



# Community in Spotlight

## Light Aircraft Association February 2022

General Aviation is a diverse and varied sector made up of multiple different communities. The successes and challenges for one community - such as the sailplane community - may be vastly different from others such as those operating powered aircraft for recreation or by training organisations. The new Community in Spotlight initiative is led by the CAA GA & RPAS Unit to provide an opportunity for General Aviation Partnership (GAP) members to talk about their community and membership organisation. This work forms part of the regular GAP meetings and is used to highlight particular communities to share and highlight what is happening in their community. Each area is unique so the GAP and CAA are keen to hear about demographics, how the community might be changing, where they see themselves in 5 years' time and recent successes and challenges.

These community presentations are combined with an on-site visit by the General Aviation (GA) team to get to know members of the community and membership organisation and to talk about any current successes and challenges.

The Light Aircraft Association was established in 1946, with a clear focus on supporting the UK's amateur built aircraft movement. This has developed into an association of just under 8,000 members supporting a fleet of 2,700 active aircraft under their Permit to Fly airworthiness system with their engineers supporting 1600 build/repair projects annually. The LAA has 17 full time members of staff including qualified engineers and a countrywide network of inspectors with the aim of helping the UK GA community to own and fly their own aircraft, affordably and safely.

Our meeting on 24 February 2022, is the second in the Community in Spotlight Series. Here Steve Slater, CEO of the LAA together with Eryl Smith, Chair of the LAA Board and other key members of the management team spent time sharing



## LAA in numbers

Formed in **1946**

HQ at Turweston Aerodrome

**17** full time staff members

**360** LAA inspectors

**7,800** members

**2,700** active aircraft

**1,600** projects

**£1.3m** turnover

to have the skills and knowledge to perform a number of maintenance tasks themselves under the supervision of LAA Inspectors. With our delegated powers we can support our members in this endeavour” comments Steve Slater, CEO. LAA.

Elements of GA continue to change with new challenges every day. Areas discussed included concerns over ageing inspectors and the need to ensure succession and skills retention. The LAA also stressed GA should not get forgotten or left behind in the technological development and growth of drones, particularly when considering how both users of airspace can operate together safely. A key concern for the LAA is to ensure that GA interests are considered fully in the emerging AMS work programme. As with the BGA in our last Community in Spotlight case study, the LAA believe that electronic conspicuity has an important role to play when considering an integrated modern airspace for all, but acknowledged that more work is required to understand how to arrive at a solution that works for all.

A shared interest is what the next generation of aircraft may look like and which technologies will lead the way when considering the green agenda. Hydrogen fuel is still a relatively immature technology and may not be applicable to lighter sport aircraft. While battery-powered electric aircraft are appearing and the LAA is supporting projects such as Nuncats Humanitarian aircraft, further improvements in batteries will be required to ensure these aircraft are more useable in the future. The current use of fossil fuels is likely to continue for some time yet and much of the LAA fleet can utilise non-leaded aviation fuel. The LAA does not endorse the use of E10 Mogas in aircraft, due to the chemical solvent properties of the higher level of ethanol now being used. The LAA has been monitoring **Project Martin**; an activity being led by the RAF in a quest for a sustainable Zero Carbon fuel.

further insight into the workings of the LAA and discussing longer term plans for the LAA and UK GA as a whole, as well as any key concerns including future possible ways of working.

An area of change for the LAA is the makeup of members. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, they have seen an increase in membership, mainly from existing PPLs seeking lower cost means of flying. This new core of members may purchase an aircraft already operating on a Permit to Fly or to self-build and as such, the requirements of what the members are looking for is changing. To support new GA pilots and aeroplane owners the LAA have launched a new training programme with a wide-ranging syllabus combining theoretical learnings and hands-on training opportunities at their headquarters at Turweston Aerodrome. Here members can attend hands-on sessions with LAA engineers in both a classroom and training workshop. The expanded range of courses are proving to be very popular. “The training sessions are giving us an opportunity to go back to our root purpose and ambition, which is to make aviation affordable and an important element of this is to empower pilots



This interest in the environment also supports LAA recognition that many GA airfields are green and open spaces acting as natural nature reserves. Airfield green spaces use no or very little pesticides or nitrate fertilisers. In addition, airfields can support seed plants and pollinating insects such as bees. Many GA airfields have the potential for the amount of annual carbon absorbed by shrubs to be greater than the carbon generated from its aviation operations.

There was a shared consensus by both CAA and LAA colleagues that more needed to be done to ensure the UK had the next generation of aviation and aerospace professionals; ensuring that we have in the UK the skills and capabilities to enable us to meet the Governments ambition to be the best place in the world for aviation. Both the CAA and the LAA have undertaken a number of initiatives to support STEM but there was an appreciation on both sides that we could work more collaboratively on these topics not just with the LAA but with all members of the General Aviation Partnership.

Michael MacDonald, GA Policy Manager said:

*"It was fantastic to meet with the LAA, one of our key stakeholders and hear about their current projects and challenges they are facing as an organisation. The opportunity to have a discussion in this way, I find highly valuable and helps us as the regulator have a much better understanding of the topics that are top of mind for the GA pilots and engineers in the UK."*

*"Knowing that we shared a number of common themes with the LAA was positive and we believe there are more collaborative efforts we can make."*

**Thank you to the LAA for taking part in our Communities in Spotlight initiative.**