

Press release: One giant leap: Vertical launch spaceport to bring UK into new space age

- Industrial Strategy funding awarded to proposed vertical launch spaceport in Sutherland, Scotland
- Horizontal launch sites such as those planned in Cornwall, Glasgow Prestwick and Snowdonia to be boosted by new £2 million development fund
- Commercial vertical and horizontal launch demand is worth a potential £3.8 billion to the UK economy over the next decade and will support further growth of Britain's space sector
- Additional grants to be announced at next week's Farnborough International Airshow will see leading commercial spaceflight operators launching from Sutherland

UK spaceports

The UK Space Agency has selected the first vertical launch site in Sutherland on the north coast of Scotland and is making available a new £2 million fund to boost horizontal spaceport development across Britain, Business Secretary Greg Clark will announce today (Monday 16 July).

Scotland is the best place in the UK to reach in-demand satellite orbits with vertically launched rockets. Initial funding of £2.5 million will go to Highlands and Islands Enterprise to develop the vertical launch site in Sutherland which will use a combination of proven and innovative rocket technologies to pave the way for a world-leading spaceflight market.

This will grow the UK space economy through regular, reliable and responsible access to space.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

“As a nation of innovators and entrepreneurs, we want Britain to be the first place in mainland Europe to launch satellites as part of our Industrial Strategy. The UK's thriving space industry, research community and aerospace supply chain put the UK in a leading position to develop both vertical and horizontal launch sites.

“This will build on our global reputation for manufacturing small satellites and help the whole country capitalise on the huge potential of the commercial space age.”

Horizontal launch sites have significant potential in a future UK spaceflight market, which could attract companies from all over the world to invest in Britain. Sites such as Newquay, Glasgow Prestwick and Snowdonia will be boosted by a new £2m fund to grow their sub-orbital flight, satellite launch and spaceplane ambitions.

Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling said:

“The space sector is an important player in the UK’s economy and our recent Space Industry Act has unlocked the potential for hundreds of new jobs and billions of revenue for British business across the country.

“Today’s announcement is exciting for places like Newquay in Cornwall too, paving the way for further potential space ports in the future.”

The £50 million UK Spaceflight Programme is also considering leading proposals for horizontal spaceplane operations from across Britain, submitted as part of its call on low cost access to space.

Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell said:

“The UK Government is driving the commercial space age and Scotland is leading the way. We are investing £2.5 million in a vertical launch site in Sutherland which will create hundreds of new jobs. And we will invest a further £2 million in horizontal launch sites – Prestwick is in the running for that and I wish them well.

“Scotland is uniquely positioned to pilot the UK’s commercial space sector and the UK Government recognises this pot.”

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

“The UK Government has an exciting ambition to take the UK into the commercial space age by enabling small satellite launch and spaceflight from UK spaceports. Wales now has an exciting window of opportunity to take a leading role in shaping that future.

“We have the right geography and a skilled engineering base in aerospace, electronics and the software industries, standing ready to diversify and to flourish in the fast-developing space market. The opportunities are vast – for Britain’s strategic capabilities and for Wales in terms of job creation, cross border synergies through the Northern Powerhouse, linking to our strong academic institutions and the potential economic impact. We must now stand ready to grasp them.”

The UK has a thriving space sector with significant capability in manufacturing satellites and using the information they collect to drive innovation in other sectors ranging from healthcare to finance.

Graham Turnock, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

“This spaceport grant will help to kick-start an exciting new era for the UK space industry, and this is only the beginning of our LaunchUK campaign. We are committed to supporting a commercial market for access to space in the UK, and we will continue to engage with any company who seeks to operate here.”

A number of sites across the UK are developing their spaceport plans and engaging with regulators, demonstrating the scale of the industry’s ambition

and confidence in a future UK spaceflight market, which could attract companies from all over the world to invest in Britain.

Low cost access to space is important for the UK's thriving space sector which builds more small satellites than any other country, with Glasgow building more than any other city in Europe.

Will Whitehorn, Non-Executive Chairman of Clyde Space said:

"From designing and building the very first satellite in Scotland, Clyde Space has grown and become a front runner in small-satellite manufacturing. Having a spaceport located in Scotland will bring about a whole host of commercial advantages and not only to our operations in Glasgow, but to the entire space sector in the whole of the UK."

Peter Platzer, CEO of Spire Global, said:

"A spaceport in Scotland and the UK is fantastic news! Launch continues to be the most unpredictable part of the overall supply chain, with delays, often for months and sometimes years, being the norm. In Spire, Scotland already sports Europe's most advanced and prolific satellite manufacturing capability, and with a space port right next door, enabling clockwork like launches, we can finally get our space sector supply chain to be truly integrated!"

The UK's thriving space industry, research community and aerospace supply chain also put the UK in a strong position to further develop horizontal launch sites. The Government's decision to make available a £2 million strategic development fund, subject to business case, will help accelerate this early-stage market further.

Small-satellite launch and sub-orbital flight from the UK will support organisations across the country to remain at the forefront of commercial space services. It will drive new highly skilled jobs and boost local economies – not only in the communities around spaceport sites, but in the UK's space sector as a whole.

Charlotte Wright, Chief Executive of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), said:

"The decision to support the UK's first spaceport in Sutherland is tremendous news for our region and for Scotland as a whole. The international space sector is growing and we want to ensure the region is ready to reap the economic benefits that will be generated from this fantastic opportunity."