



UK-FIRST AIR TAXI VERTIPORT TESTBED PLANS UNVEILED BY SKYPORTS AND BICESTER MOTION

News / Business aviation



Skyports Infrastructure signed an agreement to develop the UK first vertiport testbed at Bicester Motion, Oxfordshire, the 444-acre estate dedicated to pioneering mobility technology, past, present and future. The new vertiport, which will include a compact 160 sq m passenger terminal, will be a critical facility for testing ground infrastructure and flight operations and will play a significant role in enabling the next generation of electric, low noise aviation in the UK. The vertiport, positioned adjacent to Bicester Motion' existing general aviation grass runways, will continue the airfield' long history of aerospace innovation. It will also align with Bicester Motion' strategic vision to integrate both traditional and vertical aviation operations from its airfield.

Developed as part of the Advanced Mobility Ecosystem Consortium and backed by Innovate UK Future Flight Challenge, the vertiport will serve as a key node for early vertiport network planning and demonstrations, as well as for the Consortium's wider testing programme and public and

stakeholder engagement. This will include being flown at by Vertical Aerospace, the global company developing one of the world's most advanced electric aircraft in the UK, to conduct demonstration flights and test key procedures ahead of commercial launch. Skyports will aim to open the doors to its UK vertiport by the end of 2024 to align with the AMEC testing programme.

In October 2022, Skyports launched a "Living Lab" terminal in the USA with renowned aircraft partner Joby Aviation. Also in 2022, Skyports inaugurated its European vertiport testbed with Groupe ADP in France. In February 2024, Skyports, the Dubai Roads and Transport Authority and Joby Aviation penned an agreement to launch commercial air taxi services in Dubai by 2026.

The UK vertiport design, which has been submitted to Cherwell District Council, has drawn inspiration from Skyports' existing testbeds in Paris and California. The strategic location of Skyports' Bicester Motion vertiport, approximately 1 hour 40 drive from central London by road and close to Oxford and the Cotswolds, will demonstrate how air taxi services will provide a vital link between urban centres, regional, tourism and retail hubs. By air taxi, the same journey will take less than 25 minutes.

Duncan Walker, chief executive officer, Skyports, commented: "Our vertiport at Bicester Motion is ideally located to serve as a central hub for the UK's advanced air mobility industry. The facility will be employed by Skyports and our strategic partners to test and refine all aspects of our ground technology and operations within a UK context. This will also be a key location for early demonstration flights in the UK and will help to pave the way for permanent operations in the future."

Daniel Geoghegan, chief executive, Bicester Motion said: "Our agreement is a major step for UK aviation innovation. Partnering with such an innovative company as Skyports is not only a significant boost to Oxfordshire's aviation cluster but also will facilitate the development and accessibility to a new sustainable, low-carbon and futuristic mode of transport across the world. This news reflects the next chapter in Bicester Motion's evolution of aviation and presents the opportunity for Bicester and the county to be at the forefront of this exciting pioneering industry. We have already had successful specialist drone flight testing from the airfield and these eVTOLs will use electric power to hover, take off, and land vertically meaning that noise is to a minimum and pioneering sustainable flight and travel are nearer a reality."

Gary Cutts, challenge director - Future Flight, Innovate UK, stated: "The UKRI Future Flight Challenge was launched with the objective of accelerating the development and integration of innovative aviation solutions for UK industry and communities. Through flagship projects such as AMEC, we're ensuring that the UK remains firmly on the map as a leading contributor to the next generation of aviation. Skyports' vertiport at Bicester Motion is instrumental to this objective. As a hub for researching, testing and demonstrating ground and air operations for the advanced air mobility industry, it will play a significant role in developing a UK vertiport network and implementing commercial air taxi services in the future."

James Richmond, Head of Advanced Air Mobility at consortium leader AtkinsRéalis said: "This vertiport testbed will help to demonstrate the technical and commercial feasibility of air taxi services in the UK. It is also an ideal opportunity to optimise the passenger journey, taking into account key factors such as processing time, security and accessibility – bringing to life the future of air transport for the public and key stakeholders".

Andrew Macmillan, chief commercial and strategy officer at Vertical Aerospace, said: "At Vertical we are pioneering a new, hassle-free way to travel with zero emissions, but we can't do this alone. Creating the right infrastructure is critical to getting electric aircraft into the air and the UK's first

vertiport will help accelerate this by providing crucial learnings to the industry. Along with our partners we are excited to show the world the benefits of electric aviation.”

Skyports’ new vertiport at Bicester Motion will include:

- a compact terminal, constructed on a plot of 0.42 acres (0.17 hectares), to showcase vertiport infrastructure’s efficient nature and highlight the capacity for seamless integration into urban landscapes, where space is at a premium, and facilitate fast passenger throughput.
- passenger processing facilities which will include access control gates, weight and balance optimisation, and identity validation, verification and screening. The addition of a dedicated passenger lounge will demonstrate a comprehensive customer experience.
- operations room will be equipped with Skyports’ suite of Vertiport Automation System (VAS) technology, which will feature a bespoke resource management and scheduling module, to enable high throughput aircraft agnostic operations.
- situational awareness module to provide visualisation tools for comprehensive airspace and vertiport perimeter monitoring. The airside area will comprise a single final approach and take off area and one stand.

05 MARCH 2024

ARTICLE LINK:

<https://connect.50skyshades.com/news/business-aviation/uk-first-air-taxi-vertiport-testbed-plans-unveiled-by-skyports-and-bicester-motion>