

# Consultation: Legislation for new types of Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) aircraft

## Part B: Complex Motor-Powered Aircraft

CAP3267B

Published by the Civil Aviation Authority 2026

Civil Aviation Authority  
Aviation House  
Beehive Ring Road  
Crawley  
West Sussex  
RH6 0YR

You can copy and use this text but please ensure you always use the most up to date version, credit the CAA and use it in context so as not to be misleading,

First published May 2026

Enquiries regarding the content of this publication should be addressed to: [futureofflight@caa.co.uk](mailto:futureofflight@caa.co.uk)

The latest version of this document is available in electronic format at: [www.caa.co.uk/CAP318](http://www.caa.co.uk/CAP318)

## Part B: Complex Motor-Powered Aircraft

---

### Background

---

New types of VTOL aircraft will go through a rigorous certification process to ensure they meet the appropriate safety standard in UK SC-VTOL. However, at least for the initial years of operation while we gain more insight into their use, the CAA's view is that **all new types of VTOL aircraft – Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters – should be Complex Motor-Powered Aircraft (CMPA) by default**. This will ensure new types of VTOL aircraft are maintained to the highest standards, pilots are trained at an Approved Training Organisation, and operations are conducted to the highest standards.

Prescribing both Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters as CMPA by default as a starting point ensures that both operational oversight and maintenance standards are aligned with the complexity and types of operations these aircraft can be used for. However, we also acknowledge that there may be some cases where treating Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters as CMPA may not be proportionate for certain operational regimes.

Our views on VTOL aircraft may also evolve as we gain more data and evidence on their use. That is why we are proposing to include a discretion in the regulation that would allow the CAA to disapply the default rule and determine that a specific Powered-Lift aircraft or Non-Conventional Helicopter can be excluded from the CMPA regime. This will require the CAA to define a process and criteria to determine how it will exercise this discretion. The intention of this discretionary provision is to ensure the appropriate level of safety, while simultaneously providing industry with a proportionate degree of flexibility as technology evolves.

The CAA consulted on its proposed approach regarding CMPA in November 2025, as part of **Consultation: Policy framework for new types of Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) aircraft (CAP 3186)**<sup>1</sup>. The response to the consultation was 83% positive for our proposed approach for CMPA. The following sets out how we propose the discretion provision to operate in practice.

### General policy position

---

The CAA position is that all Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters are to be classified as CMPA by default.

The effect of this policy is a general rule that Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters must be maintained and operated to the regulations that apply to commercial,

---

<sup>1</sup> [CAP3186: Policy framework for new types of Vertical-Take Off and Landing \(VTOL\) aircraft | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)

passenger carrying aircraft. A guide for owner/operators as to these requirements, identifying the necessary organisation approvals, is set out in the Annex to this document.

## Discretionary Classification of VTOL Aircraft as Non CMPA

---

The CAA is actively developing the regulatory framework needed to support the safe, scalable introduction of Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters in the UK.

We acknowledge that there may be some cases where treating Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters as CMPA in accordance with the general policy position outlined above may not be proportionate for certain operational regimes. As such, we are proposing to introduce a discretionary power within regulations that would allow certain new types of VTOL aircraft to be treated as non-Complex Motor-Powered Aircraft (non-CMPA). This discretionary power would be applied to an aircraft type not to individual aircraft.

Where the CAA exercises its discretion to classify an aircraft type as non-CMPA, the owner of any such aircraft becomes responsible for its airworthiness and operation. For a Powered-Lift or Non-Conventional Helicopter classified as non-CMPA and operating non-commercially, the right-hand column of the table included in Annex A will apply. The owner may either to take responsibility for the continuing airworthiness tasks or contract an appropriate organisation.

We propose that this discretion would be exercised on an application by the Design Approval Holder (DAH) to the CAA's General Aviation team.

The CAA aims to ensure that the emerging VTOL sector can innovate safely and at pace. We consider that the introduction of a discretionary mechanism would:

- Support proportionate regulation for new types of VTOL aircraft.
- Avoid overregulation where full CMPA treatment is not justified.
- Maintain safety by requiring a structured, evidence-based risk assessment.
- Ensure consistent regulatory treatment anchored in transparent criteria.

## Proposed Eligibility Criteria

The CAA proposes that there should be defined fixed eligibility criteria that a Powered-Lift or Non-Conventional Helicopter must meet before discretionary non-CMPA classification can be considered:

1. **Maximum Take Off Mass (MTOM) below 2,000 kg for a Powered-Lift and 600 kg for a Non-Conventional Helicopter.**
2. **Operation limited to private, recreation (non-commercial) flights.** Commercial flights would remain under the CMPA framework.

- 3. Submission of a risk assessment.** The applicant must demonstrate that the aircraft's operation, maintenance and intended environment can achieve an acceptable level of safety outside the CMPA framework.

## Weight and Operational Limits

The CAA is proposing that only aircraft below a specified weight limit will be eligible for non-CMPA classification. Our proposed threshold is a Maximum Take Off Mass (MTOM) below 2,000 kg for a Powered-Lift and 600 kg for a Non-Conventional Helicopter. The Design Approval Holder of an aircraft below these weights will be able to apply for Non-CMPA classification of their aircraft (which will not, however, be guaranteed).

The CAA, in early 2025, requested feedback on a proposal to use 2,000kg as the threshold. The early feedback was favourable and now is the opportunity to provide feedback and comments on the use of 2,000kg and 600kg as the threshold for non-CMPA.

The 2,000 kg (for aeroplanes) and 600 kg (for helicopters) limits are known regulatory points that align with long-standing certification structures and safety targets.

The 2,000 kg MTOM threshold for aeroplanes has been used worldwide for decades, in ICAO Annex 8 and within many light aircraft rules. Historically, it has marked the upper boundary of light aircraft where occupant numbers are small, ground risk is comparatively low, and where simplified certification philosophies are acceptable.

The 600 kg limit for helicopters is a risk-containment boundary. Impact energy is lower and ground risk remains much smaller. Emergency descent concepts (ballistic parachutes, etc.) remain practical.

We consider the same justifications apply in relation to Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters.

Likewise, we propose that only Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters that will be used for private, recreational flights will be eligible for non-CMPA classification. This is consistent with other non-CMPA classified aircraft of this size, where the carrying of paying passengers using an aircraft that is not subject to the airworthiness and operational regimes that CMPA and Commercial Air Transport is prohibited or restricted.

We consider that these weight and operational criteria align with the CAA's broader policy direction of applying existing regulatory frameworks as far as practicable, with bespoke requirements only where needed due to specific characteristics of Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters.

## The Role of the Risk Assessment

Where both the weight and operational eligibility criteria are met, a Design Approval Holder (DAH) may apply for non-CMPA classification. To support their application, the CAA proposes that applicants should be required to provide a comprehensive risk assessment, addressing at minimum:

- Operational modes and environments
- Failure modes, redundancy, and emergency procedures
- Pilot competency and training
- Maintenance and continuing airworthiness approaches, and
- Interaction with nearby persons, property, and airspace users.

Requiring a risk assessment to be provided at the application stage will enable the CAA to understand what the safety risk is for that particular aircraft type and to form a view as to what types of mitigation may be appropriate, and whether an equivalent level of safety can be achieved in ways other than through application of the full CMPA regime.

To be in a position to decide whether to exercise its discretion and classify an aircraft type as non-CMPA, the CAA will require information from the DAH as to how the aircraft is expected to operate in practice and what risk mitigations have been built in or will be applied throughout its operational life. We consider that the best way to do this is for the DAH to carry out and provide to the CAA a comprehensive risk assessment addressing, at minimum, the points listed above. The proposal will be for the CAA to provide a proforma risk assessment for the applicant to complete.

The CAA proposed that it should only exercise its discretion where it is satisfied, on the basis of the risk assessment, that a high standard of safety can be achieved without the application of the CMPA regime.

This proposal reflects the CAA's commitment to applying equivalent safety levels to different types of aircraft and operations while allowing regulatory flexibility where risk can be demonstrably mitigated.

## How the Discretionary Process Is Expected to Work

The proposed process is expected to include the following steps:

1. The Design Approval Holder submits its application for certification of its aircraft and, at the same time, submits the application for non CMPA classification, confirming the aircraft meets the MTOM and private-use eligibility criteria.
2. The Design Approval Holder includes with its application a risk assessment addressing relevant operational and airworthiness elements.
3. The CAA carries out a technical review of the risk assessment, which may include penitential requests for additional evidence.

4. The CAA issues a written determination, granting or denying non-CMPA classification, with reasons where the application is denied.
5. The CAA may impose restrictions in terms of occupancy, airspace use, and overflight restrictions (e.g. day VFR, avoidance of ground obstacles/people/buildings).
6. Ongoing oversight, including any conditions or limitations the CAA may impose.

The intent is to provide proportionate regulation consistent with the CAA's strategic direction for new types of VTOL.

## Conclusion

---

The current CAA policy is to classify all Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters as CMPA. The CAA's proposal to introduce a discretionary power for designating certain Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters as non-CMPA represents a measured and sensible regulatory evolution. By creating a pathway for lighter, privately operated Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters to be regulated proportionately - supported by evidence-based risk assessments - the CAA is striking a balance between safety, innovation, and practicality.

This change is an important step in enabling a flexible yet safe regulatory environment as the UK prepares for increasingly widespread operations of Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters.

***Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with our overall approach regarding the CMPA discretionary power? Please explain your answer.***

***Question 2: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed eligibility criteria with the use of MTOM with the proposed limits, and limited to private, recreational flights? Please explain your answer.***

***Question 3: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to the risk assessment required for non-CMPA classification? Please explain your answer.***

***Question 4: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed process for non-CMPA classification we have outlined? Please explain your answer.***

## ANNEX A

## Differences between CMPA and non-CMPA

The following table provides a summary of the applicability of the Annexes to Assimilated Regulation (EU) No 1321/2014 and Assimilated Regulation (EU) 965/2012 relating to the requirements and organisations involved in regard to CMPA and non-CMPA classified aircraft.

For owner/operators of Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters classified as non-CMPA, the column under “Non-Commercial” “Non-CMPA” would apply. It should be noted that for Non-CMPA, Part ML of Assimilated Regulation (EU) No 1321/2014 would apply rather than Part M.

### Operational Regulatory Differences between CMPA and Non CMPA

Airworthiness terms	Licenced air carriers		Commercial		Non-Commercial	
Flight Operations terms	CAT		Commercial (SPO)		Non-Commercial (including training organisations)	
	CMPA	Non-CMPA	CMPA	Non-CMPA	CMPA	Non-CMPA
<b>Flight Operations</b>	Part-ORO (AOC) Part-CAT Part-SPA	Part-ORO (AOC) Part-CAT Part-SPA	Part-ORO (DEC) Part-SPO Part-SPA	Part-ORO (DEC) Part-SPO Part-SPA	Part-ORO (DEC) Part-SPO Part-SPA	Part-NCO Part-SPA Part-SPO
<b>Continuing airworthiness management</b>	Part-CAMO	Part-CAMO	Part-CAMO	CAO-CAM or CAMO	Part-CAMO	Pilot/owner, or CAO-CAM or CAMO
<b>Aircraft Maintenance</b>	Part-145	Part-145	Part-145	CAO-M or Part-145	Part-145	Individual maintenance, or CAO-M or Part 145
<b>Maintenance programme / approvals</b>	Approved by the CAA or by an organisation with indirect approval	Approved by the CAA or by an organisation with indirect approval	Approved by the CAA or by an organisation with indirect approval	Approved by the CAO or CAMO	Approved by the CAA or by an organisation with indirect approval	Declared by the owner, or approved by the CAO, or CAMO if managing the aircraft
<b>Regulatory oversight</b>	Greater oversight (Part-CAMO/Part-OPS combinations), more audits, formal approvals and continued surveillance	Greater oversight (Part-CAMO/Part-OPS combinations), more audits, formal approvals and continued surveillance	Greater oversight, more audits, formal approvals and continued surveillance	Greater oversight, more audits, formal approvals and continued surveillance	Greater oversight, more audits, formal approvals and continued surveillance	Lighter oversight

#### Notes:

CAO-CAM is not a formal abbreviation, it is a Part-CAO organisation with continuing airworthiness management privilege.

CAO-M is not a formal abbreviation, it is a Part-CAO organisation with maintenance privilege.

Individual maintenance is not a formal definition, it is maintenance released by pilot-owner or independent certifying staff.

For owner/operators of Powered-Lift and Non-Conventional Helicopters classified as non-CMPA, the aircraft will be on either a Certificate of Airworthiness (i.e. the aircraft has a Type Certificate), or on a Permit to Fly. In both cases, the aircraft will be restricted to private, recreational flying only. Any potential owner/operator should view the CAA website to make themselves aware as to what their responsibilities are and what will be expected of them when owning and flying one of these aircraft.

## ANNEX B

## Abbreviations

---

CAMO – Continuing Airworthiness Management Organisations

CAT – Commercial Air Transport

CMPA – Complex Motor-Powered Aircraft

DAH – Design Approval Holder

EU – European Union

ICAO – International Civil Aviation Organisation

MTOM – Maximum Take-off Mass

ORO – Organisation Requirements for Air Operations

PtF – Permit to Fly

SC VTOL – Special Condition Vertical Take-off and Landing

SPA – Specific Approvals

SPO – Specialised Operations

VFR – Visual Flight Rules

VTOL – Vertical Take-off and Landing

## ANNEX C

# Summary of Questions

---

***Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with our overall approach regarding the CMPA discretionary power? Please explain your answer.***

***Question 2: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed eligibility criteria with the use of MTOM with the proposed limits, and limited to private, recreational flights? Please explain your answer.***

***Question 3: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to the risk assessment required for non-CMPA classification? Please explain your answer.***

***Question 4: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed process for non-CMPA classification we have outlined? Please explain your answer.***