



ACP-2021-006 - ENABLING BVLOS UAS OPERATIONS FROM KEEVIL AIRFIELD

STAGE 3 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS v1

These FAQs aim to supplement the consultation documentation that can be found online at the Portal. Further information and evidence for the answers below can be found within the Full Options Appraisal and Consultation Document.

Local Community FAQs

1. How often will the airfield be used?

The airfield will be used periodically throughout the year, but primarily by RPAS during the summer months.

Normal operating hours will be Mon - Fri during the working day only. Weekend and night flying may be conducted infrequently in support of exercises and mandated currency requirements.

2. How loud is your aircraft?

The aircraft is fitted with a Wankel Rotary engine which produces similar noise levels to a standard single engine piston aircraft of similar size. In order to mitigate against noise Watchkeeper will be flown in the vicinity of the airfield for as little as time as possible. The airspace will primarily be used for take-off and landing as well as transit to and from Salisbury Plain. Additionally, specific noise abatement procedures will be developed in consultation with local communities and introduced to minimise noise pollution.

3. What are RPAS/UAS?

RPAS are Remotely-Piloted Air Systems, commonly referred to as 'drones'. Unmanned Aerial Systems or Vehicles (UAS and UAVs) and the term RPAS are interchangeable.

4. How do your aircraft operate around the airfield?

Watchkeeper will operate on pre-defined routes between Keevil and Salisbury Plain. The routes will be similar to that of normal aircraft circuit patterns. The aircraft itself is flown remotely by pilots in a Ground Control Station (GCS) located at the airfield.

5. What developments will there be at the airfield?

Keevil Airfield will be used as a training location to allow RPAS integration with military training exercises on SPTA. In order to facilitate this, there will be some infrastructure development in due course but are yet to be determined.

6. What is meant by BVLOS?

BVLOS stands for 'Beyond Visual Line of Sight' and refers to how certain RPAS can be operated. As Watchkeeper can operate up to 150km away from the Ground Control Station it is operated BVLOS.

7. Why has Keevil been chosen as the location for operating RPAS?

Having been tested over a three-month period in Summer 2021 Keevil has been selected as a site for training military RPAS operators due to its proximity to Salisbury Plain Training Area.

Due to its asphalt runways and minimum amount of other airfield based users, Keevil offers substantial improvements to training outputs compared with other live flying locations and will allow the MOD to significantly accelerate wider RPAS conceptual development due to the increased opportunities to integrate with wider Army and Defence exercises.

Alternative locations such as Boscombe Down, Upavon, Netheravon or Deptford Down have been discounted due to its existing operations or runways limitations.

8. Will Bannerdown Gliding Club's operation be negatively affected by RPAS operations at Keevil?

Bannerdown Gliding Club is member of the Royal Air Force Gliding and Soaring Association. Its contribution to the Service flying community in the provision of recreational flying opportunities is invaluable. Although all efforts will be made to minimise impact on their operations, the standing agreement with Service flying clubs are that Military training takes priority over recreational flying activities. However, it is anticipated that RPAS will pose little to no impact on Bannerdown Gliding Club activities due to the majority of gliding occurring at weekends.

9. How safe are RPAS?

Watchkeeper is operated in accordance with strict safety regulation and is certified to fly within UK airspace. Robust measures are put in place to deal with emergency scenarios.

The routes the aircraft will follow minimises risk to life by avoiding urban areas and buildings as much as possible. In the event of an emergency, the aircraft will either conduct an emergency landing at the airfield or conduct a forced landing in Salisbury Plain Training Area at pre-selected sites away from populated areas.

10. Will this increase traffic in nearby villages?

All large military vehicles must approach the airfield from the North and will therefore not cause undue congestion in surrounding villages. Less for initial

deployment period there will not be a requirement for regular convoys of military vehicles.

11. What will your payload/camera be looking at?

During operation between Keevil and Salisbury Plain the aircraft's camera will be used to provide situational awareness for the pilots only. Only once the aircraft is established over Salisbury Plain will the cameras be used for training payload operators in surveillance.

12. Will there be a point of contact for local residents should they want to discuss military operations at Keevil?

During exercise periods there will be a duty telephone number for the Ops Room that residents can call should they wish. Residents may also contact the Low Flying Complaints and Enquiries Unit on SWK-lowflying@mod.gov.uk

Aviation stakeholders FAQs

13. Why do you need to change the airspace around Keevil?

Current regulation requires certified RPAS operating BVLOS to be contained within segregated airspace. In order to facilitate RPAS operations from Keevil the surrounding airspace is therefore required to be modified to ensure take-off, landing and transit is conducted within segregated airspace which traditionally is satisfied in the UK by Danger Areas.

14. Why can the MOD not operate RPAS from other airfields such as Netheravon, Middle Wallop or Boscombe Down?

Whilst Watchkeeper has operated from MOD Boscombe Down in the past it is not possible to conduct sufficient ab-initio pilot training or tactical training from this location due to the type and amount of other airfield operations.

Middle Wallop, as the home of the Army Aviation Centre, is a busy airfield for training rotary wing pilots. Additionally, its runway and its airspace currently discount this location.

Netheravon, Upavon and Deptford Down, whilst contained within Salisbury Plain, have undulated grass runways that is currently discounted due to technical limitations placed on the Watchkeeper aircraft.

15. How often will the airspace be activated?

The airspace will be activated by NOTAM as required. It will be used mostly in the summer months to support training and exercises on SPTA. It will only be activated should a DACS or a DAAIS be available.

16. Will my aircraft be denied access to Keevil?

Whilst access may not always be possible (such as during take-off, landing and transit of RPAS) it is the intent of the MOD to make the airspace as accessible to all air users as possible. A frequency for any services available will be published on the activation NOTAM and in the AIP.

17. How long does it take RPAS to transit between Keevil and Salisbury Plain?

From the boundary of SPTA to Keevil is approximately 2.5NM. It takes no more than 6-8 mins to conduct a recovery from the furthest point of the airspace (exact time is dependent on transit altitude and runway in use).

18. I am concerned that the airspace sought for this activity will deny air users use of valuable Class G airspace.

The airspace will be tactically managed to ensure any airspace structure is efficiently utilised. Through consultation and continued refinement the MOD hopes to create a structure that minimises impact on air users, further mitigated by the provision of Crossing Services as appropriate.

19. Will this lead to increased funnelling of aircraft between Salisbury Plain and Bristol's / Brize Norton controlled airspace?

The potential funnelling effect of aircraft is noted and consideration for this has been made during the initial airspace design options. Trend analysis indicates that the majority of aircraft are already avoiding the Keevil Drop Zone as is advised in the note on aeronautical charts, regardless of the status of activity. As a result the impact of a new airspace structure over Keevil airfield is assessed to have minimum impact on additional funnelling. Further detail on this can be found in the Full Options Appraisal document.

20. What happens if the RPAS loses link with the pilots?

Watchkeeper is operated with multiple levels of redundancy that minimises the likelihood of the aircraft losing link with the Ground Control Station. However, in the event that link is lost the aircraft will fly a pre-determined 'lost-link route' and remain in an orbit over Salisbury Plain Training Area to allow pilots to regain link. The aircraft is also capable of completing an automatic landing back at the airfield should attempts to re-establish link be unsuccessful. The airspace structure has been designed to contain the flight path of the aircraft at all times.

21. Should the Air Ambulance or an aircraft in distress require access to the airspace immediately how will this be managed?

A Letter of Agreement between WK and the Wiltshire Air Ambulance was created during the TDA of summer 2021 to ensure safe access to the airspace at all times regardless of the status of WK, with procedures devised to ensure access as required. For other aircraft that may be in distress in the area, Boscombe Down ATC will coordinate.