

RATTLESDEN GLIDING CLUB.



Rattlesden Gliding Club (RGC) has been operating on the historic WWII Rattlesden Airfield for over 45 years. Located in the heart of Suffolk close to the towns of Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket, RGC is a registered Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) with a passion to share the experience of gliding and help people achieve their dreams of learning to fly. We operate from two runways, the main runway is what is left of the hard runway from operational use, this is approximately 1000 metres long, then we have a shorter grass cross strip of approximately 540 metres.

We have around 80 club members, around 50 of which are active full flying members, the others being either family, or social, all though share a love for gliding with a strong community spirit. The flying members are either learning to fly through our structured training system, or flying locally, or flying cross-country when the weather is suitable. The more experienced pilots sometimes enjoy doing aerobatics, and flying competitions, but all enjoy socialising with others in our comfortable clubhouse, there is something for everyone at RGC.



We fly from what remains of the WWII Rattlesden Airfield which is in between the villages of Rattlesden, High Town Green, Brettenham, and Felsham. The historic control tower was renovated many years ago to become our clubhouse. The facilities include toilets, office, training/briefing room, kitchen, and a bar and lounge area. Other facilities include a large hangar for housing our fleet of club aircraft, an MT hangar for vehicles, this also includes a glider workshop, and two separate T hangars for motor gliders. There is also ample on-site car parking near the clubhouse, and we have a member only caravan park. and In front of the hangars, we have a large grass area for parking the members glider trailers, and for rigging our gliders.



The club's fleet currently consists of four 2-seater gliders, these are mainly used for training, then we have two single seat gliders, one motor glider, and a Eurofox towplane. One of the single seat gliders is a basic type, this is perfect for early solo pilots, the other is a higher performance glider, with a retractable undercarriage, this is flown by the more experienced pilots, and is great to use for cross-country flying during the summer soaring season. The club's motor glider, a Motor Falke, is a more recent addition to the fleet, this is the yellow and orange one you would have seen flying around the area, there is also a white, privately owned one on-site.



We purchased the Motor Falke just before Covid struck, so it had a bit of a slow start, but in the past year it has been used more and more frequently. It is used by members who have a TMG (Touring Motor Glider) licence for pleasure flying, and it is also used by members who are training towards their TMG licence, these flights are carried out with a qualified instructor. The other thing it is perfect for is for trainee glider pilots to practice field landings, and cross-country navigation, these flights are also carried out with a suitably qualified instructor.



Our club prides itself in a high level of excellent instruction by a group of instructors who have all undergone intense training, and certification with the BGA (British Gliding Association). They also

have to undergo regular refresher courses and are kept up to date with all the latest legislation, and structured training programmes through the BGA. The BGA is the governing body of sport gliding in the UK, it supports all the gliding clubs, with expert help, advice, and guidance for clubs. These include general club management, planning and site security, funding, child protection, and other issues. They also support clubs and their members by providing airworthiness management, this is in combination with the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority). This means that all our gliders, and motor gliders are inspected at regular intervals by approved BGA/CAA inspectors, this is a very thorough, and structured inspection process. Our Eurofox towplane, this is the small yellow one you see buzzing about towing the gliders up. Being a light aircraft, this comes under the LAA (Light Aircraft Association). As per the BGA, the LAA is the governing body responsible in the UK for all things light aircraft, they also do this in combination with the CAA. So once again, the Eurofox is subject to lots of thorough, and structured airworthiness checks at regular intervals.

Winch launching is a much cheaper method of launching and is therefore very popular with members. The winch is extremely powerful, it has an 8.5 litre V8 engine that has been converted to run on LPG. It has twin drums so that we can launch two gliders in quick succession, please note: this is NOT for launching two gliders at the same time. On flying days, the winch when the wind is coming from a southerly direction will be found sitting at the Felsham road end of our main runway. The winch is capable of accelerating a glider from 0-60mph in 3 or 4 seconds and will keep the glider climbing safely at its recommended launch speed, this varies from type to type of between 50-70mph. With this method, launch heights vary according to the strength of the headwind, but the least we expect to achieve is 1000ft, and on good days, we can sometimes achieve 1,500ft. As mentioned above, this method of launching is much cheaper than aerotowing (it's also good fun). During the summer months when there are plenty of thermals about in the airfield vicinity this is a very popular method with our pilots of getting airborne, there is also a sense of pride of climbing away in a thermal from a winch launch.

The club uses a converted coach (converted with the hard work of members) during flying days, this acts primarily as a launch point with radios and a computerized flight logging system, and for instructors to brief/de-brief trainee pilots before and after flying. It also has a small kitchen area with hob for making hot drinks, a fridge for keeping drinks, etc cool, and comfortable seating with tables to have lunch, or to shelter from the elements in inclement weather. The coach also has large storage area's underneath for storing everything we need at the launch point for a safe, and comfortable days flying. We offer two methods of launching, one as mentioned above is aerotowing using the Eurofox towplane, and the other is winch launching. A typical aerotow launch height is 2000ft, but quite often, pilots take launches up to 3000ft, and sometime 4000ft. This method of launching is very popular during the wintertime when there are no thermals about, it allows pilots to keep their hand in with a reasonably long flight, or perhaps to practice some aerobatics. It is also very popular in the soaring season when the thermal activity is further away from the airfield, this would be quite difficult to reach from a winch launch. Also, sometimes the thermals are difficult to locate lower down, so an aerotow is also popular in these conditions.



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We try once a year to arrange a club expedition to another gliding club for our club members to experience flying at different locations. At Rattlesden due to the surrounding topographical features, as we know, East Anglia is very flat, we only have the use of thermal activity. At other sites they have large hills, and some have mountains, these open up other types of lift for our pilots to experience. In the hilly area's you can experience ridge soaring, this is when the wind is blowing onto the hill/ridge, this causes an updraft the gliders can use. In mountainous areas, again with the wind coming from the correct direction, wave lift forms and this can go up to incredible heights. Just recently, one of our members was in Wales and achieved his diamond height by climbing to over 17,000ft (oxygen is of cause required at these dizzy heights).



I hope this has given you a little insight into the club's activities and how it operates, please remember, you are also welcomed to visit, and to see what we are up to first hand. We are active every weekend and Wednesday throughout the year, and Fridays are used for carrying out trial flights for the public who have purchased gliding vouchers. We then have two flying weeks during the year where we hope to fly every day, weather permitting. These are usually held in early May, and then again, the week following the August Bank Holiday. This brings me on to our annual Open Day, this we hold every August Bank Holiday Monday, hopefully you have seen the signs advertising this event around the area. Please remember that you are all welcome to this Open Day, it is a day when we showcase the club, and try and show the public what gliding is all about. We also each year have a very realistic gliding simulator that you sit in and fly, this is kindly loaned to us from the BGA.



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