Holyrood debates the space race – with ‘Scotland’s rocket’ parked outside

THE ONLY British rocket to successfully reach orbit was displayed outside Parliament as MSPs heralded Scotland’s emergence as a leading player in the new global space race.

Black Arrow’s visit to Holyrood coincided with a space debate held in the parliamentary chamber, serving as a symbolic representation of the UK’s position at the forefront of the rapidly growing space sector.

Transported back to British soil from its landing site in South Australia by fast-moving space firm Skyrora, Black Arrow was unveiled in front of leading industry figures and politicians on Burns Night this year – almost 50 years since its original launch.

MSPs voted 79 to 21 in favour of welcoming both the Space Industry Act 2018 and the UK Government's Industrial Strategy – including support for a £50 million programme to fund small satellite launches from UK spaceports.

The decision to bring Black Arrow home has been applauded by Helen Sharman, who became the first UK astronaut in 1991 and believes the rocket's return will inspire people to find out more about Britain's impressive space legacy.

Helen said: "Space is such an integral part of every day that often we do not think about the satellites and rockets that enable our modern lives.

"Looking at Black Arrow, we can see how much science and engineering were needed to create it. I hope it will inspire people to find out more."

A motion calling for Parliament to recognise the

diversification the space sector brings to Scotland's economy was also supported unanimously, with Minister for Trade, Innovation and Investment Ivan McKee predicting the space sector to be worth £4bn by 2030.

Mr McKee said : "Scotland's space sector has huge potential – in the manufacture of rockets and satellites and their launch and operation.

Daniel Smith, Director at Skyrora, said: "Skyrora welcome the Minister's comments and would certainly echo his predictions.

"Scotland is key to the UK's plans to capture more of the global space market and is well placed to take advantage of this incredible opportunity thanks to our engineering heritage, world-class universities, an already established space sector and, of course, geography – we're perfectly situated for launching small satellites to low-earth orbit."

Edinburgh-based Skyrora, which is just 20 months old, has already developed a large team comprising 120 people with headquarters in Edinburgh and six workshops around Europe, including a new production facility in Loanhead, Midlothian.

The company, which plans to launch satellites into orbit from the North of Scotland, is developing propulsion technology with many similarities to Britain's first and only launch vehicle to date.

Daniel Smith added: "It's important that we move fast to secure our position as a space nation and we hope that Skyrora can set an example to other young space companies through our fast growth, emphasis on collaboration, innovative development of hardware and commitment to educational outreach."

"I am delighted that Skyrora has brought the Black Arrow to Scotland and look forward them being a key part of Scotland's exciting journey to become Europe's leading space nation" "

Christine Grahame Grahame, MSP for Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale, said: “I am delighted to be part of securing the display of Black Arrow which I had the privilege of seeing recently in Penicuik.”

Black Arrow was developed and tested by a team of engineers on the Isle of Wight, with the third flight from Woomera, Australia, serving as the first and only UK-led orbital launch.

The transportation process to get Black Arrow back from Australia involved it being shipped across land and sea, making the journey from the Australian desert to Bishop’s Move in Penicuik – where the rocket was first unveiled.

Skyrora’s next rockets, Skylark Micro and SkyHy, are ready to launch and will allow their team to gain more valuable experience, with the latter capable of reaching the edge of space, a feat never accomplished by a private company launching from the UK before.

The firm’s rapidly expanding team aims to capture its share of the fast-growing small satellite launch market and recently displayed a 3D printed prototype engine for its orbital launcher at the National Student Space Conference at Edinburgh University. The same engine is set for testing at Cornwall Airport Newquay in the coming weeks.

It is developing launch vehicle technology that builds on previous British rocket programmes with the aim of reducing the cost of launches thanks to proven technology and advanced engineering methods.

The firm draws on Britain’s launch heritage with ambitions to build a robust supply chain while creating new employment opportunities to inspire the next generation of talent.