

Virgin Orbit finally granted licence for delayed UK space launch from Cornwall

Richard Branson's satellite company Virgin Orbit has finally been granted licences to allow it to take part in the UK's first-ever space launch. The UK's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said the entrepreneur's company had met the licensing requirements having demonstrated it had taken "all reasonable steps" to ensure safety risks arising from launch activities were as "low as reasonably practicable".

The licences were issued following consent from transport secretary Mark Harper. Virgin Orbit also received its range control licence from the space regulator, which means the company is able to issue warning notices to keep people out of hazardous areas and monitor the progress of the rocket.

The launch from Spaceport Cornwall, at Newquay Cornwall Airport, was due to happen on December 14 but has been delayed until after Christmas. Virgin Orbit previously cited technical and regulatory challenges in getting ready for the launch.

Dan Hart, chief executive of Virgin Orbit, said the issuing of the licences was a "major milestone" and represented the completion of an "enormous effort". He said: "With our partners at the UK Civil Aviation Authority, Spaceport Cornwall, UK Space Agency and our payload customers, together we are progressing towards the first launch from Cornwall – keeping a strong focus on a safe and successful mission for all."

In November, Spaceport Cornwall was [issued with its own licence](#) from the CAA for the launch, which will see the UK become the first country in Europe to launch satellites into space.

A specially [modified Boeing 747 – called Cosmic Girl – from Virgin Orbit](#) will help launch the satellite. It will have rocket launchers attached to its wing which can then propel small satellites into orbit. Several of the satellites have been constructed in the UK, including the first Welsh satellite, which will also be on the launch and was [built by Cardiff-based Space Forge](#).

Melissa Thorpe, head of Spaceport Cornwall, said: “We are thrilled for the Virgin Orbit licenses to be in place for this historic launch. It has been an incredible effort by all partners to reach this milestone, and my team cannot wait to share in the excitement of the upcoming launch with everyone that has made it happen. Together we can now get these Earth benefitting technologies into Low Earth Orbit and open up Space For Good from Cornwall.”

Mr Harper said the launch next year would reinforce the UK’s position as a “leading space nation”. He added: “Today we are one step closer to opening the UK’s galactic gateway, with Virgin Orbit receiving an historic first licence to allow the UK’s first ever spaceflight launch.”

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