

Wellesbourne Mountford

This World War Two airfield honours its military past while being home to one of the biggest GA communities in the UK

By Keith Wilson and Mike Roberts



AIRFIELD INFO Wellesbourne EGBW

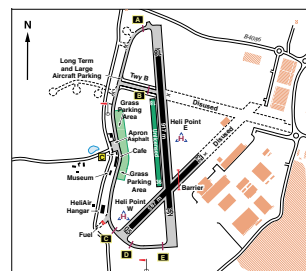


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NS21153 W0013687

Runways: 18/36 (asphalt, 917m), 05/23 (asphalt, 587m)

Tel: 01789 842000 (TWR)

Radio: Wellesbourne Infmtn 124.025

www.wellesbournearfield.com

With its central location in the middle of England, Wellesbourne Mountford is a useful stopping-off point for refuelling or to visit local sites and attractions at Warwick, Royal Leamington Spa and Stratford-upon-Avon.

Wellesbourne has always had a good reputation for being a friendly and welcoming airfield, but in recent years this reputation has been enhanced. The airfield is a thriving general aviation hub with around ninety resident aircraft and over 73,000 movements per annum in 2013 and growing, making it one of the busiest GA airfields if not the biggest in the country.

Recently rumoured to be under threat from a potential planning application, local group "Wellesbourne Matters" has helped preserve the

airfield, supported by the local authority, which has included the airfield and the desire to retain the flying activities at the site in the local Core Development Strategy. With the further support of the government's recommendations to local authorities to view airfields as part of a national framework, Wellesbourne's future at the hub of that framework would look to be more secure.

Seventy-five years ago next year, the Government purchased over 200 acres of Warwickshire farmland four miles east of Stratford-upon-Avon. It was designated RAF Wellesbourne Mountford and its first resident was Number 22 Operational Training Unit equipped with Wellington bombers and supplemented with Avron Anson navigation trainers. This unit was



"People who come here are always made welcome. We're not the most formal airfield, but we do pride ourselves on everything running smoothly..."

Michael Littler, Director

ABOVE: VULCAN LANDMARK & MUSEUM, WHERE VISITORS CAN GET A CLOSE-UP VIEW OF A VULCAN COCKPIT

RIGHT: SIGN IN AT THE TOWER

devoted to the training of UK and Commonwealth aircrews: pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, wireless operators and air gunners. At its peak in March 1944 it was turning out 113 aircrew a month.

Wellesbourne was closed in 1964 and placed on a care and maintenance basis until it was sold back to its pre-war owner - the Littler family. Thankfully, John Littler was a keen pilot and saw the potential it had as an airfield working alongside the family farming business. From 1965 various aviation activities were here, including a temporary home for Air Atlantique's DC3s, and the site was re-licensed for commercial flying activity in 1981.

There are two asphalt runways which have been recently refurbished. An open market operates on Saturdays and public holidays when 05/23 is not available. Runway 10/28 is disused and is available for parking heavier aircraft - twins and jets - while most singles are parked on the grass. The main 18/36



Airfield Destinations | Wellesbourne Mountford



TOP: TAKE FLIGHT AVIATION'S SMART PREMISES

FAR LEFT: WARWICK CASTLE, ONE OF THE MANY LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

ABOVE: THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE THEATRE, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

BELOW: MUSEUM EXHIBITS ON DISPLAY

"We try to park visitors as near to the Touchdown Inn as possible..!"

Airport ground handler



runway is equipped for night operation.

Warwickshire Aviation is a thriving fixed wing maintenance facility on the airfield, with rotary craft taken care of by Heli Air. This is the UK distributor for Robinson helicopters, offering training in R22s, R44s and R66s and a Hughes 269. National operator Aeros offers Commercial flight training and South Warwickshire is a fixed wing flying school, which has operated on the airfield for over thirty years. On-Track Aviation does a good trade in instructor and other specialist courses, while Take

Flight Aviation operates everything from Cessna 152s to a Piper Malibu from its smart headquarters. It is celebrating taking the operation in the last ten years from a single aircraft club with a handful of members to fifteen aircraft and 200 flying members. It offers PPL flight training and aircraft hire without limits, whereby members can hire aircraft without the normal club and flying school restrictions.

The airfield has a licensed restaurant, the Touchdown Inn with outside patio area overlooking the taxiway. It is

popular with the local community as well as with pilots. The all-day-breakfast and home-made cakes are perhaps the most popular offerings with the aviation fraternity.

Pilots intending to fly in are advised to check the Wellesbourne website, and visitors are asked to contact Wellesbourne Information on 124.025 at least ten minutes before ETA. Wellesbourne does have a practiced FISO service, used to handling everything from experienced bizjet operations right through to solo

"We prefer PPR and overhead joins. Sometimes we get as many as thirty visitors on a weekend day..."

Duty Flight Information Service Officer



ABOVE: TAKE FLIGHT OPERATED PIPER

RIGHT: MALIBU GLASS COCKPIT

students on qualifying cross-country exercises. The airfield can get busy at weekends so visitors should be familiar with local procedures. It is in a noise-sensitive area - all the surrounding villages must be avoided. Overhead joins are preferred, with variable circuits at 1,000ft QFE. Helicopter circuits are usually flown to the west of the runways at 600ft QFE.

On departure, you have to be sure to follow the noise abatement procedures and again avoid the villages. If departing on runway 05, you turn left onto 030 degrees to avoid Wellesbourne. If runway 18 is in use, you climb straight ahead past the lake south-east of Loxley and continue outside the village. From runway 36, you turn right onto 030 degrees towards the green roof and climb to 1,000ft QFE before turning crosswind. This ensures that you do not overfly either Charlecote or Hampton Lucy.

An Avro Vulcan is parked close to the threshold of runway 18. XM655 is a model B.2 and a former resident of



"The Touchdown Inn is so popular in this area that we get people queuing outside the restaurant. Everything is freshly cooked..."

Frankie, local pilot

number 50 Squadron, RAF Waddington. It arrived at EGBW in 1984 and is cared for by volunteer members of the XM655 Maintenance and Preservation Society. A briefing, video presentation and a guided walk-round, including an all-important cockpit visit, can be had for the price of a donation.

Close to the Touchdown Inn is the

Wellesbourne Wartime Museum, which charts the history of the airfield. A Vampire T.11, Provost T.1 and Yak-52 are displayed outside, along with the noses of a Sea Vixen FAW.2 and the former RB.199 and Olympus test-bed Vulcan B.1. This latter nose has been mounted on trestles, enabling visitors to have a view of the cockpit via the crew entry door.



The real alternative to aircraft ownership, the sky's no longer the limit!