Clued up

GA Update

April 2023

AIRSPACE REFUSAL

UK Civil Aviation Authority

ACCESS DENIED?

Don't shrug it off, there's a feedback process designed to help improve the system for all

It's frustrating — you plan a route, note the frequencies you need, refresh your RT wordage, get well into the flight, request a transit through a piece of controlled airspace and are refused entry. What do you do? Ideally you fall back on Plan B and continue outside that piece of airspace. But what about after landing? Do you simply shrug your shoulders, or perhaps complain to a few friends, and then forget about it?

While some pilots do follow up a refusal to try to find out why they were denied access, many others don't which is a pity because there's a straightforward system to record these denials and, importantly, this provides data for the CAA to use to help improve airspace access for all.

It's called the UK Airspace Access or Refusal of ATS Report Form and is designed to highlight airspace refusal issues that can be resolved so that others might in future get the access you were denied.

If you haven't yet come across it, it's an online form (technically known as FCS 1522) that lets the CAA know you were denied access, refused an air traffic service, or

type of service you wanted. But don't think because it's an online form it's just a black hole with little action being taken after it disappears from the screen.

It's part of an appetite for data about airspace usage to find out what's happening in the real world, so a lot goes on behind the scenes and many pilots get a personal reply after submitting the form. All of the feedback is then shared with CAA teams that need it, including:

- *Airspace Classification Team, where it can be matched with other reports or known incidents and recorded within the Airspace Classification Review system.*

- *The Airspace Infringements Team, separate to any specific investigation, to help highlight potential hot-spots and monitor refusal of access or service as a factor that can lead to reported infringements.*

- *Airspace Regulation, where it is reviewed with regard to airspace change proposals.*

- *Air Traffic Management Team where feedback might be sought from the relevant airspace control authority.*

Details are also shared with the UK Airprox Board for review and checked against reported airproxes for potential issues.

Air Traffic Units are very open to feedback, and explanations of the issue that caused the refusal can often be relayed back to the pilot. For example, one pilot reported being refused a transit of Newcastle's Class D. When followed up it became apparent that the Air Traffic Control Officer was dealing with a complex traffic situation at the time with a high workload due to resource restrictions and was the only radar controller available, so the decision was taken to deny transits for a period for safety reasons. The pilot appreciated the feedback and said it was a good insight for them into what ATCOs are sometimes faced with.

In another case, East Midlands had periodically reduced its LARS provision due to staffing issues and occasionally had to refuse zone transits due to workload. In

Picture courtesy of SkyDemon

this specific case the controller plugged in at the time had misinterpreted the Watch Manager's direction and unilaterally refused all zone transits. As a result of the report the service provider was able to clarify with the controllers that they should aim to facilitate zone transits unless they are dealing with a high workload, the traffic scenario at the time means a transit can't be accommodated and/or there is a credible safety concern.

High workload and safety are a quite understandable reasons for turning people away, but if the radio's quiet when a request is made you might not see it that way and wonder why there was a refusal. The explanation here is that even though the frequency might be quiet ATCOs could be carrying out a number of other functions which mean they can't accommodate you, these include:

- *Planning ahead and scanning the radar while preparing to deal with traffic that hasn't yet called up but is about to take up a large amount of their workload.*

- *Coordinating with adjacent sectors, air traffic units or other controllers. This involves a lot of phone calls to coordinate climbs, descents and other actions for inbound and outbound traffic which can be quite time-consuming, especially if there's a wait for the other controller to get a break in their workload to answer.*

- *Checking that all instructions are being complied with.*

- *Watching the traffic situation to check it's working correctly and doesn't require intervention.*

So, by submitting a UK Airspace Access or Refusal of ATS Report Form the data captured allows intervention if an area of controlled airspace is not being serviced as it should be. Do submit it as soon as possible after the flight as some ATC recordings and radar replays that might be needed are only kept for 30 days.

The information fed back is also vital to help make positive changes to airspace and its management when, for example, proposals are being considered such as the recent Cotswold Region airspace review and the Barnsley Altimeter Setting Region currently under review.

In cases such as these, data gleaned from pilot-submitted forms is vital to help form an evidence-based picture of how specific volumes are being used.

So yes, it can be frustrating at times to be denied access but if you are don't be tempted to shrug it off. Pilots are part of the system that helps put things right if necessary and that all starts with filling in the form - it isn't too onerous, doesn't take much time and who knows, it might just help you or someone else get a request approved.