Press Release: 20 February 2025

**Construction begins on Stranraer’s new Water Sports Hub**

* Led by young people from Stranraer, the groundbreaking ceremony to mark construction of new Water Sports Hub took place on Wednesday 19th February 2025.
* Construction on the £6.7m development begins this month and the Hub is expected to open in summer 2026.
* The state-of-the-art facility, built to stringent Passivhaus specification, is an important part of Stranraer’s ambition to become a major water sports destination, training facility and events hub.

Young people from Stranraer have marked construction beginning on a landmark £6.7m Water Sports Hub overlooking Loch Ryan. The groundbreaking ceremony, led by members of Stranraer Water Sports Association's (SWSA) Kids Club and Young Instructor programme, signals the start of an ambitious project set to transform the town's waterfront and establish Stranraer as a major water sports destination.

The £6.7m development, which will be built by Clark Contracts, has been designed by specialist architect John Renshaw to facilitate the requirements of those participating in water sports, and will be constructed to stringent Passivhaus specification. The hub will have changing and showering facilities, class and meeting rooms, café and kitchen facilities, offices and open public spaces. The project is being delivered in partnership with John Renshaw Architects, Cundall, Hardies and Luths Services, and the new facility is expected to open in summer 2026.

John Fenwick, Chairman of Stranraer Water Sports Association, said:

"After years of planning and hard work, and generous support from our funders, it's wonderful to see construction finally beginning on our new Water Sports Hub. I’m especially pleased that young people from our community have helped mark the occasion.

“This facility will transform what we can offer as an Association, creating opportunities for skills development, employment and establishing Stranraer as a premier destination for water sports events and training. It's a major step forward in the regeneration of our town."

Michael Scanlan, Director at Clark Contracts said:

“We are delighted to be working with Stranraer Water Sports Association on this exciting project. It is great to see continued development in Stranraer and we are looking forward to continuing to work in the area and providing these high-quality facilities for the local community.”

Loch Ryan offers natural advantages for water sports and coastal activities, and the potential for Stranraer to become a major water sports destination was identified in the SkiffieWorlds 2019 economic impact report. Following a feasibility study and a community consultation process, the vision for the Water Sports Hub took shape and a full business case was developed in collaboration with Dumfries and Galloway Council. In 2023, the project was awarded Levelling Up Funding.

The new Water Sports Hub is an example of community-led regeneration, with Stranraer Water Sports Association keen to create opportunities for Stranraer, and in particular for the town’s young people. The project aims to support the regeneration of Stranraer and its waterfront, boost the local economy by attracting major events and visitors, and provide a vibrant, accessible space for all ages to engage with water sports.

Councillor Jackie McCamon, vice-chair of Dumfries and Galloway Council’s Economy and Infrastructure Committee said:

“I am delighted to have been on-the site at the start of ground works for the new Stranraer Water Sports Hub facilities. This project, part of Reshaping Stranraer, will increase accessibility to water-based recreation, drive tourism potential and deliver events, training, community activity and regatta facilities.

“The development of the water sports hub has drawn significant investment into the area – part of the Reactivating Galloway Project, which successfully secured more than £17 million in support from the UK Government’s Levelling Up Fund in 2023. This investment is contributing to the wider regeneration of Stranraer through our ‘One Waterfront’ approach that ensures Stranraer continues to grow as a vibrant cultural and leisure destination.

“I’d like to commend the commitment and work that Stranraer Water Sports Association has put into this new facility, developing the project with the support of Dumfries and Galloway Council. I look forward to the next stages of this development and the opportunities it will bring.”

South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) has provided £720,000 towards the Stranraer Water Sports Hub project. Jane Morrison-Ross, Chief Executive of SOSE, said:

“The transformation of Stranraer Harbour is at the heart of the regeneration of the town, and SOSE is delighted to be supporting the ambitious Water Sports Hub project.

“The Water Sports Hub is one of the important developments taking place in the town, including the fantastic success of the Oyster Festival, the regeneration of the George Hotel, the ambitions for the East Pier and the Place Plan.

“We believe all these developments will have a truly significant economic impact on Stranraer and the surrounding area.”

The project is also supported by the Holywood Trust. Sammie Smith of the Trust said:

“The Holywood Trust is absolutely delighted to support Stranraer Water Sports Association with a grant for the development of the Instructors Hut and Platform. This offers the young people of Stranraer (and visitors) a dynamic and exciting way to stay active, develop new skills, and enjoy the great outdoors. The Holywood Trust’s investment in the project is testament to the solid work achieved to date by the organisation and its vibrant and positive vision for the future."

**sport**scotland have provided £100,000 towards the project from its Sport Facilities Fund.

Forbes Dunlop, Chief Executive of **sport**scotland, said:

“It is exciting to see work starting at the Stranraer Water Sports Hub. It is a significant moment for sport in the area, we know that sport and physical activity have an important role to play in bringing communities together.

"Everyone involved in the project has demonstrated a real commitment to ensuring that more people in Stranraer and the surrounding communities will have an opportunity to become physically active and connected to their local community."

Finlo Cottier, RYA Scotland CEO said: “This is an incredibly exciting moment for Stranraer Water Sports Association, the wider locality, and the Scottish sailing community as a whole. RYA Scotland has supported and worked alongside the project team as it has evolved over the years. The quality of Loch Ryan as a venue should not be underestimated, and so for work to have begun on creating the onshore infrastructure to match is fantastic.

“We believe the future is bright for Stranraer as a growing destination, and see this project as a key step in cementing Loch Ryan’s status within the water sport and wider community. We commend the work of those who have nurtured this project to bring us to this very exciting point and look forward to continuing our engagement.”

Jenna Hermans and Michael Davitt, both members of the Kids Club at Stranraer Water Sports Association, officially broke the ground to allow construction to begin on the new building.

Michael said: “I love water sports as everyone has lots of fun playing and working together.”

Jenna said: “The thing that I like to do the most at water sports is jumping off the paddle boards because it makes me feel happy. I have also learned to sail which I love doing, because you get to have a lot of fun and make new friends.”

Struan Young recently passed the Paddlesport Instructor Course through Stranraer Water Sports Association’s Young Instructor programme. He helped Jenna and Michael break the sod for the new facilities and said:

“Stranraer Water Sports has given me lots of opportunities and confidence, from the courses and coaching I have received to start racing in dinghies throughout Scotland and also gaining instructor qualifications. The new Hub will provide so many opportunities to hold events, run activities, socialise and be a great place for young people to learn water sports. I’m looking forward to being a part of the Young Instructor team which will operate from this new building in the coming years, and I can’t wait to see the new building completed.”

Stranraer’s potential as a water sports venue is already being recognised internationally, with Stranraer set to host SkiffieWorlds 2025 - the world championship of St Ayles class of coastal rowing - which will bring hundreds of competitors and thousands of spectators to Loch Ryan in July. While construction will continue throughout the duration of that event, the Association are confident that disruption to water sports activities and events will be minimal.

John Fenwick of SWSA added:

"While construction will be ongoing when we host SkiffieWorlds 2025, we've worked closely with our contractors to ensure minimal disruption to both the championship and our regular activities. We are relocating our operations to the boathouse, which will allow us to continue delivering high-quality water sports experiences for our community throughout the build. I want to thank all our members and users for their patience and understanding during this exciting period of change. The end result will be worth it - a world-class facility that will serve Stranraer for generations to come."

Ends

**Photos**

Attached photos show the groundbreaking ceremony to mark construction of the Stranraer Water Sports Hub. Photography credit for all images: Pete Robinson

**Caption 1**: John Fenwick, Wendi Cuffe (SWSA Trustee), Struan Young, Michael Davitt, Tom Wilson (SWSA Instructor), Jenna Hermans and Michael Scanlan of Clarks Construction.

**Caption 2**: Nathan Hutchinson of **sport**scotland, Jane Morrison-Ross of South of Scotland Enterprise, John Fenwick, Struan Young, Michael Davitt, Tom Wilson, Jenna Hermans, Michael Scanlan, Rowan Lloyd of South of Scotland Enterprise and Councillor Jackie McCamon of Dumfries and Galloway Council.

Higher res photos are available on request.

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