LONDON OXFORD AIRPORT INTRODUCES SUSTAINABLE AVIATION FUEL, WELCOMES NEW TENANTS, PROGRESSES WITH R&D TECHNOLOGY PARK

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London Oxford Airport is enjoying a significant year. This month it introduced sustainable aviation fuel through fuel provider World Fuel Services. New tenant OXCCU, a spin-out from Oxford University, is readying its synthetic aviation fuel facility to open in August, anticipating an anticipated 50% lower capital cost versus other e-fuel production methods. Its OXEFUEL takes atmospheric carbon dioxide and combines it with hydrogen. Using its bespoke and unique catalysts and reactors, OXCCU plans to turn H2 and CO2 into long chain hydrocarbons, in one simple step.

Then, in September, coinciding with Airbus Helicopters' 50th anniversary in the UK, a brand-new UK HQ for the OEM, comprising 66,000 sq ft hangarage and 59,000 sq ft of office/stores/workshops, is due to open. Built at a cost of £50 million, the new HQ will feature seven dedicated helipads, sized to support its largest models. Meantime, building work commences this June on the all-new R & D Science Park at the entrance to the airport – a £48

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million green campus environment offering 17 business units with over 200,000 sq.ft. First occupants should be in by the second quarter of 2025, shared James Dillon-Godfray, the airport's Head of Business Development.

SAF offered in two blends

The airport is offering customers flexibility with its SAF purchasing with options for 30% or (less costly) 10% blends. Sourced from Neste in Ghent, Belgium, the arriving SAF is simply added to existing Jet A1 static tanks on its fuel farm, reducing the cost and complexity. Each 34,000-litre delivery is a blend of biofuel with conventional jet fuel, but the precise percentage will differ each time, depending on what feedstock was used; chemicals added and in what proportions. A number of Formula One motorsport teams have wanted SAF for some time.

Adding to the airport's future technology drive is Qdot Technology, another spin-out from Oxford University. It specialises in hybrid powerplants for future eVTOL and UAV aircraft, drawing on its expertise in heat transfer technology with hydrogen fuel cells. The London Heliport, sister business to London Oxford Airport, is also talking about introducing SAF, according to Heliport Manager Matthew Rice. The Heliport marked its 65th anniversary in April, having undergone numerous changes, as well as owners.

The heliport was regularly close to its 12,000 annual movement limit pre-Covid. Since then, it has typically seen 3,000 less, but business is really picking up, said Matthew. It's already at maximum capacity of the British Grand Prix in July – 150 movements or 80 helicopters in and out per day, while Glastonbury slots are booked out already for June. Currently the heliport's priorities are to prepare space for a new fuel installation, with overground tanks and new safety netting. The VIP terminal, furnished with a piano, features the red branding of Edmiston, which has been a sponsor since 2019.

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Helicopter charter growth

Two premier players in helicopter charter are long term helicopter resident Capital Air Services, whose Managing Director Michael Hampton marks 30 years at the business, (and even longer at Oxford Airport with his origins working with former owner CSE Aviation), and SaxonAir, new to Oxford. Likewise, Volare Aviation reported its helicopter charter business is buoyant. It recently added another third Leonardo AW109 to its UK AOC and bolstered its Oxford MRO facilities with the opening of a paint shop for helicopters.

Speaking about SaxonAir's decision to open a base at the airport, CEO Alex Durand commented: "I learned to fly at Oxford. We own an Airbus helicopter and Airbus HQ is there. There's a gap in the market to the west of England, but principally Oxford is doing brilliantly with its sustainability efforts, which we admire. It is taking the lead as a hub for green transportation, just as we are pursuing at Norwich. (Its latest initiative is a move into electric aircraft flying training.) We want to be part of it as a forward-thinking progressive partner," he said.

SaxonAir and Capital Air Services both report strong demand with helicopter charter. Capital recently added three new ACH145 D3 five-bladed helicopters to its managed fleet, which are now flying all over the UK, Ireland and Northern Europe. The expanded executive twin fleet has brought it more work from charter brokers, with its much larger cabin and excellent performance characteristics. Training pilots is an issue, however, he noted, with simulator training only available in Finland or Germany.

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Tui moves in

In other news, Oxford Airport, traditionally known as the cradle of pilot training, has just welcomed Tui's multi-crew licence cadet programme. A total of 30 ab initio pilots will be trained at Oxford through to 2025 on Diamond Aircraft trainers.

Volare and UK CAA discuss Lilium introduction

Volare Aviation is expanding its aircraft management activity, and getting closer to charter brokers, highlighted Christian Cliff Lee-Fatt, Head of Commercial Operations. Its eVolare business, centred on the Lilum, places Volare in first mover position introducing the aircraft to service (ahead of the airlines).

"We're busy securing sites, engaging with infrastructure partners and have a firm plan regarding the power issue, he said. It is also in close discussion with the UK CAA as launch UK customer for the aircraft. Volare expects to take 10 aircraft between Q4 2025 and Q1 2026, which will be London Oxford Airport-based, plus 10 more options. "It's a single-pilot operation, so we've had quite a few meetings about that." He noted. Volare is committed to the Lilium and Cliff shared he doesn't have a weekend off (until September) because he's travelling with the full-scale Lilium mock up. Next stop is EBACE next week (28 – 30 May).

More insurers supporting business aviation

Matthew Day, Director for General Aviation at insurance specialists Gallagher shared some good news that following a number of significant name withdrawals three to four years ago, more insurers are getting into, or coming back to, business aviation, ushering in softer rates. This is a marked difference from three years ago when underwriters started withdrawing from aviation, creating less choice and increased rates, exacerbated by world events like the Russia/Ukraine

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conflict. “We are seeing up to 40% more capacity now and we can trade off and leverage for our clients.”

Gallagher is also stepping up to support the newly emerging eVTOL/AAM market. It has appointed Tony Jones, formerly of Virgin Galactic, to “lead its push in the eVTOL/AAM world.” With Jones based in Los Angeles, Gallagher has also formed a working group to evaluate the sector. We say to any operator if you are looking at this new sector come and talk with us, early. Insurers still haven’t quite “figured out” the risk profile of the emerging UAM sector and accordingly, can’t price it. “There will be an element of ‘best guess’ but until we see the details, we just don’t know.” Gallagher is exhibiting at EBACE *Booth D50*.

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