

Opposing circuits

The Park airfield is relatively long but narrow, invariably we will be faced with opposing circuits.

Opposing circuits (also known as mirror circuits) to the same landing area involve gliders and/or tugs potentially approaching each other on the base leg at a relatively high combined speed when the attention of both pilots is inevitably concentrated on positioning their aircraft in relation to the landing area.

Opposing circuit traffic will be difficult to detect. As such, opposing circuits to the same landing area represent a potentially significant hazard that pilots need to be aware of.

Tips for mitigating risk when flying “The Park” Circuit

The purpose of the circuit is:

- To arrive at the final turn in the right place
- At a safe height and speed
- With safe alternative always available
- Form an orderly flow to landing

Though good lookout is important through every phase of flight, it is of **crucial importance** in the circuit; where traffic density is likely to be high and everyone is heading for (and concentrating) on the same landing area.

Complete WULF checks prior to joining the circuit and check the radio is set on the correct frequency and volume is sufficient.

Gliders should aim to fly a standard circuit, joining it via “High Key”.

Announce joining downwind on the radio e.g. “Park Traffic, FUY downwind Left (or Right) hand”. Be aware that the tug aircraft may join via a base leg but will always announce intention via radio.

Listen carefully on radio for other aircraft making downwind calls, build the mental picture of what is happening around you.

No further radio calls are required, **unless** you become aware of another glider on an opposing circuit or close by you on your current circuit.

If a potential threat (another aircraft) is identified speak up on the radio and re-iterate your position and ask for their position - this will:

- Establish contact, if you receive a radio response you will know they are alerted to your presence.
- Allow a plan of action to be agreed e.g. “land long”, “land left” etc.

Remember the lower glider has priority in a conflict, always have a back up plan available to cater for the unexpected.

From “Low Key” onwards your approach speed should be set and trimmed. The word “Key” is used here in the sense of impending critical decisions. Alternative approach paths may be necessary because:

- We are fallible and can make mistakes
- We may find unexpected lift or sink
- The landing area may become blocked

Always plan and fly the circuit with alternative approach paths to other landing areas in mind. The Park is relatively long, it is easy to adjust and land further up the field, particularly if decision is made in good time.

On Diagonal leg and Base legs, scan for other aircraft on an opposing circuit, they can be quite hard to spot. Do not forget to look outside of the circuit checking for aircraft that may be on a long final, particularly before making the final turn.

FLARM will help but lookout is paramount - If you see an aircraft on an opposing circuit, speak up on the radio, use plain language if you cannot remember correct terminology and formulate a plan.

Try to land on the side of the airfield opposite the launch line (ie if launching on 26 south, land on 26 north) then taxi off to the side if it is safe to do so – this clears the landing run for other aircraft. Once on the ground push the aircraft to the side to clear the run. Particularly important when numerous gliders return concurrently.

LPC also have a role here, they should monitor the airfield, coordinate efficient removal of gliders from the airfield and use the radio should they spot a circuit situation developing. An early call from “Park Base” whilst aircraft are on the Downwind leg may alert all parties to a potentially dangerous situation. Once aircraft have turned base leg there is possibility a radio call from LPC may cause confusion, from Base Leg onward LPC should stay silent unless there would be a clear benefit in making a call – a difficult decision in a time pressured situation.