ADEPT President's Awards 2023
Entry form

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Award category	Digital Innovation/Technology
Project Title	Surrey's digital placemaking - Your Neighbourhood in 3D and street design code webtool
Local authority entrant	Surrey County Council
Partner/s if applicable	Digital Urban, Create Streets

Headline summary (150 characters max.)

Immersing ourselves in gaming led to a sevenfold increase in under 35s interested in our transformation of the Farnham road network and our upskilling

Video - please paste links to any video evidence here. (Leave blank if not relevant.)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-S7l5IAvzNI

Digital innovation: How has this project shown evidence of successful digital innovation and the imaginative use of new technology? (150 words max.)

A static exhibition on transforming the road network in Farnham in Summer 2022 attracted only six per cent of consultation responses from people aged under 35. The Leader of the County Council challenged us to increase engagement from younger people. We secured a £125,000 grant from the DLUHC PropTech fund. Digital Urban, our digital engagement supplier created an immersive game in an existing 3D model of the town built by local supplier Munrostudios. Participants could fly around using vibrating jetpacks to explore the town as it is, and with either of the proposed options. A joystick option was available. We held pop-up VR events in a vacant shop, outside a gym and at a music festival to capture younger audiences. Whilst the VR events attracted whole families, when compared to the previous consultation, there was a greater reach (45%) to younger participants. Participants said "VR helped to visualise" town proposals.

Digital innovation: How has this project shown evidence of improved outcomes for users? (150 words max.)

The Farnham Board met in December 2022 to discuss the latest on the Farnham Infrastructure Programme - including results of the summer town centre consultation. We have richer feedback to make decisions around the future of this town to help improve outcomes such as rapidly reduced carbon emissions, economic vitality, well-connected communities and more people walking and cycling. This is as a result of an improved environment for shoppers alongside new cycle parking, trees and planting. The new tools can also be applied in future engagement. The further street design code digitisation project is responding to a Healthy Streets Citizens' Panel in December 2022, which attracted over 1,200 responses. 80% of respondents said that environment and street design of their local area has an impact on their health. And yet 88% wouldn't know where to find information about street design in their area. The Healthy Streets webtool will address this.

Digital innovation: How has this project shown evidence of the transformation of a service/department/organisation by changing behaviours, delivering savings or improving ways of working? (150 words max.)

Before the VR project, our Placemaking and Major Projects Communications teams had little experience of using digital technologies such as this. We learned how to commission an immersive game with support from the Enterprise M3 Game Sector Lead and conducted pre-market engagement prior to procurement. Digital Urban, our digital supplier, worked collaboratively with us to upskills our teams, leaving a legacy. We gained experience of managing uncertainty in a live setting and how to conduct in-game user research. We benefited from sharing learning with 27 other digital engagement PropTech projects across individual and joint LPAs (36 in total). We continue to provide learning on digitising planning with Surrey LPAs. Buoyed on by strong internal collaboration, we are digitising the Council's new street design code with another £125k from DLUHC supported by the Council's Digital Design Team. This enables Council transport development planners to champion design and speed up planning decisions.

Digital innovation: How can the innovation/technology in this project be applied in multiple sectors/areas? (150 words max.)

The immersive game built can be applied in new localities. We have richer feedback to make decisions around the future of one town centre, and new tools for future engagement in others. The Surrey Green Social Prescribing Project has since run a successful VR pilot funded by Defra. This health context reinforces that VR will play a key role in our digital transformation, as championed by The Council's Digital Data and Tech Network. This will improve efficiencies whilst enhancing resident and staff experience. Participating in the DLUHC PropTech engagement pilot means that Surrey is informing widespread adoption of digital citizen engagement tools and services by local authorities nationally. Our subsequent experience as a DLUHC Design Code Pathfinder is informing 24 other local authorities that are writing their codes whilst aspiring to digitise them. Our webtool can be used by transport development planners and developers to champion beautiful and sustainable design.

Digital innovation: How does this project demonstrate scalability and resilience - the ability to use technology in a wider scope and in a way that encourages longevity of use? (150 words max.)

The VR was expensive, and we were lucky that external funding meant we can trial it. But it is not so expensive that it can't be used for major infrastructure schemes in the future. We are better equipped to commission VR and 3D models now, which will reduce officer time and cost. The VR learning is scalable to capital projects in the £300 million Surrey Infrastructure Plan Pipeline budget over the next five years. This includes nearly £40 million for placemaking in town and village centres to 2028. Collective VR learning across the County Council is informing a business case for wider VR roll out. The new street design webtool will influence multi-million-pound new developments and retrofit settings for years to come. In November 2022, a Design Council review panel was pleased to see a local highway authority taking such an ambitious approach with placeshaping at its heart.

All categories: please add anything else that supports your award entry

The Placemaking Group that led these digital projects was formed in Surrey County Council in 2021. The team has pioneered two new digital approaches with DLUHC support. It is leading development and delivery of multiple new town and village improvements with beautiful and sustainable design at their heart.