Royal Mail and Skyports Drone Services launch fully electric drone deliveries in Orkney

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Royal Mail and Skyports Drone Services have today announced the launch of the Orkney I-Port operation, a drone delivery project established in partnership with Orkney Islands Council Harbour Authority and Loganair.

Royal Mail and Skyports Drone Services have established a daily inter-island mail distribution service between three islands on Orkney. The project will initially operate for three months, with the intent to extend in the future. This is the first UK drone delivery project which can be conducted on a permanent basis under existing regulatory frameworks. This is due to the unique landscape of Orkney and the proximity of the islands to one another. This allows for flights to be conducted using extended visual line of sight (EVLOS) permissions rather than beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) permissions.

Letters and parcels will be transported from Royal Mail's Kirkwall delivery office to Stromness, from where Skyports Drone Services will conduct drone deliveries to Royal Mail staff on Graemsay and Hoy. From these locations, postal workers will then carry out their usual island delivery routes.

The weather and geography of Orkney can impact the ability to provide an uninterrupted delivery service. For example, pauses in the ferry schedule - by which some mail is transported - are common during poor weather due to the challenges of docking safely. The I-Port operation significantly improves service levels and access for rural communities, significantly shortening delivery times to Graemsay and Hoy.

The use of electric drones for inter-island delivery will also bring significant safety improvements, ensuring postal workers can deliver between ports and marinas throughout Orkney without risk. There will also be emission savings.

Skyports Drone Services will conduct the inter-island flights with the Speedbird Aero DLV-2 aircraft. The multirotor drone is capable of carrying payloads of up to 6kg.

The I-Port is one of the nine winning projects of the Freight Innovation Fund Accelerator, a programme funded by the Department for Transport and delivered by the Connected Places Catapult to support innovators with

grant funding and business advice. Skyports received £150,000 of grant funding to test Orkney I-Port operation as a part of the programme.

Rt. Hon. Alistair Carmichael MP for Orkney and Shetland said: "I was glad to attend the drone tests and see their development for myself. Obviously these schemes are still at trial stage and so we should temper our expectations. Even so anything that helps to maintain the universal service, especially in areas of the isles which are more difficult to reach, is something that we should give a chance to support. Royal Mail remains a critical part of keeping the isles connected – and local knowledge and care are vital to that network."

Chris Paxton, Head of Drone Trials at Royal Mail, said: "We are proud to be working with Skyports to deliver via drone to some of the more remote communities that we serve in the UK. Using a fully electric drone supports Royal Mail's continued drive to reduce emissions associated with our operations, whilst connecting the island communities we deliver to."

Alex Brown, Director, Skyports Drone Services, said: "By leveraging drone technology, we are revolutionising mail services in remote communities, providing more efficient and timely delivery, and helping to reduce the requirement for emissions-producing vehicles. We're pleased to once again be partnering with Royal Mail to demonstrate how drone operations can benefit UK logistics on this project. The I-Port project also marks an exciting milestone as it is the first operation we are completing with aircraft partner Speedbird."

Source: Royal Mail

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