

Pilots demand better protection from rogue drones



A 'quadcopter' drone with camera

by Paul Nizinskyj 8:00am Wednesday 29th October 2014 in News

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PILOTS have demanded greater protection against the risk of drone collisions a day after it emerged one nearly hit a plane coming into land at [Southend Airport](#).

The British Airline Pilots' Association called for tougher rules for the use of drones when it appeared before a House of Lords committee on Monday, arguing they should meet the same standards as piloted aircraft.

It follows the recent publication of a report by air safety organisation the Airprox Board which found a quadcopter drone nearly hit an Aer Lingus flight carrying 74 passengers when it came in to land on May 30.

The drone came within 25 metres of the ATR72 turbo-prop plane after being deliberately being flown near it.

However, neither the drone nor the person operating it was traced by [Essex Police](#) because the incident was not reported for six days.

A police spokesman said: “We were made aware of this incident, which was reported to have happened on May 30, on June 5.

“At that time, there was no further potential for police action.”

Southend Airport refused to comment on the incident and said all inquiries were to be directed to the police.

Pilot Simon Woodford, who frequently flies private aircraft out of North Wield Airfield over Southend, said he believed the easy availability of drones – which can sell for as little as £225 – meant many users were unaware of their responsibilities.

He said: “There have been great advances in drone technology and they are very controllable, but they need to be considered in the same way as model aircraft.

“This means they operate in designated areas with notifications made to pilots about where they are and how high they are flying – which I don’t think is happening. The sort I’ve seen have been these quadcopters.

The fact is they can do quite a bit of damage. A friend of mine was flying down the Rhone Valley at five and a half thousand feet and had his windscreen taken out by a bird as small as a pigeon.”

Without Civil Aviation Authority permission, drones may not be flown over or within 150 metres of a built-up area or an organised open-air assembly of more than 1,000 people, nor 50 metres of a person or any vessel, vehicle or structure not under the flyer’s control.

A Department for Transport spokesman said: “Civilian remotely piloted aircraft systems are closely regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority and are treated in the same manner as equivalent manned aircraft.”