

Ballynahinch manufacturer production investment **houseboat trebles after major**

A Ballynahinch company is on course to treble production of its specialist houseboats after investing in a purpose-built production space.

Bluefield Houseboats said it will now be able to produce 36 vessels a year from just 12 currently after acquiring developing a 6,000 square feet factory on land just outside the County Down town. The move, backed by Ulster Bank, has also seen the firm create three new jobs and put in place plans to expand headcount further in the future.

Only launched in 2016, the company said it is aiming to grow production to 100 houseboats annually by creating an additional 13,000 square feet of space on the same site.

The houseboats themselves are largely aimed at the commercial market, but the company said it sees opportunity to create vessels for residential use, as well as supporting marinas to capitalise on tourism potential.

Operations director Colin Nelson said the aim of the investment, of an undisclosed sum, was to minimise waste while maximising productivity.

“It was all about implementing the principles manufacturing best practice to sustain growth. Already, we have a very strong proposition and a high demand product which we believe will only continue to grow as population size and density combined with land availability intensifies.”

Technical director Justin Reid said that focusing on production efficiencies has been key.

“By streamlining the production process we’re able to eliminate the double-handling of materials and increase our output, manufacturing up to eight individual houseboats under the same roof at any one time compared to only three previously.”

Ulster Bank provided the investment for the firm, which Ulster Bank Business Development Manager Derick Wilson said will have a transformative impact.

“Before this investment, Bluefield Houseboats had already established a solid reputation for its premium product suite. With the benefit of a modern and built-for-purpose manufacturing base, the company is now equipped to attract further investment and maximise its export potential in a market with huge opportunity for growth.”