

27th June 2017, Henlow, Bedfordshire

Plans revealed for the World's first commercial space and deep-sea research and training centre at heart of RAF Henlow site regeneration

Blue Abyss, the world's first commercial deep-sea to space research, training and test centre, is at the centre of a multi-million-pound regeneration vision to develop a science, innovation and technology park on part of the soon-to-close RAF Henlow site.

The Blue Abyss team is working with Central Bedfordshire Council to create the £120m facility, designed by London's Gherkin' architect Robin Partington, on part of the RAF Henlow site, which is due to close by 2020.

Blue Abyss will house the world's biggest 50m deep pool, a hotel, an astronaut training centre, hypobaric and hyperbaric chambers and a human performance centre to enable divers, astronauts and top athletes to perform at the peak of their potential.

Plans include a conference theatre and training rooms, and a 120-bed hotel.

It hopes to start building at the end of the year to start operating in 2019, bringing about 160 new jobs.

The Blue Abyss team plans to reuse some facilities at RAF Henlow, including a centrifuge base already installed at the base for its long-arm human centrifuge for high-G astronaut training.

A launch event for the project was held at Cranfield University on Tuesday June 27, attended by representatives of the European Space Agency (ESA), the UK Space Agency, Romanian cosmonaut Dumitru-Dorin Prunariu, Blue Abyss non-executive director, and representatives from central and local government representatives.

Blue Abyss will provide an arena for pioneering research and development into extreme environments, which in turn will enable better human performance in deep sea and space environments by encouraging innovation.

The research and development will help to reduce risk, test operational procedures, improve performance and aid exploration in these environments.

The centre will also offer a wide range of experiential 'space preparation' packages for groups and individuals.

These packages will run alongside a ground-breaking commercial astronaut training programme to allow ordinary people to undergo a full astronaut training programme ready for the wave of commercial spaceflight opportunities coming to market.

Blue Abyss' education outreach programme and collaboration with universities will help shape a new generation of scientists and engineers, working with primary schools through to post-graduate and post-doctorate researchers.

"RAF Henlow provides the ideal site for Blue Abyss. The market is waiting for this facility – space tourism, the UK space programme and the demand for experiential packages.

"Having a centrifuge base already there is an important feature because it's the most expensive and difficult element of a key item of equipment to install.