

Crossing the channel, the other way – A guide to flying to Deenethorpe from the continent

This guide is intended to encourage competitors to fly rather than drive to the World Microlight Championships at Deenethorpe in July 2024. It explains the logistics involved, and some differences about flying in the United Kingdom.

We start with the boring but essential parts of necessary permissions to fly foreign aircraft in the UK. We then highlight key differences in the way aviation operates in the UK compared to what you may be used to. Finally, we recommend routes to get to Deenethorpe with some good places to visit along the way.



Permissions

Normally, sub-ICAO foreign aircraft may require individual permissions to fly in the UK. However, WMC2024 will be applying for a bulk exemption for all competition aircraft. It is therefore **essential** that you fill out all WMC2024 registration documents clearly and submit them promptly.

Outside of WMC2024, the best source of advice on permissions is the MLA Flying in Europe guide available from the European Microlight Federation's emf.aero website.

Regardless of the Bulk Exemption all competitors or visitors to WMC2024 must do the following.



Flight plans

A flight plan is necessary to cross the FIR from France into the UK. This must be submitted at least one hour before departure. It should be activated on departure by Le Touquet tower or Lille Information, but does not need to be closed on landing in the UK.

For the return journey you do need to make sure your flight plan is closed on landing in France as they do conduct overdue tracing otherwise.



Customs

Departure from France must be from a customs designated airfield. Other countries may have different rules but are assumed to have similar requirements. Check with your airfield of departure.

Key options for departure across the English Channel from France are [LFAT Le Touquet](#) and [LFAC Calais](#). Experience of UK pilots since Brexit has shown Calais is not always staffed by customs even after prior notification. This is an issue for us as we need a passport stamp to avoid problems on the return journey. Travel in the opposite direction may be less affected by this.

There is a full list of [French Customs Airfields](#) on the Online GAR website. Details can change regularly and at short notice so review against the AIP and specific airfield website information for the latest information.




General Aviation Report (GAR)

UK Customs and Border Force must be notified of aircraft and passenger details prior to entry into the UK. This is covered by the submission of a General Aviation Report (GAR). Full details of the process can be found at [General aviation operators and pilots notification of flights - GOV.UK](#) but it is overly complicated.

You must submit your passenger information and intended arrival airfield online. The latter must be either a designated airport, or a non-designated airport that has a Certificate of Agreement in place. There is a list of such airfields in [Annex E](#) of the above document. Deenethorpe has a Certificate of Agreement in place. Check the list for other stops.

For arrival into the UK from most places the GAR must be submitted at least two hours prior to departure. Longer notification (12 hours) may be required for flight to/from Ireland/Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. You cannot submit more than 48 hours in advance. There is a similar requirement for GAR submission in the opposite direction to depart the UK.

The official GOV.UK website [Submit a General Aviation Report \(GAR\)](#) is relatively easy to use. A good alternative is [OnlineGAR](#) but this requires purchase of credits.

 **Submit a General Aviation Report (GAR)**
GARs Aircraft People Organisation Account Sign out Help & Guidance

It is helpful to register and load your crew, passenger and aircraft details into the system in advance. This is best done on a laptop rather than a phone.

Flying direct to/from Deenethorpe is more complicated than other destinations. It does not have IATA or ICAO code. This means you will need to specify a latitude and longitude manually. Deenethorpe is located at:

Latitude 52.500000

Longitude -0.590000 **Note the negative value indicating West**

Do you know the departure port's ICAO or IATA code?

If the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) or International Air Transport Association (IATA) code is unknown, geographic coordinates are expected.

Yes

No

You are only required to enter coordinates if your port does not have an IATA or ICAO code. Provide geographic coordinates as latitude and longitude pairs to six decimal places.

Latitude

For example 51.500594

52.500000

Longitude

For example -0.124600

-0.590000

After submitting your GAR, you must check for a Response Message confirming that all personnel can travel.



Checklist

The detail above can be summarised to confirm the essentials are in place:

- CAA permit or valid exemption
- Flight plan (1 hour prior to departure)
- Customs outbound from the continent
- GAR inbound to the UK (2 hours prior to departure)



Prior Permission Required (PPR)

Unlike much of Europe, airfields in the UK generally expect you to request permission to land before you set off. This is known as Prior Permission Required (PPR).

It usually involves a short telephone call to let the destination airfield know that you are intending to fly in. You will usually provide aircraft type and registration, and receive the current weather and runway in use. More complicated airfields may provide a verbal briefing of their procedures for which it is useful to have the airfield plate to hand. Occasionally it is necessary to cancel PPR if you change your plan so that they do not start search and rescue procedures.

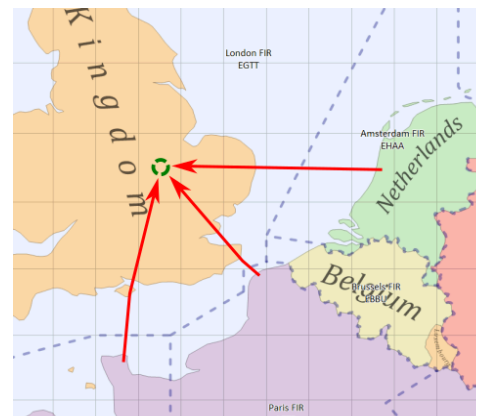
Weather and other emergency diversions are another matter and supported by the [Strasser Scheme](#). Simply call up on the radio and explain you are diverting due to weather.

Some airfields do not require PPR. Others provide an automated website. Be sure to check the airfield website and NOTAM details.



Sea-crossing routes

Most people fly the short crossing from Cap Gris Nez to Dover rather than a longer crossing across the North Sea east-west or the longer English Channel crossing from Cherbourg. This guide will concentrate on using that short crossing and subsequent airspace.





Radio services

The UK does radio slightly differently to elsewhere. Instead of the standard Flight Information Services we have Basic, Traffic and some other services in the UK. The CAA have put together some reasonably readable information describing the various services in [CAP 1434](#).

Key Flight Information Services provided for VFR flight in the UK are:

Basic service	This is the lowest level of service between a pilot and an air traffic controller. If ATC are aware of airspace activity that may affect your flight they will tell you; however, this is subject to their workload and the avoidance of other traffic is solely the pilot's responsibility. Maintain a good lookout.
Traffic service	ATC will use radar to provide you with detailed traffic information on specific conflicting aircraft; although they will not provide deconfliction instructions. Traffic service may be limited by radar coverage at low altitudes and controller workload.
Radar control service	ATC will utilise radar to provide mandatory heading and level instructions within controlled airspace.

Lower Airspace Radar Service (LARS)

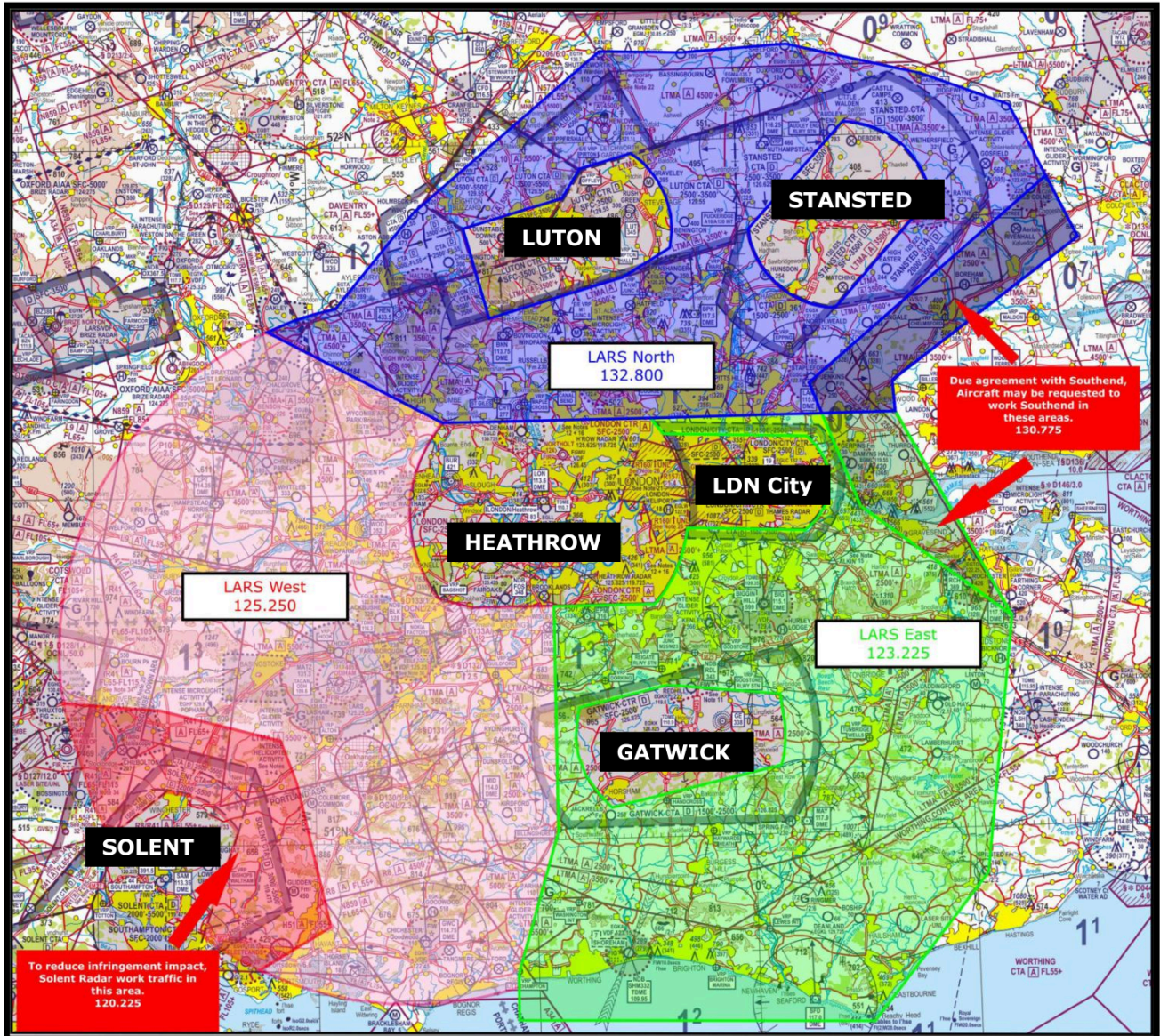
Air Traffic Services Outside Controlled Airspace (ATSOCAS) are provided by a variety of ATC units across the UK. These are a secondary offering from these units and are generally available on weekdays between 0800 and 1700 local. Coverage is piecemeal and dependent on radar coverage and controller workload.



Extract from, and full page available from UK AIP ENR 6-10 [LARS](#) showing intended coverage.

Farnborough Radar

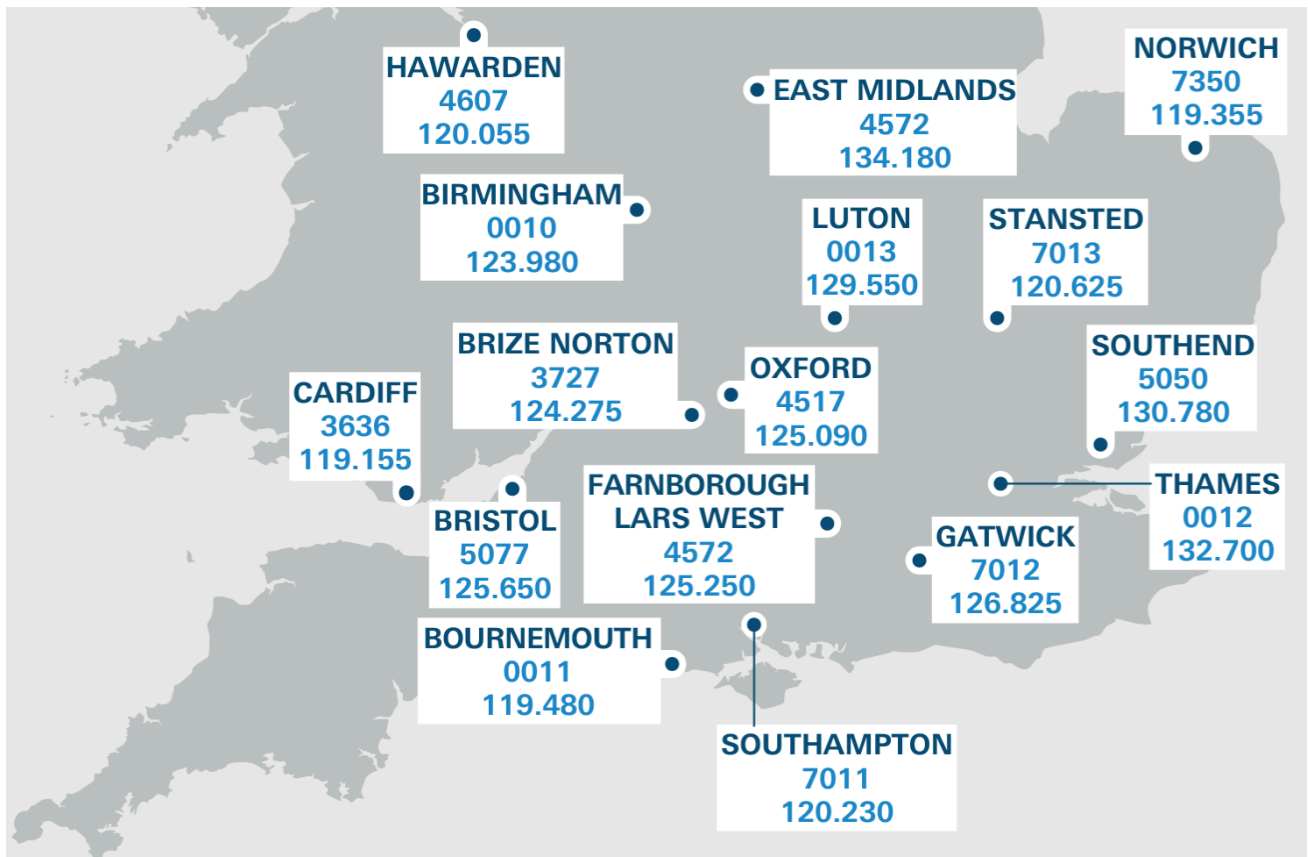
A key provider of LARS in the south east of the UK is Farnborough Radar. Coverage is split between three sectors - North, West and East. These can be very busy frequencies each with separate controllers. When quieter the sectors may be joined with only a single controller handling all traffic.



Listening Squawks / Frequency Monitoring Codes (FMC)

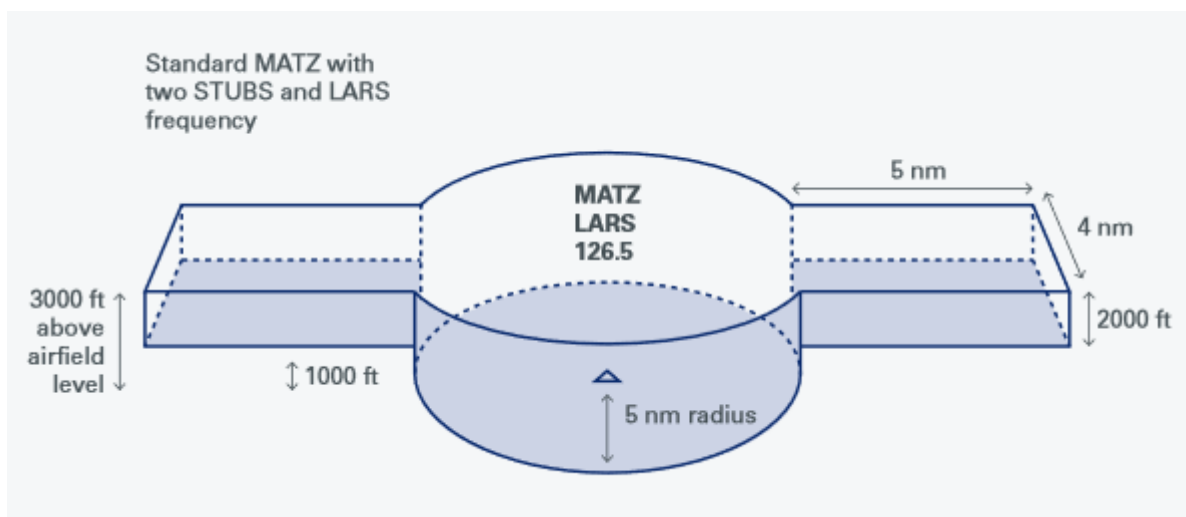
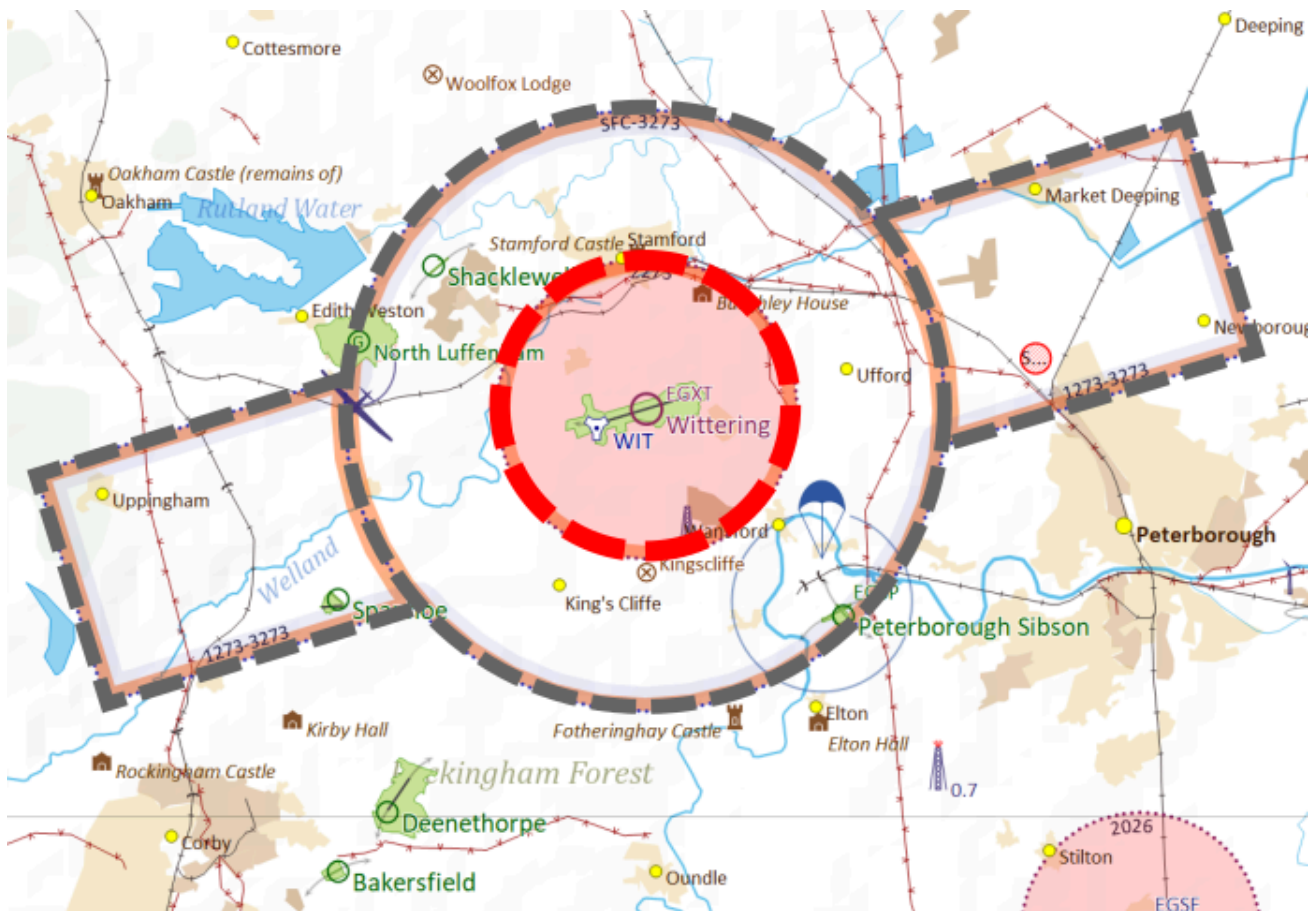
Listening Squawks are an alternative to making contact with ATC. By setting the appropriate transponder code you indicate you are tuned in and listening on the appropriate ATC frequency. This gives ATC the opportunity to make contact if necessary (e.g. to warn of the potential to infringe on airspace, or perhaps of opposite direction traffic) without the need to maintain a formal contract.

The Airspace & Safety Initiative maintains a [printable card](#) showing relevant frequencies and codes. SkyDemon shows similar information.



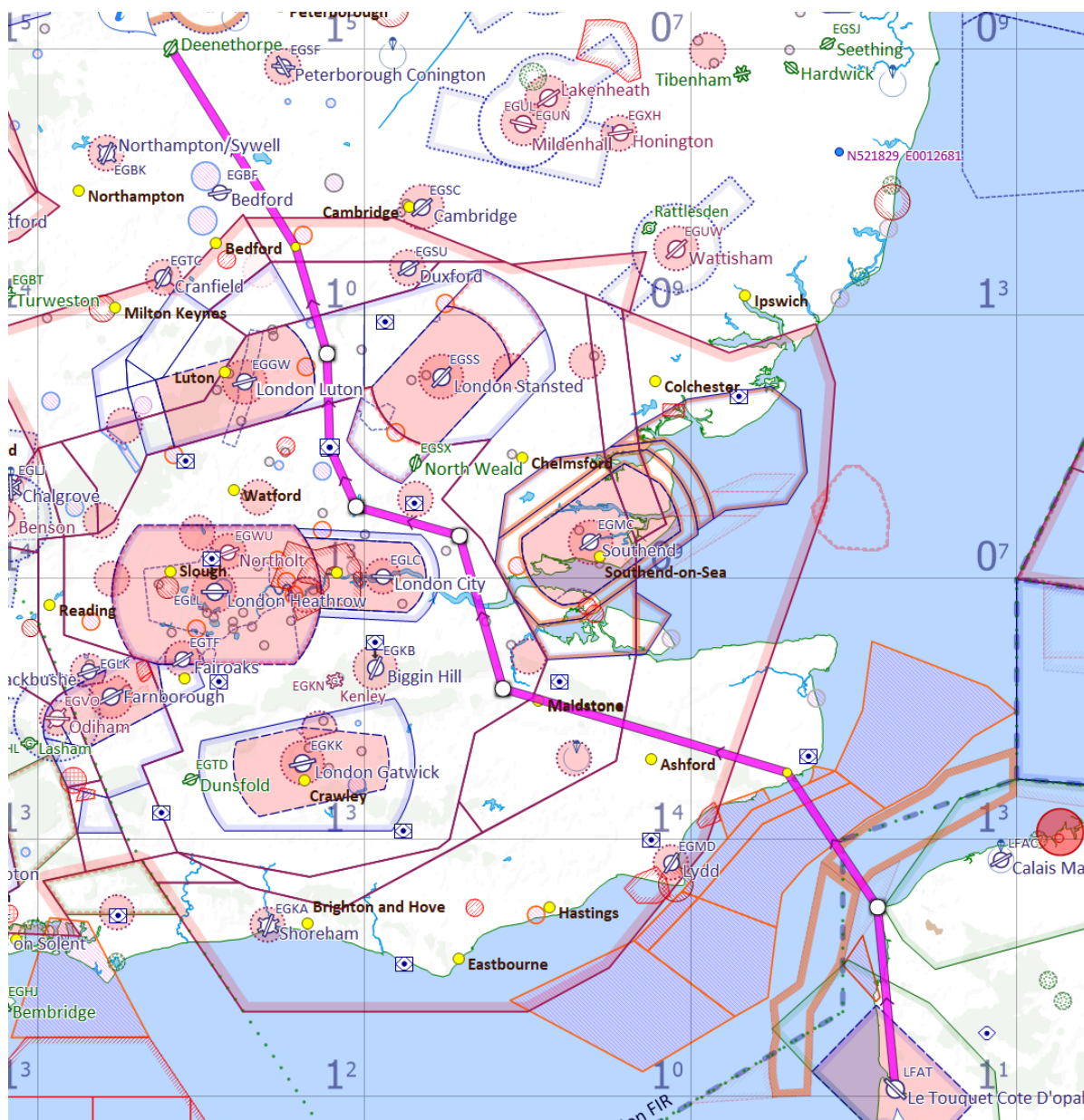
Extract from Airspace & Safety Initiative [FMC guide](#).

Military Air Traffic Zones (MATZ)



Military Air Traffic Zones such as Wittering to the north of Deenethorpe are relatively large pieces of airspace. Civil traffic does not need permission to enter the MATZ highlighted in grey, but it is courteous to request a **MATZ penetration** from the controlling unit. Outside of the hours of operation **blind calls** on the appropriate frequency are recommended. You must not enter the inner ATZ without ATC permission.

Recommended route to the east of London



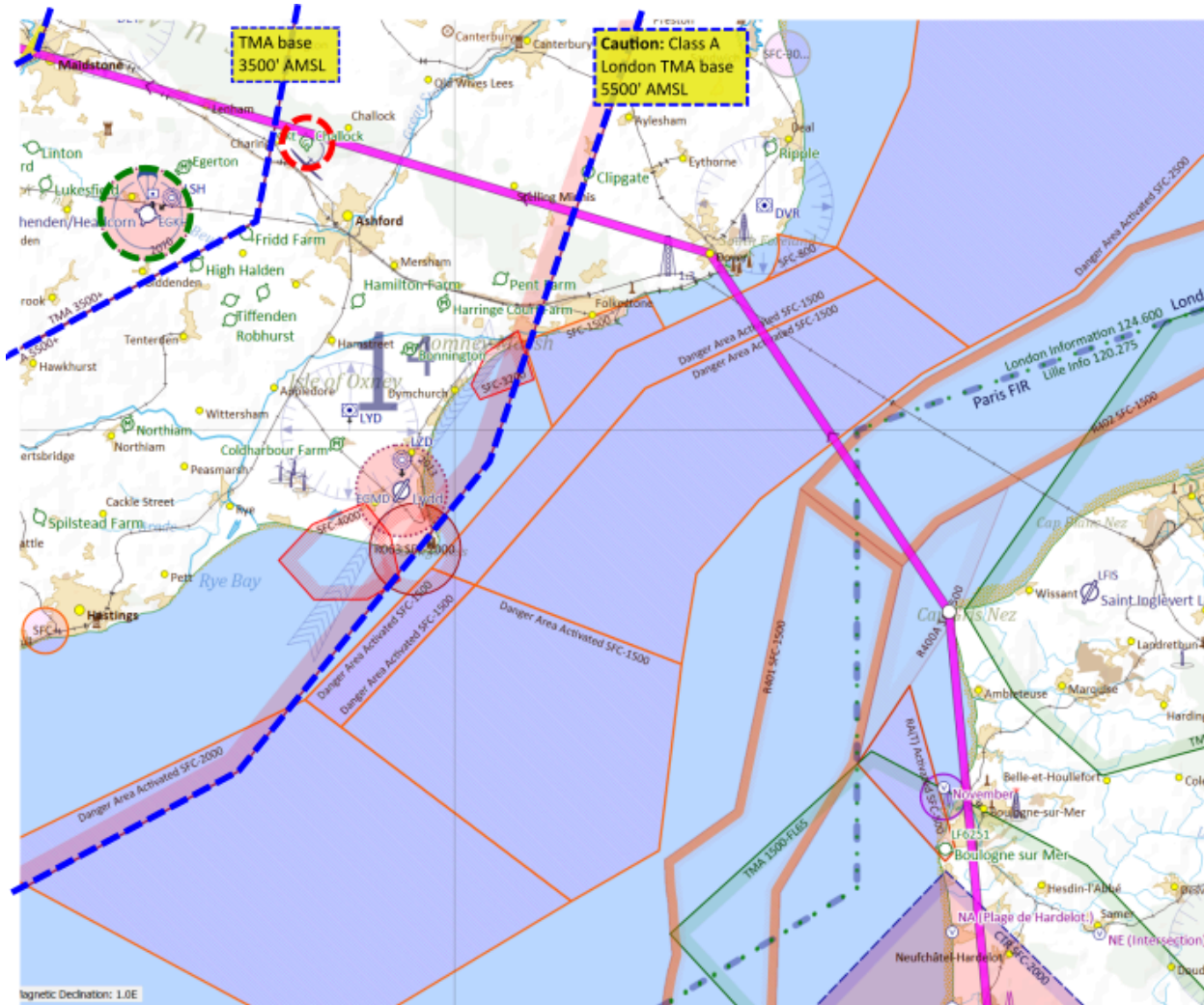
For the purposes of this guide, the flight is direct from LFAT Le Touquet to Deenethorpe. Other departure points are similar, and alternative stops en-route are suggested.

South East UK airspace looks quite complicated but is not as bad as it first looks. If you stay below the 2500' AMSL London TMA it is relatively straightforward. We'll break it down into a series of steps highlighting airspace, pinch points and places to stop off.

For simplicity, straight lines have been drawn. In reality you may need to fly around a gliding site, or wish to short-cut a corner. NOTAMS have been hidden from SkyDemon for clarity as their temporary nature may well indicate differently than at the time of writing.

It is perfectly reasonable to fly this entire route non-radio from the point of departing France. However, it can be useful to seek the assistance of ATC where appropriate. Some useful ATC services to use are suggested.

Navigating the channel



Departing LFAT Le Touquet, the tower will pass you to Lille Information 120.275. Lille will likely be keen to pass you to London Information 124.600 as soon as possible, probably before the FIR boundary.

There are various restricted and danger areas activated by NOTAM over the channel to allow manned and unmanned aircraft to operate to spot migrant boats. These are generally low-level from surface to 1500' or 2500'. Normally not all are active simultaneously.



Airspace - I like to cross the water as high as possible so I tend to climb up to 7000' coasting out from France, but caution the base of the London TMA begins at 5500' partly out to sea on the British side. It later steps down further to 3500' then 2500'.



EGKH Headcorn - Headcorn is a good place to stop if you want to get out of drysuits, etc. from the crossing but is otherwise a little pricey (now £20 landing fee) and too early a stop if departed from Le Touquet. They should have AVGAS. PPR by telephone.

Navigating around London



Airspace - As we pass [Challock gliding site](#) the London TMA drops to a base of 3500' AMSL then further to 2500' AMSL at Maidstone, so we must ensure we fly below these altitudes. In blustery weather I tend to find this part of the route quite turbulent due to the landscape.



[Rochester airport](#) and town sit on slightly higher ground so are easy to spot and avoid before turning north. On a good day you'll begin to see the skyscrapers of London on this leg, but they're often rather hazy in the distance.



The next point to note is the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge/[Dartford Crossing](#), which is surrounded by an industrial area with a number of tall towers crossing the river.



Caution: Keep a good look-out for other aircraft on these legs as there's little space vertically or horizontally making it somewhat of a pinch point.

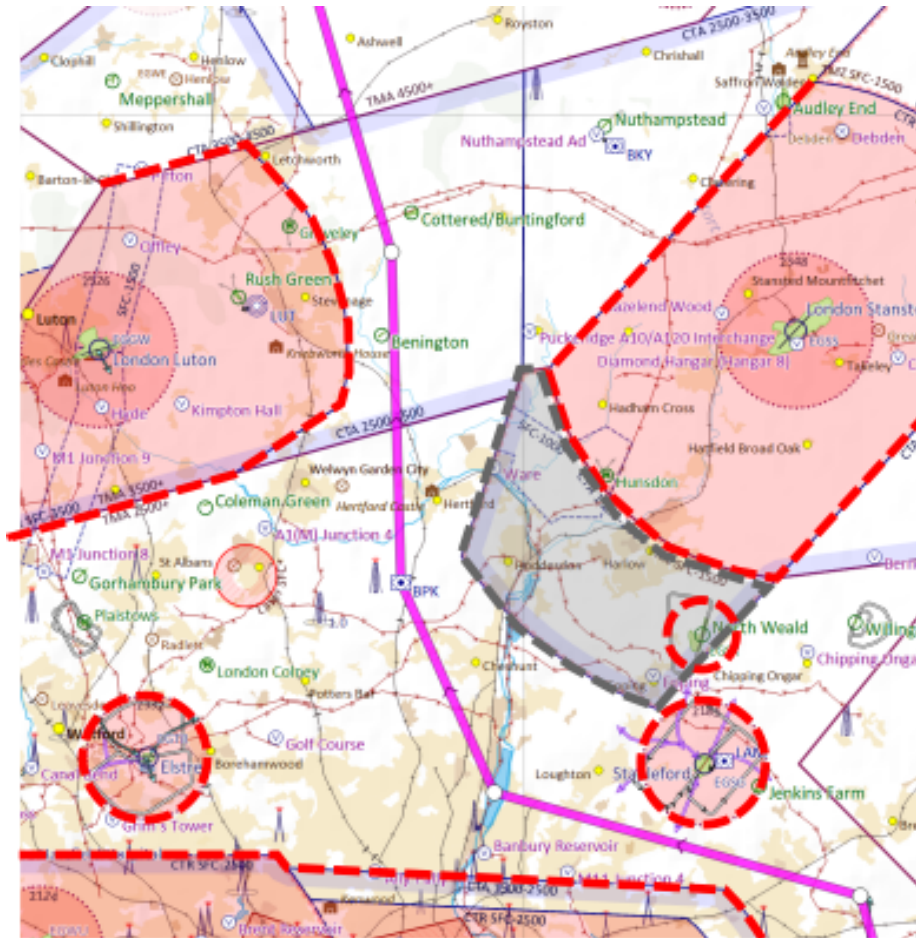


Once north of the River Thames remain east of [EGML Dayms Hall](#) airfield. With only grass runways this doesn't stick out well at low level, but has a cafe and AVGAS if you want a breather at this stage.



Farnborough LARS East 123.225 - Basic or Traffic service.

Navigating between Luton and Stansted



Turning east through the gap you may find it difficult to remain within gliding distance of a field given the limited height. There is usually a sports pitch or similar if you meander a little.



Caution: Continue to watch out for other traffic in this area as it remains a pinch point. There's little room so it can be busy with traffic.

The big reservoirs are a good next point to turn north, but it might be worth cutting the corner off to fly north of the most built-up areas.

Transiting between Stansted and Luton looks complicated, but provided you stay below 2500' in the gap between the two it's fairly straightforward. It is possible to transit directly through Luton and/or Stansted airspace, but that is beyond the scope of this guide.

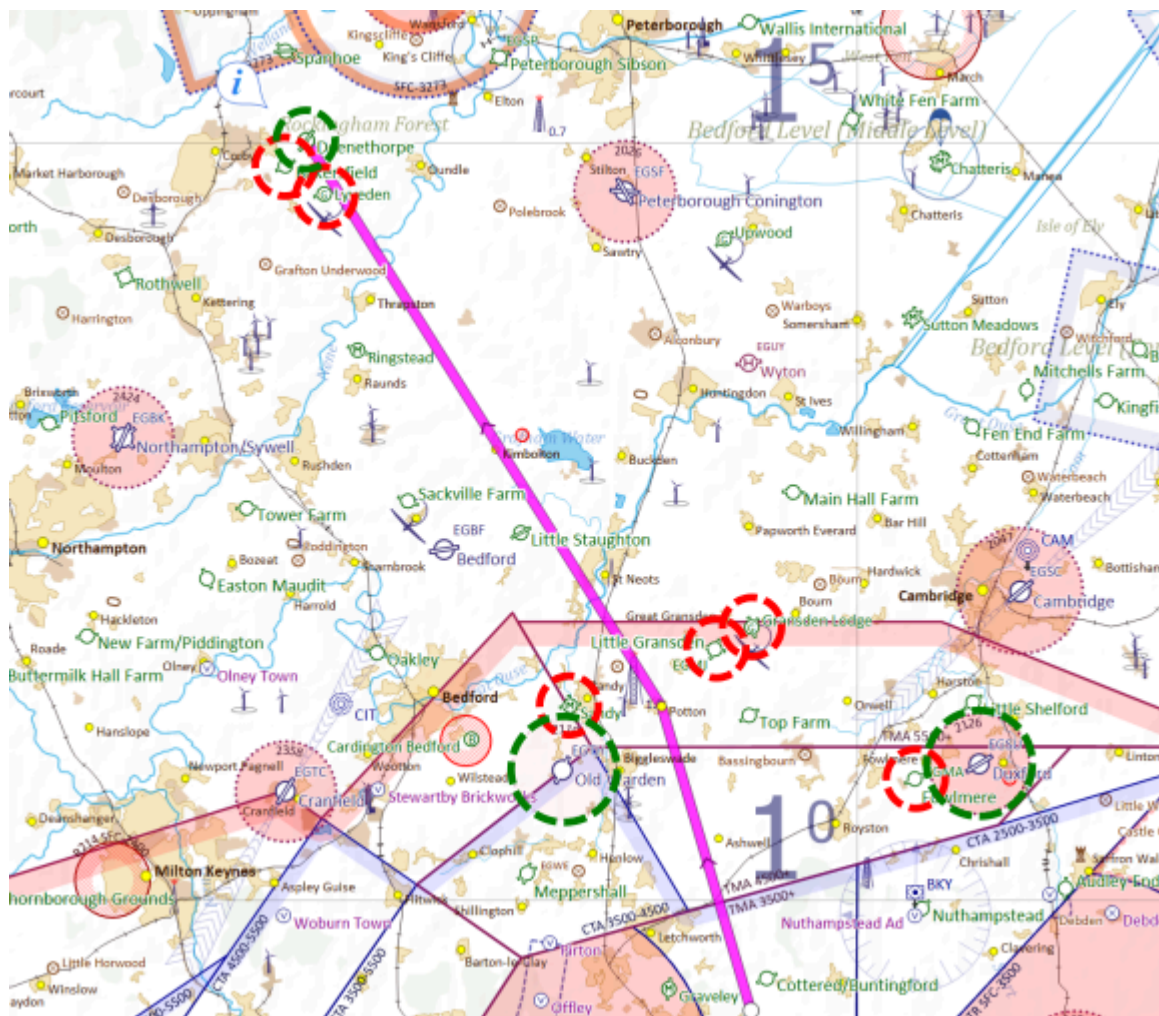


You can transit through the Stansted Transponder Mandatory Zone (TMZ) but with the base of the Class D CTA above at 1500' it is hardly worth it, saves very little time and is particularly tight past North Weald. The Airspace & Safety Initiative has [a basic guide on the Stansted TMZ](#).



Farnborough LARS North 132.800 - Basic or Traffic service
Stansted Radar 120.625 - Listening Squawk 7013
Luton Radar 129.550 Listening Squawk 0013

Navigating to Deenethorpe



Heading north out of the Luton zone, the airspace starts to open up. Be careful not to climb too early or turn left too soon.

There are a couple of good places to land if you've spare time en-route, or even overnight:



[Imperial War Museum Duxford](#)

£18.90 landing fee appears to include museum attendance for up to two hours. Check details on the Duxford website [Information for Pilots](#) page. PPR by telephone.



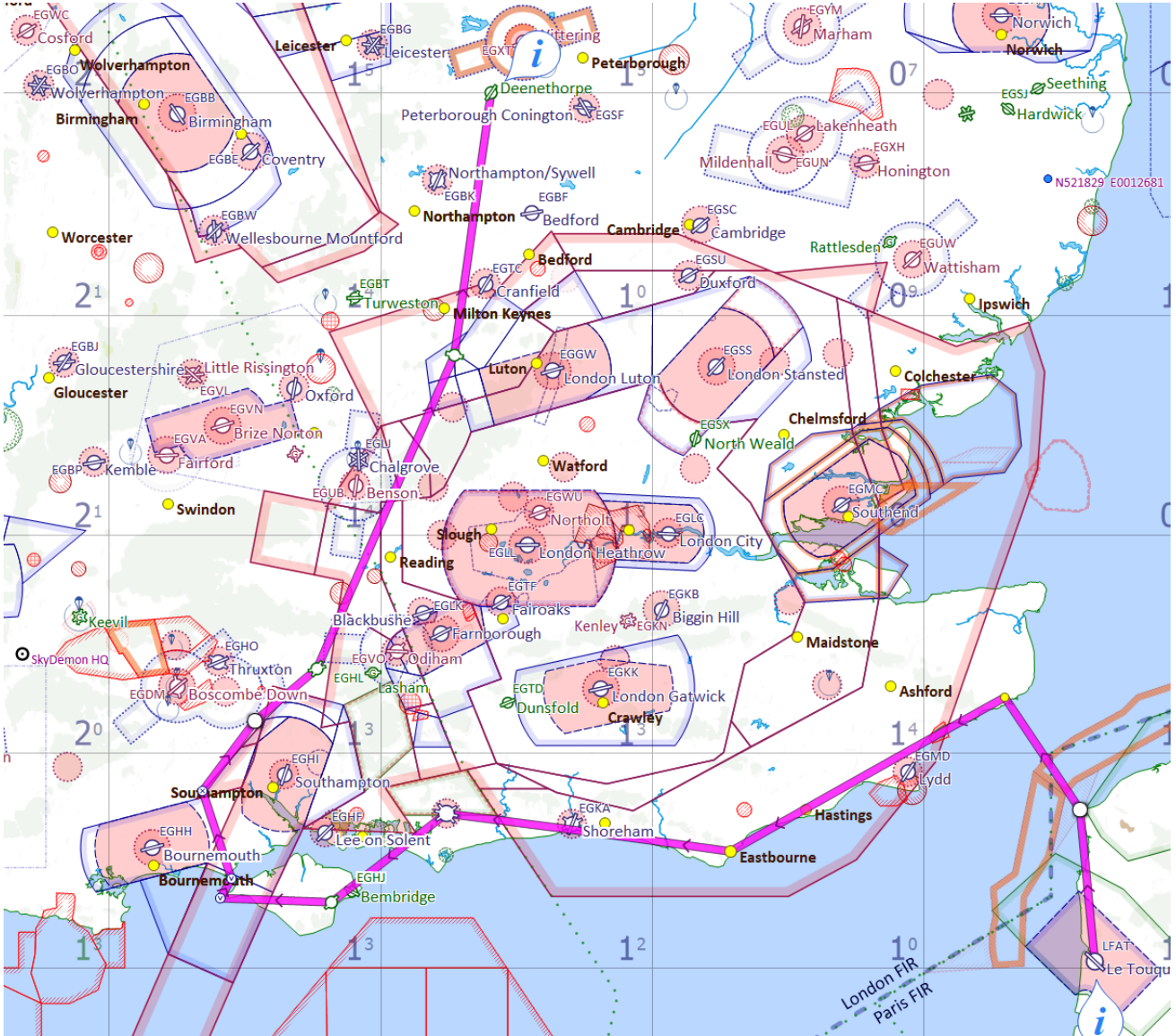
[Old Warden](#) - Home of the [Shuttleworth Collection](#)

£15 landing fee grants the pilot free access to the museum (passengers £15.50). There is a good sit-down, hot-foot cafe. Check opening times and online PPR via the [aerodrome information](#) pages on the website.

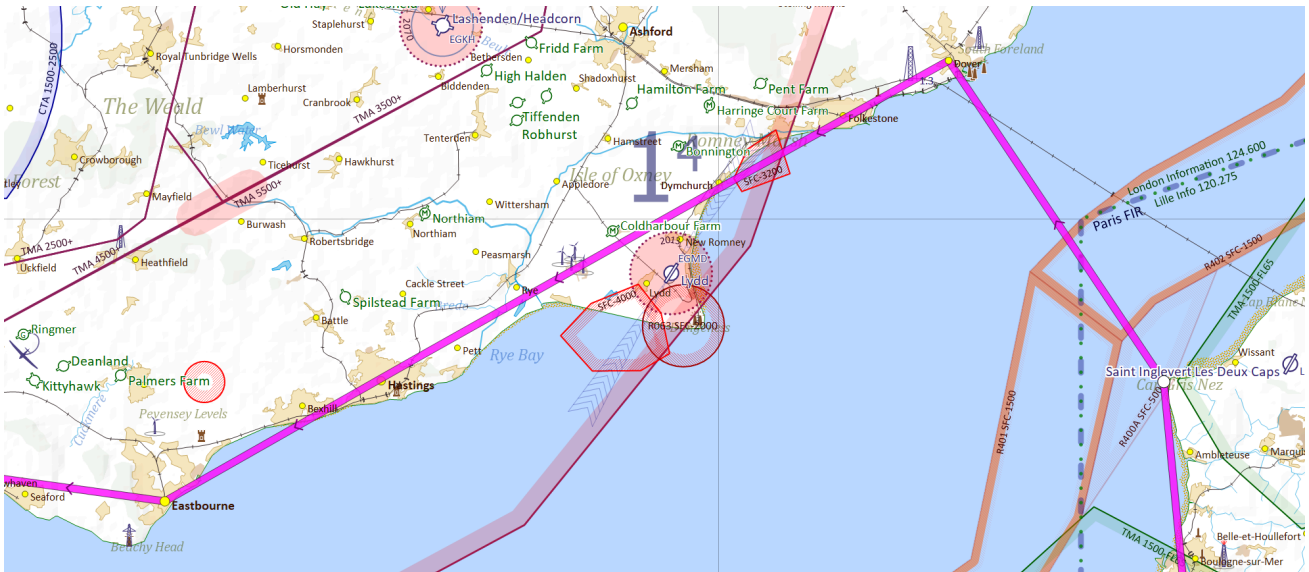
Final approach information for Deenethorpe is on the [WMC2024 website](#).

Recommended route to the west of London

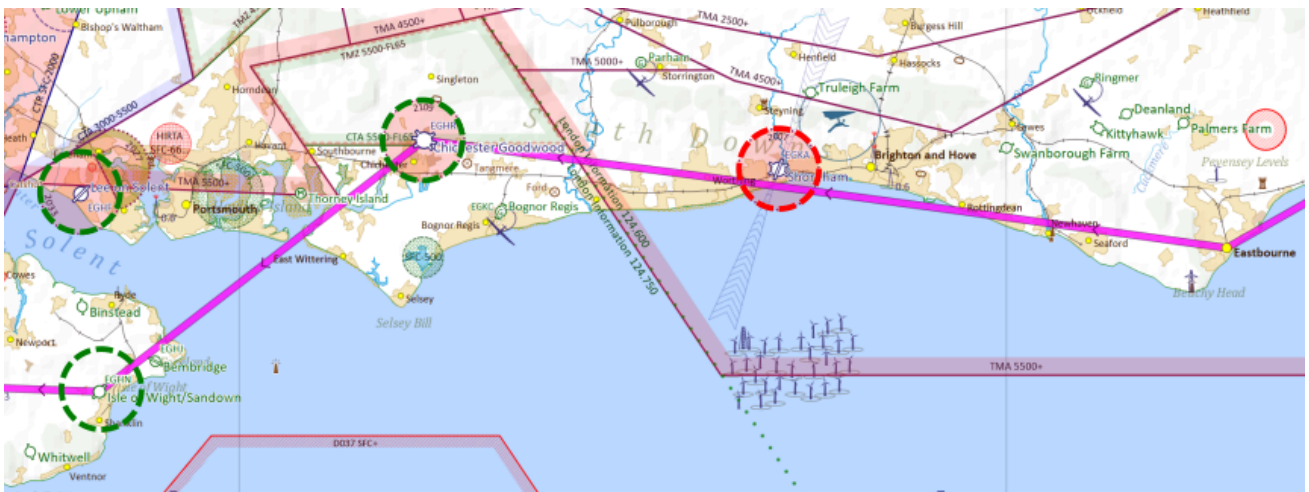
If you have more time available, an alternative route takes you to the west of London. It is a considerably longer route. You can avoid a lot more of the low-level airspace, although there are still choke points to navigate.



The South Coast and the Isle of Wight



After coasting in from the English Channel, begin to head south west down the coastline. There are danger areas and [Lydd](#) to avoid but they are easy to avoid laterally or vertically.



There are lots of places to stop off or overnight on this part of the journey.



[Goodwood](#)

Goodwood is a nostalgic and famous airfield to get in your log book.



Sandown, Isle of Wight

A firm favourite for UK pilots. Sandown is a very welcoming airfield.



The beach is a 30 minute walk away.



Camping welcome.



AVGAS available, or a short walk to Morrisons for MOGAS.



The Needles to the west of the Isle of Wight



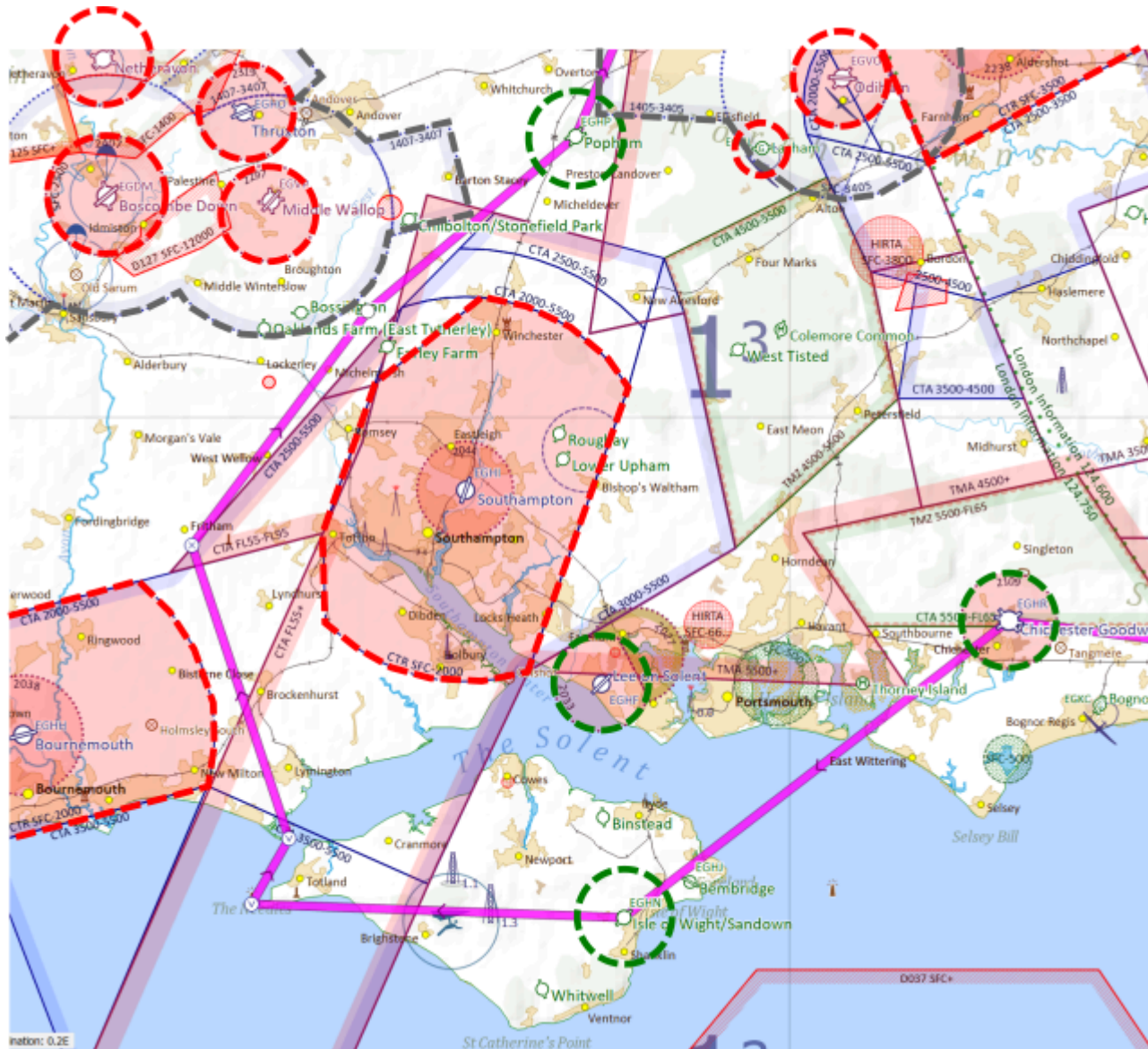
Lee on Solent

An alternative to Sandown on the mainland, Lee on Solent is ideal for visiting the Historic Dockyards at Portsmouth. A short taxi ride will take you to the Gosport Ferry across Portsmouth Harbour.



This is a busy airport used by Coastguard helicopters amongst others in close proximity to Southampton controlled airspace. Pilots should read detailed briefing notes on the website.

Heading North from the Isle of Wight



For this guide, I've made the assumption of an overnight stop at Sandown. On departure, it is worth flying to the west of the island to see [The Needles](#), before crossing The Solent at [Hurst Castle](#) and heading north over [The New Forest](#).

You will need to fly this at low-level as the base of the Class D Solent CTA is 2000' AMSL. There is also a pinch point between the Solent CTR/CTA and the Boscombe Down/Middle Wallop MATZ requiring careful navigation and look-out.



[Popham](#)

Popham is the natural home of UK general aviation and an ideal place to stop.

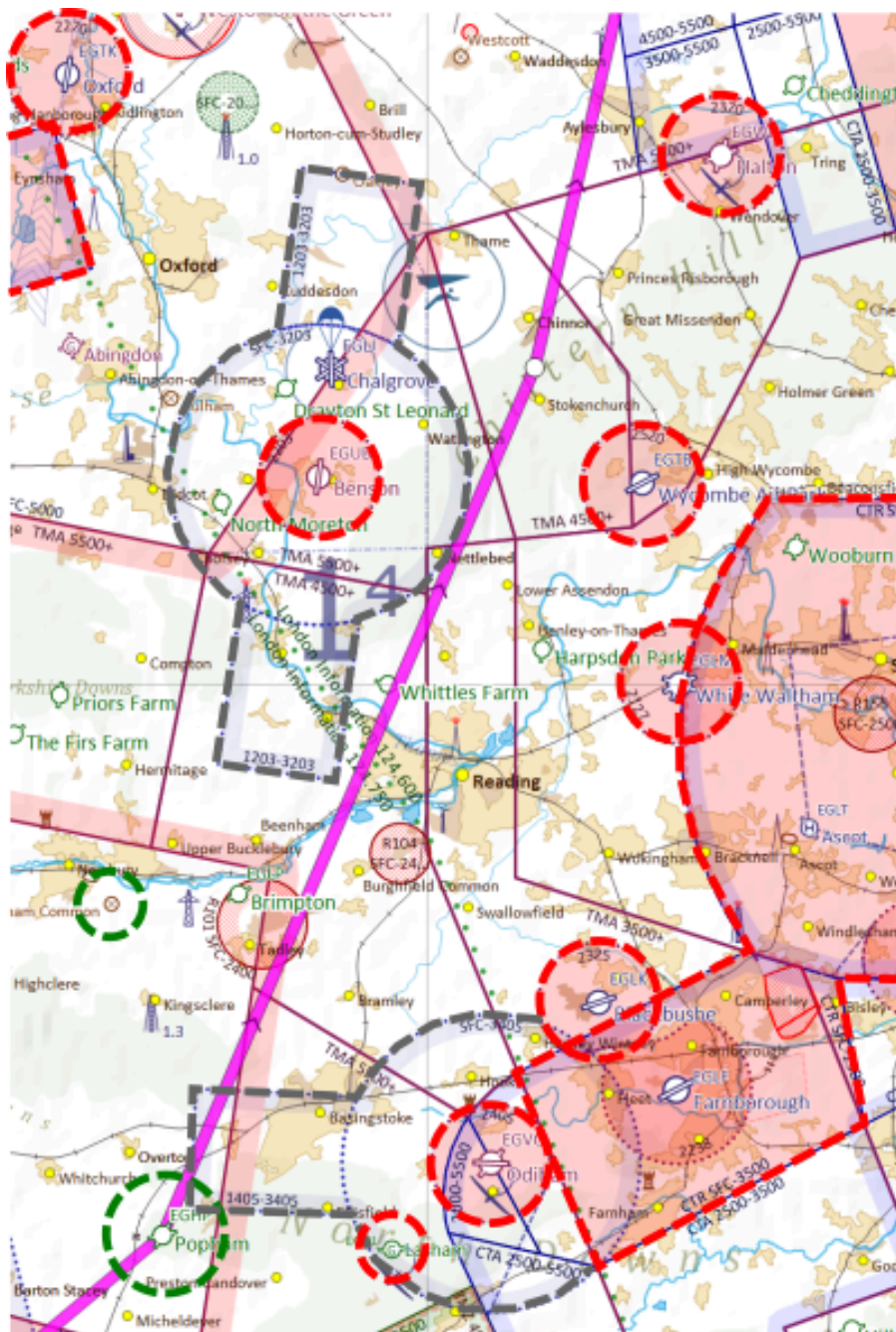


Cafe



100LL and UL91 by credit card

Heading further north, west of the London airspace



The route continues north from Popham. The airspace looks busy but by remaining to the west of the Farnborough CTR and London airspace is relatively easy to navigate.



Caution [Lasham](#) - the busiest gliding site in the UK. In good weather there may be many gliders about.

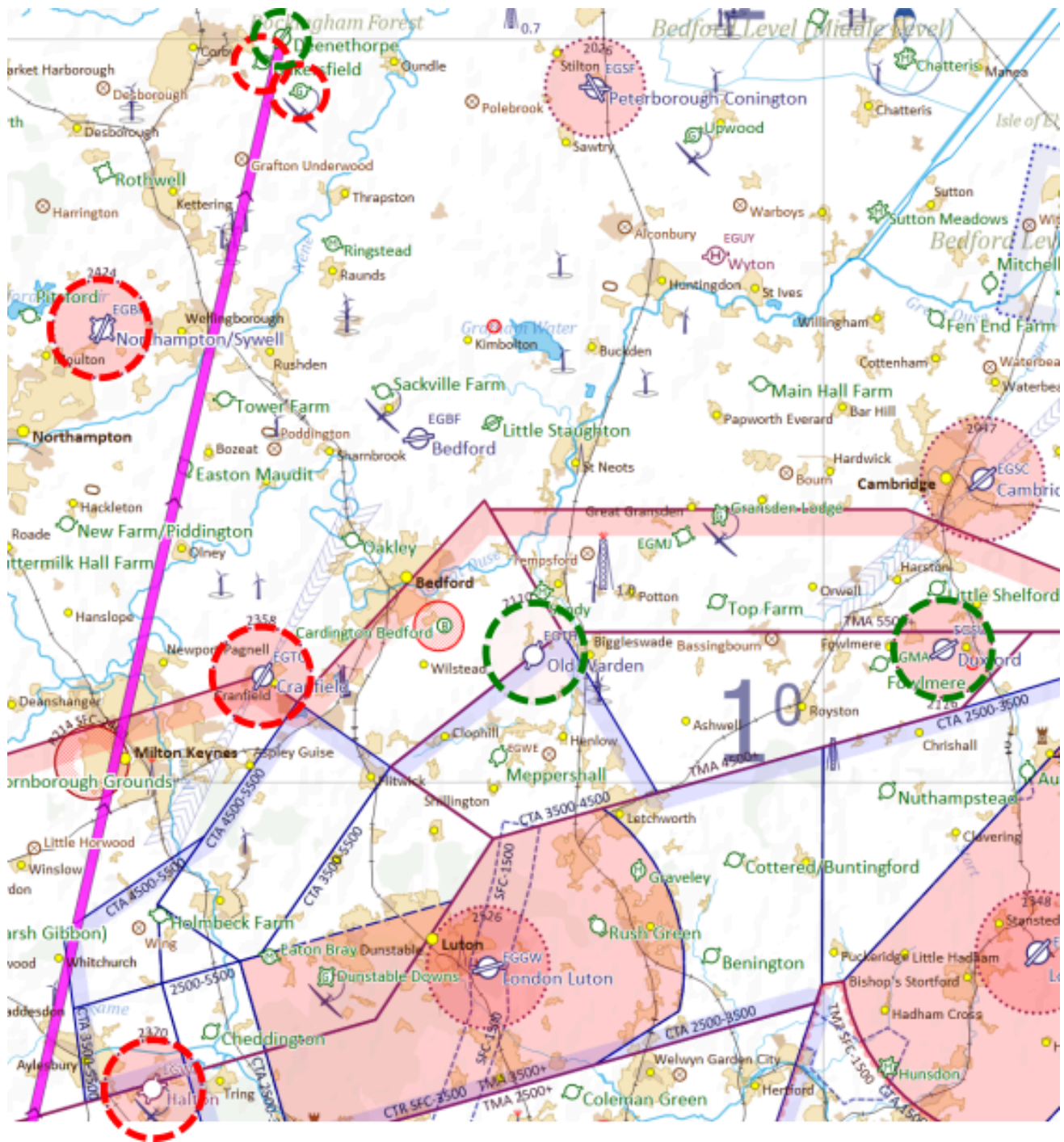


Disused [RAF Greenham Common](#) is a readily visible cold war sight from the air (but best not to attempt a landing).



Benson MATZ presents an obstruction, but you can easily route around, or perhaps request a **MATZ penetration** to pass through.

Navigating to Deenethorpe



The final leg to Deenethorpe becomes relatively straightforward, remaining west of the Luton zone. Approximately abeam Milton Keynes is a good point to head east to visit the aviation museums at [Old Warden](#) or [Duxford](#) as discussed earlier.



Photo by [Nick Fewings](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Departing the UK for the return trip



Flight plans

Unlike inbound to the UK, you will need to ensure your flight plan is closed on arrival at your foreign destination to avoid overdue action.



Customs

Don't forget to arrange customs at your European destination. OnlineGAR may do this for you.



General Aviation Report (GAR)

As before, you'll need to file a GAR for your departure.



Fuel drawback

It is possible to claim back the fuel duty (approx £0.53/litre on unleaded) for all the fuel in the aircraft tank at the last point of departure from the UK (i.e. fuel onboard at last takeoff). The necessary forms to claim by post are available on the GOV.UK website - [Claim duty drawback on oils used as fuel on foreign-going aircraft](#).



Base mapping images courtesy of SkyDemon.
Other images from [flaticon.com](#).