



# South-West Future Flight Innovation Zone Drone Ecosystem Engagement Workshop

*Shaping the Future of Drones & Advanced Air Mobility in the  
South-West*

iAero, Yeovil

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2026

# Agenda



1. Welcome – Corinne Matthews, Somerset Council
2. South West Future Flight Innovation Zone – Corinne Matthews, Somerset Council
3. South West Future Flight Innovation Zone Drone-related projects and investment – Andrew Chadwick, Ventura System Solutions
4. Drones Special Interest Group Concept Discussion – Andrew Chadwick
  - Customer and industry needs
  - Membership
  - Regional coverage and scope
  - Activities
  - Operating models
  - Facilities and infrastructure requirements
  - Future aviation and drone skills needs

# Agenda



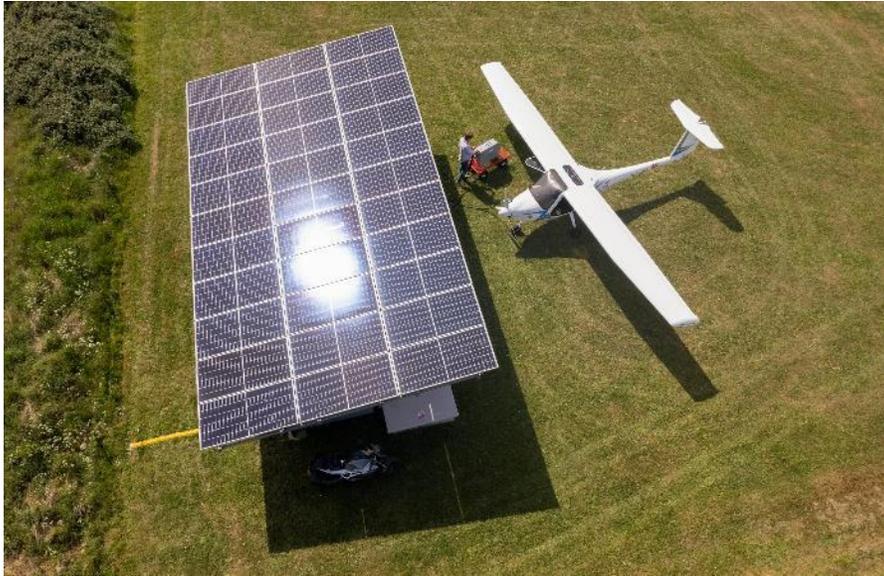
5. Next steps – Andrew Chadwick, Claire Gibson, Corinne Matthews
6. Company showcase / Information pitches
7. Lunch and networking

# SW Future Flight Innovation Zone (SW FFIZ)



**Somerset**  
Council

# The Catalyst for Change



# Future Flight Innovation Zone

## Leveraging Assets

- Airports
- Airfields
- MRO
- iAero
- Academic excellence
- Manufacturing capability
- Skills for the future providers
- Links with collaborative Organisations - Leonardo, Met Office, et al
- Local Authorities



# Future Flight Innovation Zone - Capabilities

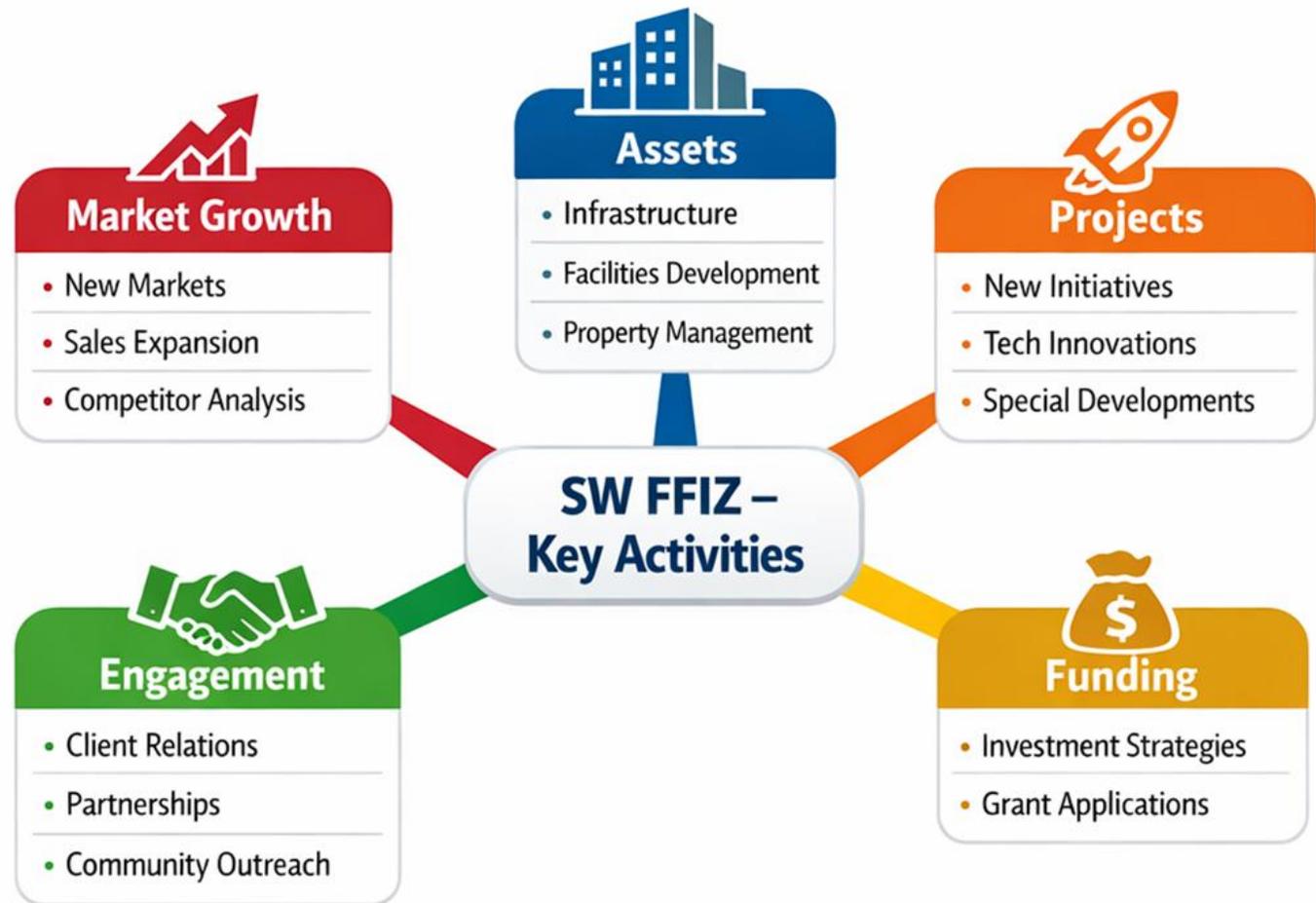
Our emerging test hub will be a 'living lab demonstrator'.

- A test location for sustainable aviation including hybrid, electric and hydrogen flight
- A test location for integrated airspace
- A location for developing skills and training engineers on future flight technologies
- A regulatory testing ground to help aircraft developers certify their systems
- Innovation and sustainability providing increased opportunities for collaboration between universities, engineering design hubs, MRO, airports and energy
- Development and proving of ground infrastructure that is critical to enabling the future of flight
- Demonstration of air and ground integration
- Facilitating options for later commercialisation, manufacturing and upscaling



Centre for Future Clean Mobility

# SW Future Flight Innovation Zone - Activity



# SW Future Flight Innovation Zone - Activity

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Growing the market
• FAB 1 – Asset Management
• IPEC Innovative Procurement
• Project Aura – Agri Tech (drones & Space)
• Environmental monitoring market engagement

Assets
• iAero
• Volant BVLOS System
• Somerset Council Officer Support
• Exeter Airport
• Sustainable Aviation Board Stakeholders



Future proofing
• FAB 2 – FFIZ 2.0, future skills
• Drone skills bootcamp
• Call-off CAA support
• Engaging with Local Authority leaders

Projects – externally funded
• RESCUE
• Future Air South West (FASW)
• University of Birmingham – Community Engagement

# Project RESCUE

## Delivering a Somerset-based environmental monitoring and resilience service using drones



Somerset Council, Limosaero Limited, Land & Minerals Consulting Limited

### Summary

- **Emergency Response:** Assess and design drone-based solutions, including operational concepts, for data collection, rescue support, and monitoring during environmental emergencies in Somerset.
- **Collaboration & Data Sharing:** Develop frameworks for multi-agency data sharing and explore service provision models to ensure effective use of drone intelligence.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Identify regional growth potential from adopting drone technologies and supporting services.

### Potential Benefits

- The UK Government estimated that flooding in 2015/16 cost the economy £1.6 billion.
- Drones and related technologies enhance flood response by enabling faster coordination, early breach detection, mapping flood extents, and minimising disruption - significantly reducing the cost of flood response and environmental resilience, and potentially saving lives
- RESCUE offers a scalable proof of concept with applications beyond weather response, including coastal monitoring, land management, and biodiversity surveying.



### Exploitation

- **RESCUE Project** – Trials drone solutions for environmental emergencies, scalable across the UK.
- **Connected Ecosystem** – Unites authorities, academia, industry, and facilities for innovation access
- **South West Future Flight Innovation Zone** - enables testing, certification, and commercialisation of new aviation technologies.
- **Regional Growth** – Drives business creation and skilled jobs in Somerset and the South West.

### Contact Details

- [corinne.matthews@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:corinne.matthews@somerset.gov.uk)

# Drones Special Interest Group Concept Discussion

- The SW FFIZ has a unique offering, based on an economic, market growth, and jobs agenda.
- Drones, AAM, and emerging aviation technologies are a technical enabler for this, and work so far has focussed on developing the foundations.
- This includes the projects mentioned plus a series of Drones workshops, engagement across the sector, with Government, exhibition attendance, and conference speaking.
- All by one person!
- As the footprint of FFIZ grows, is there a need now for a dedicated Special Interest Group, delivered by a “coalition of the willing” - sector stakeholders across the SW - to grow the adoption of drones, driving end user adoption, and thereby growing the market?
- By creating a pull from users (with some push from operators) will a thriving drone ecosystem be enabled?

# What does this look like?



Customer and industry needs



Membership



Regional coverage and scope



Activities



Operating models



Facilities and infrastructure requirements



Future aviation and drone skills needs

# Customer and industry needs

No change?

Drones and  
AAM focus?

Networking?

Market  
insights?

Business  
advice?

Sector  
engagement?

Understanding  
of drones?

Supply chain  
development?

Collaboration  
spaces?

Regulatory  
guidance?

Business  
Introductions?

Funding?

Training?

# Membership



Open to all?

SMEs?

Large  
companies?

Individuals?

Schools,  
colleges?

Local  
Authorities?

Industry  
Groups?

Operators?

Users?

Customers?

Manufacturers?

Other sectors,  
e.g. maritime?

# Regional coverage and scope

Somerset only?

South West –  
Somerset, Devon,  
Cornwall?

Wider South West  
– Wiltshire, North  
Somerset,  
Bristol?

Civil  
applications?

Defence?

Both?

# Activities



South West focus only?

Networking only?

Development of a market-facing drone ecosystem?

Project / Opportunity collaboration?

Lobbying – regulator(s), Government, etc.?

Seek funding / Business Development?

Workshops – sector briefings, company introductions?

Showcasing?

Demonstrations?

Sector briefings & Introductions?

Events?

Education? Training?

# Operating models

Open to all?

Membership only model?

Paid membership?

Free to join, but paid for events, workshops, etc.?

Funding from commercial activities?

Alignment with other Drone industry organisations?

Local Authority owned and funded?

External company-owned, funded, and managed?

# Facilities and infrastructure requirements

SORA approved  
airfield?

T&E facilities?

UTM? ATM?

Dedicated  
airspace?

Physical site –  
hangar, support  
services, etc.?

“Real life”  
test/demo sites?

Small test sites?

Offices?  
Workshops?

Access to college  
facilities? E.g.  
Yeovil College H2  
Hub?

Met services?

Simulations?  
Digital Twins?

Test  
drones/aircraft?

# Future aviation and drone skills needs

Drone  
bootcamps?

Sector-  
specific  
bootcamps?

Flying?

Data capture,  
analysis,  
management?

New fuels?

Flight  
management  
systems?

Software  
development,  
AI?

Autonomy?

New  
materials,  
composites?

Air Traffic  
Management?

# Next steps

Responses collated

Report produced for Somerset Council

Recommendations for next steps

Inform SW FFIZ future strategy

Feedback to you in Spring



Thank you

# Company showcases / Information pitches

- Austin Chick - iAero / Leonardo
- Richard Beedel – Tech SW
- Meteomatics
- The Black Arrows
- University of Bristol
- Survey Solutions
- Drone Major Limited
- Ridge and Partners
- Aston University
- VIZGARD
- KOREC Group
- SkyBound
- Inview Assets
- Vantage
- SLiNK TECH