

Olympic restrictions – from the horse's mouth

The CAA and the RAF gave a three-handed presentation to AOPA members at the Bonus Day at Duxford on on flying restrictions covering the Olympic Games, concentrating in particular on the welcome changes that have been made to the security services' original proposals, which would probably have sent a number of general aviation businesses in the Home Counties over the weir. While the current plans are still a serious drag on business, they represent a huge improvement on what went before, and credit is due to the CAA, NATS, and the Department for Transport for joining with general aviation to convince the spooks that the thing could be done better.

The speakers were the CAA's head of Olympics planning Dawn Lindsey, Wing Commander Mike Tetlow, an RAF navigator who has been seconded to the Metropolitan Police to assist with Olympic security, and Squadron Leader Sian Ryan, who is responsible for organising the unit of military controllers at Swanwick who will provide the flight following service imposed in the restricted area during the Olympics.

A quick summary of the situation: the original restrictions, announced in March and bounced on the industry without consultation, covered a vast area of Britain's most active GA airspace 100 miles across, and were scheduled to run

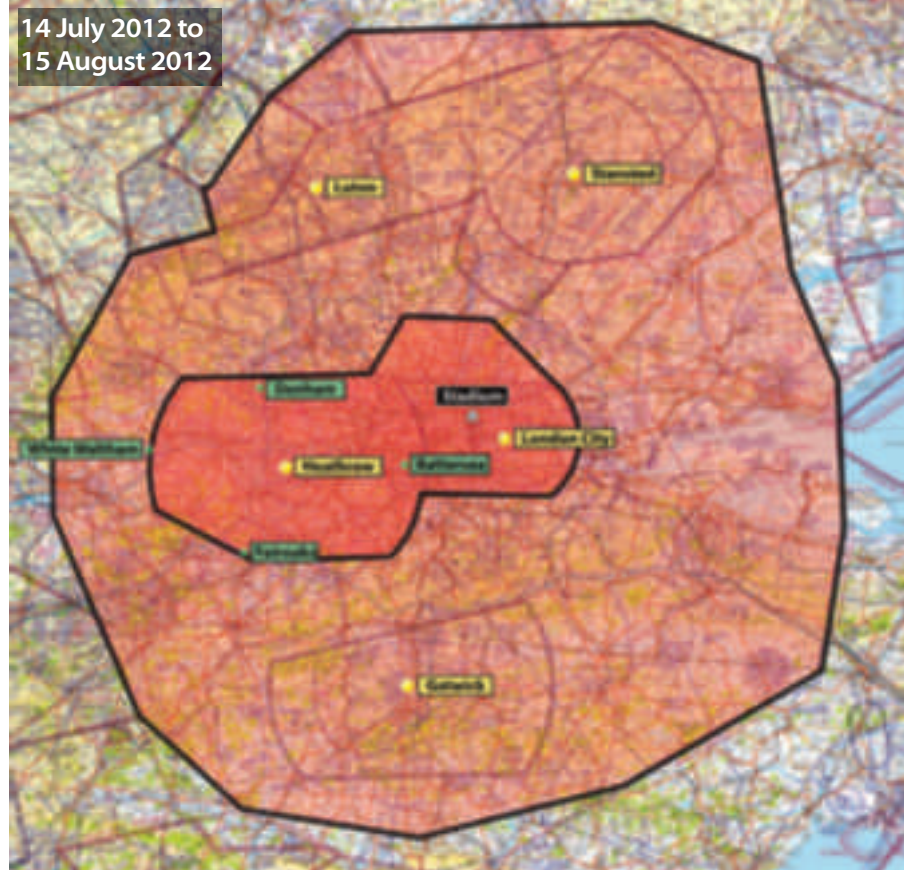
knowledge. During the period of the Olympics and the Paralympics a flight-following service would be established to ensure that nobody left a pre-approved track. This, of course, will be labour-intensive from an ATC standpoint, leading

to refusal of access for some aircraft. The original restricted area covered some 18 airfields and more than 40 flight training organisations, who would be badly affected.

The strategy has not been to seek



14 July 2012 to
15 August 2012



Right: the new restrictions proposed for the full Olympics (top) and for the Paralympics (bottom) have been significantly reduced

for the two busiest months of the summer flying season. A limited number of flights would be allowed, but only of aircraft with transponders, and after VFR flight plans had been filed and accepted. These flight plans would have to be rigorously adhered to. Student solo cross-countries were banned, and VFR aircraft were totally prohibited from parts of the area.

Since the March announcement, AOPA UK has been working with others to win alleviation from the most onerous aspects of the restrictions. It has had strong official support, especially from the CAA, where Dawn Lindsey has been indefatigable in promoting general aviation's case. Through these official bodies it has been possible to ring bells in the darker recesses of the Ministry of Defence and the security services, where responsibility for the restriction lies.

The security services aimed to establish in the restricted area a 'known environment' into which no unauthorised traffic could intrude without their

16 August 2012 to
12 September 2012





Left: Dawn Lindsey shows the Olympic restriction chart, which will be given away with new half mils

alleviation on the grounds that the restrictions were overkill; there was never any possibility that MI5 would respond to general aviation pilots' protests that we knew more about their business than they did. Instead, the thrust has been to demonstrate that important adjustments could be made without compromising security at the Games. Counter-proposals have been made in detail for specific changes in small areas to enhance the ability of local pilots to go about their business as normal.

As a result of this lobbying, the government announced a series of important amendments which went a long way towards meeting AOPA's goals. Most importantly, the main restrictions will now

last for only one month rather than two – from 14 July to 15 August 2012, while less onerous restrictions will cover the period of the Paralympics from 16 August to 12 September. In addition, the restricted area has been shaved in some parts, and a list of concessions have been made to cover specific problems around individual flying sites. Airfields like Booker which lie within three miles of the boundary of the restricted area can apply for exemptions to allow traffic to come and go at will, using agreed routes. The ban on student solo cross-countries has been lifted, and arrangements have been made for airfields in the prohibited area at the centre of the restricted zone – affected airfields include Denham, Fair Oaks and White Waltham, as

well as Battersea Heliport – to stay in business.

The edge of the restricted zone has been shaved in some areas to accommodate local traffic concerns. But in other areas the security services are immovable. The transponder requirement will not be changed which is bad news for those whose aircraft have no transponders, like the microlight school at North Weald. Representations were made to allow such slow-moving traffic to fly without SSR, but it became clear that the spooks are not just concerned about terrorist attacks – they will consider the intrusion of a paraglider flown by a publicity-seeker in a batman outfit to be a serious breach of security.

A dedicated group of military air traffic controllers will be established, using civilian equipment, to provide a flight-following service for a maximum of 120 aircraft an hour in the restricted zone. Circuit traffic is exempt from the requirement to file flight plans and will not count towards the 120 aircraft limit – but they'll still have to have transponders. While it was originally stipulated that VFR flight plans would have to be filed via AFPEX, and promises were made that the unwieldy system would be upgraded to be more user-friendly, it has now been agreed that other systems can be used. Flight plans must be filed between 24 and two hours before take-off. Flight plans will have to include accurate timings and waypoints, including those for entering and leaving the restricted zone. Pilots will receive an acceptance message and an approval number which will have to be quoted on first contact with ATC. Special arrangements are being made for essential pipeline and powerline patrols, which were not catered for in the original plans.



Flesh on bones

The CAA and RAF team put the flesh on these bones. Dawn Lindsey began by saying that a proposal to follow the Olympic torch relay with a 'moving RAT' had been discussed and discarded as unworkable. Apart from the main restricted and prohibited areas, there would be RATs of short duration covering Olympic venues outside London, such as major football stadia; there will also be some oddities like a RAT at Hadleigh Farm near Southend, where the mountain biking will take place. These will be activated as normal by notam. A restricted area up to 3,000 feet will cover the sailing at Weymouth for the

Left: restriction covering the sailing at Weymouth will stretch up to 3,000 feet

entire duration of the Games.

They're going to have a test run of the flight planning system on November 12th (this date may change). You can get involved by filing a plan for a flight you don't intend to make on that day – the main point is to test how long it takes Atlas Control, the Olympics ATC system, to process the flight plans and to point up any glitches in the procedure, but if you don't file flight plans often, it's a great way of testing your own system. Because the test is being run on a training and development platform at NATS in Swanwick, you'll only be able to file (for the test) by AFPEX because that's all the training system understands.

The CAA is producing a special chart covering the restrictions, and while they've made a start on it, it's far from finalised. A copy of the current draft has been left with Martin Robinson. The CAA has a dedicated budget to cover communications and has hired a contractor who was involved in the Sydney Olympics, so all will be explained!

The RAF view

Here Mike Tetlow picked up the baton. As well as having flown in Phantoms and Tornado F3s, Wing Commander Tetlow is a GA pilot who flies the Chipmunk and Citabria, as well as a glider pilot – all of which gives him an excellent understanding of GA's position on the Olympic restrictions, and an ability to

speak to the spooks with authority on what was proportionate. The aim, he said, was to create a 'known traffic environment' where any unknown infringer could be identified and dealt with in good time. There had been much discussion over the size and shape of the restricted zone. "While the restricted area looks very big at 90 knots, it is much smaller in a Challenger at 400 knots, which has to be taken into account," he said.

He warned that extra restrictions may be imposed at any time if there was deemed to be an increase in the level of threat. "We don't plan to do that, but we could do it if the need arose."

Explaining individual changes to the prohibited area, he said that general aviation flights would be able to use a portion of the Class A airspace at the south west corner of the Heathrow Zone under a Role 18 exemption, outside a line drawn across the prohibited zone from the Ockham VOR to the Woodley NDB. This was to give VFR traffic to bypass Farnborough to the north-east during the air show.

No aircraft will be allowed into the prohibited zone (broadly the Heathrow Class A and the London City Class D, with a few add-ons and take-offs) unless they've undergone crew, baggage and passenger screening. There will be certain exemptions for White Waltham, Denham,

Olympic team: Wing Cdr Mike Tetlow, Sqn Ldr Sian Ryan and Dawn Lindsey

Fairoaks and Battersea Heliport.

Each airfield will have its own squawk, which aircraft in the circuit will use. Aircraft coming out, having got an acceptance number for their flight plan, will be given a discrete squawk. Transponders are required, but Mode A is acceptable. Arrangements had been made for non-transponder aircraft to leave the zone in formation with transponder-equipped planes; 'in formation', he said, did not mean a few feet off the wingtip, but within about a mile.

Wing Commander Tetlow made no bones about the fact that there was limited capacity in the restricted zone, and if you didn't have an acceptance number you couldn't presume you could fly just because you'd filed a flight plan. But there were many more desks, and many more bodies, available than had originally been planned, and they would work hard to see that demand equalled supply.

Airfields within three miles of the restricted zone boundary had individual arrangements whereby their traffic could leave and enter the zone by the most expeditious route without contact with Atlas Control; there included Old Warden, Duxford and Fowlmere, Earls Colne and Headcorn. No flight plans or transponders would be required for this traffic, but pilots would obviously have to be aware of the approach pattern. Farm strips within three miles of the boundary can have similar concessions, but they must apply for them – they can't simply presume they can fly. Deadline for applications is March 12th, but the quicker you apply, the better.

While the ban on solo students had been lifted, instructors would be answerable for their conduct in the zone – there's a special responsibility to ensure that the student knows exactly what he or she must do.

Follow me

Wing Commander Tetlow had a few very interesting things to say about interceptions. He showed a slide of a Eurofighter at high alpha and remarked that this is probably what an infringer in a light aircraft would see as the fighter attempted to slow down to keep pace. He had sent two of these after a PA28 that flew into a royal birthday RAT, an interesting experience for the Piper pilot. Interception procedures would be printed in the margin of the special chart that is being produced of the restricted area; might be a good idea to brush up on them now. Initial contact would be attempted by radio – the RAF is currently working up some 'intercept scripts' – and failing that the fighter might waggle its wings in a 'follow me' gesture; then they have what they call the 'knife-edge' manoeuvre in which they present their underside with all its weaponry to the infringer...

Squadron Leader Sian Ryan normally



Biggin's Olympic hopes punctured

Biggin Hill's attempts to maximise its potential during the Olympic Games have been blocked by the local council, which has refused to countenance extending the airport's operating hours by five hours a week for a seven-week period.

Biggin's Managing Director Jenny Munro characterised the rejection as a missed opportunity to showcase the town, the airport and the area at a critical time. While many government bodies and industries are pulling out all the stops to ensure the Olympic Games generate some economic benefits, the effect of the Olympics on the general aviation industry seems overwhelmingly negative.

Biggin Hill airport enjoys a large measure of support in the area, having been part of the fabric of the community for more than 90 years, but inevitably there are vociferous 'antis' who are dedicated to killing it off. The debate over the airport's application for extended hours, conducted at a series of public meetings, was lively, but it was clear that the airport still has much to do to counter misinformation and scaremongering. In the end, the council – the London Borough of Bromley – took the easy road.

Ms Munro said afterwards: "A massive increase in written support means that the council must start seeing this airport as an asset which generates hard cash for the borough every year, and upwards of 1,000 jobs. I will welcome the day when the council, ourselves, and our residents are fully aligned behind a sustainable business which represents a good news story in these days of economic and social challenges. I am convinced we will get there, because we all have a responsibility to the 300,000 plus people in this borough and the local economy, not just the few airport objectors.

"Our way ahead now is to make the best of the Olympics opportunities that remain."



Biggin Hill's hopes of an Olympic windfall have been dashed

Below: Wing Cdr Mike Tetlow is a GA powered and glider pilot



works LARS and is familiar with general aviation activity; she set out some of the challenges they face in setting up a unit staffed by military controllers using civilian equipment covering an area with which they are not familiar – much training and orientation is needed before the big day.

Atlas Control had effectively fallen to the military because there's nobody else who can do the job – what's more, civilian controllers are much more expensive. Apart from the controllers, they'd identified some 40 assistants who would be handling the flight plans. These people are already very knowledgeable about flight planning, and there's to be a round-the-clock telephone helpline for the confused and uncertain. They can also provide 'ambassadors for AFPEX' who can come out to your club or school and talk you through it.

You'll get a phone text message saying your flight plan has been accepted, always presuming it is not delayed by the phone company. Acceptance numbers are an absolute must, but it wouldn't simply be a matter of 'computer says no'... there would be an explanation in each case of why the plan was being rejected, together with suggestions on how to fix it. "It's an automated system, so things like leaving extra spaces or substituting a letter O for a number 0 will lead to rejection," she said. While flights would probably be accepted within 30 minutes of the stated time, less is better.

Playing fair

Martin Robinson concluded by thanking everyone at the CAA, in the military and elsewhere who had come together to fight GA's corner on this. "We should remember where we started from, and how far we have come," he said. "Dawn Lindsey and her team, the DfT and industry worked very hard to convince the spooks that security need not be compromised by positive changes which would be highly significant to industry.

"There is still the potential for the government to close the airspace down if people do the wrong thing, so it's up to all of us to ensure that the message gets across, and that everyone knows what they are doing. To make this work, everybody must play fair – only ask for what you need, if you have to cancel a flight plan, do so in good time, and stick as closely as possible to your times – testing the limits of the system will rebound on your fellow pilots. It's up to GA to maximise the potential of the system."

AOPA's Nick Wilcock added that nearer the time, the AOPA Instructor Committee will be promulgating some recommended codes of practice for guidance.

Some useful URLs:

www.flightplanningonline.co.uk

www.myafpex.co.uk

www.airspacesafety.com/olympics ■