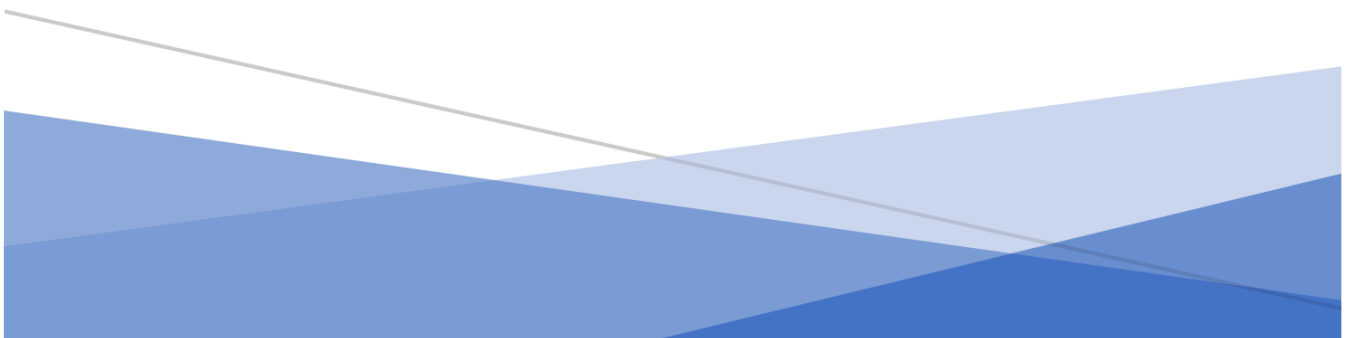


Dronetech Digital Asset Management

Summary Report on 3 SWFFIZ Pilots undertaken Spring 2026



Executive Summary

The Pilots

The Dronetech Digital Asset Management Pilots explored the benefits that can be achieved by using drones linked to sophisticated software data analytics. The Pilots demonstrated how these applications can create powerful 3D interactive models of property assets that can highlight defects and heat loss anomalies so that public sector organisations can secure significant reductions in financial costs, carbon and risk.

Three Pilots were undertaken in Plymouth and Taunton involving social housing estates managed by housing associations (LiveWest and Clarion) and in Taunton a museum, headquarters building and leisure centre owned and managed by Somerset Council. These buildings were selected as being indicative of the types of buildings contained within the Council's property portfolio ranging from historic, aged HQ type buildings (1930s – 1970's) and atypical leisure centre type properties. Three experienced dronetech companies were selected via a procurement exercise to undertake the work, with EiBC providing project management and business evaluation support. The Pilots are one of a number of programmes being pursued for the South West Future Flight Innovation Zone (SWFFIZ), led by Somerset Council.¹

Context

Somerset Council has a diverse range of over 1,200 property assets supported by a small property team. The Council has challenges in managing its assets due to financial and staffing capacity pressures and are mostly heavily reliant on a reactive rather than planned maintenance approach. Due to Unitisation of 5 councils into one many property data sources are fragmented, leading to out of date stock condition reports. The combination of these factors inevitably carry more cost, potential inefficiencies and risk. The two social housing providers in the Pilot are the largest in the South West² and the UK. They are also being challenged by demanding regulatory pressures to keep their assets to at least a 'decent homes standard', rising customer expectations and requirements to achieve demanding net zero and energy efficiency targets³.

Benefits

Cheaper, Quicker with and Higher Quality Data Collection: The results of the Pilots show that dronetech methods are cheaper and faster (**by at least 10x**).⁴ They also provide **higher quality digitally based data** on the physical and thermal conditions of properties, this enabling organisations to easily share and integrate 3D interactive models and to see RAG dashboards that help decision makers easily see defects and thermal anomalies on-line.

Analysis and decision making can therefore be made quicker. Using dronetech also avoids most surveys to be undertaken at heights and is therefore **lower risk**. Often it also avoids the **high costs of scaffolding** and the **impacts** this has on **users and customers**.

Securing the Large Scale Benefits of Planned Preventative Maintenance: Crucially, one of the longer-term benefits associated with the digitally based dronetech approach is to better enable managers to **avoid** problems such as blocked gutters, cracked roof tiles, dampness, leaks and other expensive property damage before it occurs. **Defects can also be pinpointed**

¹ The SWFFIZ is led by Corinne Matthews, Aerospace, Energy and Economic Development.

² Clarion 125,000 homes and LiveWest 40,700 homes (Note LiveWest has recently merged Bromford Flagship)

³ For example, all housing stock must be EPC band rated C or more by 2030

⁴ All data for all the Pilots was captured in 2 days

whilst highly accurate measurements of, for example doors and windows, allows managers to use AI tools to quickly assess the **cost of upgrades or replacements** – and when work has been carried out easily **check whether contracted work was completed satisfactorily**. This means asset managers can move to a planned preventative maintenance (PPM) approach and radically **reduce emergency repairs** that are **typically 3–5x more expensive than planned work**.

By using dronetech and adopting a proactive approach, buildings and equipment can be maintained regularly before failures occur, with many industry sources suggesting **savings of at least 20%** in addition to **extending the life of assets and reducing capex**. For social housing providers in particular the Pilots also demonstrate how the technology provides a **quick analytical tool to assess the orientation and size of roofs for PV upgrade programmes**.

There is also evidence that **procurement costs** can be cut. Dronetech means accurate/uncontested information on, for example, roof condition and gutter repairs/cleaning, can be shared with tenderers prior to a contract, meaning they do not have to set aside such large contingency sums for uncertainties. A recent University of Exeter procurement for cleaning all gutters on their estate **secured a 5-10% lower prices (in real terms)** than a previous traditional tender.

Implications and Innovation

Our wider UK research and the Pilots demonstrate the scale of opportunity for major cost and carbon reductions as well as the potential for significant returns on investment. Clarion, as early adopters of the approach, already claim that it has saved many millions of pounds for their business that in turn is benefitting their clients. However, whilst the broad strategic benefits are clear, in EiBC's opinion, more work needs to be done to embed this type of work and also better quantify the scale of benefits and return on investment for local authorities and social housing landlords.

The Pilots also underline that the challenge is not about drones per se, but about linking dronetech and digitally based data capture and AI assisted analysis – which in turn enables major reductions in costs, carbon and risk. This requires organisations to change traditional processes and behaviours to be able to secure these outcomes and benefits. The community also has to be engaged and understand the benefits. In EiBC's view this means that a cross-directorate business transformation approach is required and that relying only on property department actions, simply won't work. Teams from strategic asset management, maintenance, development, environment and sustainability, business transformation and digital all need to be involved, as well as finance, risk, HR and employee/tenant liaison. Having a cross-directorate business champion will also be crucial.

Recommendations

EiBC's suggested actions are as follows:

- **Business Transformation Asset Programme at Somerset Council**
Drawing on the outcomes of the Pilot there are a number of excellent reasons why Somerset Council should consider pursuing a business transformation programme around dronetech and asset management⁵ This would require the Council to consider

⁵ An asset management programme might also link with a programme focussed on the environmental and emergency planning and community safety. This is referred to in the Somerset Council/UKRI 'Project Rescue' Report

how best an interdepartmental team can work up a Business Case to specify the particular assets and activities to be included in a programme, the costs, outputs and expected impacts to be achieved and the timelines. We believe there are benefits for a programme to operate over at least a 2-year period (with a Y1 interim review) so that some of the early and longer term benefits can be identified, secured and measured.

- **Joint Local Authorities Asset Management Project**

Following a recent South West local authorities event involving directors of environment, economy, planning and transport ⁶ the headline results of the Pilot were shared. Based on this Somerset Council could explore a possible collaboration with perhaps 2-3 other local authorities in the South West to share more of the detail of the Pilots and also explore joint delivery of dronetech services and a business transformation programme. Such an initiative might attract central government funding, given its significance and impact for all local authorities across the South West and England.

- **Adoption and Scale up for Social Housing**

As committed partners to adopting the approaches highlighted in this Pilot it is clear that both LiveWest and Clarion will continue to work up and scale programmes of work in dronetech and digital asset management.

EiBC believe there is a strong case to better share the lessons being learnt for the social housing sector and also to better quantify the cost and carbon benefits. With higher levels of adoption this will in turn drive the demand for innovative dronetech and asset management services, improved productivity and economic development. This type of work might be supported by government (MHLG/DESNZ or UKRI) and perhaps involve LiveWest and/or Clarion taking a lead role in a further phase of work, including a dronetech procurement framework for social housing and a best practice and dissemination programme. In the South West this could involve for example, LiveWest working with the SW Homes for the South West consortia⁷ - and also inviting Somerset Council's Housing Revenue Account activities to be part of this.

⁶ ADEPT is a membership organisation for directors of environment, economy, planning and transport. A presentation by Corinne Matthews (Somerset Council/SWFFIZ) and Richard Collins (EiBC) to over 20 ADEPT SW members was made in early March 2026

⁷ A group of chief executives from some of the largest housing associations in South West England