



The British Model Flying Association

**MODEL FLYING AND FARMERS
A HIGH VALUE SELF SEEDING CROP**

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The presence of a model flying club on a farm is an attractive proposition in terms of the return from the small amount of land used and the minimum interference with normal farming activities.

The British Model Flying Association (BMFA) is the working title for the Society of Model Aeronautical Engineers. The SMAE was established in 1922 as the governing body regulating the sport of model flying in the UK. The Society was registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee in 1948 and in 1988 adopted the working title of the BMFA.

The BMFA has over 800 affiliated clubs comprising the majority of its 36000 strong membership. Clubs vary in size from as many as 250 members to as few as 5 or 6. The average club membership is around 45.

Model flying is recognised as a sport by the Sports Council.

The Models flown by our members are mostly radio controlled, some powered by small internal combustion engines and others gliders. Some models are driven by silent power sources such as rubber, electricity and carbon dioxide gas. The size can vary from as little as 12" wing span to 12 feet or more. The average wingspan is about 60".

Safety

The BMFA lays down extensive Safety Codes in its Member's Handbook which is available on request. Affiliated clubs are expected to adhere to these Codes. Model flying sites close to a working airfield can be a problem if proper liaison is not effected between a club and the local Air Traffic Control. All airspace use is controlled by the Air Navigation Order 1985. From a safety point of view it is probably best to deal with clubs affiliated to the BMFA.

INSURANCE

The Association provides £25M Third Party Insurance Cover for every member and the Insurance cover extends to indemnify the Club, its Committee and its lawful activities. For a club to be able to affiliate to the BMFA all club members **MUST BE BMFA MEMBERS**. The Club's BMFA Insurance Policy automatically extends £25M Third Party Cover to private and public landlords.

If a farmer rents some of his land to a club **NOT** affiliated to the BMFA he would be wise to ensure that their public liability insurance is not less than that offered by the BMFA Policy.

LAND REQUIREMENTS

A model flying club needs an open space to fly model aircraft throughout the year without too many restrictions and without causing undue nuisance to neighbours and the general public.

The ideal flying site will have easy access to a public road, be at least half a mile (800 metres) from the nearest habitation (the farm house can be closer than this at the farmer's discretion) and have reasonable car parking facilities within walking distance of the flying area.

The total area of the flying facility (the landing/takeoff strip, car park and a path between the two) can be less than an acre (0.4 hectares). The aircraft will overfly a further 40 to 50 acres (16 to 20 hectares)..

The field containing the landing/takeoff strip should have few trees and be of a minimum size of 5 or 6 acres (2 to 2.5 hectares) for a club with just one flying discipline, and a little larger, say 10 to 12 acres (4.5 to 5 hectares), for a multidiscipline club. Ideally hedges and fences should be low for a small field and the field itself should be preferably, but not essentially, flat.

Sheep, cattle and horses may graze the field surrounding the mown strip and hay, silage and arable crops can be taken off the land surrounding the close mown area as appropriate.

The Landing and Takeoff Area is typically the size of two cricket squares, say 23meters to 46 meters, and is close mown. Clubs usually undertake to do their own mowing. Surrounding growing grass is not usually a problem.

The Car Park should ideally be within 90 meters to 180 meters of the flying area. For a club with 100 members a car park for 30 cars would be adequate as it is rare for all members to be present at any one time. Ideally the car park access will be close to a public or farm road.

A building, if available, would be useful for the storage of mowing equipment.

Water. A large pond or small lake could be attractive to a club operating water planes.

NOISE

Noise from model aircraft can be a problem if it isn't treated in a sensible fashion. The Department of the Environment published a Code of Practice on Noise from Model Aircraft in 1982 which permits a maximum noise energy output of 82dB(A) measured with the noise meter held 7 metres from the model. This maximum noise energy output limit compares favourably with the maximum allowed noise energy output from agricultural tractors (89dB(A) specified in Regulation 58 of the 1986 Construction and Use Regulations for Motor Vehicles. NOTE that an increase or decrease in noise energy output of 3dB(A) represents a doubling or halving of noise energy output – this means that agricultural tractors are allowed to make more than double the noise of model aircraft)

The BMFA recommends that affiliated clubs and members comply with the above Code and, indeed, encourages further reductions in noise energy output.

Domestic and wild animals and birds seem more curious than alarmed by model noise and flying activity.

GROWTH

The sport of model flying as a leisure activity is growing with the advent of reliable radio control equipment and ready to fly model aircraft combined with more public leisure time.

With growth comes the demand for somewhere to carry out the sport. Model aircraft, apart from control line models, require a great deal of airspace and so, apart from the use of a few large town and city centre parks, most model flying takes place in the countryside on suitable available sites. Available is the key word. Model flying sites are very difficult to find. The requirements of the DoE Noise Code of Practice govern the suitability of flying sites for models using predominantly internal combustion engines.

LINKS TO OTHER SPORTS

The very nature of model flying prohibits the linking of model flying with other sporting interests with the exception of model yachting, if there is a body of water available, and/or model car events.

Some airports successfully share facilities with model flying, one of these is hang gliding. There is a joint British Hang Gliding Association/BMFA Code of Practice in operation where there are shared sites.

MANAGEMENT

Lease/Rental

Clubs would probably prefer to lease for security of tenure, but this preference should not rule out a rental agreement. In many cases there are just informal word of mouth agreements in place which seem to work well.

The clubs usually carry out the mowing of the flying strip for themselves. However some may find it convenient to have the strip mown for them by the farmer. In such cases the cost of this service should be taken into account when negotiating lease/rental terms.

Subsidy and Diversification Schemes

The use of the relatively small amount of land required by a model flying club will minimise the side effect on any compensation payment or grant compared with the new income it will generate. The model club does not use the whole of the field it is sited in, so only the small area actually used by the club will reduce the amount of the subsidy or other scheme payment.

Public Access

In the interests of safety it would be wise for the farmer to give the club exclusive rights to use the site. Model flying sites should be positioned away from public rights of way where possible.

National and Regional Competitions

The BMFA organises National and Regional Competitions and it would be reasonable to expect a significantly larger rental to be charged for a one or two day event.

The farmer would not be expected to administrate or supervise activities involving such competitions.

The general public are usually excluded.

Refreshments, Shelter and Lavatory Facilities

The use of lavatories and a shelter would be appreciated but we can see problems providing them in the middle of a field. However if the farmstead is close to the flying field then it may be possible to provide these facilities.

If the site is, again, close enough to the farmstead and the club membership is large enough to make the proposition viable then the provision of refreshments may be worth consideration. Most model flying clubs operate without such a facility.

Usage of the Flying Site

Usage depends initially upon the terms of the lease/rental agreement but, supposing a 365 day term, the use would depend primarily on daily weather conditions rather than the seasons. Given fine weather model flying takes place throughout the year. It should be noted that weekend use is heavier than weekdays and model flying only takes place during daylight hours.

PLANNING AND LEGAL ISSUES

If an activity is carried out on a piece of land for more than 28 days per calendar year (January 1st to December 31st) then Planning permission is required for a Change of Use.

Permitted Development (PD)

If flying takes place on a piece of land for 28 days per calendar year or less then the activity can take place without making a planning application. If a club flew only at weekends then they might be able to operate successfully under PD rules when the effects of bad weather are taken into account. It should be noted that it is NOT possible for a club to move fields on the same farm in an attempt to stretch out their PD usage as the whole farm forms a single planning unit.

It is probable that planning permission would be required for a car park with hard standing for the cars.

PUBLIC SAFETY

BMFA codes of Practice recommend that model flyers Do not overfly houses, domestic gardens, car parks, traffic, railways, organised games, people or spectators. Overhead electricity and telephone cables are also to be avoided.

These Codes of Practice are contained in the BMFA Member's Handbook. This is available on request from our head office.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) lays down special conditions for the operation of models weighing over 7kgs (15lbs).

FINANCE

The lease or rental payable on a model flying site depends on a large number of factors such as the size of the site and the facilities available, size of the club membership, the numbers of available days of use each week and so on.

This leaves the problem of suggesting a reasonable annual return for the use of about an acre of land with overflying rights over a further 40 or 50 acres.

It should be noted that it is not in the power of a landowner to grant overflying rights over his land as he does not own the airspace above his land. In the same way the local authority is not able to grant planning permission for overflying as their jurisdiction ends once a model leaves the ground.

This also means that if model aircraft operate over land belonging to a neighbour that neighbour is unable to prevent it from happening. Without free use of airspace general aviation would not be possible.

The BMFA recommends that fees/rents are negotiated on an individual basis.

FURTHER ADVICE AND INFORMATION is available from:

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Updated April 2012