

## **OMFC PORT MEADOW FLYERS' GUIDE**



### **Introduction**

At 300 acres, Port Meadow is one of the finest model flying sites in the country, and one of the few locations in the south of England that is suitable for Free Flight (FF). However, it is important to note that the Meadow is open to the public, and grazed by horses and cattle. Although Oxford City Council byelaws apply at the site, the Freeman of Oxford have historic grazing rights; indeed, its ownership status is still a matter of some discussion. Port Meadow is also a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and it is home to rare and archaic plants. OMFC is privileged to have an exclusive right to fly model aircraft at the Meadow, and it would be easy to jeopardise our future access by flying inconsiderately, damaging the environment, and leaving litter or debris behind. The aim of this guide is to provide useful information for OMFC members regarding routine day-to-day model flying at Port Meadow. It is intended to supplement, but not replace, the club rules: the club rules and the BMFA Article 16 Authorisation remain the authoritative references.

### **Car Parking**

The car park that is most commonly used by OMFC members is Godstow Car Park, situated near Wolvercote at the northern boundary of the Meadow (OX2 8PU). There is a parking charge and, at the time of writing, the ticket machine does not accept cash. There is another car park to the south of the Meadow at Walton Well Road, but this is rarely used by members due to its distance from suitable flying areas.

### **Rangers**

Port Meadow is monitored and maintained by a team of rangers. They are funded via Oxford City Council, but the service is provided by the private contractor ODS. The rangers might ask for proof that you are a member of OMFC, so membership slips and proof of BMFA membership should always be carried in either paper or electronic form.

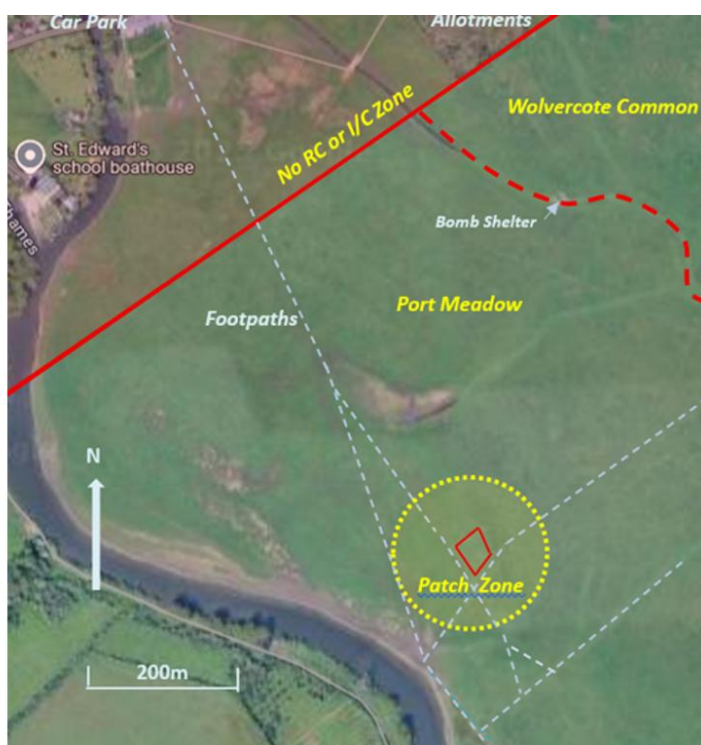
### **Physical Hazards**

The most significant physical hazards at Port Meadow are the railway to its east and the river to its west. Other hazards include trees on the boundaries and a concrete 'bomb shelter' between Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common. Note that the club rules preclude recovery of models from railway property, and from trees unless they can be reached from the ground. Models should not be retrieved from the river unless they can be reached from the shore or by boat. During the winter months the river often bursts its banks, causing widespread flooding, sometimes making access difficult and the Meadow less suitable for model flying activity. Note that Port Meadow is occasionally overflown by full-size aircraft at low-level; mostly, these are air ambulance and police helicopters. Hot-air balloons have been known to use the Meadow as a launch site, and paramotors have been seen to overfly the Meadow as low as head-height. Finally, note that there is no shelter of any kind on the Meadow, and that model flying activity can take place more than 1km from routine vehicular access. For these reasons, the club rules recommend that fliers should

use appropriate weather protection, carry a mobile phone, and carry a first aid kit: injuries, perhaps not necessarily related to model flying, are always a possibility.

### Model Flying Areas at Port Meadow

Model flying is permitted anywhere on Port Meadow, except the designated 'No RC or IC Flying' Zone if applicable. Models may not be launched or deliberately flown in Wolvercote Common. For RC power models that require a smoother surface for take-off and landing, there is a mown 'Patch' in situated mid-Meadow (approximately 800m south of the Wolvercote car park). When the RC Patch is in use, an approximate 100m radius 'Patch Zone' is applied. This is to enable the Patch site to be set up as closely as possible to the BMFA's layout recommendations, which stipulate a 100m 'Dead Airspace' zone in which no flying is permitted. When the Patch is in use for RC flying: (i) RC flyers operating elsewhere on the Meadow should not fly within it without prior permission from the Patch users and (ii) Free-flight and tethered models should not be launched from within Patch Zone without prior permission from the Patch users.



### Surface

Mostly, the surface at Port Meadow comprises rough, medium-length grazed grass with slight undulations, tussocks, some taller plants, and some areas of bare soil. In some places, the grass is long enough to conceal models from sight, which might make them difficult to locate from a distance (note that lost models have been found by using a camera drone). There are numerous footpaths and cattle tracks. Almost the whole of the Meadow is unsuitable for rolling take-offs and landings, and it is recommended that RC models with wheeled undercarriage use the mown Patch. The southern portion of the Meadow is especially prone to flooding, and some parts can remain wet or boggy for throughout the summer months.

### The Public

Usually, there are numerous 'uninvolved persons' present at Port Meadow – ie those who are not participating in the model flying sessions and who are not aware of the instructions and safety precautions. Walkers, dog-walkers and joggers can move surprisingly quickly; their direction of travel is unpredictable, and they can approach from any direction. Uncontrolled dogs are not

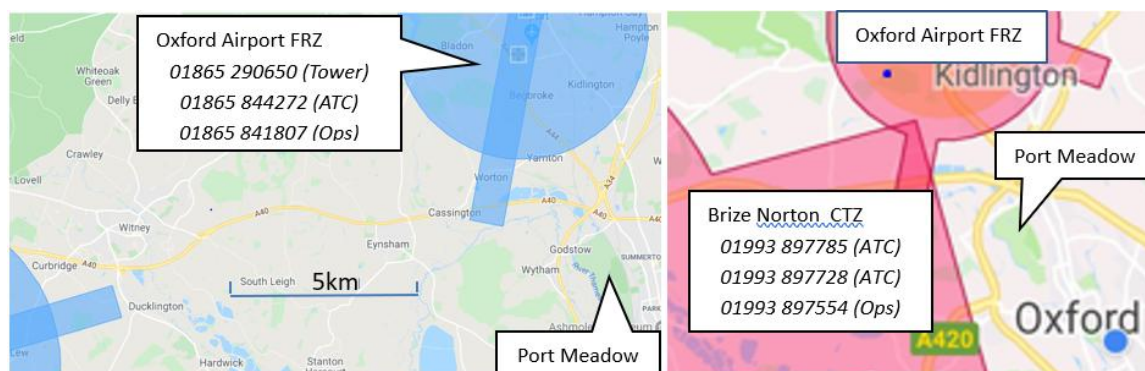
permitted at Port Meadow; however, the reality is that any loose dog is liable to chase and damage models. Groups of picknickers occasionally gather in inconvenient locations, and model flying activity inevitably attracts public attention, so expect people to approach you and occasionally start chatting - perhaps at inopportune moments. Some people display genuine interest, while some might be less than supportive; however, it is always important to engage positively with the public; they have every right to use the Meadow within the Council's byelaws, and model flying has no special rights above other recreational activities. Our continued use of the site is, to an extent, reliant upon public goodwill, and we must do our best to maintain this. Of course, 'uninvolved people' must be avoided by the margins stated in the BMFA Article 16 Authorisation and note that, because we fly in such close proximity of the public, RC flyers operating models with a mass of 250g or more are required to hold a BMFA Achievement Scheme 'A' Certificate or 'BPC' before flying unaccompanied (subject to some limited exceptions as outlined in the club rules).

## Animals

Herds of grazing animals are often a source of frustration at the Meadow. Cattle and horses seem to take an interest in model flying activity, and it is sometimes necessary to relocate to another launching site if that is an option. While it is tempting to try and scare the animals away, take care - they can be dangerous. As already mentioned, keep an eye out for loose dogs - many owners take advantage of the Meadow to let their dogs off the leash. Flocks of large Canada geese can sometimes affect flying; red kites are commonly seen and they can provide a good indication of thermal activity, but care must be taken to avoid disturbing wildlife. Finally, the use of insect repellent is a good precaution, especially during May to June when Blandford flies are about - these flies in particular can inflict a nasty, long-lasting, bite.

## Local Airspace

Presently, there is no regulated airspace over the Meadow: however, Oxford Airport's FRZ lies only about 3km to the north and north-west. Brize Norton's FRZ is over 10km to the west; however, its Control Zone (CTZ) extends upwards from ground-level and it lies less than 3km west. Although model fliers have no obligation to seek permission to fly in a CTZ, it makes sense to avoid it, and it is recommended that Brize Norton ATC be alerted regarding any 'fly-aways' in that direction. Note that there are occasional temporary airspace restrictions: flyers should always consult Altitude Angel before flying <https://dronesafetymap.com/>



## Powered Models

Port Meadow is suitable for most types of powered model aircraft. Electric models may be flown at any time, and I/C models (not gas turbines due to the fire risk) may be flown at the Meadow subject to time limitations set out in the club rules. For RC flyers, the most flexible type of powered model is probably a hand-launched type, preferably without undercarriage, giving you the ability to launch your model away from the Patch should it be occupied by, say, a herd of grazing animals. The club rules limit RC models to a mass of 7.5kg; however, it is rare to see models with a mass greater than 2.5kg being flown at the Meadow (note - FF models are limited to a maximum mass of 2kg).





### **OMFC Patch**

The mown Patch enables running take-offs and landings for RC models; however, it is quite small (about 25m x 30m), and it is not ideal for large models. Cattle not only leave deposits, but also damage to the surface, so it is often not as smooth as we would like. Unfortunately, the Patch cannot be enlarged or moved without seeking permission from Natural England, and any questions raised regarding the status of mowing within the SSSI risks our permission to mow being withdrawn. When two or more RC fliers are operating at the Patch, it is deemed to be 'active'; the site should be set up in accordance with the club rules and, as far as possible, the recommendations in the BMFA Handbook. A separate 'OMFC Patch Set-up Guide' describing how to set out the flightline, pits and 'dead airspace' areas may be found on the OMFC website. Powered gliders may be flown at the Patch at the same time as 'traditional' RC models, provided fliers conform with the circuit patterns and 'dead airspace' areas. However, for thermal soaring activity, it may be preferable to relocate elsewhere on the Meadow. RC pure gliders should not routinely be launched, flown or landed within a 100m radius of the Patch when it is in use (note - 100m is the length of a full-size football pitch).

### **Pure Glider Launching**

Port Meadow is an excellent site for thermal gliding. Bungee, towline and hi-starts may be used on the Meadow subject to the stipulations and marker requirements set out in the club rules. It is important to ensure that the lines do not hazard people, animals and other models; for this reason, for RC gliders, the club rules mandate two people when using bungees or towlines.

### **Free Flight**

Port Meadow is an outstanding location for FF activity; however, it is not without its hazards and drawbacks as already mentioned - in particular, the public and animals. Care must be taken to minimise the chance of models landing on railway property, in the river, or in the surrounding trees, and a retrieval pole is certainly well worth considering. Although the rules permit non-I/C powered FF models to be flown very close to the Godstow car park, this may be inadvisable due to the proximity of people, property and hazards. It is recommended that the 'No RC/IC Flying Zone' should only be used for test glides, or for smaller models such as chuck gliders. Particular attention is drawn to the BMFA Article 16 Authorisation Section B Para 2, specifically the need to launch 'from an area free from uninvolved persons', and to identify a 'flight volume' - ie in which you believe the model will remain; and be reasonably satisfied that no 'uninvolved persons' will enter the 'flight volume' and be endangered. The size of the 'area free from uninvolved persons' is not stipulated in Article 16; however, for launching, 30m clear of people, in line with our mandated separation, seems reasonable. Normally, FF models should not be launched or deliberately flown within approximately 100m of the Patch (ie the 'Patch Zone') when it is in use for RC flying.

### **Dethermalisers**

Dethermalisers (DTs) are recommended for all FF models wherever practicable. Radio DTs are preferred, and the various rules covering DTs and their use may be found at Club Rule FF3. Note that FF models weighing more than 250g are normally required to be fitted with a DT, subject to the exceptions set out at Rule FF3.

### **'Fly-aways'**

If you suffer a flyaway incident please ensure that, if necessary, it is correctly reported to the CAA in accordance with Article 16 (use the [BMFA Members Reporting Portal](#)). If your model is clearly heading towards the nearby Oxford Airport FRZ, report it to Air Traffic Control as soon as possible (ideally straight away) on 01865 290650. Note that if you see your model descend to the ground, it is not a 'flyaway'; it is merely a 'lost model' and is thus not subject to mandatory reporting. However, to reduce the chance of causing harm to livestock, any loss of a model on the Meadow should be reported to a member of the committee (or event organisers if applicable), with details of time, date, model description and approximate location. This information can then be passed to



the Meadow rangers via the Oxford City Council Parks and Open Spaces Team. It's worth messaging the club on Whatsapp too – a number of wayward models have been found and returned to their owners in this way. Camera drones are especially useful for locating models in long grass. If your model lands on railway property, please call Network Rail on 01865 245539.

### **Risk Assessment**

A risk assessment for the Port Meadow site may be found on the OMFC website.

### **Amendments and Suggestions**

If you have any suggestions regarding this document, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the OMFC Committee.