspace. Airspace changes shape quite regularly. As such all pilots need to use the latest chart information. By operating with out of date or incomplete information pilots can place innocent third parties at risk and seriously damage the reputation of gliding. Each year there are a significant number of infringements of controlled airspace (primarily by aeroplanes). Any infringement can endanger others, can result in significant disruption, results in negative publicity and is totally unacceptable.

A 2016 analysis of over 500 infringements identified that around 90% of the GA pilots who infringed were not using a GPS or GPS moving map.

Every year, a number of Airprox's are reported. An airprox is a reported 'close encounter'. The reports range from visual sightings at many nm's distance (often for reasons that go beyond safety) through to near collisions where the pilots reacted just in time. Or were just lucky. It should be appreciated that normal proximity between gliders is perceived to be frighteningly close by other aviators.

Anticipating potential threats and inconveniences to other airspace users can be improved through:

- Careful pre-flight planning, and
- In-flight awareness and decision making

The following guidance identifies some of the areas in which pre-flight planning and decision making are particularly important if pilots are to keep legal and safe while flying cross country. Pilots are individually responsible for compliance with the ANO and associated requirements. Sometimes this may require detailed pre-flight preparation.

2. Guidance

Cross-country/soaring flights should be planned and flown to minimise risk and inconvenience to other airspace users. There are a number of considerations, including:

a) NOTAMs:
Use a good NOTAM checking tool to check for NOTAMs around the task area, including any Restricted Area's (Temporary). Take care to understand dimensions and local timings. The 'Restrictions of Flying' free-phone for a final check before getting airborne is helpful, particularly during the mid-summer flying display season. 0500 354802.

b) Controlled airspace:
Glider pilots can obtain permission to enter certain controlled airspace. In that case, unless operating under the terms of an agreed Letter of Authority (LoA), it is likely that the glider pilot will have to regularly communicate with a controller and comply with instructions. The realities of flying a glider mean that in the majority of cases, it is *impractical* to operate in controlled airspace.

Glider pilots can (supported by GPS moving maps) and do fly close to controlled airspace boundaries. Glider pilots are fully entitled to fly right up to the edge of controlled airspace - but unfortunately in most cases the controllers do not know if the radar trace will stop at the edge. Unless advised, the controllers will not know the glider pilot's intentions and as a consequence route aircraft under their control at least three miles away from any glider showing on their radar screen.

Glider pilots intending to stay outside controlled airspace but operating horizontally close to controlled airspace, or flying over controlled airspace should endeavour to contact the appropriate Air Traffic Control (ATC) unit to explain their intentions. The ATC unit will recognise a glider if the radio-call includes 'glider' as well as the G-xxxx registration. The following information is generally required by the controller - glider position, height, intention (eg 'staying clear of the zone') and any service requested (most likely to be 'no service required').

c) Air Traffic Zones:
Pilots invariably need permission to enter an ATZ. . When flying very close to an ATZ, particularly one known to have instrument traffic, glider pilots should ideally listen out on the ATZ frequency. If at any stage the glider pilot believes that there will be a need to enter the ATZ, the pilot should make formal contact with ATC prefixing the call with 'glider', state their need (eg to enter the ATZ) and state their intentions (eg to climb or to land).

d) Radio Mandatory Zones
RMZ airspace is operated in accordance with the background airspace classification. An aircraft operating in an RMZ is not subject to an ATC clearance. Before entering an RMZ call the appropriate station with the glider call-sign, type of aircraft, position, level, and intentions . Maintain continuous air-ground voice communication while within the RMZ. If unable to establish two-way radio communication with the RMZ ATC, the pilot is to avoid

the RMZ airspace. The pilot must advise the RMZ ATC authority when exiting the RMZ (or as soon as practical after exiting).

e) Instrument traffic procedures in class G and Instrument Landing System (ILS) approach paths:

A number of airfields in the UK have instrument traffic procedures which are detailed in the UK AIP. In some cases the instrument approaches are indicated by a feather on the ½ mil chart (for example Cambridge, Gloucester, Exeter, Cranfield, Oxford). These instrument approaches are available as a file for most gliding moving map software.

Invariably, instrument traffic operating in Class G is not looking out. Glider pilots should aim to avoid the airfield overhead or the ILS approach areas. When operating close to these airfields, pilots should listen out on the ATC frequency. Where there is a need to operate overhead the airfield, or when vertically close to and when horizontally within say an approximate 20 degree arc either side of the ILS 'slope', it can be very helpful if the glider pilot makes contact with ATC prefixing the call with 'glider', stating their location (eg 5nm NE of the airfield at 2000') and stating their intentions (eg to climb, to glide to xxxxx, etc). Don't forget that last minute calls can result in pilot overload as the pressure comes on. Air traffic controllers have almost no appreciation of pilot workload. As ever, aviate, navigate and communicate in that order.

f) Visual Reporting Points:

VRPs at major airports should be treated with caution due to possible conflicts with powered traffic that is more than likely engrossed with the radio.

g) Parachute Drop Zones:

The list of parachute sites and the appropriate contact ATC frequency is on the aviation charts as a block of information. Details of all sites, including military, can also be found in the UK AIP. It is always best to try to contact the parachute site by telephone for pre-flight briefing when task setting.

When in-flight, the local ATC unit should be able to say if the site is likely to be active. The glider pilot can then ask for the Dropping Zone (DZ) frequency to check the current activity. By talking directly to the parachute site DZ, one may be allowed to cross safely. If they are busy, fly around the zone. Some sites only inform the parent ATC unit when the drop aircraft is airborne, although they are likely to be active all day. In the event of receiving a nil response from the DZ frequency, the glider pilot should act on the information given by the ATC unit *and, if in any doubt, remain clear of the site.*

Be aware that drop-planes may operate outside as well as inside the parachute zones in order to position themselves for the drop. They often manoeuvre sharply with steep descents.The major sites at Langar, Peterborough / Sibson, Hinton-in-the Hedges and Weston-on-the-Green are very busy. Some sites are very difficult to identify. A pilot will not see a free falling parachutist in time to avoid a collision. *If in doubt, stay out.*

Understanding the operating environment and then planning and flying in a way that avoids hazards or mitigates definitely helps to maintain a reasonable level of risk to third parties and glider pilots. Beyond the obvious and immediate safety considerations, failure to do so will

certainly contribute to the demise of gliding through increasing airspace and or equipage restrictions.

3. Helpful references

http://airspacesafety.com
Bronze and Beyond (J McCullagh)
Any PPL Air Law study publication (for example by J Pratt)
The Air Navigation Order (ANO)
The UK Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP)

All can be found online through a simple search.