



# Digital Communities

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REBALANCING BRITAIN: INSPIRING THRIVING DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

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This report outlines how the O2 Digital Communities project made the most of technology to positively impact St Helens - and how other towns can set up their own digital community projects to create positive social and economic outcomes in their area.

# FOREWORD

BY BEN DOWD



**Connectivity continues to be the lifeblood of our economy. The digital economy now accounts for over a third of overall GDP - and it is predicted to grow to over £764bn by 2020.**

But we know that the opportunities within it and the benefits technology can bring are not being felt everywhere. We did some research last year which highlighted that more than half of digitally-skilled jobs to be created in that period will be in London and the South-East. At the same time, a study by the Government's Digital High Streets Board found many smaller northern towns are lagging way behind when it comes to broadband speed, access to Wi-fi and digitally-engaged shoppers.

That's why this time last year we set out to try and start closing Britain's digital divide. We partnered with St Helens Council to deliver a complete tech transformation of the town. Together we wanted to put the possibilities of digital directly into the hands of local people.

During the pilot we:

- Gave small businesses free digital makeovers providing the tools, tech and expertise to help them grow
- Hosted careers clinics for young people, helping them make the most of being digital natives
- Offered grants and mentoring to budding entrepreneurs to help get their projects off the ground
- Bolstered the local digital infrastructure, with new, free Wi-fi hotspots
- Created a new app to help vulnerable young people use public transport safely

We wanted to critically assess the impact of the pilot on the local community and its potential to help rebalance the North-South economic divide.

So we commissioned an independent study to fully understand the longer term potential of Digital Communities both in St Helens and in other towns across Britain.

It shows how, in just ten weeks, the pilot has helped to improve the productivity of local businesses, increase people's access to local services and boost young people's confidence. But this is about more than just creating a feel-good factor.

The study estimates that the pilot could inject an additional £46.3m to the St Helens economy by 2020 –that's almost 10% additional growth thanks to more jobs, more consumer spending and more productive organisations.

With the positive economic and social impact on the community clear to see, we wanted to explore the potential for other places to feel the same benefits. This report identifies 30 towns, with similar demographics and challenges, where the model could be replicated. If implemented in those towns there's the potential to inject an additional £450m to the national economy by 2020. In a mature economy, that's growth we need to grab with both hands.

But let's be clear, all this future potential is modelled on a first-time trial; an ambitious pilot built from a blank piece of paper. As with any testbed, we have made valuable learnings. That's why we have created this Digital Communities Blueprint. It shares our journey so far and recommendations for future collaborations between businesses and government to help build these prosperous, connected communities.

It's evident that when communities put digital at their heart they prosper. Now we need collective effort from business and government to inspire more towns to follow in St Helens' footsteps to help build a thriving Digital Britain.

# FOREWORD

BY COUNCILLOR BARRIE GRUNEWALD, LEADER OF ST HELENS COUNCIL



**One of the words used most frequently to describe the partnership between St Helens and O2 - when we joined forces to embark on the Digital Communities programme - was 'ambitious'.**

We are the birthplace of the industrial revolution – the first Northern Powerhouse – with our industries of coal, glass and pharmaceuticals that generated wealth and helped make Britain what it is today. We are also the birthplace of a previous 'connectivity revolution' as the parent of the modern railway when the Rainhill trials took place in 1829. For almost two centuries now - what was born in St Helens has gone on to connect people around the world.

St Helens, then, has always been ambitious.

And our Digital Communities project was ambitious. As in many northern industrial towns, there was a feeling in St Helens that somehow the digital revolution had passed us by and that we weren't feeling the benefits of being part of a digitally connected society. That in itself made us the ideal testbed to showcase how digital technology can make a real difference to our communities, our businesses and our lives. If it could happen here, it could happen anywhere.

And I'm delighted to say that the project has been extremely successful. Residents and businesses alike have been able to embrace technology and gain vital new skills during the three month project.

The rejuvenation of our town centre is a key goal. And one of the most tangible legacies of the project has been the installation of a free town centre Wi-Fi network that connects retailers with their customers.

It's proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the introduction of digital technology and skills can help change the outlook and outcomes of even the most traditional of businesses.

Smaller enterprises and residents too have benefited, with workshops and 'inspirational sessions' - from tech tutorials for start-ups, through to coding classes and digital career clinics for young people.

A Digital Hub in the Hardshaw Centre also hosted O2's 'Think Big' programme, which encourages young people to participate in social action as a way to develop their enterprise and digital skills and boost their employability.

Digital inclusion has to be accessible for everybody, of course. St Helens has an ageing population and this was an issue that we particularly wanted to address. Special sessions at our main library saw older people getting up to speed with digital technology – and opening up a world of communication, information and consumer opportunities.

Perhaps most importantly however, the project has got people in St Helens talking about the digital world - and people outside St Helens talking about our pioneering role in this project – which is exactly what we hoped for.

# WHY DIGITAL COMMUNITIES?

**In our increasingly digital world connectedness is delivering a host of opportunities and benefits to local people, businesses, economies and communities every day.**

A report by Ecorys last year for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport found that digital skills open up wider opportunities for society and democracy with implications for economic growth, social mobility and access to public services. At the same time, greater digital infrastructure, tools and expertise can help local councils to overcome structural challenges, such as having to balance budgets year on year, and drive engagement with local citizens.

But currently these benefits are in pockets and not balanced across businesses and communities throughout Britain. Research from O2 shows that Britain needs 2.3 million digital workers by 2020 to satisfy the UK's digital potential – yet almost half of new digital jobs to be created will be in London and the South East<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, a review by Baroness Martha Lane Fox, chair of digital skills charity Go ON UK, found that 11 million adults still lack “four basic online skills – the ability to communicate, search, and share information, and to do these things safely.”<sup>2</sup>

The ambition of the O2 Digital Communities pilot programme, launched in October 2015, was to test the extent to which a relatively short programme of digital engagement could make a difference to a predominantly analogue community grappling with modern

day challenges – from social exclusion to unemployment and funding cuts to local services.

It found that there are many benefits of a local digital engagement strategy, across both the medium and longer term:

- Improved performance of local businesses, boosting profitability and therefore their ability to invest and grow
- Improved opportunities for young people, giving them the confidence to start their own businesses or to align their digital expertise with the skills that businesses need
- Increased social inclusion, improving connectedness and helping people access services in more effective ways
- Raise local expectations, increasing the aspirations of the community for improvement and change

On a grander scale, the effects of digital technology and connectivity can go beyond individual communities. It can help close the gap in productivity and profitability between the UK's poorer and best performing areas. If businesses do better, the local economy prospers, as wages increase and money stays in the local economy. In the longer-term, it can improve community resilience and reduce burgeoning social welfare bills.

**In short, creating a digital community is a long-term strategy that can address issues systemically, dealing with their causes, rather than spending more time later on dealing with impacts.**

1 Research conducted by Development Economics on behalf of O2 (2015)

2 <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2014-01/17/martha-lane-fox-lords-speech>

# SNAPSHOT OF THE ST HELENS PILOT

## The Digital Communities pilot had three main objectives:

- Improve access to connectivity across the community
- Increase digital confidence and competence among businesses to help them capitalise on digital growth opportunities
- Raise digital engagement in the local authority among citizens to help them benefit from improved digital services

St Helens proved the perfect partner for this pilot:

- It is a digitally and economically-deprived town with an appetite for change
- Has a willingness among the local council and businesses to try something different

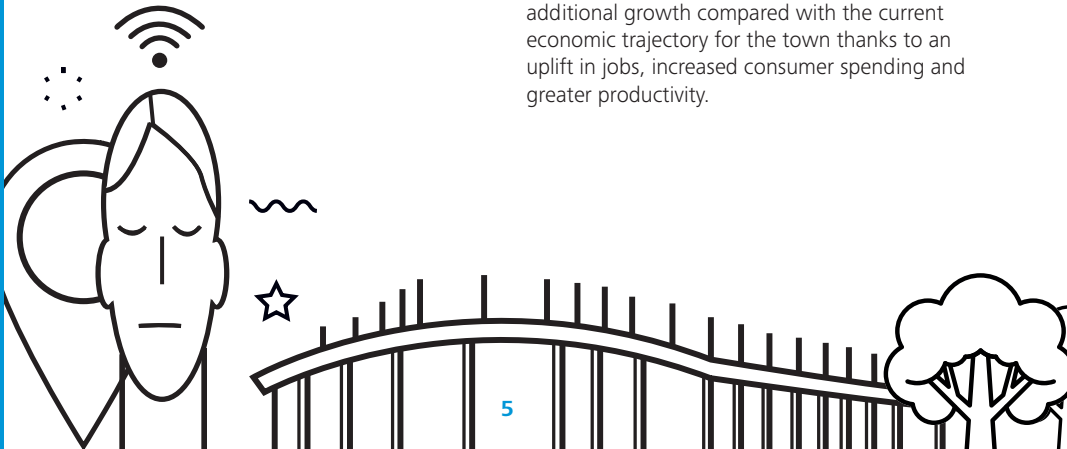
The pilot engaged specifically with three particular groups: small and medium sized businesses, education, and the community.

## In just ten weeks, a range of initiatives were tested to bring the benefits of digital to the entire community, including:

- Transforming a disused retail space into a Digital Hub, a space to host workshops, events and seminars
- Providing free digital makeovers to small businesses
- Offering grants and mentoring to ambitious young people to help turn their digital ideas into reality
- Boosting the local digital infrastructure through free O2 Wi-Fi hotspots around the town centre

The pilot reached more than 42,000 people in St Helens – close to a quarter of the borough's population. It improved the digital engagement of the town by 15%, moving St Helens 17 places up the Digital High Street Index.

Economic modelling estimates that the longer term pilot could inject £46.3m to the St Helens economy by 2020 – representing 10% additional growth compared with the current economic trajectory for the town thanks to an uplift in jobs, increased consumer spending and greater productivity.



# RESULTS

The Digital Communities project reached

**42,697** people in St Helens

**1200**

people visited the hub

**40+**

events held at the Hub

**81%**

thought Hub events were great

**15%**

uplift on the Digital High Street index

**65%**

thought the project was a good idea



Hello St Helens



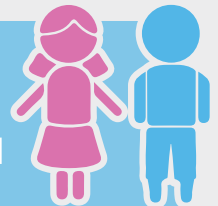
**8**

businesses given new digital technology

think big

**15** young people given Think Big grants

**100** young people helped by Think Big events



**2** O2 Wifi hotspots created (College and town centre)

**5000** public O2 Wifi log ons

 **£46.3m**

the amount St Helens economy could grow by 2020 if it continues on the same trajectory

 **£1.5bn**

economic boost to the UK economy by 2020 if towns are given access to better digital infrastructure and technology

 **10%**

Business support services

 **8%**

Arts and entertainments

 **8%**

Construction

Will see the biggest increase in jobs in St Helens by 2020



Replicating the pilot in eight towns in the North could boost the region's economy by an additional **£410m** by 2020



# DESIGNING THE DIGITAL COMMUNITY PROJECT

The St Helens pilot produced some rich learnings for future Digital Communities projects. In this section, we describe the critical principles for success.

The recommendations are rooted in qualitative analysis of the pilot's impact and interviews with participants.

## Tap into local expertise and identify

### 1 local advocates

There are existing pools of expertise in all communities. Work with them in the planning stages to align the opportunities that will come from the project with their existing objectives, to increase participation and impact. It's also important to identify and engage key local influencers and groups who, in addition to the core project team, can advocate the pilot and increase awareness within the community. A good starting point is leveraging existing networks, relationships and programmes (e.g. if there is a local business skills development programme, validate the digital component and improve if needed).

**"You can't drive this project from the office - you need boots on the ground"**

*- Nigel Dutton, Head of Blue Door Experience at O2*

### 2 Identify key partners

To ensure the success of a Digital Communities project it is important to recognise and engage a mix of partners who each bring varying expertise and assets to the initiative. In the case of the St Helens pilot, this work was largely supported by O2 and St Helens Council. The nature and composition of the partnership are likely to differ depending on local or regional requirements: think about national and local organisations (for profit or non-profit) that can benefit from contributing too.

### 3 Make the local council central

The council is an essential player, and should shape the project from the start to ensure that the intended outcomes have clear value for the local community. Councils are experiencing turbulent change, and need to actively explore new ways of working. Those in the vanguard of this are prepared to innovate and adapt.

**"Any good digital process starts with some analogue steps"**

*- Ben Dowd, Business Director, O2*

### 4 Have a physical presence

It might seem counterintuitive for a digital project, but a physical presence makes a significant difference to the impact of the project. In St Helens the Hub was a flexible multi-purpose space in the heart of the town centre where citizens could discuss their digital problems face-to-face with in-house experts, learn more about new technologies, and attend events and seminars. The Hub acts as a focal point – but it could move during the project, depending on phasing and design.





## 5 Set up a dedicated team to run the Digital Communities project

The project needs a dedicated team to run it. People won't be able to fit it in around their day jobs. In an ideal world, the team needed to deliver this would include:

- an overall project manager
- someone responsible for planning and running the events at the Hub
- someone managing relationships with businesses
- someone looking after all communications
- a technical expert

These roles can be shared across partner organisations but the council will also need a dedicated project lead to marshal resources.

## 6 Start early. It takes time to build public understanding of project purpose

Arguably an obvious point but we think it's worth making: activities almost always take longer than expected to deliver. Start planning early to make sure you involve the right stakeholders/participants and have a clear strategy in place at least three months in advance to raise awareness around Digital Communities. The businesses involved in the Digital Makeovers should be carefully selected and contacted early in the process, to ensure that they are able and willing to engage in the opportunity.

## 7 Expect to run the project for four to six months

It will take time to build awareness and knowledge of what the Digital Communities project is and what it offers. For maximum impact, focus on a small number of activities at any one time, and phase them to involve different groups when they have time to engage (for example: colleges will be focused on exams in late spring and early summer, many businesses are at full capacity in the run-up to Christmas).

## 8 Strip out the digital jargon

Digital professionals can talk their own language, sometimes without realising it. Make sure that when you're explaining the project you're using non-specialist language to talk about benefits rather than technology. For example, the phrase 'digital skills' isn't always helpful. Young people typically have digital skills without knowing it; older people aren't clear what the phrase refers to.

**"Technology is just the start: what you can do with it is more important"**  
- Norman Mellor, Client Director, Central & Devolved Government, O2

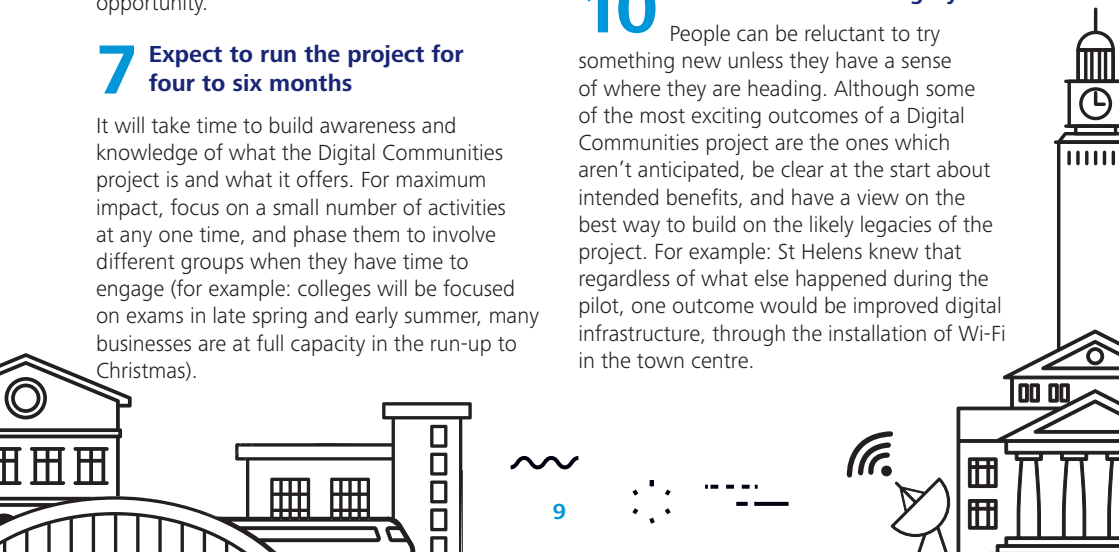
## 9 Things will change. Be adaptive

Plan carefully but be agile and ready to change course in response to unexpected outcomes. Monitor what's happening, be nimble, test ideas quickly, and expect to evolve them as you learn. Having the right people with time and authority to get things done will help make the most of opportunities and challenges that present themselves.

**"With the Hub we touched and impacted the lives of so many people. This sleek, modern place really helped us attract more attention"**  
- Milica Gay, Business Program Manager, O2

## 10 Have a vision for the legacy

People can be reluctant to try something new unless they have a sense of where they are heading. Although some of the most exciting outcomes of a Digital Communities project are the ones which aren't anticipated, be clear at the start about intended benefits, and have a view on the best way to build on the likely legacies of the project. For example: St Helens knew that regardless of what else happened during the pilot, one outcome would be improved digital infrastructure, through the installation of Wi-Fi in the town centre.



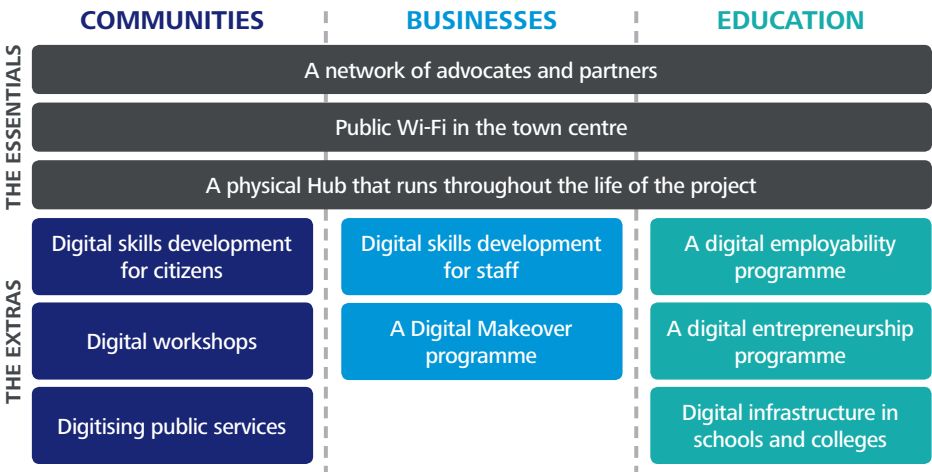
# BUILDING BLOCKS

This section is designed to help others to develop their own Digital Communities project and illustrate how core building blocks can be assembled to meet the specific needs of different communities and accomodate varying resource requirements.

Planning in advance is key for the long-term success of the Digital Communities:



The St Helens pilot worked across the community, the education sector, and the business sector, partly because O2 and St Helens Council were able to offer the required resources and expertise. But activity is entirely scalable and a council or community could decide that it will run a lighter project or focus on specific groups first.



# HOW TO GROW: COMMUNITIES

Everyday digital skills are critical in today's connected world. People without them are more likely to feel isolated and less likely to be able to access opportunities and services in their communities that are available to them.

The Digital Communities initiative remedies this by increasing the level of aspiration and digital engagement.

The learnings from the St Helens pilot point to two key routes to engage your local community depending on the resources available.

Ideally future projects would include both elements and at the very least, one of the following:

- Improve the town's **digital infrastructure** (e.g. installing public Wi-Fi in the town centre to provide citizens and businesses with free connectivity when out and about)
- A **physical Hub** that runs for the life of the project

## Digital infrastructure



In order to deliver value to the local community – whether jobs, improved services or business growth – improving the local digital infrastructure should be a priority. In the case of St Helens two new Wi-Fi hotspots were installed in the town centre, to increase uptake and use of technology and to help both businesses and citizens be more connected when out and about. Depending on existing infrastructure, this initiative is typically straightforward and cost-effective to implement and has a high ROI in terms of impact, image and use.

**“By installing Wi-Fi in the town centre we unleashed potential in the town”**

*- Norman Mellor, Client Director, Central & Devolved Government, O2*

MEASURING REAL IMPACT ON ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS IN A SHORT PILOT IS DIFFICULT. BUT **WEEKLY USAGE OF TABLETS AND LAPTOPS IN ST HELENS DID INCREASE** DURING THE TEN-WEEK DIGITAL COMMUNITIES PILOT.



**57%**  
DEC 2015

**50%**  
SEPT 2015



**54%**  
DEC 2015

**51%**  
SEPT 2015



## Physical Hub

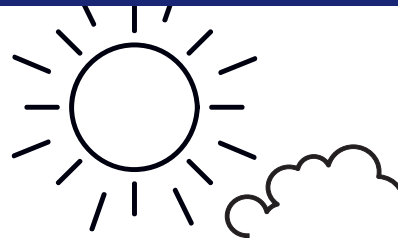


Think of the Hub as the core of your activities and your main point of contact with the public. It plays a pivotal role in taking community members on a journey from analogue to digital. The location and the ambience of this space is crucial to its success:

- Start with the Hub in the town or city centre to make the project visible, easily accessible and to increase footfall and the attractiveness of the High Street
- Make the space flexible enough to accommodate a calendar of diverse events (e.g. multipurpose walls, stackable chairs etc.)
- Open and run digital workshops during evenings and weekends – so people can attend around work and childcare commitments
- Consider a flexible pop-up structure that can be moved to different locations at different times throughout the project (e.g. colleges, libraries, etc.)
- Create a modern, sleek space with a strong brand identity, to attract people in and drive awareness

**“The Hub brought new energy to a run down area”**

*- Hayley Bell, Digital Experience Manager, O2*



WHAT ST HELENS  
ACHIEVED IN **10 WEEKS**  
WITH ITS DIGITAL  
COMMUNITIES HUB



40+  
events held  
at the Hub

More than  
**1,200**  
people visited  
the Hub



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# COMMUNITY: EMPOWERING VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

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## COMMUNITY CASE STUDY

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### MY TRAV APP

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With support from O2, St Helens Council has been able to explore a social and digital innovation: an app to help young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to travel independently to school. MyTrav was the idea of Newcastle City Council who won funding from O2's Local Government Digital Fund in 2014, and has been developed by KMS Caretech.

Young people with SEND often travel to school in taxis or mini-buses which gives them little opportunity to build independence for their transition into adulthood. The MyTrav app provides prompts and guides them through their journey using public transport or when walking. Their parents or carers can access a secure portal to check their progress, and receive an alert if they go the wrong way or don't arrive when expected.



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# HOW TO GROW: BUSINESSES

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**Digital opportunities for growth are no longer the preserve of tech start-ups. Businesses in any sector can embed digital tools in their processes and services to improve service delivery, get closer to their customers, and reduce administration time and cost. By doing so they can improve revenues and profitability; free cash and resources to invest in growth; and help drive local economic sustainability.**

The business component of a Digital Communities project can be transformational. But it is also the most complex to run, for a number of reasons. Every business is different; it has its own systems and methods in place, it has its own level of ability to absorb new ideas and new processes.

At the same time, for businesses that are able to make the digital jump, the benefits can be significant, in terms of saving time, improving work arrangements and improving outcomes for customers.

To engage the local business community, there are some important building blocks:

- Digital Makeovers: adding digital tools and processes to existing systems
- Advocacy and third party endorsement to drive awareness and participation among the business community
- Digital skills development for business leaders and staff, with mentoring if possible

## DIGITAL MAKEOVER:

A Digital Makeover involves working with a company to identify current business opportunities and challenges and implement digital equipment and processes to improve its systems, increase its effectiveness, and reduce costs. In the St Helens pilot, O2 selected a number of businesses with the potential to benefit from such a digital transformation. A Digital Makeover programme therefore has a number of elements, some of which involve pre-qualifying businesses that may be able to benefit.

- Start identifying and recruiting businesses well ahead of the project to engage those that can benefit, for example by working through existing business organisations and networks. Consider using the case studies within this report to bring to life the benefits for businesses. While a Digital Makeover represents a big opportunity, both for the individual business and for the local and regional economy, not all businesses are ready or able to take advantage of the opportunity
- Invite interested businesses to explain what they plan to do with some level of digital investment, to create a shortlist of candidate businesses. There's a fine line here. Too much detail, and businesses won't engage; too little, and you won't know which ones understand the opportunity. On the basis of the learning from the pilot, we recommend a simple application process that lets the business say how it hopes to benefit from a digital investment, and how it will support the project to give the makeover the best



chance of success (who's going to take on responsibility for the initiative internally, for example

- From this shortlist, evaluate any technical issues that need to be resolved. Some of the Digital Makeovers in St Helens took longer than initially planned because equipment needed to be aligned with IT systems
- Help the digital transition with some technical support, and if possible, a business mentor who has experience of these kinds of digital transitions and can provide some business support during the project. Ideally, the equipment needs to be configured so it works well on Day One, to give the makeover the best chance of having an impact on the business' operations
- Create some case studies: start early with some businesses if you can. SMEs tend to put more trust in the experience of other businesses, so if you can drive two or three makeovers before the overall project starts to act as case studies the Digital Makeover is likely to have more credibility with the wider business community

**“Whatever the size of the business, it's clear that the opportunity posed by the digital economy is huge – and growing all the time. Yet we often see that many time-poor start-ups and small businesses are failing to make the most of this opportunity due to lack of resource and – more often than not – skills.**

**We know through working with O2 on the Digital Communities pilot that, in actual fact, even the quickest and simplest steps – like using a smartphone or tablet to work on-the-go, or creating a social media profile – can make a huge difference. There's a real potential for more pilots just like this to help businesses across the country grow, and I'm excited to see this become a reality.”**

- Emma Jones, Founder, Enterprise Nation

In the case of the St Helens pilot, the equipment for the Digital Makeover (e.g. new iPads, Office 365 etc.) was provided as a grant to the businesses who were involved in the project, largely for reasons of time and to help with learning from the initial project.

Having reviewed this with some of the businesses involved, we do not believe that it is a necessary condition for success. It may be better instead to discount the equipment to focus the minds of business owners or management teams on the business case, while also clarifying issues of ownership.

## DIGITAL EMPLOYABILITY:

Many communities have existing employability programmes that prepare young people for the world of work. Digital skills tend to be under-represented in some of these programmes, and one effect of this is that young people who are digitally competent in their personal lives underestimate the possible value of these skills in the world of work.

In order to succeed, Digital Employability initiatives need to:

- Partner with local organisations running employability programmes, and add a 'digital layer' or 'digital module' to their existing programme
- Test the digital module with trainers and employers
- Potentially the module can also be offered as a stand-alone diploma or certificate, perhaps during the school or college holidays.

Over time, as businesses become more digital through the Makeover programme, and as young people become more aware of their digital skills through the Employability programme, these initiatives have the potential to be connected through a Digital Skills Exchange, which connects digital expertise to business needs. This could be considered as part of the legacy programme.



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# BUSINESS: SMARTER WORKING AND SELLING

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## BUSINESS CASE STUDY

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### UNITE HEALTHCARE

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Unite Healthcare – set up in 2012 by former social worker Dan Butler – now has 70 employees providing care services across Merseyside. But the rapid growth of the business has outstripped the ability of its business systems to cope. Through participation in the Digital Communities pilot, the company has been able to improve communications with staff who are often out of the office and on the move, and speed up recording of patient information.

Information such as staff rosters now go direct to the phones of staff, where the company used to use paper rosters, and changes can be updated quickly. The savings in recording time mean that carers can spend more time with patients, and also see more patients in a given time. Admin time has been reduced from two hours to 30 minutes, and the number of patient visits has increased from 6 to 8-10 per day

**“The impact of technology on our business really has been invaluable. The nature of what we do means that being able to provide quality, in-depth face-to-face consultations is absolutely fundamental.**

**Thanks to Digital Communities we’re no longer wasting precious time travelling across Merseyside to and from the office to type up notes; we’re seeing more patients each day, and for longer – and our staff are already more motivated as a result. To have seen such a positive impact in such a short space of time is fantastic, and I’m not stopping there either; my next step is to use the technology to boost our website and social media presence”**

- Dan Butler, Managing Director, Unite Healthcare



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# HOW TO GROW: EDUCATION

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**The digital economy plays a crucial role in Britain's sustained economic growth - we estimate that 2.3million digital jobs will be created by 2020. Improving digital literacy and skills, and harnessing the existing potential of young people, our digital natives, is imperative for future success. Experience of digital entrepreneurship improves confidence, aspiration and employability among young people, while the use of digital tools in the education environment improves the quality of learning and engagement.**

**“This project has boosted our confidence and encouraged us to follow our passions”**

- Student at St Helens College, awarded the Think Big grant

To engage schools and colleges we suggest focusing on one or both of these initiatives, which have been tested in the pilot in St Helens:

- Digital entrepreneurship programmes
- Digital infrastructure within schools and colleges

## **DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP:**

A programme that is designed to inspire and equip young people to use digital tools to build business or non-profit initiatives. The process offers experience and skills development valuable for future career opportunities, including thinking about business planning and learning how to sell ideas.

In the St Helens pilot, this was driven by the O2 Think Big programme, which is a national project designed to encourage young people to use connectivity to create positive change in their communities. But even without O2's support, the programme should be designed with a partner to provide:

- Modest investment to further develop the projects (we would recommend £150/£300 per grant)
- Mentoring and training support to set up their digital platforms

Even for students who don't gain awards, the process of preparing and delivering the pitches is a valuable process.

As with the other initiatives, planning is key to engaging school and colleges and ensuring that students can participate.

- Involve schools and colleges early in the process so you can secure their support (colleges need time to fit the programme in the school activities calendar)
- Communication needs to start well ahead of launch, to drive awareness and allow students time to apply for the grant programme.
- Engagement with these digital natives needs to happen on multiple channels:
- Leverage online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as well as schools' and colleges' internal social networks to introduce the grant programme
- Be visible in their gathering spaces in college: cafeterias, libraries etc.
- Create a mentoring scheme to offer support throughout the programme
- Use local events to promote the opportunity

**“There is nothing better to improve self-confidence than standing up in front of a crowd of well-known business people in St Helens to put a pitch forward. This experience has really transformed some students - this is truly brilliant”**

- Paul Hatton, St Helens College

## **DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE:**

Schools and colleges are businesses too, with dozens of staff, hundreds of pupils, and turnover in the millions of pounds. They are also locked into scores of review and monitoring processes, many stipulated by legislation and regulation. As the Hope Academy case study shows, even a modest digital investment can produce effective results quickly. Compared to the broader business sector, they have a number of benefits as partners. They are in fixed locations, often with good technical infrastructure in place. They also usually have existing IT staff who are capable of implementing and supporting digital initiatives, and welcome the opportunity to do so.



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# EDUCATION: ENABLING INNOVATIVE TEACHING

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## EDUCATION CASE STUDY

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### HOPE ACADEMY

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Hope Academy is a joint Catholic and Church of England secondary school in Newton-le-Willows that has been in turnaround after a period in special measures. The school has around 1,400 pupils and about 140 staff. The most recent Ofsted report notes “this school has rapidly improved. It is now good, and is improving further across all aspects of its work.”

It joined the Digital Communities pilot because an equipment grant through O2 enabled senior staff to observe lessons using iPads, creating a time saving (previously lesson notes had been taken on paper forms) and enabling more rapid feedback. However, as staff started to use the iPads in their day-to-day work and teaching, there were also other benefits, as IT Manager Simon Green explains:

**“At the beginning we wanted to digitise the way we conduct lesson observations in the classes but then we started looking at other ways to use this technology; like the science teacher that attached the iPad to a TV to show the experiment live in the classroom.**

**These are the outcomes that took us by surprise: the above and beyond, the people taking the technology without any steer from us and coming with their own innovative ways of doing things.”**

# HOW TO BUILD: LEGACY

**The ultimate goal of a Digital Communities project is to use connectivity and technology to improve how people work and live. But changing behaviour and expertise requires a long-term commitment: the project is designed to kick-start a bigger sustained process. It helps people believe that real change is possible if the building blocks for the future are put in place as part of the project.**

Apart from looking for one-off digital infrastructure improvements such as public Wi-Fi, there are a number of ways to keep the Digital Communities project alive in the day-to-day work of the council and local organisations. Consider, for example:

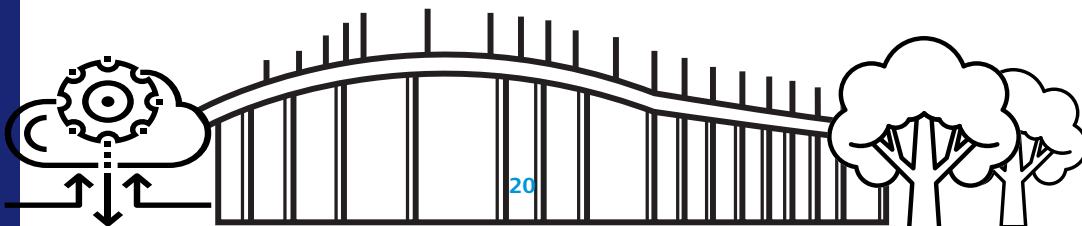
- Partnering with mobile or technology companies to improve the digital or tech element of existing local employability programmes
- Partnering with relevant organisations (e.g. Go ON UK, Digital Action Plan etc.) to help improve local digital skills, of both SMEs and individuals
- Adding Digital Communities “pop-up” Hubs to local events and festivals, to help people improve their confidence with their existing devices. (A similar model in a different sector is the “Dr Bike” stalls at street markets, which help people fix their bikes and make them roadworthy.)

- Look for ways to support digital thinking in schools’ and colleges’ entrepreneurship programmes, along the lines of a local Think Big-type initiative. Businesses and foundations may want to help too
- Helping businesses assess the potential benefits of becoming more digitally enabled, to assess the business case
- Sharing success stories to positively reinforce digital behaviour change and to inspire more Digital Communities

More broadly, the principles of legacy-building should be about aligning better digital outcomes with existing initiatives and programmes, as explored in the case study on the next page. To help these things happen, it’s worth identifying advocates during the life of the Digital Communities project who want to be engaged in taking forward the Digital Communities initiatives.

**“One of my objectives is to be a better connected place. The digital agenda is one way of doing that.”**

- Mike Palin, Chief Executive,  
St Helens Council



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# LEGACY: INVESTING FOR GROWTH

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**“We need a better connected population if we are to meet the challenge of public service reform.”**

- Mike Palin, Chief Executive, St Helens Council

**“Digital Communities have proven a very good way to accelerate conversations about the importance of digital”**

- Tracy Mawson, Director of Business Services, St Helens Chamber of Commerce

One of the benefits of a Digital Communities project is that it creates access to new learning and insights about the way the community works. One legacy of the St Helens pilot is that part of a business development fund provided by the Council and run by the town’s Chamber of Commerce is to be ring-fenced to encourage the development of digital businesses within the area. The main part of the fund has relatively specific conditions and relatively short timescales, connected to job creation. The result is to encourage steady small business growth. This new ring-fenced element of the fund will allow for investment in digital businesses with greater potential for growth, but which require longer lead times to realise this potential.

The change was initiated after St Helens Council Chief Executive Mike Palin saw such a business, a startup driver support platform called Drivernet, pitch at the Digital Hub. St Helens is a logistics centre, and when Palin tested DriverNet’s business idea with one of the town’s large logistics businesses, he realised that the council’s existing business development programme didn’t foster digital businesses which were higher growth prospects, but were also higher risk.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**1 Every local authority must have a mobile strategy.** Smartphone ownership has doubled in the last five years; people spend more time online on their smartphone than on any other device; and mobile data consumption is growing far faster (64% in 2015, according to Enders Analysis) than fixed data consumption. Mobile, therefore, is overtaking fixed in its importance to the digital economy. It is no longer acceptable for local authorities to fail to integrate mobile into their organisational strategies.

**2 The digital economy will not function and grow without the digital infrastructure to support it.** Without informed decision-making by local authorities and reform of the planning and Electronic Communications Code, coverage and capacity difficulties will become more common place and the national and local digital economy will suffer.

**3 Digital needs to be a key pillar in City Devolution deals.** With Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield among the cities to sign up to new devolution deals, it is nothing short of critical that digital is embedded into their investment plans if they are to benefit from jobs, growth and wider opportunities generated by the digital economy. Otherwise they simply

will not be able to compete effectively with cities that are putting digital at the heart of their plans.

**4 Digital Champions should be appointed to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).** Having a dedicated digital expert on each LEP will ensure that local authorities and businesses are thinking about the critical infrastructure and addressing the necessary skills gaps in order to help the digital economy to flourish. Our experience suggests that currently many LEPs still fail to see the opportunities that come from investment in digital; but with the right leadership and focus, LEPs can be critical to accelerating change.

**5 The Northern Powerhouse needs a digital roadmap.** The St Helens pilot provides a clear blueprint for the Northern Powerhouse project to maximise digital opportunities in order to achieve the Chancellor's bold ambitions. The project needs a clear digital strategy to enable more effective and efficient businesses and public services, if it is to boost regeneration in deprived areas of the north.





What assets are already in place to help support the development of a Digital Communities project?

*This might include local charities, tech organisations, local programmes and local centres of excellence?*

*Can you align the project objectives with the outcomes that the target organisations are measured on?*



What resources will the Council, along the other organisations involved, commit to making the project happen?



What type of marketing and promotion will you need to create awareness?



What type of launch events will be most appropriate?



What kind of physical presence will the project have in the community (will you have a permanent digital Hub or a mobile one)?



Which schools or colleges are best placed to engage with the project (which have infrastructure, expertise, etc.)?



What are the best ways locally to engage with the business community (organisations, networks, other business channels)?



What level of investment do you need to make the project work, in cash and resources?

*Which partners can help to provide this investment?*



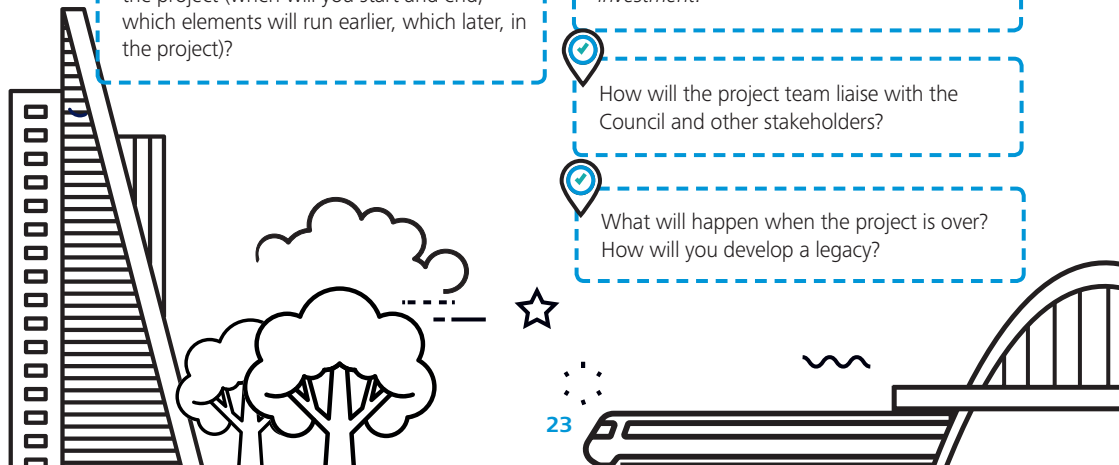
How do you plan to schedule and sequence the project (when will you start and end, which elements will run earlier, which later, in the project)?



How will the project team liaise with the Council and other stakeholders?



What will happen when the project is over? How will you develop a legacy?



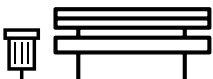
**This report was written by Andrew Curry and Silvia Rigoni of The Futures Company. It was developed through a number of methods, including a review of project outputs, published and unpublished; interviews with key personnel within O2, St Helens Council and the St Helens Chamber of Commerce; and a full day workshop in St Helens involving project participants.**

The research was conducted using an appreciative inquiry approach. The STEP model, devised by Lisa Friedman and Herman Gyr, was used as a framework to analyse the organisational structures in developing and delivering the pilot.

The economic modelling was conducted by independent research consultancy Development Economics. It drew on existing economic data inputs, a comprehensive literature review, a survey of St Helens businesses and citizens, and other research outputs from the pilot to estimate the future economic trajectories both with and without the interventions delivered within the pilot.

The 30 towns identified in the report as viable locations to replicate the pilot are: Darlington, Grimsby, Halifax, Hartlepool, Lancaster, Oldham, Wakefield, Loughborough, Mansfield, Northampton, Telford, West Bromwich, Worcester, Basingstoke, Bedford, Chelmsford, Gloucester, Ipswich, Maidstone, Swindon, Ayr, Livingston, Perth, Stirling, Carmarthen, Newport, Wrexham, Derry, Larne and Newry.

Our thanks go to the following people for their contribution to the research for this report, through their participation in interviews with The Futures Company and the workshop in St Helens: *Hayley Bell, Laura Brooks, Mark Dickens, Ben Dowd, Nigel Dutton, Milica Gay, Simon Green, Linda Harris, Paul Hatton, Abigail Housley, Steve Lucas, Tracey Mawson, Norman Mellor, Nick Mussell, Mike Palin, Becky Potgieter, John Quirk, Paul Styles, Brad Tooth, Daniel Webster, and Kerry Whitehurst.*

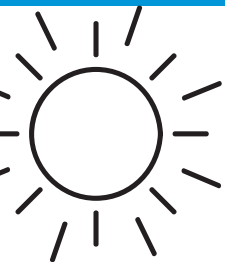




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# NOTES FOR YOUR DIGITAL COMMUNITY

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# NOTES FOR YOUR DIGITAL COMMUNITY

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**“WITH THIS  
PROJECT WE  
HAVE CHANGED  
THE PERCEPTION  
OF THE PLACE  
AND INCREASED  
THE LOVE FOR  
ST HELENS”**

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- Mike Palin, Chief Executive, St Helens Council

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT:  
[CONNECT.O2.CO.UK/HELLOSTHELENS](https://connect.o2.co.uk/hellostheleens)**

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