

# Letters to the Editor

## FAA IR

Sir,  
Thank you, first of all, for the efforts you make on our behalf. Your work is very important and greatly valued.

I write today in support of your article on the FAA IR. I transferred to the FAA for all the reasons you have articulated so often. My training was focused on the practical aspects of flying and my IR test was a gruelling eight hours long. I have never experienced such pressure from an examiner before or since. I am proud of my achievement and I feel privileged to fly airways from time to time but, most of all I, feel that I am a much better pilot than I ever was with my IMC rating. I do not believe I am an irresponsible pilot (though I have made my share of mistakes) but, equally, I do believe I am a much better pilot. My philosophy is to use my skills to keep me out of trouble, not get me into it.

If Brussels has its way, my flying days will be over. It's expensive enough keeping my vintage aircraft in the air but the cost of a conversion to the G-reg is completely out of the question, especially with the Geronimo STC; the aircraft will almost certainly have to be scrapped. I would have to revalidate all my CAA licenses and undergo an initial medical as my old one expired several years ago now (I missed a trick there...) and go back to club

flying, which is why I bought my own aircraft all that time ago. No thank you.

I would lose an investment totalling some £100,000 including the capital value of the aircraft of about £35,000. It would be a personal disaster. All my suppliers would lose income.

Please continue to fight our corner and if I can ever help, please let me know. In the meantime I will fly as often as I can, just in case!

**Warren Armstrong**

## Unlicensed strips

Sir,  
I found it rather strange reading David Ogilvy's article on basic instruction from unlicensed airfields. I know that GA has changed quite a bit in the last forty years and we live in a much more litigious society but it was as if it had never happened before.

In the late sixties I used to operate out of two unlicensed airfields, the one a dis-used military airfield and the other a large well equipped MOD airfield which, normally, was officially closed while we were operating. This was my first experience of instructing in an unlicensed environment and it seemed to pose very few problems and, in the latter case, the students seemed to gain much from the quiet and relaxed airspace. In the first case, circuit and solo flying was carried out at a local licensed airfield after which we refuelled and returned to base.

More recent years have seen me back on an unlicensed field after retiring from full time instructing and what I miss most of all is the flexibility we used to enjoy all those years ago.

It seems a ridiculous waste of time and the student's money to fly to another airfield merely to undertake a dual exercise. I am unsure how valid Mr. Ogilvy's argument is in regard to a licensed airfield suffering competition from "a neighbouring site" causing it to "relinquish the licence" and the possible "closure of both places." One thing I am sure about, however, is that the excellent licensed airfield which I have used for the last few years will no longer accept us for circuits at the weekend – a rather important period of time for the average PPL student.

One could not possibly disagree with the assertion that many airstrips would be unsuitable for training though they might be used in the limited way I indicated above. Some years ago a friend wanted to renew his tailwheel experience on the strip in the photograph. He could still land the Auster perfectly but directional control on the first take off wasn't quite so good and I do recall our proximity to that row of trees on our right. Interestingly, a recent view down that strip on the internet indicates that it has grown surprisingly wide and there's no sign of those trees – maybe the sort of place I'm looking for now I'm back to tailwheels.

In my opinion there are still a number of unlicensed airfields where basic training could be undertaken safely. The airfield from which I operate at the moment could be an example – motor glider and microlight training takes place there in any case. It is also possible that the use of such airfields for training could reduce the pressure on licensed airfields and their local population by spreading the load of circuit work around the country. It may also be that the CAA might be persuaded to consider a

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different sort of licence more specifically tailored to the sort of light training aircraft in use. A useful first step might be, however, to permit dual training from unlicensed airfields with all circuit and solo work restricted to licensed airfields. The removal of this one restriction could be a great help for many small flying clubs.

**David Burbridge.**

### White knights

Sir,  
At the current time the country is beset with economic difficulties and the latest problem is the possibility of deflation – ie, a period of time when prices actually fall. From the pages of the financial press I gather that this is a very real threat with considerable dire consequences.

But wait! I see a white knight on the horizon riding to the rescue. Yes, it's none other than the CAA. Not for them a decrease in prices or some namby pamby one or two percent increase, or even, god forbid, a closing down sale. No! I know that we can rely on the CAA to impose their usual swingeing annual price hike and therefore single-handedly save the economy.

So I say 'Hurrah for the CAA'.

Your etc

**Name and address supplied**

### Oxford costs

Sir,  
As a point of note, with reference to your recent article on fee increases at Oxford, your readers and members ought to be aware of the full facts.

Back over five years ago, we were charging exactly the same landing fees for visiting aircraft under 1.5 tonnes as we are today - £15+VAT. Indeed an aircraft of 2 tonnes was paying £30+VAT in contrast to today's fee of £15+VAT for any single-engined aircraft under 2.73 tonnes (6,000 lbs MTOW) – double the cost today. More than that, at weekends, the fee for any aircraft under 2.73 tonnes today is

merely £7.50+VAT, or actually waived altogether if one uplifts 45 litres of fuel and there's no car parking fees contrary to your article.

I can't see how that is GA-unfriendly? Apples-for-apples comparisons of residency (parking) elsewhere at IFR airports, plus 120 landings a year at just £120+VAT/month show that Oxford's costs are far from extortionate, indeed less than many alternatives within a 100 mile radius at similarly-equipped airports (indeed better than many airports with no approach lights, NDB and certainly no ILS).

Using the ILS on procedural approaches at a premium is commonplace at most commercial airports equipped with an ILS – the 'NAV' fee. If you want the airport to clear the approach for five, six or seven minutes of all other aircraft, that comes at a cost.

An airport like Oxford would never of course recoup its operational costs for running the airfield from piston-GA activity alone, the whole business, as with many other peer airports around the country, is subsidised significantly through property rental revenues and more recently business aviation-related revenue.

As proven with the above facts, we have tried consistently to be sympathetic towards the private aircraft owner on costs whilst enhancing the amenities and capabilities of the

**Oxford costs**  
Changes at Oxford Airport have been increased again, and new changes have been introduced for aircraft owners who must now pay to use the car park.  
AOPA members at Oxford have been hit with a series of cost increases and some are looking for new airfields at which to base their aircraft as a business aviation centre, and Oxford has ploughed money into upgrading the airfield as a business aviation centre, and owners of light aircraft are questioning whether the airfield is using price to drive them out.  
In summer, the price of the monthly landing card was raised from £24 to £120, and VAT was added in November. As one owner points out, that's a 60% increase since May. In addition, the card now entitles the holder to only ten landings a month – any more must be paid for at £7.50 each.  
Since June, users of the ILS, and some £29.50 every time they use the ILS, and some pilots have voiced concern that scud-running and discreet use of a partial ILS approach will lead to safety issues.  
Oxford's problems stem from the fact that its biggest tenant, Oxford Air Training, has been forced to take its business abroad, leading to a catastrophic shortfall in activity at Oxford. The airport manager James Dillon-Godfrey answers owners' complaints with sympathy but adds: 'School flying once represented 95% of activity here. It is now down to just 36% and

we are the quietest we have ever been in our history. Our operating costs have doubled in five years whilst our movements have dropped by 70% in ten. We are no longer a profitable business today, but have made substantial investments with the aim of becoming so in the near future.'  
Some £15 million has been invested in the airport in the last few years, he says. And that money must be recouped. 'If you looked at the books, you may well conclude that we should have become an industrial estate housing estate or business park some time ago – a lot more money to be made a lot quicker. Believe it or not though, we are determined to keep it all going as a viable regional airport' in preference to any other avenue. Any suggestions on alternative means of making a living are warmly received. I've looked at motor racing, horse racing, film studios, Sunday markets, but exhibition centres and golf courses, but aviation remains in the forefront. As the only 'commercial' airport between Heathrow and Birmingham, we definitely have an aviation future.'  
One Oxford owner says: 'I have sympathy, but the cost burden cannot continue to fall on the GA user. Every new charge breaks somebody else's back. If I leave they will no longer have my £25,000 per annum fees for doing very little.' ■

**Left: Oxford airport manager James Dillon-Godfrey says the airfield has never been quieter. Below: Oxford has invested millions in facilities for business jets**

airfield hugely over the last few years at a vast cost to the respective owners - £15m capital expenditure over the last two years alone. It costs a frightening amount of money to resurface runways, aprons, taxiways on a typical WWII airfield and comply with ever-increasing and burdensome legislation. At

Oxford, the piston-engined GA fraternity are getting an awful lot more than they would or could ever pay for. There aren't that many IFR airports in the UK with say Cat 1 ILS, open from 06:30-22:30 hrs with a 1,553m, brand new runway that charge as little as we do.

I am absolutely sure that other airfields will close over the next decade where owners will not be able to justify the refurbishment or upgrade of those airfields in compliance with CAA or indeed environmental requirements. In the meantime, we will do our utmost to try and retain the price levels described above to the benefit of the forever-challenged GA market.

Perhaps a cost comparison (residency costs per landing?) would be useful feature in the next edition!

Always happy to shed further light on the realities of the airport side of the equation.

**James Dillon Godfrey**

Head of Marketing & Development  
Oxford Airport

\*See story elsewhere in this issue

### Wind turbines

Sir,  
I read your article on wind power (GA, December 2008) with much disappointment. I know David Ogilvy has good intentions and works hard for our Association, for which I thank him. The thoughts he expresses in his article are not helpful to the world and the UK government effort to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

We have a declining power supply from nuclear and fossil fuel and are faced with power cuts maybe as soon as this winter, and certainly we need to boost our supplies of power from non-polluting sources.

There is a growing effort of Community Owned Wind Turbines in the UK which rewards local investors with a 10% return and/or free power. I don't know whether you would regard this as a sweetener or not, but it is in effect the same for the locals (even if they have not invested) to have an interest in the local area and its amenities.

I sent the attached article to a Magazine trying to green up the image of aviation, before we are rejected by society as a polluter of the planet.

Incidentally I am not aware of any accidents involving aircraft and wind turbines, are you?

**Tony Marmont**

*Not yet. AOPA does not object to wind turbines, merely to placing them where they will be hazards to aviation – Ed.* ■

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