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**Dorset’s £4.3 million to boost rural mobile connectivity**

A bid led by Dorset Council has been awarded £4.335m to help understand how rural communities could benefit from next generation mobile connectivity.

A consortium of council, local, national and international partners plans to show that mobile infrastructure can be delivered cost effectively and sensitively to benefit rural businesses and communities.

The Dorset project is one of seven across the UK to be funded by the Government’s Rural Connected Communities competition over the next two years.

The total cost of the 5G RuralDorset initiative is £6.675m with the council contributing £150,000. The rest will come from industry and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Four trials in the county will look at innovative public, social and business uses of improved mobile coverage. They will test whether this connectivity can be delivered cheaper and quicker using existing masts, buildings and fibre wherever possible to minimise visual and other impacts on communities.

**Agri-tech** - new wireless technology on existing masts and fibre owned and operated by internet service provider Wessex Internet to allow innovative agricultural uses. These may include ‘smart’ farm controls, crop and livestock monitoring and using drones to spray more precisely and minimise chemical run-off into local water courses.

**Lulworth Estate** - new mobile services to unlock social and commercial benefits. These will include Vodafone bringing enhanced mobile phone coverage to the area for locals and the 1 million visitors who visit each year. Additional possible uses from tourism and education to healthcare will be considered.

**Connected coast** – improved safety along a section of the coast by upgrading access to digital communications for first responders and supporting organisations.

**5G Innovation hub** - at [Dorset Innovation Park](https://www.dorsetlep.co.uk/dorset-innovation-park), Winfrith. This Local Enterprise Zone and advanced-engineering centre already supports large and small companies that develop innovative connected products and services. New connectivity will support businesses operating in the county and across the supply chain to test and develop products in a collaborative and secure way.

**Deputy Leader of Dorset Council Peter Wharf said:**

“We are delighted to receive this funding. Improved connectivity is critical to our smart rural place aspirations and making Dorset a great place to live, work and visit.

“Introduced sensitively in our world-famous UNESCO-recognised coastline and the wider environment, 5G can help keep vulnerable people safe and well, deliver economic growth, and provide enhanced educational and social opportunities.

“This exciting project won’t banish all the county’s mobile phone not-spots but is an opportunity for Dorset to become a leader in Europe in understanding how next generation connectivity can positively transform the lives and economies of rural communities. We look forward to sharing our learning experiences with other parts of the UK.”

Unlike 3G and 4G, the term 5G doesn’t refer to a single thing but to an ecosystem of technologies - wireless communications, hardware and software - that together offer high quality network services.

Government is funding trials to see if the next generation of mobile services can be rolled out differently to help solve rural challenges. 5G builds on previous generations of wireless connectivity, so trial areas will also get 4G coverage.

The project will start in March 2020 and is due to be completed by end of March 2022. A list of frequently asked questions can be found [here](https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/digital-first/2020/02/20/5g-ruraldorset-frequently-asked-questions/).

The 5G RuralDorset consortium includes Dorset Council, Vodafone, Wessex Internet, Excelerate Technology Ltd, Bournemouth University, Kimcell, Hugslock, Telint, Neutral Networks, University of Strathclyde, New Generation Internet Services and Satellite Applications Catapult.

More detailed plans for the trial sites are now being developed and there will be opportunities for people to find out more about the specific plans, ask questions and give their views.

To stay up to date on the 5G RuralDorset project [follow @digitaldorset on Twitter](https://twitter.com/digitaldorset?lang=en-gb), [subscribe to the Digital Dorset e-newsletter](https://dorsetcouncil.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=c39535cf4f9d1ca66af8d2b44&id=bc36c80975) or [read the Digital Dorset blog.](https://news.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/digital-first/)

**Notes to editors:**

The Government’s Rural Connected Communities competition will trial innovative use cases and technical solutions to build the business case for investment in rural connectivity and explore the capabilities of 5G to benefit rural communities. It will also help demonstrate demand from a variety of economic sectors and rural communities for 5G technologies.

Projects are expected to show a combination of societal and economic benefits that will together create a stronger case for investing in the deployment of 5G infrastructure for rural areas.

The 5G RuralDorset consortium has supporting partners including the RNLI, Maritime & Coastguard Agency and Microsoft.