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Light aircraft pilot fined for flying over Luton Airport without permission

Court hears passenger aircraft were disrupted as a result

 5 March, 2019

The pilot of a light aircraft has pleaded guilty to flying over Luton Airport without clearance from air traffic control, four times in the same day. The pilot's actions led to four passenger aircraft and a business jet having to be given avoiding instructions by air traffic control. Departures from the airport were also temporarily suspended.

Christopher Morrow, 65, from Barford, Warwickshire, admitted four offences of flying in Class D controlled airspace without permission on 3 September 2018, when his case was heard by Bedfordshire Magistrates' Court in Luton earlier today. He was fined £7576 and ordered to pay £750 costs to the Civil Aviation Authority which brought the prosecution.

The Court heard that Mr Morrow was flying a Cessna 172 aircraft from Wellesbourne in Warwickshire to Duxford and back, carrying two passengers. Despite his aircraft being equipped with GPS mapping, he chose to rely instead on the more traditional method of navigation using a paper chart and visual reference points. At some point he lost awareness of his position and entered Luton Airport's controlled airspace twice as he tried to establish his location. He was unaware that he had strayed into controlled airspace. On his return flight from Duxford he once again entered Luton Airport's controlled airspace without permission.

Mr Morrow's actions had a significant impact on the workload of the duty air traffic controller, who had to instruct arriving aircraft to halt their final approaches to Luton Airport. Departures were also stopped three separate times as the controller attempted to resolve the situation. The air traffic controller was unable to make contact with Mr Morrow's aircraft.

Alison Slater, Head of the Civil Aviation Authority's Investigation and Enforcement Team, said: "This once again shows the consequences of a pilot being seriously underprepared for a flight. Mr Morrow's actions impacted hundreds of passengers onboard aircraft arriving and departing from Luton Airport. Passengers have every right to expect that their flight on a commercial airline is fully protected when in controlled airspace."

The Civil Aviation Authority said it was determined to take action whenever necessary to protect members of the public, including prosecuting those responsible for infringing controlled airspace.

