The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Transport & Connectivity Plan: Digital Policy

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1 Enhance digital connectivity

Ensure the availability of high quality, affordable digital connectivity services and support the exploitation of digital technologies

Overview

1.1 The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough **Digital Connectivity Strategy for 2021-2025** forms the basis for this digital policy as part of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

1.2 Digital connectivity plays an increasingly important role in providing access to jobs, and to services and experiences such as entertainment, social interaction, shopping, banking, education, and healthcare. During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns we were heavily dependent on digital connectivity for enabling people to work from home, students to attend online classes and lectures, and for keeping in touch with friends and family. Lockdowns necessitated various swift transformations that have endured: many more businesses now use collaborative software such as Zoom and Teams; many more people now work from home at least part of the week; retailers have boosted their ecommerce capabilities; and GPs make much more extensive use of remote consultations over the phone or online.

1.3 There are important interactions between our use of digital technologies and the transport system. Most obviously, digital connectivity enables more working from home and remote meetings, and this has significantly reduced travel for commuting and for business. Increased use of online shopping has also reduced the need for individuals to travel to and from shops, while increasing the numbers of light goods vehicles delivering orders. On public transport, mobile connectivity helps to make journeys more productive, interesting, and pleasant, whether accessing work applications or entertainment, and this is a factor influencing a modal shift away from cars. Furthermore, the transport system itself is of course already highly reliant on digital technology, for monitoring traffic and road conditions, controlling traffic lights, providing real-time passenger information, smart motorway signage etc; and new applications such as smart parking and AI-controlled road junctions offer the prospect of further improving the efficiency and sustainability of transport. Such considerations are behind the updated title of the plan: the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan - emphasising the importance attached to improving digital connectivity.

1.4 Much has already been achieved in this regard, in particular the success in making superfast broadband nearly ubiquitously available across the Combined Authority. However, this is a rapidly moving area, driven by exponential improvements in technology. Telecoms develops far more rapidly than any other type of infrastructure: for example, average monthly data usage on fixed broadband lines increased by 19% *per annum* in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between 2018 and 2022. With the ongoing roll-outs of new technologies such as full-fibre broadband and 5G mobile infrastructure, it is vital that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough stays at the forefront of digital connectivity in terms of:

- Fixed broadband connectivity;
- Mobile connectivity;

- Smart infrastructure; and
- Digital exploitation, access, and inclusion.

Policy theme X.1: Fixed broadband infrastructure

Overview

1.5 There is now nearly ubiquitous coverage of superfast broadband services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough: as at September 2022, 97.3% of premises could access services with download speeds of 30 Mbps or more, according to Ofcom[1]. Only 0.7% of premises are now unable to obtain a service at 10 Mbps or more, and these are covered by a Universal Service Obligation whereby BT is obliged to provide a 10 Mbps+ service if requested (up to a cost threshold of £3,400 per premise). This progress has been achieved through a combination of private sector investment by the telecoms operators, plus public 'gap-funding' through the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme for areas where there were no plans for commercial superfast roll-outs.

1.6 The focus for industry players and policy-makers has now shifted to rolling out gigabit-capable (i.e. 1,000 Mbps+) and full-fibre infrastructure. Gigabit services are primarily delivered over Virgin Media's cable network and through full-fibre networks being rolled out by operators such as BT Openreach, CityFibre, Hyperoptic, and OFNL. The UK Government has set targets for the proportion of UK premises covered by gigabit-capable networks: 85% by 2025, and 99% by 2030[2].

1.7 In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the coverage as of September 2022 stood at around 70% of premises for gigabit-capable networks and 49% for full-fibre, both of which were higher than the UK averages of about 68% and 41% respectively[3]. The Government's expectation is that commercial gigabit roll-outs should achieve about 80% UK coverage without the need for any public subsidy.

1.8 Government has set a target of 85% gigabit-capable coverage for the UK by 2025; however, this is an average for the country and there is a danger that without a specific focus, as a predominantly rural area, we will no longer be at the leading edge and will not have the ubiquitous forward-facing infrastructure we need for our area to prosper. Therefore the Digital Connectivity Strategy has set a local target to meet at least 85% coverage by 2025. This will be met by a combination of coverage provided by commercial operators, investing their own funds to roll out infrastructure in our area, and by coverage provided on a 'gap funded' basis as part of the Government's Project Gigabit procurement programme, of which Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is one of the first pilot areas. Project Gigabit will provide up to £68 million in public funding for the area , with procurements managed centrally by Building Digital UK, an executive agency of DCMS.

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[1] Source: **Connected Nations 2022** (Ofcom, December 2022). Note: Connecting Cambridgeshire uses 24 Mbps rather than 30 Mbps to define 'superfast'. The 24 Mbps metric is not regularly reported by Ofcom, but another source, **Thinkbroadband**, estimates that 24 Mbps coverage was c. 98.6% in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough at December 2022.

[2] Source: **Levelling Up the United Kingdom** (DLUHC, February 2022)

[3] Source: **Connected Nations 2022** (Ofcom, December 2022). **Thinkbroadband**, estimates that gigabit coverage was c. 74% and full fibre coverage was 51% in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough at December 2022.

1.9 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a very dynamic commercial environment, with a number of active suppliers planning significant investments in gigabit-capable infrastructure. However the challenges involved in rolling out broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, means that the operators need a supportive local environment in order to deliver successfully. We will continue to work closely with operators to support investment, remove barriers and facilitate coverage to ensure planned commercial investment is delivered.

Policy Summary

1.10 Connecting Cambridgeshire is the delivery body for the Combined Authority's digital infrastructure strategy covering Cambridgeshire and Peterborough[4]. To support the continuous improvement of fixed broadband infrastructure the Combined Authority will, with the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme, continue to:

- Facilitate industry investment in fixed broadband infrastructure;
- Work with government to deliver public funded fixed broadband solutions where commercial coverage is not viable; and
- Integrate fibre ducting in transport and other infrastructure schemes and exploit this asset.

Policy X.1.1 Facilitate industry investment in fixed broadband infrastructure

1.11 The Combined Authority will continue working with network operators and the councils to encourage investment and facilitate commercial coverage of improved fixed broadband infrastructure by:

- Establishing timely and constructive communications and relationships between the network operators' and the Local Highways Authorities' respective teams;
- Ensuring that street works permit schemes are proportionate and efficient, and in line with best UK practice; and
- Facilitating timely wayleave agreements with network operators for access to council-owned land and property.

Policy X.1.2 Work with government to deliver public funded fixed broadband solutions where commercial coverage is not viable

1.12 The Combined Authority will continue working with the UK Government to:

- Achieve the timely and successful implementation of the Project Gigabit programme's gap-funding procurements of gigabit-capable coverage; and
- Support and extend the national Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, which provides government funded vouchers, with a local top-up where needed, for homes and businesses that will not be covered by commercial or gap-funded schemes.

Policy X.1.3 Integrate and exploit fibre ducting in transport and other infrastructure schemes

1.13 By ensuring that appropriate ducting is integrated into transport and other infrastructure schemes we are helping to speed up commercial deployment of fibre networks, minimise future disruption of roads and walkways, and reduce the carbon emissions associated with installing new ducting. The Combined Authority will continue working to:

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[4] In the remainder of this digital policy, statements saying that 'the Combined Authority will…' should be taken to mean that this will be delivered via the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme.

- Integrate the provision of fibre ducting into locally-managed transport and other infrastructure schemes;
- Lobby for fibre ducting to be included in nationally-managed transport and other infrastructure schemes involving Cambridgeshire and Peterborough; and
- Ensure that the fibre ducts owned by public authorities are comprehensively mapped, well managed and actively promoted for use by commercial network operators – for example through the Light Blue Fibre joint venture between Cambridgeshire County Council and the University of Cambridge.

Policy theme X.2: Mobile infrastructure

Overview

1.14 People of all ages increasingly rely on mobile internet access for socialising, shopping, home working, banking, digital payments, public service information, news, and entertainment. Mobile connectivity is also an important underpinning technology for the Combined Authority's work to improve bus services: to be successful, Demand Responsive Transport and new travel hubs will need travellers to be able to book, track services and understand disruptions to give the best possible customer experience.

1.15 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough enjoys reasonably high overall levels of mobile 4G coverage: as of September 2022, 75% of premises could obtain an indoor signal from all four mobile networks, and 98% of the geographic area had outdoor coverage from all four operators[5]. However, the situation varies significantly across the Combined Authority area: for example, only 56% of premises in South Cambridgeshire could obtain an indoor signal from all four mobile networks as of September 2022. Whilst remaining gaps in 4G geographic coverage should be addressed through the Government's Shared Rural Network programme, which entails £1 billion investment across the UK from the operators and the UK Government, little progress on partial not-spots has been seen to date across the region.

1.16 The latest generation of mobile technology, 5G, not only offers higher speeds than 4G but also provides lower latency (i.e. quicker response times), the ability to handle much higher densities of devices, improved energy efficiency, and greater flexibility in tailoring services to specific user needs. These features are expected to be useful for businesses in exploiting applications such as augmented reality, factory automation and asset monitoring – helping to boost productivity. 5G services are also likely to be crucial to support future plans for incorporating autonomous vehicles into public transport services, building on earlier feasibility and pilot projects in the Cambridge area.

1.17 Roll-outs of 5G are still at a relatively early stage in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and coverage varies markedly by operator. Connecting Cambridgeshire is facilitating multi-party discussions to facilitate operators' 5G roll-out plans. Three, O2 and EE have some 5G coverage (though not city-wide) in both Cambridge and Peterborough, and Three is actively looking to expand into market towns such as Ely, Huntingdon and St Neots. Vodafone has very little 5G coverage currently in the region but has started to submit planning applications for 5G equipment in Cambridge.

1.18 Mobile infrastructure presents significant challenges from a planning perspective, especially in historic areas, given their potential adverse visual impacts and the effect on street clutter.

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[5] Source: **Connected Nations 2022** (Ofcom, December 2022)

Planners in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have recently seen a surge in planning applications for new or replacement mobile masts to support 5G roll-outs. In the Greater Cambridge area more than half of such applications (submitted between September 2019 and August 2022) have been refused. There is a clear tension between the need to facilitate rapid roll-outs of new technologies, and the need to preserve the character of our streetscapes.

1.19   Current 5G roll-outs are focusing on expanding coverage as widely as possible through the large 'macrocells' served by tall masts or roof-top sites. However, many consider that the full benefits of 5G – in terms of speeds and latency - will only be realised with 'network densification', implementing networks of relatively closely packed 'small cells'. These small cells will typically be located closer to ground level, and may be positioned on street furniture such as street lights and CCTV columns. For future roll-outs of small cells, there is a particular issue in Cambridgeshire in that the street lights are managed under a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract; this currently restricts the County Council's ability to offer these assets for other purposes such as hosting mobile infrastructure.

Policy Summary

1.20   To facilitate the continuous improvement of mobile infrastructure across the Combined Authority we will continue to:

- Identify areas of inadequate mobile coverage/capacity;
- Facilitate mobile infrastructure delivery;
- Enable the use of council assets for hosting mobile infrastructure;
- Explore with operators and with Government the options for minimising adverse impacts of mobile infrastructure on our streetscapes; and
- Support the deployment of innovative mobile technologies and use cases.

Policy X.2.1 Identify areas of inadequate mobile coverage/capacity

1.21   While the Shared Rural Network initiative should fill remaining gaps in <u>outdoor</u> coverage of 4G, there are likely to remain pockets where it is not possible to obtain an <u>indoor</u> signal – particularly in South and East Cambridgeshire[6]. Furthermore, given the rapid growth in mobile data usage, capacity issues can cause connectivity problems in areas of particularly high demand density at certain times of day. Drive-testing commissioned by the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme has previously helped to identify such capacity issues – for example at Cambridge Station. The Combined Authority will continue to work with stakeholders to identify areas (including transport corridors) where poor coverage or capacity adversely affects businesses, communities, or travellers, and to liaise with operators to find solutions.

Policy X.2.2 Facilitate mobile infrastructure delivery

1.22   Working with operators and councils, the Combined Authority will continue to support work facilitating mobile infrastructure delivery, through:

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[6] As at September 2022, the proportion of premises able to obtain an indoor signal from all four operators was 92% in Cambridge, 90% in Peterborough, 71% in Huntingdonshire, 69% in Fenland, 65% in East Cambridgeshire, and 56% in South Cambridgeshire. Source: **Connected Nations 2022** (Ofcom, December 2022)

- Working with UK5G, Mobile UK and other bodies, continuing to make reliable expert information (from the UK Health Security Agency) readily available to residents and elected Members regarding concerns about health risks associated with 5G;
- Continued collaboration with and learning from other leading areas, such as the West Midlands Combined Authority's WM5G unit, to explore barriers to mobile connectivity in greater depth and to trial and test solutions;
- Specialist telecommunications planning resource to support deployment of both 4G and 5G; and
- Helping operators to find alternative solutions in cases where planning applications are refused (or are likely to be refused).

Policy X.2.3 Enable the use of council assets for hosting mobile infrastructure

1.23   By offering mobile operators the use of council-owned assets such as building roof-tops and street furniture we can both facilitate more rapid roll-outs of new mobile technology and minimise the adverse visual and street clutter impacts of new infrastructure. The Combined Authority will continue to support work to:

- Ensure that future management arrangements for street lights allow flexibility for these assets to be used for hosting mobile infrastructure;
- Work with the DCMS Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) pilots and learn lessons from these as to how best to make council-owned assets available for use by the mobile industry;
- Identify council-owned assets, qualify them for appropriateness for hosting mobile infrastructure, and maintain a well-structured database of these assets; and
- Develop the commercial model for offering the use of council-owned assets by mobile network operators at predictable and fair prices and terms.

Policy X.2.4 Explore with operators and with Government the options for minimising adverse impacts of mobile infrastructure on our streetscapes

1.24   We have recently seen a surge in demand for new masts in support of 5G roll-outs, and the implementation of small cells in the future could further increase the need for mobile infrastructure on our streets. We will seek to minimise the adverse impacts of mobile infrastructure on our streetscapes by supporting work to:

- Explore potential neutral host models through which multiple operators share infrastructure provided by a third party in certain areas;
- Encourage the use of Centralised Radio Access Network (C-RAN) architectures[7];
- Develop standards with Government for multi-use 'Smart Poles' which can host a range of functions including street lighting, electric vehicle charging, environmental sensors, small cells and WiFi as well as micro energy generation; and
- Continue to collaborate, learn and share good practice with other UK historic cities in minimising the visual impacts of new mobile infrastructure.

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[7] C-RAN is concept whereby the data processing 'baseband unit' (BBU) functionality for a mobile base station is moved some distance, e.g. kilometres, away from the mast and its 'remote radio head' (RRH) and antennas. The BBU functionality is held in a central location and is connected to several masts by optical fibre 'fronthaul'. This gives cost savings through pooling BBU resources, provides greater flexibility in efficiently managing resources across multiple masts, simplifies intercell coordination, reduces the street clutter associated with base stations, and reduces the power required at cell sites.

Policy X.2.5 Support early deployments of innovative mobile technologies and use cases

1.25   The Combined Authority will support work to:

- Submit funding bids with operators and industry for trialling innovative mobile technologies such as small cells; and
- Encourage the development of private 5G networks, including those using 'network slices' of public networks[8], working with businesses and campuses.

Policy theme X.3: Smart infrastructure

Overview

1.26   Advanced data techniques, sensor technology and digital connectivity are creating opportunities to enable the sustainable growth of local economies, create better places and to help address challenges such as moving towards net zero, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the reduction in transport congestion and air pollution.

1.27   Examples of smart 'Internet of Things' (IoT) applications include: monitoring local air quality through a network of pollution sensors; monitoring movement (vehicle, cycling and pedestrian) conditions through sensors and cameras; monitoring flood risk levels through water level sensors; providing travellers with improved real-time public transport information through street signage and mobile apps; helping drivers to find available parking spaces efficiently through smart parking applications; identifying, monitoring and prioritising road potholes through the use of image recognition technology attached to bin lorries; and the use of image recognition and Artificial Intelligence technology to optimise traffic flow through road junctions and to prioritise sustainable travel modes.

1.28   Various types of connectivity are used to support such technologies. While fibre may be required in some cases, for example where real-time video information needs to be transferred, many types of sensors generate relatively small amounts of data and have only modest requirements for bandwidth and latency. For the latter, wireless-based low power wide area networks (LPWANs) can be a cost-effective solution – with wide coverage areas, and low power consumptions that allow batteries for remote sensors to last for ten years or more before being changed. Leading types of LPWAN include LoRa which uses unlicensed radio spectrum, and the technologies based on mobile network operators' licensed spectrum: NB-IoT and LTE-M. Each type of LPWAN technology has its own pros and cons.

1.29   While sensors and connectivity can provide data, this only creates value when it is effectively *shared* with the people and organisations to which it is relevant. Where such information is intended for end users such as travellers, it is vital for it to be up-to-date, reliable and very easily accessible.

Policy Summary

1.30   To improve the exploitation of smart technologies across the Combined Authority we will continue work to:

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[8] 'Network slicing' will become available as mobile network operators implement 5G standards in their core networks, enabling end-to-end '5G standalone' functionality. This allows multiple virtualised logical networks to be supported on the same physical network infrastructure. Each network slice is an end-to-end network tailored to meet the specific requirements for a particular application (e.g. for bandwidth, latency and service level guarantees).

- Support the roll-out of LPWAN infrastructure for IoT applications;
- Facilitate the sharing of data from IoT applications;
- Support trials and pilots of promising new smart technologies; and
- Support the implementation of proven smart technologies at scale, to improve the sustainability of the transport system.

Policy X.3.1 Support the roll-out of LPWAN infrastructure for IoT applications

1.31   LoRa networks using unlicensed spectrum have already been deployed in Cambridge, Ely, South Cambridgeshire and St Neots. LPWAN services are also available from mobile network operators, using their licensed spectrum, such as NB-IoT (Vodafone) and LTE-M (O2). The Combined Authority will support work with district councils to extend the coverage of the LoRa network, and will support the market in the roll out of LPWAN technologies.

Policy X.3.2 Facilitate the sharing of data from IoT applications

1.32   With councils and the Greater Cambridge Partnership we will support the development of a data hub which allows effective sharing of IoT data between public sector organisations and with businesses and communities.

Policy X.3.3 Support trials and pilots of promising new smart technologies

1.33   The Combined Authority will support work with councils, utilities, Highways England, businesses and educational institutions to obtain funding for and implement trials and pilots of promising smart technologies, including applications using the LoRa network, and applications for improving the sustainability of the transport system.

Policy X.3.4 Support the implementation of proven smart technologies at scale, to improve the sustainability of the transport system

1.34   Following trials and pilots we will work with partners to ensure that proven smart technologies are implemented at a scale that makes a material impact, in particular on the sustainability of the transport system. The initial focus will be on working with the Greater Cambridge Partnership to deliver its Smart Workstream, but the Combined Authority will support smart implementations throughout Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Policy theme X.4: Digital exploitation, access and inclusion

Overview

1.35   ONS reports[9] that the proportion of UK households with internet access had reached 96% by early 2020, and the proportion of adults who had used the internet in the previous three months was 95%. With Covid-19 lockdowns prompting a surge in demand for laptop and tablet computers and much greater use of online video calls for keeping in touch with friends and family, it is likely that the levels of household internet penetration will have improved further over the last couple of years – an assumption supported by Ofcom data[10] which shows that the total number of fixed broadband lines in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough increased by about 23,000 (8%) between 2019 and 2022.

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[9] Source: **Internet Access Households and Individuals** (ONS, August 2020)

[10] Source: **Connected Nations 2019** and **Connected Nations 2022** (Ofcom, December 2019 and December 2022)

1.36   However, digital exclusion is still a real issue for a variety of reasons, and the pandemic brought this into sharp focus. For example, many schoolchildren in low-income households found it difficult to access online education during lockdowns – whether through a lack of appropriate devices, through a lack of appropriate workspace in the home, through a reluctance to use up mobile data (where the household only had mobile connectivity), through a lack of fixed or mobile connectivity at home, or through parents lacking the confidence or skills to help their children access online resources.

1.37   There are challenges around social housing. Historically, levels of internet access for social housing residents have been below average, largely due to lower household incomes. Furthermore, operators can face difficulties in reaching agreement with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) for the physical installations required for gigabit-capable broadband services, leaving residents with a limited choice of broadband options. Issues include: wayleaves and access; complex ownership models; and the capacity of housing associations to engage in the technical and legal steps required. Telecommunications providers can also find it difficult to find an appropriate point of contact within RSLs, and Government-funded connectivity vouchers are oriented towards owner occupiers rather than tenants.

1.38   In health and social care, digital technology is becoming ever more important in reducing the stresses on the system. Telecare is helping to keep people living independently in their own homes for longer, and telehealth applications are increasingly used to help monitor and manage chronic conditions in an ageing population. There is a potential issue over the next few years as BT and Virgin Media are looking to migrate their voice services off the traditional Public Switched Telephone Network onto their digital platforms by December 2025 ('PSTN switch-off'). This brings a risk of service disruption and/or confusion or worry for some telecare users, as older types of equipment may need to be unplugged from the landline and reconnected via an adapter into a router. There are also some concerns over continuity of telecare and voice services in the event of a power cut (not an issue with traditional landlines as they are fed with remote power from the exchange).

1.39   To generate positive economic impacts from the availability of improved broadband and mobile infrastructure, it will be key for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough businesses to take up and effectively *exploit* applications enabled by this improved connectivity. This can be a struggle for SMEs, which sometimes lack the resources or expertise necessary to optimise their use of digital technology - for example, in setting up appropriate equipment for the hybrid meetings[11] that have become more common over the last couple of years.

Policy Summary

1.40   To help reduce digital exclusion and improve the exploitation of digital technology for socio-economic benefit the Combined Authority will support activity to:

- Raise awareness of digital inclusion opportunities;
- Extend the availability of public access WiFi;
- Work with stakeholders to improve digital connectivity in social housing;

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[11] That is, meetings with some in-person attendees and some remote attendees. Making such meetings work effectively can be much more challenging than it is for meetings which are all-in-person or all-remote. The success or otherwise of hybrid meetings may have a material effect on the extent to which businesses continue to support remote working.

- Work with partners to minimise disruption associated with PSTN switch-off, and the proposed withdrawal of 3G mobile services; and
- Support SMEs' exploitation of digital technology.

Policy X.4.1 Raise awareness of digital inclusion opportunities

1.41   A variety of initiatives already exist to promote digital inclusion, such as the work of Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership, Cambridge Online, Good Things Foundation, and industry-led initiatives such as the cheaper 'social tariffs' offered by broadband providers to households in receipt of certain benefits. The Combined Authority will continue to support work with councils and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that people are signposted to relevant digital inclusion activities as appropriate.

Policy X.4.2 Extend the availability of public access WiFi

1.42   Free-to-use public WiFi can play an important role in helping to ensure that as many people as possible have access to digital connectivity, as well as supporting struggling high streets as part of the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Working with councils we will support work to:

- Investigate opportunities and funding to further expand the CambWifi services into more locations across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough;
- Consolidate existing public access Wifi services by broadcasting CambWifi in as many locations as possible;
- Publicise logon information and the locations where CambWifi is available to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from the service; and
- Monitor the usage of CambWifi, and ensure that the service continues to provide a high quality service as user volumes and data traffic increase.

Policy X.4.3 Work with stakeholders to improve digital connectivity in social housing

1.43   Some local councils which operate their own housing stock have been able to address this issue for their properties. For example, Cambridge City Council has recently devised and implemented a standard 'bulk' wayleaves scheme for their properties, which has resulted in a marked increase in access to full-fibre provision for tenants. However, only a small proportion of social housing across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is overseen directly by local councils and therefore a wider approach is needed to resolve the current issues. The Combined Authority will continue to support work with RSLs to explore the issues that affect digital connectivity for social housing, and to develop approaches to resolve these issues.

Policy X.4.4 Work with partners to minimise disruption associated with PSTN switch-off, and the proposed withdrawal of 3G mobile services which is expected to have a disproportionate impact on the more vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the area

1.44   The Combined Authority will support work with councils, service providers and other stakeholders across the public, private and community sectors to:

- Ensure there is widespread awareness of the plans for the PSTN switch-off and 3G service withdrawal and an understanding of the impact for existing usage.
- Ensure that users particularly affected by PSTN switch-off (e.g. those with devices such as telecare equipment or intruder alarms plugged into landlines) are provided with timely information on how to maintain their services; and

- Ensure that council-provided Lifeline services continue to work reliably for all users after PSTN switch-off, and that users are appropriately supported in making any changes necessary to their equipment's connectivity.

Policy X.4.5 Support SMEs' exploitation of digital technology

1.45   Recognising that successful implementation by businesses of digital technology has substantial impacts on productivity and on sustainability (including reducing the need to travel), the Combined Authority will work with partners to secure funding for programmes supporting digital exploitation by SMEs – building on the success of programmes such as the EPSRC-funded Digital Manufacturing on a Shoestring programme, and the ERDF-funded Digital Technology Grants.

Control Information

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V1.0 Draft for internal review	19 September 2022
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