

Press release

2 November 2020

Training centre for helicopter pilots

The Swiss Rotor Hub will be an expertise centre for helicopters, creating 10–15 highly skilled jobs at Grenchen Airport. The heart of the new build is a cutting-edge virtual reality flight simulator (VR) to train helicopter pilots, which allow savings on flight operations. Grenchen Airport is reaching another milestone in its development as the most important Swiss training site for pilots.

Grenchen Airport has recently submitted the documents for the planning permission process to the Federal Office of Civil Aviation. The two-storey building designed by Grenchen-based company Ivo Erard Architekten + Planer AG is to replace the dilapidated green Farner Hangar. The same planning consultancy also developed the new Rega/LAT training building.

The air rescue service Rega and its recently commissioned training base, the European Flight Academy and the Horizon Swiss Flight Academy currently train around 100 pilots for Lufthansa and Swiss every year. The planned helicopter expertise centre will complement these facilities. The flight simulators, planned for the Swiss Rotor Hub and operated by the Dübendorf-based company VRM, enable realistic exercises including emergency manoeuvres, load operations and rescue operations via helicopter. This means that training to increase flight safety can be carried out in a largely emission-free and environmentally friendly manner on the ground at the training centre. In addition to the training rooms, there will also be rooms for course participants to stay overnight at the new campus. The halls on the ground floor will be used for servicing and maintaining helicopters. Furthermore, Mountainflyers will offer training and charter flights at the Swiss Rotor Hub. The Fribourg-based Vuichard Recovery Aviation Safety Foundation offers special training for safety-related flying techniques across the world. Centaurium Aviation Ltd intends to set up its own maintenance centre. This will make it possible to carry out maintenance work on helicopters again in Grenchen in the future.

In addition, Centaurium Aviation Ltd will be available to help customers of the Swiss Rotor Hub with all questions relating to compliance management and aircraft management.

The company, until now based in Moerigen, is also the Bell Textron representative in Switzerland. Bell is not only one of the world's leading helicopter providers, but also carries out intensive research in the field of urban mobility and the development of new, more environmentally friendly aircraft. In the new building on Grenchen's Flughafenstrasse, a showroom and a sales office will be opened up for Bell. 'We are very proud to be able to develop our expertise centre with renowned partners of the helicopter industry', says Daniel Borer, CEO of Centaurium AG, who is managing the project as the developer.

Grenchen Airport, which is making land available to Centaurium AG under construction law, is optimistic about the Swiss Rotor Hub. 'The project fits in perfectly with our strategy', says director Ernest Oggier. Two-thirds of take-offs and landings in Grenchen are currently carried out as part of training flights. The shift from a leisure to a training airfield continues with the commissioning of the Swiss Rotor Hub. In the medium term, a maximum of 200 additional helicopter flight operations per year are expected, which is negligible in the grand scheme of over 50,000 flight operations. Conversely, the virtual reality training on the simulator will reduce flight operations. Director Ernest Oggier emphasises that, with the return of helicopter maintenance work at the airfield, more highly skilled jobs will be created.

The Mayor of Grenchen, François Scheidegger, is fully on board with the project. 'I am delighted about the significant investments in our airfield.' Grenchen is further developing its position as the most important Swiss training site for pilots. Centaurium AG estimates that the construction of the helicopter centre will begin in summer 2021 and operations will begin in spring 2022.

Further information:

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