

Putting digital at the heart
of our place...



Essex
County
Council

Harlow
Council
Working together for Harlow



Epping Forest
District Council



Hertfordshire



BOROUGH OF
BROXBOURNE

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Foreword from our Chair...

Welcome to the **fourth annual DIZ Progress Report**. These reports are an important way to highlight the work being done by the enormous number of partners involved in the Digital Innovation Zone working across Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford together with partners across the wider Hertfordshire & Essex geography.

In the following pages you will be able to see the busy and impactful year that the partnership has had in our work to make the DIZ the best connected place of its type in the UK.

Our focus remains to continue to support and enable the build out of world-class digital infrastructure for our residents, businesses, learners and communities. The partnership has continued its role in promoting our place for investment from the public and private sector but has also focused in on areas that our partners tell us are of real importance to them. This includes work on sustainability and carbon emissions reduction, on digital inclusion and on support for our high streets.

Looking forward, we will be working together on new collaborative bids for enhanced connectivity, fostering closer links with digital investors already working in our geography to enable more and better business-to-business outcomes.

I would like to take this opportunity to again thank all our colleagues from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors and from the education sector who have, once again, given their valuable

time, insight and enthusiasm, to help our place deliver on the digital agenda. The success of the DIZ is founded on their work, their collaboration. And a common understanding of digital technology's ability to create better places that deliver for those that live, work and study and do business here.

Councillor Alan Lion, Epping Forest District Council,
Chair of the DIZ



DIZ: An ever-evolving partnership for our place...

An introduction by John Houston, DIZ Director

The Digital Innovation Zone area, which covers five districts across two counties, has continued a strong performance on its core objective of making it the best connected place of its type in the UK.

While build out of infrastructure projects continues, **the partnership has conducted an in-depth review of connectivity outcomes showing strong progress on the rate of connections and the speed of services being offered across the whole geography.** This infrastructure is an absolutely fundamental part of our ability to do business, deliver services and, importantly, market our communities for new inward investment, creating jobs and prosperity.

Over the recent past there have been many welcome announcements of major investment from the public and private sectors on digitally enabled and knowledge-based employment.

As the technology has developed with new applications and opportunities, the partnership has continued its effort on 'knowledge uplift' bringing leading national and international speakers to our local partners who are helping to shape how to get the best outcomes from these new opportunities. As the landscape is continually evolving this is a very important element of the work of the DIZ as our strategy commits us to deliver digital in a way that leaves 'no-one behind'

While current performance on mobile connectivity is generally good, the partnership will be targeting enhanced 5G investment over the next twelve

months to enable our area to maintain its competitive advantage, unlocking new opportunities for our place to do business better.

Once again, we gratefully acknowledge the continued financial support of our district and county council partners - Broxbourne BC, East Herts DC, Epping Forest DC, Harlow Council, Uttlesford DC, Essex CC and Hertfordshire CC. The partnership has also been helped significantly by organisations from the private sector such as CGI, Connected Places Catapult and other organisations without whose support we would not be able to deliver our programme of events.

The issue of digital skills, ensuring that our businesses and residents are able to fully compete and make the most of the digital investments that are coming will become a key theme over the next year. There is much good work already underway in further and higher education as well as the private sector but we would like the DIZ to be a beacon area for this critical work.

I would personally like to thank Mike Warr, DIZ Programme Manager who continues to be central to the success of the DIZ. I would also like to thank former councillor and DIZ Vice-Chair Linda Haysey and Melanie Miller, from Broxbourne BC who have now left their roles but whose commitment and insight has been instrumental in developing the partnership



“Fantastic partnership working.
The partnerships in the DIZ
facilitate knowledge sharing with
shared interests”
[DIZ Stakeholder]



“[The DIZ has]...already shown
to securing 5G and other
connectivity

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own strong commitment
other forms of advanced
ty for their community”
[External consultant]



Connectivity underpinning the future of our place...

Connectivity has remained a key central focus for the DIZ since its inception and work continued throughout 2022/23 to ensure the geographies of Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford are best placed to attract the kind of critical telecoms infrastructure it will require to future-proof our place.

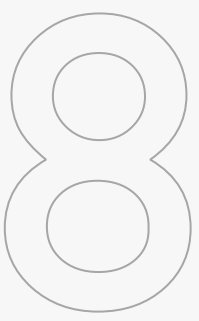
Working in conjunction with Essex and Herts county councils' digital delivery teams, the DIZ area has seen delivery of **fibre and gigabit-capable connectivity continue to exceed national progress towards Government targets**. Connectivity profiles developed by the DIZ and based on the Ofcom Connected Nations 2022 report show three of the five DIZ local authorities with gigabit capable coverage in excess of 80%. The Connectivity Profiles also highlighted the comparatively healthy levels of mobile coverage across the five districts. The Profiles have drawn out some key areas for future development such as commercial broadband provision and indoor mobile signals and the DIZ will continue to monitor progress in these areas.

Addressing the need for future-proofed mobile communications infrastructure provision, including 5G masts and small cell units, the **DIZ was invited to join the Early Adoption Group for the DCMS Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) programme in 2022/23**, ensuring it remained close to the pilot exercises being undertaken across the UK and in a position to inform and influence certain outputs from the programme.

As well as being invited to speak at one of the DCIA Dissemination events in Dec 2022, the **DIZ also worked closely with Connected Places Catapult and actively participated in the testing and review of the DCIA Data Integration Toolkit**. The DIZ informed the design and content of a platform to support organisations looking to use public sector assets to support future deployments of telecoms infrastructure.

This builds on the work undertaken previously by the DIZ to map the publicly held assets of its local authorities, whether land, buildings or street furniture. Having been ahead of the curve in identifying this opportunity, the DIZ is keen that we continue to explore all options to maximise the value of our assets in supporting deployment of telecoms networks and will continue to speak to industry partners and monitor the outcomes of DCIA to determine the best route to achieve this locally.





“This is the D
breakthroughs. With a his
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Visibility, identity & positioning: Building awareness of our place...

Working to attract and deliver inward investment to future-proof the local economy has been a key driver for the work of the partnership, promoting this area as a place that can support economic growth.

Looking at digital infrastructure to underpin this, the **DIZ continues to make concerted efforts to position ‘our place’ in west Essex and east Hertfordshire as a location that is ready to welcome digital investment and network developments.** This has included attending national and regional events as guest speakers to bring our place and the opportunities it offers to key investors from the public and private sectors.

In 2022, the DIZ was **selected as one of two areas in the UK** that UK5G (now UKTIN), the national innovation network dedicated to the promotion of research, collaboration and the industrial application of 5G in the UK, wanted to work with to develop their readiness for 5G infrastructure and investment.

Working closely with the UK5G team and design consultancy Harvard, communications and messaging assets were developed to help the DIZ area attract investment and test projects, raise awareness of the DIZ as a “beacon area” for 5G development and communicate what sets the area apart from others.

This messaging has informed the 5G elements of the DIZ website refresh undertaken in 2022 that has introduced a more engaging and dynamic ‘look and feel’ to the site whilst also acting as a ‘go to’ repository of best practice and guidance.

A number of the resources now featured on the

website also reflect the work undertaken in conjunction with Mobile UK, the industry body for the four major mobile network operators, to develop co-branded guidance on the benefits of 5G.

Guidance notes are available on 5G and key themes such as the environment, climate change, healthcare, retail businesses, working from home, rural areas and the delivery of council services.

An FAQ section, developed with UK5G, addresses some of the most publicly voiced concerns and more commonly asked questions about 5G, whilst other featured resources set out signposting on the safety and benefits of 5G technology.

This has all contributed to the **development of the website as an asset for partners** to use to market the place and to direct their residents, businesses, members and officers to advice and guidance on this key future infrastructure issue.

The work with UK5G has also informed the DIZ approach to social media and renewed efforts have been made this year, extending the reach of DIZ social media content but also delivering more engaging content and links to key social media posts from the across the digital landscape.

The final piece of work with UK5G was a **one minute animation that reinforces what the DIZ has to offer to investors, innovators and service providers as a potential beacon area for 5G** innovation. This video has been regularly used throughout the year to further promote the area to as wide an audience as possible and can be viewed using the link on the opposite page.

DIZ. A place of
story of firsts.”
[DIZ Animation]



[Click to view the DIZ 5G animation](#)



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What We Do

Who We Are

Where We Are

5G + Infrastructure

Digital Sustainability

Digital Inclusion

Digital Skills

Digital + the High Street

Thought Leadership

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ESSEX & HERTFORDSHIRE DIZ CONNECTIONS CAFÉ & ROUNDTABLE

A beacon for the application of new technology

8th September, 2022 – 11:00am-2:40pm

Civic Centre, The Water Gardens, College Square, Harlow CM20 1WG



“The seminars are great and include inspirational speakers that provide strong awareness raising and briefing on topical issues.” [DIZ Stakeholder]

Knowledge uplift: Developing expertise within our place...

“The pace of change has never been this fast, yet it will never be this slow again.” Justin Trudeau

Bringing our partners with us on our digital journey has always been at the heart of what the DIZ does. In the last year we have continued this through a number of key events and initiatives.

The DIZ delivered its first ‘In Person’ event since the pandemic when, in conjunction with Connected Places Catapult (CPC), it presented the **‘Connections Café and Round Table’** event that explored how disruptive change can be driven and key challenges such as climate change tackled through collaborative innovation and cluster activities. The round table element brought together key local and national thought leaders from Stansted Airport, Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), UK5G, CPC and our local DIZ councils to explore how challenge-led and collaborative efforts can be galvanised to drive innovation and attract investment that addresses the key public and private sector challenges facing the DIZ.

Building on our work on 5G (see pages 7 & 8), the **DIZ delivered the ‘What Can 5G Do For Us?’ online Smart Place Seminar** with featured speakers and presentations from DCMS, CGI and Bable Smart Cities. Over 50 delegates registered to explore what 5G looks like today and could mean in the future, how public sector assets might support further deployment of 5G and what the key use cases will be to drive its development.

As well as these flagship events, the DIZ has also

sought to bring about continued knowledge leadership and shared learning through its **monthly series of Advisory Boards**. Seeking to bring in guest speakers to address issues of key importance to the DIZ partners, in 2022 these meetings have seen contributions from Mobile UK, Bable Smart Cities, New Rylands, Essex County Council’s Digital Inclusion team, our local Further Education colleges and the DIZ Town Centre SIG.

And, in early 2023, the DIZ came together for an ‘In Person’ Advisory Board session that presented the views of key partners such as CGI, Stansted Airport, ARU, Uttlesford Community Action Networks and our county and district councils on the key emerging digital challenges and opportunities for the DIZ and its partners.

Finally, throughout the year, **the DIZ team has continued to share its weekly ‘horizon-scanning’ weblinks newsletter** with partners, highlighting more than 440 links of interest in 48 newsletters. These links act as a key source of awareness raising for DIZ partners and stakeholders and are currently circulated to more than 130 individuals. The newsletters curate links to articles on a range of digital topics including digital skills, connectivity, cyber-security & online safety, digital health & social care, sustainability, digital inclusion, future tech and artificial intelligence, whilst also highlighting digital events, webinars and conferences, both upcoming and recorded, to view on demand. To be added to the distribution list for the newsletter, please contact mwarr@eppingforestdc.gov.uk.

Sustaining the future of our place...

Sustainability and carbon emissions reduction are at the forefront of partners’ concern across all sectors, trying to understand how technology can be used to deliver more effectively on this major challenge for us all.

Early in 2022, the DIZ brought together a number of key digital and smart place industry leaders to explore ‘**How Can Digital Help Save The Planet?**’.

Around 80 delegates registered to hear from CGI, Microsoft, Jacobs and Mobile UK as they discussed what digital technology might mean for efforts and initiatives to address the emerging climate change and environmental challenge. The recording from the event is now publicly available to watch on demand via the DIZ website at <https://diz.org.uk/diz-resources/>

The DIZ also looked to the gathered delegates to

understand their collective thoughts and suggestions on the development of a DIZ Green Charter. Collating their ideas on what such a set of collective aspirations and ambitions might look like and that the partners of the DIZ could collectively sign up to. The outputs of the discussions **will inform the work of a newly formed Digital Sustainability Special Interest Group (SIG) in the year ahead.**

This SIG held its inaugural meeting in May 2023 with a representative membership from DIZ local authorities, academics and businesses and explored which opportunities exist locally for digital technology to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

A key challenge for all partners, in their drive to be more sustainable, is to use existing and emerging technology, as well as local data, to help people move about easily and sustainably. The DIZ will continue to explore options such as EV charging and online platforms to achieve this.

As referenced earlier, the **DIZ has collaborated with Mobile UK to produce a number of guidance documents** that identify how 5G mobile telecoms technology and infrastructure can make a contribution to addressing environmental issues. These are available at:

<https://diz.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Climate-Change-Mini-Pack.pdf>

<https://diz.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Environment-Mini-Pack.pdf>



enable us to positively address, not only
negative environmental impacts of
it also the drive to exponentially cut
emissions” [DIZ website]

(c) Photo by Robert Linder on [Unsplash](#)





“Leaving no-one behind
during digital
transformation is vitally
important so that our
residents, service users
and more vulnerable
communities do not
miss out”
[DIZ Website]

Inclusion at the heart of innovation in our place...

The DIZ remains **committed to ensuring no-one is left behind by digital innovation** and has continued to support the Digital Share digital inclusion project led by DIZ Partner WECAN.

The aim of Digital Share is to help people to be better connected, using digital technology. Twenty-two percent of the UK population do not have the necessary skills to use technology for everyday life. Their mission is to bridge that gap, to help support some of those people who are digitally excluded to become digitally included. The project does this by:

- Providing donated refurbished digital devices;
- Providing donated data to people online;
- Providing skills based sessions to develop confidence in using digital devices;
- Providing technical advice on specific devices that residents may own, but not be able to fully use;

Donations of equipment and requests for equipment, data, and skills development are processed through Digital Share's bespoke platform, enabling them to manage requests and provide a single point of access for professionals and service users to request support.

The intention is to, through the project, **support individuals and families with limited or no access to digital devices and/or data to be able to access digital services** such as employment support, skills for life, online shopping, banking, socialising and health interventions and appointments.

The Vodafone Foundation has **provided 270,000 gigabytes of free data** and the project has also been working with the UK National Databank to bring free mobile internet connectivity to people who cannot otherwise afford it.

The project has, to date, delivered:

- 356 digital skills sessions
- 745 people supported
- 92 Digital Buddies recruited and trained
- 78 people from hard to reach groups engaged and now using digital devices and online services;
- 168 devices donated;
- 554 SIM cards distributed;
- 90,000 Gb of data made available;

Having gone through the 'test and learn' period, **the project is now providing a meaningful offer to people** and has established a model that is re-deployable, scalable and adaptable to meet the needs of various groups who are digitally excluded.

Digital Share is run by [WECAN](http://www.wecan.org.uk) and further information can be found at www.digitalshare.org



Supporting the High Streets of our place...

Throughout 2022/23, the DIZ Town Centre Special Interest Group (SIG), led by partners from Broxbourne BC and Uttlesford DC, **continued to meet and explore digital opportunities to support the high streets of the DIZ.**

Following the collaborative procurement of the Huq platform by all five district authorities in 2021/22, considerable work and review has gone into strengthening and enhancing the Huq periodical reports to best tell the story of footfall and visitor patterns in each of our town centres. The team has been able to undertake a **‘deep dive’ into the footfall patterns seen at the year’s key seasonal events** and to start to understand how these vital retail centres have begun to fully bounce back from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The refinement of the reporting has been done in close conjunction with the Huq team and this has resulted in the re-procurement of the platform for the year ahead, a key tool in planning and supporting the effective use of Government Shared Prosperity Funding and core data for bids for further funding opportunities.

The DIZ also brought to a close the exploratory **project to understand how the use of CCTV cameras to measure levels of busyness in the town centres might be**

deployed. Utilising machine learning computing technology originally implemented in Newcastle and working in collaboration with the Urban Observatory, local machine learning models were successfully trained to analyse the local CCTV feeds. However, whilst the ‘lift and shift’ concept for the machine learning proved feasible, the complexities of taking this learning from a city and refining the accuracy for a smaller town as well as translating the analysis and image processing into a new web platform for public use proved more challenging and would require considerable additional capacity and funding to develop further.

In addition to the work on footfall, the SIG has also reviewed car parking provision at all of its town centres with a view to **understanding the potential for digital platforms and systems to better support and analyse car park usage**, available capacity and future methods of parking space booking and payment.

The achievements of the SIG will be set out in an ‘end of project’ report to the DIZ Executive Board. Arrangements will then be put in place to ensure the insight gained is not lost and the data gathered can continue to be used and updated to support our town centres.

Strong partnership beyond LGC Awards Judging Panel]

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Recognition of the DIZ's approach to digital in our place...

The DIZ has continued to seek out opportunities to raise awareness of the great digital work that is going on in our place. This work and **approach to place-based digital innovation and partnership working has been recognised in different ways by national bodies.**

The year began with a presentation by the DIZ Programme Manager, joined by a colleague from Essex Partnership University NHS Trust, to the judging panel of the **Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. As a finalist in the 'Public / Public Partnership' category** the DIZ was recognised as having "...developed a strong partnership beyond traditional place boundaries".

The DIZ was also invited to speak and present at a number of events throughout the year. These included as **part of the Local Government Association (LGA) Digital Showcase, as a panellist at a DCMS DCIA Dissemination Event, and at the Local Government Procurement Expo.** This last event led to an introduction to Bable Smart Cities, based in Stuttgart, Germany, who subsequently invited the DIZ Director to deliver a session to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly in the Republic of Ireland as part of a smart place training course.

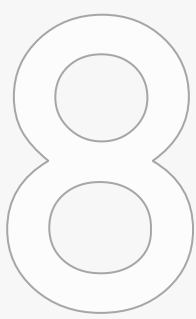
The DIZ has also been working closely with its partners at Stansted Airport and Anglia Ruskin University to **look at new opportunities for digital collaboration following the DIZ event with Connected Places Catapult** in September 2022.

In addition, presentations have been made to the following organisations that were interested in learning more about the work of the partnership:

- Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership
- Digital Essex Steering Board
- One Health Care Partnership

If you or your organisation would be interested in learning more about the DIZ approach to digital or would like the team to present to colleagues on our story to date, please get in touch at mwarr@eppingforestdc.gov.uk.





Future digital: Next steps for our place...

Looking back at all that has been achieved in the last twelve months also gives the DIZ an opportunity to take stock and set out its priorities for the year ahead. **We will continue to look to establish the foundations upon which a truly innovative place can be built for the benefit of all.**

The Special Interest Groups (SIGs) have brought new ways for the DIZ to focus its efforts on discrete areas of interest and targeted programmes of work. The next year will see the newly formed Digital Sustainability SIG build on our 'How Can Digital Help Save The Planet?' seminar with the potential to develop a public sector 'Digital Green Charter' for the whole of the DIZ, with further SIGs being considered to look at funding, digital skills and digital inclusion.

The DIZ also **plans to continue to deliver its programme of knowledge uplift, particularly through its advisory board sessions and the ongoing series of Smart Place Seminars.** The seminars are designed to address areas of key interest and priority for our partners and the next planned seminar will look at how digital technologies and applications might be deployed to address the critical challenges being faced by the public sector as it delivers health and social care to its residents. As always, the event will seek to bring together

key regional and national experts to share learning from elsewhere and to guide the DIZ in its own responses to these challenges.

Much work has already been done by the DIZ on the potential reuse of its assets to support the rollout and densification of telecoms infrastructure and this will remain an area of focus for 2023/24. As we look to maximise the value and return, in terms of enhanced connectivity, that can be brought about through the innovative use of our publicly owned assets, **the further enhancement of 5G coverage and capacity across the DIZ will continue to be an important driver for our work programme.**

And finally, **we will continue to look for opportunities for joint-working across our place,** acknowledging that the DIZ has always been able to achieve more in collaboration with our ever-evolving network of partners that it could do working alone. We will work with partners to explore new opportunities to jointly bid for funding from central government and continue to look **to identify innovative solutions to our collective challenges, that we can jointly develop and deliver, to improve the digital experiences of our residents, businesses, students and visitors.**

A person with dark hair is wearing a black VR headset and holding it with both hands. They are looking upwards and to the left. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with a plant and a wall.

“The value of DIZ is the connecting of partners together to tackle challenges / identify opportunities...driven by public service requirements, private sector business needs, and/or community and voluntary social enterprise / value opportunities” [DIZ Stakeholder]

Our Mission

While the partners of the DIZ, individually and collectively, are committed to innovate and flex an approach to deliver a better served, better connected place, our mission statement remains the same:

To be the best connected place of its type in the UK.

A place of innovation and inclusion.

A place where the benefits of digital investment are harnessed, maximised and shared across residents, commuters, businesses and borders.

For more information about the DIZ and its work programme and to explore opportunities to get involved, please get in touch:

Mike Warr DIZ Programme Manager

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John Houston DIZ Director

jhouston@eppingforestdc.gov.uk



Our front cover image shows the Anglia Ruskin University's Arise Innovation Hub in Harlow, the ecosystem for entrepreneurs. Supported by a community of scientific minds, connect with fellow entrepreneurs and innovative businesses at Arise Innovation Hub, on the newly built Harlow Innovation Park. The pioneering town of Harlow, located at the heart of the UK Innovation Corridor, is perfectly positioned for those wishing to be part of a growing Health, Performance and Wellbeing community that is well connected to research clusters in both London and Cambridge. Contact: ariseharlow@aru.ac.uk

Thank you to our core funding local authority partners for making the work programme of the DIZ possible:



Thank you to our corporate sponsorship partners and supporters for their contributions and support to the ongoing DIZ work programme and the production of this report.

