

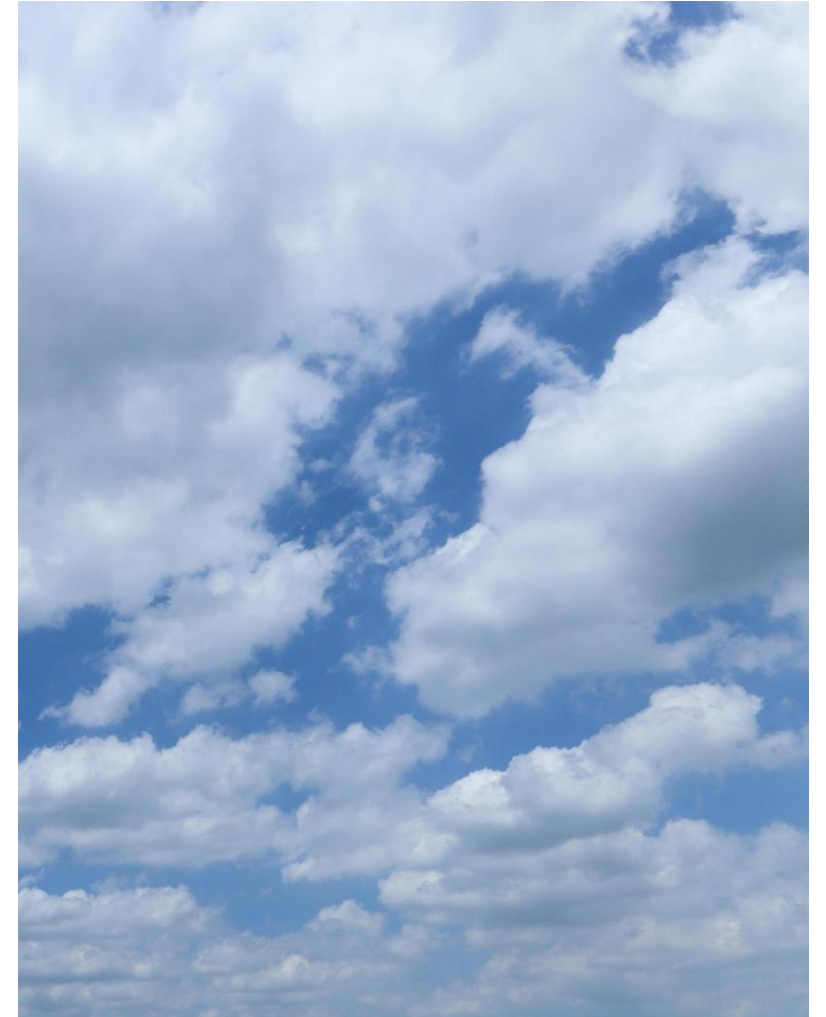
Gliding activity – a safe shared airspace guide for aeroplane and helicopter pilots

Guidance – in all cases, please refer to original source documents.

April 2026

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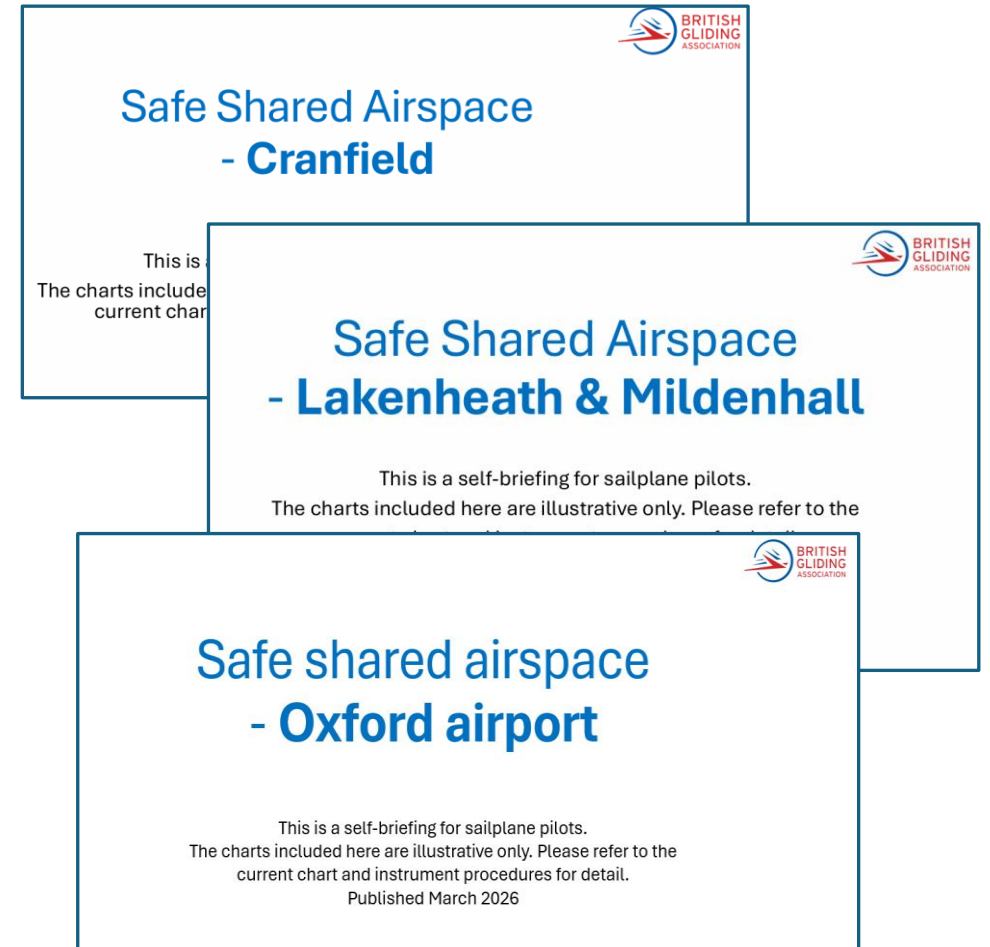


Safe shared airspace?

The gliding community advocates safe shared airspace. Glider pilots are regularly reminded of their obligations.

The British Gliding Association (BGA) and BGA clubs routinely engage with RUAWGs and other local and national airspace safety initiatives.

The BGA routinely advises clubs and glider pilots on how to contribute to safe shared airspace, including awareness of other airspace users.



AIC Y 027/2023 – gliding activity in the UK

Aeronautical Information Circular Yellow 027/2023 describes gliding activity in the UK.

It is highly recommended reading for all aeroplane and helicopter pilots and operators.

[AIC Y 027/2023 is available here.](#)

AIC for United Kingdom

NATS

Aeronautical Information Service

GLIDING ACTIVITY IN THE UK

It is active from March - October the activity takes place throughout the year during day time. Gliding sites where winch launching is carried out present a hazard to en-route aircraft on CAA charts but may not be marked on third party charts or moving map displays.

At these sites and thus can present an increased risk of midair collision. Gliders routinely fly alongside piston aircraft. Occasionally, large numbers of gliders fly the same cross country flight lines. They will also seek to derive the maximum lift along less obvious vertical flight lines.

in UK airspace.

What is a glider?

A glider is more correctly defined as a sailplane.

Some sailplanes can self-launch.

A typical glide angle is 40:1. Some sailplanes glide at 60:1.

A typical cross-country glide cruising speed is 80 kts.

A soaring flight is often between 3 and 5 hours in duration. If flying a very long distance, e.g. 1000kms, the sailplane could be airborne for 10 hours.

A Touring Motor Glider is a type of powered sailplane that can operate similarly to a touring aeroplane.

A sailplane or self-launching sailplane (e.g. with retractable powerplant/propeller) cannot generate an electrical charge to top up batteries. This influences use of transponders where equipped.

Almost all sailplanes are equipped with FLARM and radio.

[Read more about FLARM here.](#)



Where do gliders fly?

Concentrated around their home airfields, and in any airspace that is both legally and practically accessible.

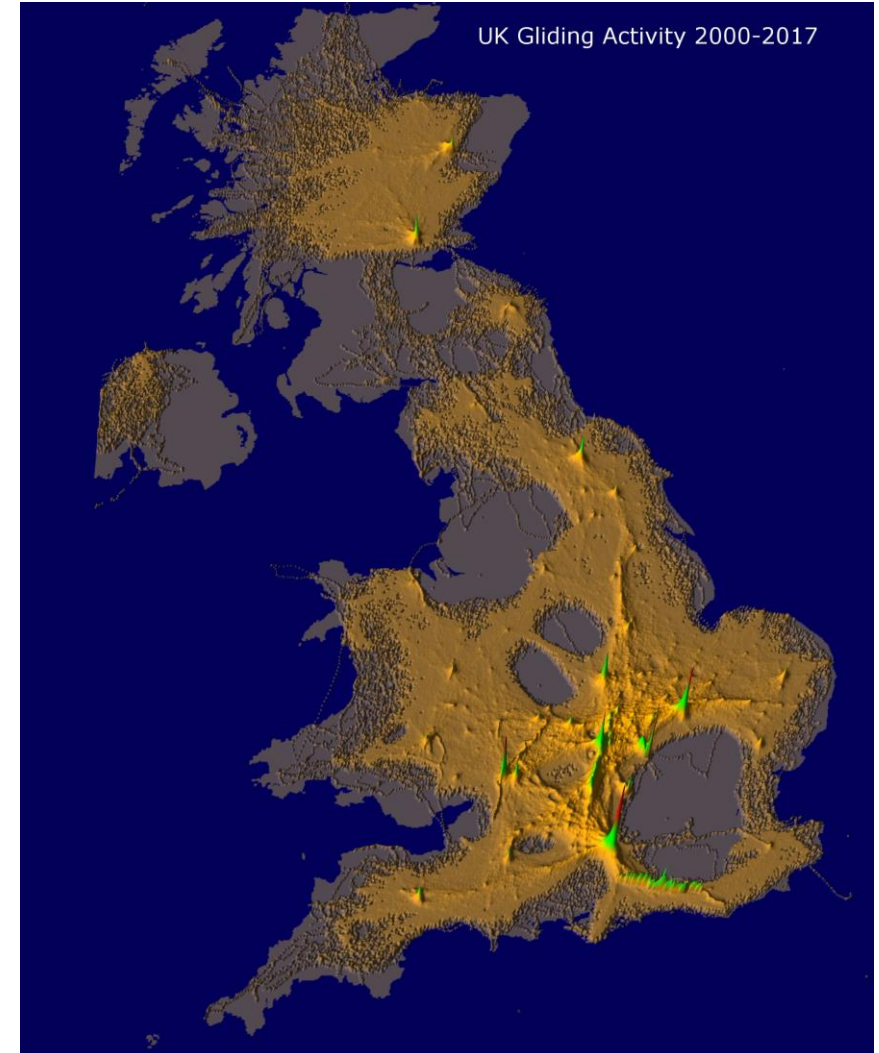
The better the soaring weather, the further sailplanes fly.

The heat map on the right illustrates sailplane activity.

It's worth noting that training sailplanes tend to operate immediately UPWIND of their launch site.

Where the wind is blowing against the terrain, sailplanes can soar along ridges below 500' agl (also see 'additional information')

Please refer to AIC Y 027/2023 for details.

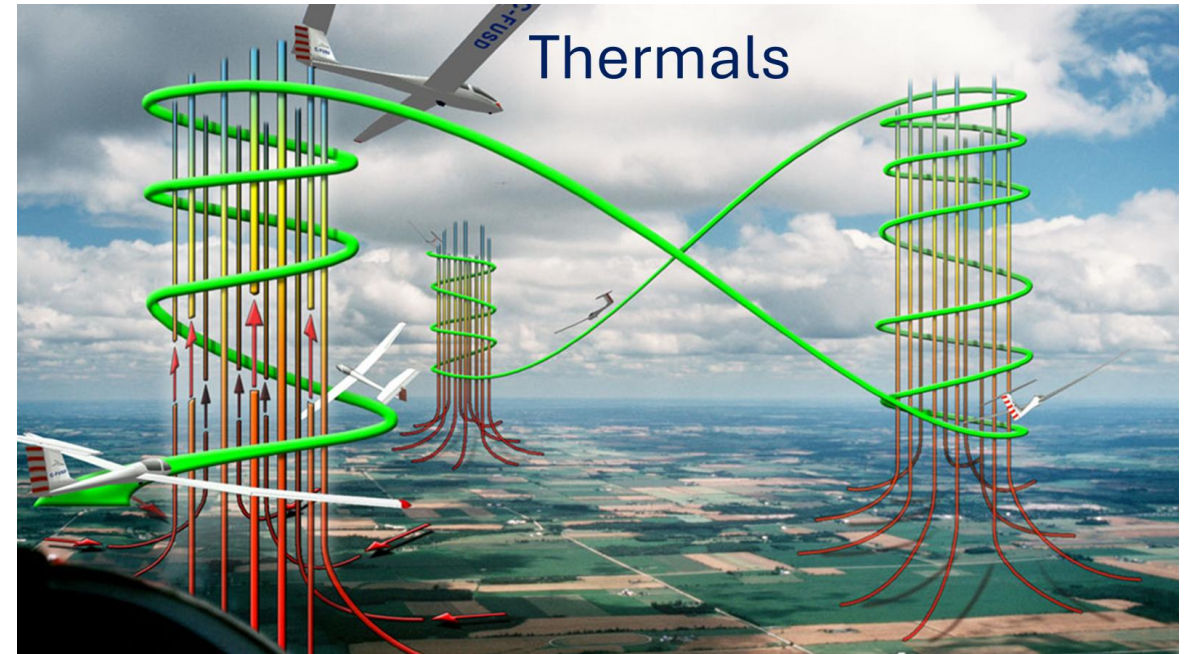


How do gliders fly cross-country?

Unless soaring along lee waves, usually above the hillier parts of the UK (see the AIC), sailplanes fly from thermal to thermal ideally between 2500' and below cloud base, stopping occasionally to circle and climb before cruising on.

Flying in a straight line for an extended time-period is unusual.

Most cross country flying takes place on suitable days between March and October, midday until around 6pm.

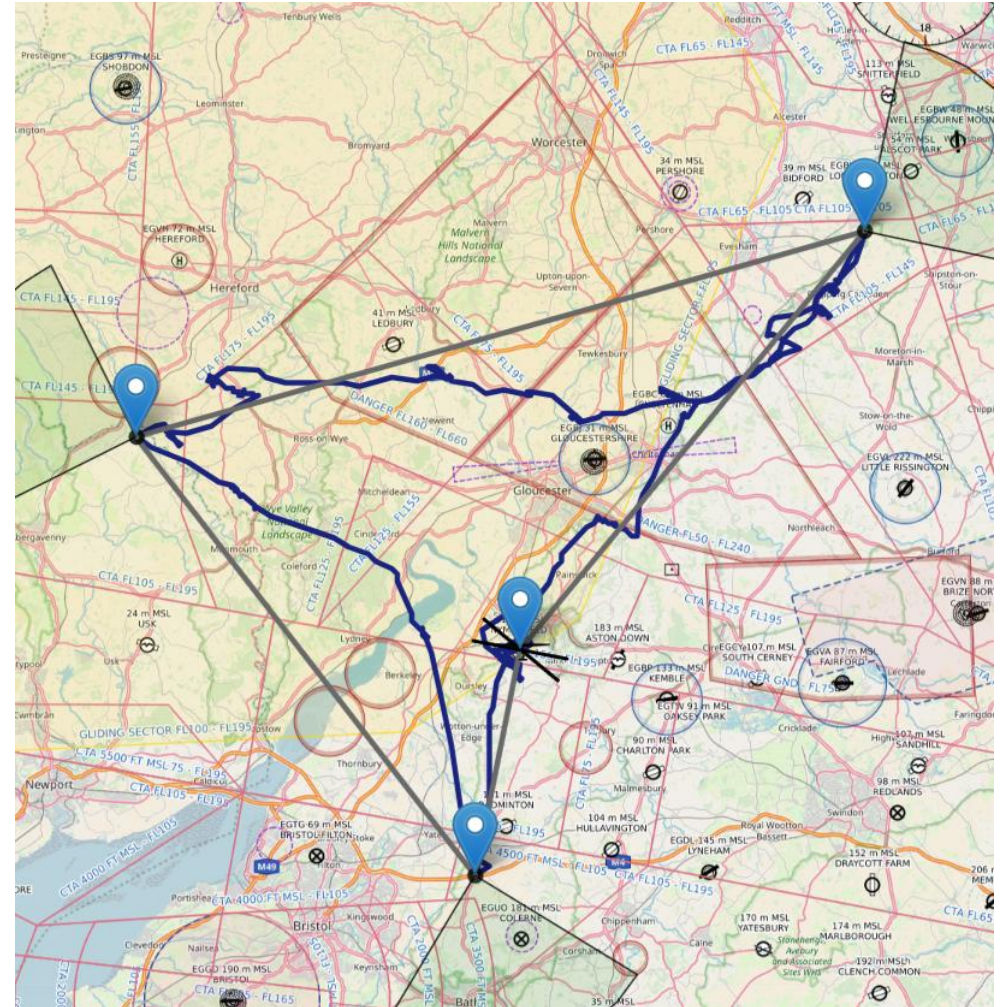


A cross-country flight

This glider flew a typical pre-planned and declared 200km A-B-C-A flight in March.

Deviations from track to find rising air (or to avoid sinking air/bad weather) are normal. The better the soaring weather, the less deviations are needed.

The spiralling bits of the trace are where the sailplane was climbing in thermals and drifting with the wind.



What instruments are used?

As a minimum, a typical sailplane will have ASI, altimeter, compass and variometer (which is a bit like a very sensitive VSI with audio output to support lookout).

Almost all are equipped with FLARM (see previous slide) and radio.

Increasing numbers are equipped with other forms of EC, e.g. SkyEcho, PilotAware, transponder, etc.

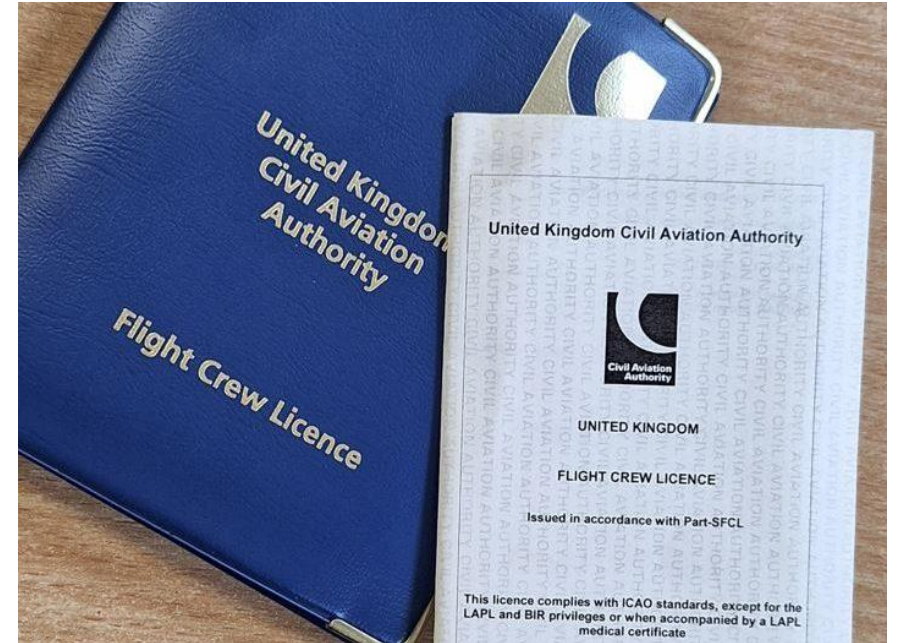


Are glider pilots licensed?

Glider pilots qualify for an SPL following training and skill test.

What about an FRTOL?

Glider pilots are not required to hold an FRTOL. However, many glider pilots complete FRTOL training as this facilitates contact with non-glider frequencies.



Why do glider pilots limit their use of radio?

Remaining airborne in a glider requires the pilot to fly in rising air, i.e. soaring.

At 3000' agl, a glider pilot is potentially less than 10 minutes from a field landing.

Talking on the radio while soaring is as distracting as using a phone when driving.

Soaring requires the pilot to be constantly looking out for and flying in thermals or lee waves, which are commonly marked by weather phenomena.

For example, cumulus clouds or lines of cumulus mark the tops of thermals. Of course, thermals also occur on the 'blue' sky days i.e. without cumulus.

Very accurate control is required to effectively utilise rising air. Concentrating on staying airborne in a tight and moving band of rising air, maintaining a good lookout AND talking to ATC can be challenging.



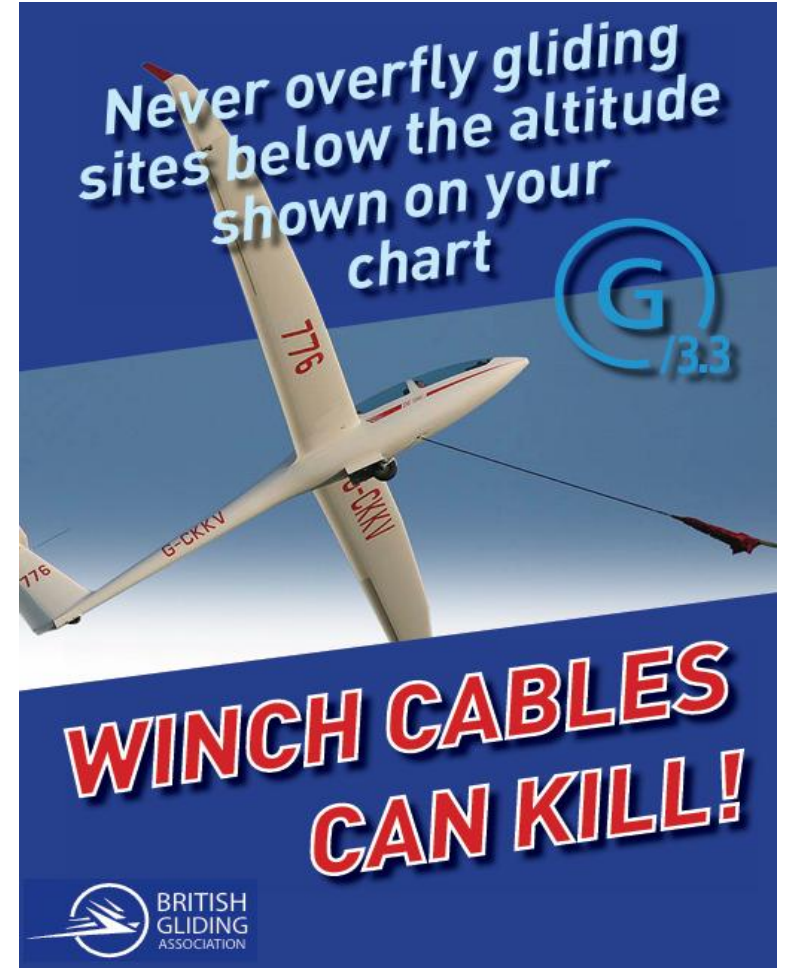
Is overflight of gliding sites an issue?

It is when launching is taking place, i.e. any day a gliding site is active.

Sailplanes are usually launched by ground-based winch, where a 4.5mm cable is wound in at speed resulting in a launch to around 1500-2000' agl (or higher - see the VFR chart and AIP).

The other main launch method is being towed by an aeroplane or TMG, usually to 2000-3000' but occasionally higher.

[There is a helpful CAA video here.](#)

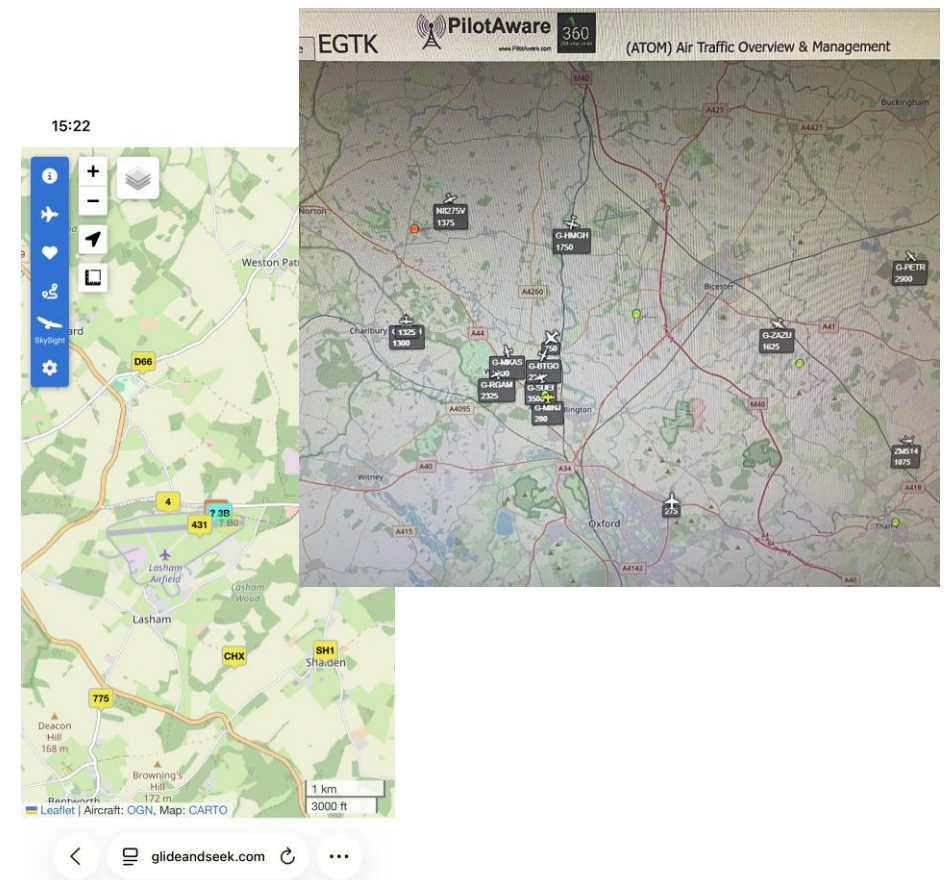


How can I increase my awareness of gliding activity?

You can use your phone or tablet or PC – please refer to one of the many free applications that show FLARM equipped activity, e.g. [Glide and Seek](#).

Or particularly helpful for towers, airfields, training organisations, or military, use available low-cost technology, e.g. [PilotAware ATOM](#).

And / or incorporate FLARM into a Flight Information Display.



How can I contribute to safe shared airspace?

When sharing airspace with VFR traffic, please always maintain effective lookout.

Be aware of when and where sailplanes are likely to be operating. We strongly recommend reading the AIC referred to in an earlier slide.

Try not to descend through cumulus clouds, as sailplanes congregate in the thermals that are under the cloud. Instead, descend in gaps between clouds.

Operate at heights that can reduce the chance of meeting a glider, e.g. above cumulus clouds. Please avoid cruising close to cumulus cloud base.

If you are an ATC unit, airfield operator, or flying club/strut, please engage with nearby gliding clubs. You can contact the British Gliding Association for more information.



Additional information

[AIC Y 027/2023 gliding activity in the UK](#)

[Airspacesafety.com - good practice for all pilots](#)

[Gliding site overflight guidance](#)

[Gliding sites, and ridges commonly soared by sailplanes](#)

[Safety Sense – moving maps](#)

[FLARM](#)

[PilotAware ATOM](#)

BGA Safe Shared Airspace briefings for sailplane pilots: [Cranfield](#), [Lakenheath/Mildenhall](#), [Oxford](#)

[Contact the British Gliding Association](#)