



Birmingham's **Digital Districts** Programme

Digital Birmingham is leading on the City's aims to establish a series of digital districts in partnership with industry to create a future proof digital infrastructure that captures the ambitions of a world class city.

The aim of the Digital Districts programme is to transform a section of the city into one of the most dynamic and innovative regions in the world in a bid to establish vibrant and flexible business and residential communities. The first of these digital districts will be in the Digbeth, Eastside and Jewellery Quarter areas of the city transforming them into a high-quality environment for working, living and learning. The areas will be supported by an exceptionally high-speed network – one that will include the all-important 'final mile' connection to the home or business.

It is designed as a testbed to encourage the uptake of ultrafast broadband with potentially unlimited speeds within a small geographic area but it is a model that can be applied to many other regions. The District will act as a catalyst in encouraging growth in specific business sectors, including the creative industries, which rely on high bandwidth to compete globally and ensure they can meet all their existing and future information and service needs.

Why is **ultrafast broadband** connectivity so important?

Digital industries are growing rapidly and are of high value, as well as having a major productivity benefit on other sectors. Therefore Birmingham and the wider Midlands need to be positioned appropriately; growing the digital sectors is a regional priority. Recent studies show that international businesses consider the quality of available telecommunications to be one of the top four criteria when determining where to locate or relocate. So high-speed broadband is vital if Birmingham is to attract the hi-tech companies that are going to thrive in the next decade. 55% of the country's GVA (Gross Value Added - the contribution to the economy of each individual producer, industry or sector) comes from technology-intensive sectors, and over the next five to seven years these sectors could create a further £35 billion to GVA.

Modern cities live or die by the way they connect, with their people, with other cities and with the rest of the world, and by their ability to exchange information and data as swiftly as possible. The development of next generation broadband infrastructure is a strategic priority for The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, which views it as an opportunity to enhance its productivity and international competitiveness. The availability of ultrafast broadband will enable Birmingham businesses to unleash their potential by developing a new generation of exciting and innovative services, products and applications, created right here in Birmingham but marketed across the world.

Digital **Digbeth**

Digbeth, with its thriving creative and media sector (currently the creatives make up 10% of the city's total number of firms), offers the perfect testbed for the city council and businesses to work together to create a blueprint for future districts across the city. The video games producers, TV companies, designers and web developers that already cluster around Fazeley Studios and the Custard Factory, are an example of the industries that will drive the development of high speed networks.

Digital **Eastside**

Eastside, a 420-acre swathe of the city centre and one of Europe's largest urban regeneration projects, is ultimately expected to create 12,000 new jobs. It is home to the new Digital Media & Performing Arts, Birmingham Ormiston Academy; the Birmingham Science Park, Aston, designated the first Science Park without walls and will be the proposed future location for the High Speed 2 railway.

The Digital **Jewellery Quarter**

This unique area dates back over 250 years and is a proposed World Heritage Site. It is still home to over 400 jewellery businesses, which still produce an estimated 40% of all UK jewellery. However, changing times and new technologies have seen a wealth of new designers and industries locating in the area, all with a demand for high speed digital connectivity.

Opportunities of **ultrafast connections**

- Businesses will be able to collaborate in real time and share for instance complex 3D engineering and construction designs with faster file transfers and download speeds.
- With ultrafast speeds will come a host of new online applications and services such as cloud computing that will enable businesses to access new markets and opportunities and in turn achieve greater economic success.
- Advanced videoconferencing will enhance how businesses communicate and enable them to do more business collaboratively on a global scale.
- IP based services such as Internet protocol TV and telepresence will open up new horizons to enable independent living through assistive technologies and facilitate shared remote care by hospital and care agency teams.
- Remote learning and home working will be greatly enhanced by being able to study and access online materials with ease and in real time.
- Homes can upload and download HD films in seconds and use a rich variety of gaming and interactive applications simultaneously.

The **catalyst** for innovation

The identified digital district is just the beginning. The idea is to extend this capability to the whole city; the existing concentration of digital businesses, particularly in Digbeth makes it the ideal starting point. A new form of partnership is needed to 'tip the balance' and give the region - already developing as a creative and technology-intensive 'village' - the impetus to become a real powerhouse for economic development, wealth creation and new jobs.