



Department
for Transport

General Aviation Handbook

For stakeholders, including
local planning authorities

2023

Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR



© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3 or contact The National Archives at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact-us

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is also available on our website at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport



Contents

Introduction	4
Section 1 – Strategic context	6
The value of GA	7
GA airfields	7
Challenges and opportunities	8
Government strategy	9
Section 2 – Development	10
GA airfields as local assets	11
Integrating new uses at airfields	12
Safeguarding airfields	13
Section 3 – General Aviation airfield operations	14
Types of GA airfields	15
Common operating procedures	16
Community relations	16
Who regulates GA?	17
Licensed vs unlicensed airfields	17
Section 4 – Opportunities for General Aviation	18
Decarbonisation and innovation test beds	19
Education, diversity and inclusion	20
Conservation opportunities	20
Borders and immigration	20
Mixed/shared use	21
Section 5 – Engagement & support	22
Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Airfield Advisory Team (AAT)	23
General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC)	23
Communicating GA airfields as assets to local economies	23
Section 6 – Strategic value of GA airfields	24
Government services	25
STEM/workforce opportunities	25
Regional connectivity	26
Innovation opportunities	26
Professional aviation training	27
Section 7 – Reference guide	28
Top tips for GA airfields	29
Top tips for local authorities	29

Introduction

Aviation in the UK

Aviation is one of the crucial components behind the United Kingdom's economic success. It creates international trade links, enables domestic connections, and employs 200,000 people across the UK. General Aviation (GA) has an integral role in this story. For many years GA has played, and continues to, play an important role within the wider aviation sector.

What constitutes General Aviation and what is an airfield?

GA refers to all non-scheduled civil aviation. This includes private business travel, emergency services, maintenance, manufacturing, training, recreational and sports. The GA sector is worth around £4 billion to the UK economy, supporting at least 40,000 jobs. Central to GA is the network of airfields, which provides the critical infrastructure to support the industry. Airfields are defined as an area of land set apart for the landing and departure of an aircraft.

GA airfields inherently occupy large areas of land and their true economic and community value may not always be fully recognised by non-aviation stakeholders. As the need for space and land increases, there can be opportunities for GA operations and community developments to work together for joint economic, social and educational benefit. These opportunities should be explored by all parties.

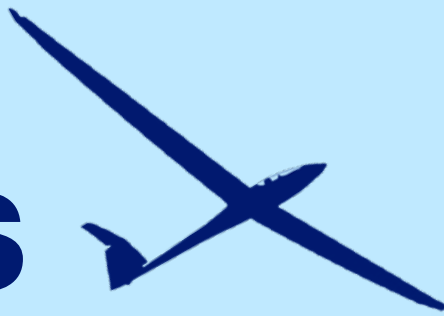
Purpose of this document

This handbook outlines the long-term economic, social, and infrastructural value that GA airfields and supporting GA activities can provide. It is designed to highlight how the sector's operations and services can interact with local community plans and offer practical steps to promote productive engagement between all parties. With a mix of case studies and links to further support, this handbook highlights considerations for local authorities in supporting local needs and the appropriate use of a local airfield site.

Disclaimer

This handbook was developed by the Department for Transport, with support from stakeholders including **GA organisations, representative bodies and associations**. It is not intended to affect the way that private matters, including planning applications, are to be determined or the procedure to determine an outcome. It has been developed through research and engagement and is designed as a starting point for considering approaches which might be suitable in local areas/regions. **It should not be taken as a substitute for professional or legal advice. There is no requirement for any organisation to apply the handbook in the determination of a decision.**

Key Facts



800+¹

Number of sites with General Aviation activity in the UK*



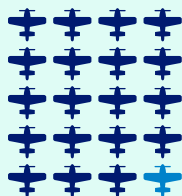
Circa. 20,000²

Number of registered GA aircraft in the UK*



95%+

Percentage of registered UK Aircraft primarily engaged in General Aviation activity*



Upto £4bn³

General Aviation's contribution to UK economy



Nearly 40,000

Direct jobs in, or supported by, General Aviation



29,000⁴

Number of licensed (recreational) General Aviation pilots in the UK*



1 York Aviation General Aviation Airfields Study 2021
2 DfT analysis of CAA UK Registered Aircraft dataset
3 York Aviation Report 2015 – Economic impact of general aviation in the UK
4 DfT analysis of CAA Pilot Licence Holder dataset

*approximately

Section 1

Strategic context

This section provides an overview of Government policy on General Aviation (GA). It aims to demonstrate the contribution the GA sector and its network of airfields can potentially provide to wider government agenda and priorities.

The value of GA

GA, which is often referred to as the ‘grassroots’ of aviation, is the entry point to our successful and world-leading aviation sector. GA is often the springboard for new and talented individuals and companies to test and develop their career or business aspirations across aviation and beyond. In May 2022, these ambitions formed part of the Government’s [Flightpath to the Future strategy](#) – a ten-year framework for modernising and innovating the aviation sector, which outlines the department’s strategic priorities and programme of work for the sector.

GA provides the entry point for many careers in aviation and is often the inspiration for the next generation of aviation professionals. GA supports significant business and commercial activities, including business aviation, manufacturing, maintenance, and flight training. It also provides a platform for government services such as military, emergency services and coastguard, law enforcement and medical flights. As our focus shifts to a sustainable and greener future, GA provides critical facilities for the research and development of new and emerging innovative aviation technologies, which will be increasingly important in supporting key commitments around Net-Zero and the Green Economy. The GA sector also supports several important historic, cultural and heritage sites and assets, hosting a number of globally recognised air shows and air displays.

GA airfields

GA airfields are a key asset and can provide crucial connectivity, both for business and emergency services. They can also be vital for attracting people into skilled jobs and the development of advanced Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (“STEM”) skills. Some GA airfields enable highly skilled, dynamic, innovative businesses to grow and flourish. For some elements of manufacturing and maintenance of aircraft, aviation services, and for research and innovation, there are no or very limited alternatives. Given their reach locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, some [GA airfields] offer opportunities to support areas to develop and grow, as well as supporting our levelling up, connectivity, growth, skills and diversity aims. Many GA airfields are also historic sites in themselves, or house assets that are culturally and historically significant to the UK.

The geographical spread of GA airfields across the UK enables vital connectivity to areas where there are limited or reduced transportation links, especially where larger scale transport infrastructure is either commercially unviable or the topography limits development. With around 800 plus well-known sites, GA airfields offer an impressive coverage of aviation activity enabling a range of Government, cargo and transportation operations across broad, diverse and niche markets.

GA airfields frequently host community, sporting and charity events and offer a range of recreational opportunities. In some areas the airfield may be the only green space in or near an urban area and are a valuable space bringing **communities together**. They also offer opportunities for environmental enhancement – such as wildflower meadows – which can contribute to biodiversity aims and gains.



Challenges and opportunities

Planning ensures that the right development happens in the right place at the right time, benefitting communities and the economy. This means our planning system must meet the needs for new housing and commercial development, in the process creating places that are desirable to live and work, whilst ensuring negative impacts on existing communities and the environment are limited.

The Government recognises a need to build more homes across the country. Local authorities must prepare a Local Plan which determines where sites for housing, commercial and other uses will be allocated to respond to local demand over the plan period (roughly 10-15 years). The reality may be that there is not enough previously developed land located in or on the edge of existing settlements

to provide the homes needed, particularly in more rural locations, so airfields – even where they are community assets – may be considered for development.

Local authorities often have to make difficult choices to decide which sites provide the most effective and sustainable location for new housing, employment uses and other development, whilst balancing local needs. As local authorities need to deliver more homes, airfield sites may increasingly be under pressure to be redeveloped for new housing or commercial developments. The economic, social and educational value of airfields can be significant, and consideration should be given to these matters by all parties [in balancing local needs].



Government strategy

It is government policy that the impact on the network of GA airfields should be considered/ recognised when new development are being proposed or considered. Airfields not only contribute to local and national economies and promote our rich aviation heritage, they can also provide a pathway to careers and STEM opportunities and act as testbeds for innovation. The Government is keen that airfields and GA businesses are involved in the planning process from the onset of new proposals and intended developments to ensure GA and aviation considerations are identified, understood and considered where relevant.



Section 2

Development

This section provides an overview of development and safeguarding policies for GA airfield operators. GA policy most relevant to Local Authorities (LAs) is articulated within both Transport related Planning Practice Guidance and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).



GA airfields as local assets

GA airfields can play an important role in contributing to local and national economic growth and priorities. The full economic, social and educational value of airfields – as well as the GA users they serve including business aviation, businesses, training and emergency service needs – should be understood and valued in all considerations. As these GA airfields can form part of a larger network, local authorities should also consider the extent to which an airfield contributes to transport and commercial connectivity outside the authority's own boundaries, working together with other authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships to maintain effective cooperation.

GA airfields vary both in their use and in their development needs and opportunities. Where an airfield operator has formalised safeguarding arrangements with a local authority (see safeguarding section below), the authority is expected to notify the operator where a proposed development could pose a risk to the use of the airfield. If an airfield's operation is either in decline or no longer functional, this does not mean it should necessarily be subject to redevelopment that leads to the permanent loss of the site. It is open to local authorities to consider appropriate options for local development, which – depending on local circumstances – might include mixed-used development which could enable the adaption and strengthening of aviation uses alongside other land uses.



Integrating new uses at airfields

Local authorities working with airfields are encouraged to think creatively and work proactively with aviation stakeholders to test options to introduce new uses that can be sensitively integrated into the airfield's land holding. Local authorities are encouraged to engage in a productive dialogue with airfield operators to understand the site context and how the economic viability and wider contribution of the airfield might be secured by testing the introduction of other land uses.

All parties should take note of any historical or cultural interest at airfield sites and how new development could impact on any such heritage assets at the site. It is also important that planners note the views of GA users to build a full picture of how the loss of, or changes to, an airfield could impact the community and local economy, so this is fully understood and considered in reaching any planning decision.

If a landowner is promoting a GA airfield for development, local authorities may wish to consider how these assets could be 'repurposed' to accommodate further uses whilst preserving the airfield itself. This can help secure the economic viability and contribution of the site by working collaboratively with landowners and operators to introduce other uses to retain valuable airfield functions such as employment, community, hotel, retail, emergency services and educational uses.

There may be further opportunities for new technology and transport integration on a GA site such as freight and cargo hubs. Investment from developers into a site to introduce a new land use (e.g., a hotel) can present an opportunity to reinvigorate the economic viability and contribution of an airfield through renewed functionality.

It may also be appropriate to consider applying the agent of change principle, which places the responsibility of managing the impact of change on the person or business responsible for it. For example, ensuring interests can be appropriately considered and aligned in locations near to GA airfields where there is potential for aviation activities to have significantly adverse effects on new noise sensitive developments.



Safeguarding airfields

Safeguarding is the process by which an airfield operator can, in consultation with the local authority, work to protect the environment surrounding the airfield from developments and activities that have the potential to impact on the airfield's safe operation.

Airfield safeguarding covers several aspects. Examples include ensuring that no buildings or structures, including trees, may cause danger to aircraft; protecting the integrity of critical electrical equipment such as lighting and navigational electrical signals; and mitigating against increased risks to aviation from wildlife, building induced turbulence and glint and glare.

A number of GA airfields are afforded officially safeguarded status by the DfT to ensure their operation and development are fully consulted about proposed developments. These airfields are currently listed in the following Government circular: [DfT/ODPM circular 1/2003](#).

A site-specific safeguarding map is focused on a safeguarded airfield and shows colour-coded areas which highlight the extent of the safeguarded area. Colour-coded areas show where consultation is required.

The Government directs local authorities to consult with an officially safeguarded airfield whenever the height of any building, structure (including trees), erection of works would, as a result of the development, exceed the level indicated on the map for the relevant colour-coded area. Consultation, as part of the safeguarding process, also includes further considerations such as radio aids and telecommunication which could be disrupted by a building or structure (this depends on various factors such as its size, shape or construction materials). Lighting needs to be considered in a safeguarding assessment as some forms of lighting could distract or confuse pilots, particularly in key locations within the airfield.

The safeguarding policy formalises the consultation process and ensures an airfield operator receives an opportunity to comment on any development that may affect its existing or future safe operation. Further details are contained within the Planning Circular identified above. Non-officially safeguarded airfields are encouraged to take steps to protect their locations from the effects of possible development that might impact on aviation operations.

Early dialogue is encouraged between local authorities and airfields. We recommend establishing an agreed consultation procedure between GA airfields and the local authority. Local authorities are asked to respond “sympathetically” to requests for safeguarding from non-officially safeguarded airfields as well as unlicensed airfields, given the importance of safety and protecting aviation activity at these sites.





Section 3

General Aviation airfield operations

This section is designed to provide all parties with an introductory overview of how GA airfields typically operate, how they are regulated, and the common types of activity at GA airfields.

Types of GA airfields

The varied range of GA activity inherently means a diverse network of airfields is required to support such activity. Although not always immediately obvious, GA airfields often host a range of critical aviation activity such as Helicopter Emergency Medical Services, support to military operations and pilot training. They also provide regional and international connectivity, aeronautical maintenance facilities and can sometimes host innovation and education centres and other businesses.

Airfields form the critical infrastructure to support the GA sector and come in a multitude of different shapes and sizes. A GA airfield can range from a large site capable of handling large jets with advanced navigational infrastructure to smaller grass strips comprising of aircraft hangars and recreational and sports facilities.

Below are just two examples of GA airfields, their layouts, services offered and value to the local community.

Cotswold Airport, Gloucestershire

Formerly RAF Kemble, Cotswold Airport is one of the largest and busiest GA sites in the UK. It serves light aircraft, business jets, commercial helicopters and larger commercial aircraft for storage, maintenance, and salvage. It has the capability to handle aircraft of all sizes (including Boeing 747). The airport also offers its infrastructure to the automotive and hospitality industries. The airfield recently took delivery of a retired British Airways aircraft which will become an events location, conference site and educational facility. Cotswold Airport is also frequently used by the film and TV industry.

Eshott, Northumberland

Eshott airfield is a former Royal Air Force Spitfire training base in Northumberland and one of the largest recreational GA flying sites in Northern England. The site is home to a flying school and retains close ties to Hartlepool college – working with educators to develop key aviation skills, offering flying experiences and exposure to vintage aircraft to encourage the next generation of aviators. The airfield also organises projects for young people and hosts events for local youth groups.

Common operating procedures

An airfield's primary purpose is to facilitate the taking off and landing of aircraft. To afford an extra level of protection of aircraft operating in the vicinity, many airfields have designated airspace above the runway and surrounding area (called an Aerodrome Traffic Zone) to offer protection to aircraft operating close to an airfield.

Aircraft arriving to and departing from airfields often operate to common procedures to ensure their safe operation in the air. When operating near an airfield, aircraft will often fly a 'circuit' at a lower height as they position themselves for landing. This may take aircraft closer to populated areas, although many airfields develop bespoke procedures to avoid aircraft flying low over populated areas.

Community relations

Many airfields recognise the importance of local relations and often amend procedures to be considerate of the impact their operations may have on others. Measures taken include limiting airfield operations during unsociable hours, limiting the number of annual flights, implementing noise abatement plans for pilots operating in and out of an airfield and redesigning flying routes to avoid populated areas and offering facilities to the local community to benefit from.



Who regulates GA?

In the UK aviation activity (excluding military) is regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) who are responsible for setting the standards, administering, and supporting the aviation industry.

The CAA is a public corporation under the Department for Transport and was established in 1972 under the Civil Aviation Act 1971.

Licensed vs unlicensed airfields

A licensed airfield is one that is overseen, assessed, and regulated by the CAA. It is required to meet and demonstrate a series of high safety and operational compliance. This isn't to say unlicensed airfields do not already meet these standards, and the CAA engage with both types of airfields to promote best practice and industry standards. Unlicensed facilities range from large airfields to privately owned farm airstrips. Their physical characteristics and operating standards still need to provide a safe operational environment. Since 2010, the CAA have allowed some flying training to take place at unlicensed airfields. Being licensed permits airfields to carry out certain types of activity (e.g. commercial, advanced training).



Section 4

Opportunities for General Aviation

This section is designed to introduce the economic contribution and future potential of GA airfields. This includes their link to wider Government agendas to improve innovation, skills, levelling up and adoption of greener technologies as part of our net zero commitments.



Although primarily placed to facilitate the taking off and landing of aircraft, GA airfields provide a range of opportunities for local areas to grow, thrive and develop. GA airfields, for example, can act as the platform for the development of STEM skills, manufacturing and maintenance of aircraft, aviation services, research, and innovation.

Decarbonisation and innovation test beds

It is important GA actively supports decarbonisation aims as part of the Government's Net Zero agenda to address both its own and the wider aviation sector's environmental impact. The Government has committed to decarbonising the entire transport system, including for aviation, as outlined in the [Jet Zero Strategy](#) published in July 2022. The Transport Decarbonisation Plan sets out the steps to be taken to deliver the necessary carbon reductions across every form of transport, including the aviation sector, and it is clear that this cannot be achieved without GA participation. The GA sector plays a vital role in the testing and introduction of new and emerging technologies before their wider scale adoption and establishment into larger scale commercial operations and the military sector. GA airfields and their infrastructure offer a unique testing environment for these new technologies, including through research and development and nurturing of STEM skills. Many GA airfields in the UK such as Goodwood, Wellesbourne and Gloucestershire often have close ties with local innovation centres, universities, and businesses. This supports job creation which enhances the GA sector and can help in efforts to level up the economy.

Old Buckenham, Norfolk

Old Buckenham is located southwest of Norwich. Its services include flight training, two museums, a memorial park, aircraft maintenance and aircraft storage. It is also home to an on-site electric aircraft development and manufacturing site, which includes all the required system components to assess the potential for renewable flight operations (from flight to battery storage). Old Buckenham made aviation history when the site hosted the world's first electric aircraft air display in July 2022.

Education, diversity and inclusion

As GA airfields, airshows, and training schools are often the first touch point for individuals interested in a career in aviation, manufacturing or science, GA airfields are well placed to support the needs and ambitions of their local communities. Key to supporting the Government's Levelling Up agenda, GA airfields can often form strong links with local educational providers to offer workplaces, experience, and future employment opportunities, and can offer a diverse range of opportunities for all.

Conservation opportunities

While there can be many misconceptions around the environmental impact from GA, GA airfields can be ideal environments as natural wildlife sanctuaries and can bolster the diversity of natural plant growth due to their expansive green areas. Many plant species, previously lost elsewhere, have been found located at airfields.

Airfields such as Bodmin and Turweston have already undertaken steps to offset their carbon footprint through the use of Solar arrays, creating wildlife rich meadows and planting of shrubs and small trees. Many GA organisations and airfields are already reviewing their own operations to identify where positive change can be made, in liaison with local conservation organisations.

Borders and immigration

Many GA airfields enjoy a positive professional relationship with local enforcement agencies and Border Force regional teams. As an entry point into the UK, GA airfields can provide a valuable resource to local law enforcement agencies on spotting and reporting the early signs of any suspicious activity.

GA Airfields should familiarise themselves with Project Pegasus, a joint initiative between Border Force, the National Crime Agency and the police which aims to counter the threats of smuggling, immigration crime and terrorism around the UK's airfields.

Pegasus is a public-facing campaign to raise awareness and promote the reporting of suspicious or unusual behaviour within the GA environment. Further information can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-suspicious-behaviour-at-small-airfields-project-pegasus

Aerobility

Aerobility are a leading disabled flying charity based at Blackbushe Airport in Hampshire. They deliver experience flights, flight training and aviation ground school for anyone with a disability. Working with the industry to ensure aviation is accessible to all, the organisation provides adaptive controls to meet the unique needs of flyers. Their work has offered flying opportunities to thousands of individuals with a range of disabilities including physical and sensory impairments and learning disabilities, such as autism.



Mixed/shared use

Mixed/shared use refers to an airfield which utilises and offers its infrastructure for activities beyond the regular day-to-day aviation functions, with the intention of broadening their asset utilisation beyond just GA operations. This could include aviation or non-aviation related activities. Whilst a number of larger airfields have already adopted mixed-use activity, a number of smaller airfields have started exploring alternative uses to strengthen their economic and commercial position and offer their unique infrastructure for the benefit of the local community – with great success for some. Examples include open-air cinemas, camping, educational and workplace opportunities, markets and use of business and recreational facilities.

GA airfields and operators who have existing business and community connections will more likely be successful in exploiting mixed-use opportunities through a range of stakeholders. Broadly speaking, whilst the primary desire to diversify may be to strengthen an airfield’s financial position, many also wish to promote and bolster the cultural, green and community benefits airfields have to offer.

Goodwood Aerodrome

Goodwood is a privately-owned 12,000-acre leisure and sporting estate which operates a range of facilities such as golf, horse racing, motor racing circuit and a hotel with clubhouse. The site is famous for community events such as the Goodwood Festival of Speed, Revival (motorsports) and music festivals, attracting many overseas visitors to the region. The airfield, which is located within the grounds, is predominately used for training, leisure, historical and sightseeing flights. It also provides manufacturers and operators of unmanned aviation technologies with facilities for the testing, development, and demonstration of equipment.



Section 5

Engagement & support



This section provides an overview of the engagement and support relating to GA airfields, including relationships with the Civil Aviation Authority and industry organisations, contact with the local authority, and how local authorities and airfields can work together.

GA airfields are encouraged to forge links with their local authority to enable constructive dialogue on a range of matters which could affect their operation. This could include showcasing opportunities for community cohesion (e.g. using infrastructure for educational purposes), addressing noise or other local community complaints, and engaging on or making representations on planning matters. Early engagement with GA airfields on local planning matters, and maintaining an open and honest dialogue, will allow for constructive discussions which could result in mutual benefits.

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Airfield Advisory Team (AAT)

The Civil Aviation Authority's AAT offer expert knowledge on operational and safety matters at both licensed and unlicensed airfields. The AAT have operational knowledge of airfields and are therefore able to advise both GA airfields and local authorities on the technical aspects of airfield operations and the impact that local plans and planning applications may have on GA airfield operations. They are a non-regulatory and advisory branch of the CAA and, whilst not required to be a statutory consultee, we recommend local authorities engage with the AAT where they have technical or operational queries relating to a GA airfield. Please find more information about the AAT on their website: www.caa.co.uk/general-aviation/working-with-you/airfield-advisory-team

General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC)

Key industry organisations such as the GAAC work to ensure that GA airfields continue to flourish and offer dedicated advice on a range of bespoke planning, property and commercial matters which affect airfields. In the last few years it has advised over 100 airfields. The GAAC is also able to advise local authorities about airfields. Please find more information about the GAAC on their website: www.gaac.org.uk

Communicating GA airfields as assets to local economies


GA airfields are assets with inherent local value to communities, serving a wide range of needs for a local population. Local strategies will form a key part in dealings between local authorities and GA airfields. This includes wider statutory transport plans such as local transport plans for maintaining and improving all aspects of the local and regional transport system over a set period of time. For further guidance on how this may impact a local area, please find further information here: www.gov.uk/find-local-transport-plans

GA airfields, owners and operators are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the process and the procedures in place to allow them to engage with or make representations to their local authority on any current or future planning application which could affect their business and operations. GA airfields should keep abreast of the Local Plan stages by frequently checking for updates online. When a new Local Plan is being prepared, GA airfields should aim to engage at the earliest stage possible to ensure their priorities and ambitions are noted by the local authority. More guidance is available here: www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance

Due to the complexity of the planning system, it would be beneficial for GA airfields to have a dedicated contact within their local authority to engage with, discuss any queries and arrange community engagement and education opportunities about GA and what it offers. This dedicated contact would ensure clear communication and the forging of strong working relationships. Many GA airfields have Consultative Committees which are a formal meeting space for the airfield operator and local stakeholders, including Councillors – but these can be expanded in their remit to address wider local matters including on planning and development.

Section 6

Strategic value of GA airfields

A small, high-wing aircraft is shown in flight against a clear blue sky. The aircraft is white with a dark stripe along the fuselage. The tail section is visible, showing a conventional tail with a vertical stabilizer and horizontal stabilizer. The aircraft is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page, flying towards the left.

No two GA airfields are the same, and each can have valuable characteristics which help create a national network of airfields that work collectively to deliver key functions. These include regional and national connectivity, training and educational opportunities, offer a community space or support to emergency service operations.



This section provides a list, and explanation of some of the key characteristics which could constitute an airfield being of strategic value to local communities, transport needs, businesses, and Government.

Government services

GA airfields support vital government services including law enforcement, airborne medical and search and rescue teams. This can offer life-saving support for those requiring such medical or search and rescue services or support law enforcement activities that impact on areas. Airfields can also be home to key operators such as the military with shared use for military operations by GA airfields. This relationship can provide the military contingency options for when support for civilian organisations is required (e.g. humanitarian) and can also support future skills, innovation, and the transferring of qualifications and licenses between sectors.

STEM/workforce opportunities

GA airfields are often the first touchpoint for new entrants to the aviation and mechanical sectors and can therefore support the development of wider STEM skills, including specialised technical roles (e.g. engineering, airspace design, avionics engineering). They offer an opportunity to spark the initial interest of aviation within young people. GA airfields are also often the location for the development of key behind the scenes roles such as airfield and aircraft maintenance and operations, such as air traffic control and fire and rescue services. From school visits to volunteering for experienced individuals, GA airfields can offer a range of educational and recreational opportunities to a diverse range of groups. GA airfields, local authorities and local educational providers are encouraged to work together to understand and engage on such educational opportunities.

Regional connectivity

Regional airports and airfields serve local communities, by supporting jobs in regions and acting as a gateway to domestic and international opportunities. GA airfields are part of a UK-wide network providing air connectivity and contributing to an accessible national transport infrastructure network that supports the movement of goods and people. This includes areas in the most isolated locations across the UK (such as coastal and island areas) and areas with limited surface access (e.g. in dense urban areas or in areas of challenging terrain).

Innovation opportunities

GA airfields can serve as a testbed for new and emerging technologies including those that can help support decarbonisation and innovation aims. This serves both the future needs of aviation and the growth of wider transport and infrastructure aims. This includes, for example, the testing of new and autonomous transport, electric vehicles, and sustainable fuels – developments key to unlocking new opportunities and growth to meet long-term UK transport aims. The geographical location of, and isolated/ controlled environments at and around many airfields can play a vital role in supporting the introduction of new, shorter urban air mobility flights (e.g. electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) vehicles) as they provide a safe place for trials and testing.



Professional aviation training

Many GA airfields are home to dedicated flight training schools and training organisations that support those with aspirations to become pilots and engineers, with students attaining formal professional aviation qualifications such as commercial pilots license (CPL) – requirements for new entrants to the aviation sector to operate an aircraft with passengers. Many commercial pilots undertake the modular route into the industry before obtaining additional qualifications. Much of this occurs on GA airfields, a key location for training both private and also commercial pilots. GA airfields can also offer vital technical and specialised qualifications such as maintenance or manufacturing qualifications, which provide individuals with a range of transferrable skills.



Section 7

Reference guide

This section provides both GA airfield operators and local authorities with a summary of the key practical guidance and best practice as outlined in this document.



Top tips for GA airfields

Relationships

We recommend that GA airfield owners and operators forge early relationships with the CAA and other GA industry bodies to understand how these organisations can support them in delivering and supporting their operations. GA airfields should also consider how engagement with local businesses and education organisations can offer mutual benefit.

Local strategies

Creating a working relationship with their local authorities will bring mutual benefits, and GA airfield operators should familiarise themselves with all relevant guidance and plans to understand how their airfield and current operations fit in to the strategic ambition of their local authority.

Safeguarding

We advise that all GA airfield operators should develop and keep up to date their own safeguarding plan and establish an agreed consultation procedure between themselves and the local authority.

Planning applications

GA airfields should familiarise themselves with the planning process to identify how they can become involved and engage or make representations should they wish.

Raising awareness

GA airfields should showcase and publicise their ongoing activities to raise awareness of their contribution to the local economy, including to the wider aviation sector and community.

Organised crime and terrorism

GA airfields should familiarise themselves with project Pegasus, a joint law enforcement operation to tackle threats to the general aviation industry in the UK. Further information can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-suspicious-behaviour-at-small-airfields-project-pegasus

Top tips for local authorities

Relationships

Forging relationships with GA airfields will allow for a better understanding of their activities and value, their future plans and aspirations, and the impacts of any proposed developments. Local authorities may wish to discuss joint ventures with airfields, such as mixed-use options, joint educational schemes or hosting local events to improve community cohesion.

Understanding the value of GA

We recommend that local authorities familiarise themselves with site context, and how the GA airfield contributes to local economies and communities.

Local transport strategies

Engagement at the earliest stages of the new strategic processes is vital to ensure that GA airfield priorities and objectives are recognised by the local authorities in decision making, particularly when selecting sites for development and infrastructure for investment. Additionally, infrastructure and development can improve access to GA and reinforce its value. Officers are encouraged to think creatively and work proactively with GA aviation stakeholders to test options to introduce new uses whilst preserving the GA airfield itself and maintaining valuable aviation operations.

Engagement

Local authorities should engage with GA organisations and airfield operators at an early stage of the Local Plan process to understand the site context and how the economic viability and contribution of the GA airfield can be secured by allowing other land uses, and/or to understand the impacts and implications of proposed development plans. There are often constructive solutions which can support the ambitions of both parties either through shared or mixed-use ideas, where early engagement can support effective delivery and outcomes.







Image credit: Rob Newby