**PRESS RELEASE**

**Hampshire club helping women reach for the skies**

Of almost 30,000 pilots in the UK, fewer than 5% are women. As a career industry and a sport, aviation has been slow to change, but a gliding club in Hampshire is determined to change that and help more women take wing.

Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre, based at Middle Wallop airfield near Stockbridge, will be running a Women’s Go Gliding weekend on Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th April to introduce women to the experience of soaring flight and aviation. The weekend is part of an initiative by the British Gliding Association, which is committed to broadening the sport and bringing in fresh skills and experience.

Gliding is a unique form of flying that uses air heated by the sun to stay aloft. Pilots can fly long distances using only thermal ‘lift’. The UK distance record is 1,108km.

Gliding creates almost no noise or pollution, and is a thrilling test of a pilot’s skill and knowledge. The sport is much more affordable than power flying, and lessons are provided by qualified club instructors.

Women of every age are encouraged to learn and take part. Youngsters can learn to fly from the age of 12 and can qualify as a solo pilot at 14. For most people, it is an exciting hobby, and gliding can also open up a career in aviation.

“Gliding has been very much a male sport, and it is important to get more women into it,” says Tony World, chief flying instructor at Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre. “The great thing is it can span all ages. We have been very successful in that we have two women who started here and gone on to world championship heights, one being Gill Spreckley and the other Francesca Roberts.”

Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre prides itself on its ability to nurture new pilots. Lottie English first went solo at the club when she was 14. Now aged only 16, she is a fully qualified pilot. “I wanted to see how far I could go. I love it, because it’s exciting, there are so many new things to discover and skills to perfect, and the support from the gliding community is amazing,” she says.

The National Women’s Go Gliding Weekend is being run at 22 clubs across the country, from Scotland to the West Country. The British Gliding Association (BGA) is supporting clubs’ efforts to recruit more women members and be more representative.

“I have been asked why are women not participating in gliding? I could write a book on this,” says Yvonne Elliott, the BGA’s women’s advocate. “But I will just comment there are numerous barriers, some of which we can change. We need to ensure all are met with a warm welcome and facilities that are great for everyone. All the clubs participating are planning to ensure a fantastic experience for everyone who gets involved.”

Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre is offering flights to potential new women members during the on the Go Gliding weekend for as little as £30. Trial flights are also available to book all year round, so come and give gliding a try. For more details, email flightbookings@pngc.co.uk

For details of flying opportunities at other clubs, or to arrange a visit to a club, visit <https://gogliding.uk/national-women-go-gliding-weekend/> or email yvonne@gliding.co.uk

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**NOTES FOR EDITORS**

1. According to the CAA, the share of female pilots increased from 4.3% in 2016 to 4.9% in 2021. Data published by the International Society of Women Pilots put the global share at 5.2% in 2018 and 5.8% in 2021.
2. By contrast, 44% of medical doctors, 33% of astronauts, 29% of scientists and 21% of engineers worldwide are women (source: UNESCO).
3. Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre is based at Middle Wallop airfield near Stockbridge. It is the largest gliding club within the Royal Navy Gliding and Soaring Association and provides affordable flying for military, MoD personnel and civilians. Its team of dedicated British Gliding Association certified instructors can provide some of the best instruction in the UK, suitable for anyone from absolute beginners up to instructor level.
4. The British Gliding Association represents 80 gliding clubs spread throughout the UK, from the Scottish Highlands to the south-west tip of England. These range from small, member-run clubs to some of the largest gliding clubs in the world. The BGA provides services to some 7,000 UK glider pilots.
5. Gliding is a recreational activity and competitive air sport, in which pilots fly unpowered aircraft using naturally occurring currents of rising air to remain airborne. Gliders can fly for hours and travel hundreds of kilometres.
6. Training is undertaken in two-seat gliders with an instructor. Gliders are launched either by a powerful winch winding a long cable and pulling the glider into the air, or by being towed behind a powered aircraft.