CATAPULT
Connected Places

FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme

Application Guidance



Contents

Contents....2

Competition Overview....3

The Freeport & Investment Zone Innovation Network....5

FIZIN....5

The Challenge Statements....8

Context....8

Eligibility Criteria....13

Competition Dates....13

Application Questions....14

How your application is assessed....25

Any Questions?....25

Competition Overview

The FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme invites UK SMEs with innovative solutions to explore real-world operational and place-based challenges identified by Freeports and Investment Zones.

Get Involved

Delivered by Connected Places Catapult, and funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), this programme aims to identify relevant solution providers and connect selected innovators with challenge owners across the Freeport & Investment Zone Innovation Network (FIZIN). It offers an opportunity to explore how existing solutions could meet practical needs and establish connections that may support future collaboration.

Applications will undergo due diligence and assessment by technical and innovation specialists. Shortlisted applicants may be invited to interview, with selected innovators considered for introductions to participating Freeports and Investment Zones where there is a relevant fit.

Summary

This is a discovery and matchmaking programme, not a funded accelerator. No grant or pilot funding is available through the programme, and participation does not guarantee a match, pilot, partnership or commercial agreement. Where there is mutual interest, innovators and challenge owners may explore further conversations, pilots, demonstrators or partnerships.

Applications close at **12 noon on 7th December 2026**, with matchmaking scheduled to begin on **1st March 2027**. Dates remain subject to minor changes. Applicants should review the published challenges, eligibility requirements and assessment criteria before applying.

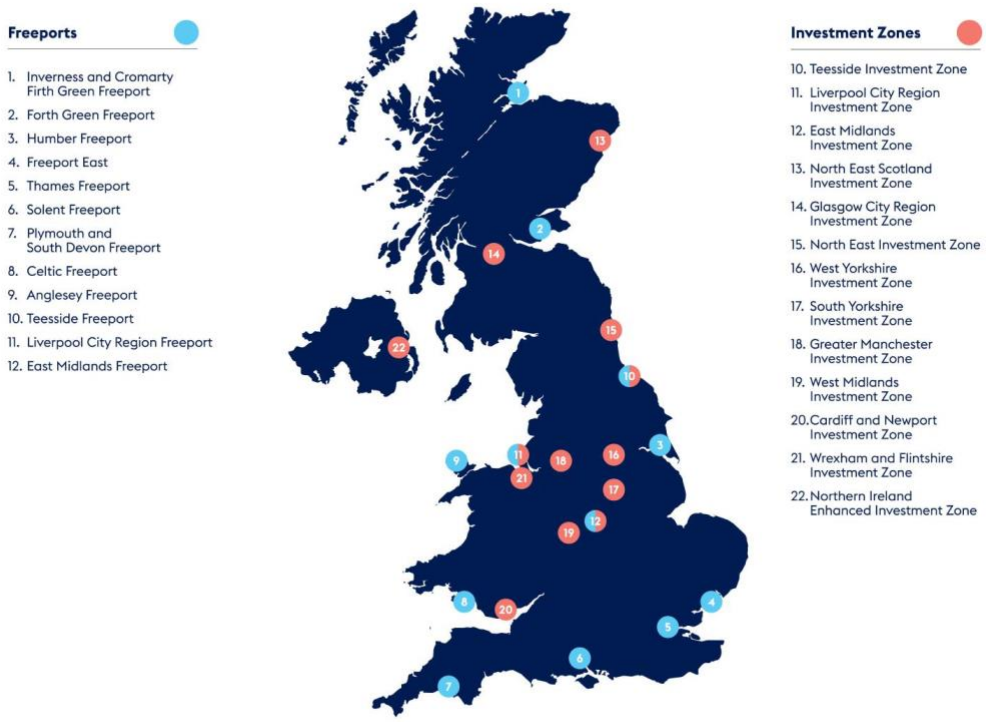
Background



The Freeport & Investment Zone Innovation Network

FIZIN

The Freeport & Investment Zone Innovation Network (FIZIN), delivered by Connected Places Catapult, brings together the UK's 12 Freeports and 13 Investment Zones. Expanded from the Freeport Innovation Network at the request of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), FIZIN supports collaboration across these 25 Industrial Strategy Zones to stimulate innovation, attract investment and drive regional economic growth. The network helps members share learning, avoid duplication and translate strategic ambitions into practical innovation projects.



Building on this network, the FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme connects innovative UK SMEs with operational and place-based challenges identified by participating Freeports and Investment Zones. Delivered by Connected Places Catapult, the programme uses due diligence, technical assessment and matchmaking to identify relevant solutions and facilitate introductions to challenge owners. Shared background themes include innovation adoption, infrastructure delivery, decarbonisation, logistics, construction, productivity and investment attraction; these should not be treated as confirmed open-call challenge areas.

The programme runs from November 2026 to March 2027. It is a discovery and matchmaking programme rather than a funded accelerator: no grant or pilot funding is provided, and participation does not guarantee a match, pilot, partnership or commercial agreement. Where there is a strong fit, introductions may support further exploration of pilots, demonstrators or partnerships.

The Challenges



The Challenge Statements

Context

Freeports and Investment Zones bring together opportunities for industrial development, investment and innovation; however, businesses need access to infrastructure and practical support to turn those opportunities into growth. These challenges draw on needs raised by participating Freeports and Investment Zones, focusing on barriers to developing current sites, reducing carbon emissions and protecting the local environment.

The FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme connects these needs with innovators that can offer new technologies, tools and approaches, including solutions developed in other sectors. Through discovery and matchmaking, it aims to help organisations start meaningful discussions and explore practical solutions. An open call also welcomes transferable ideas addressing needs beyond the named challenges.

Challenge 1: Reliable, affordable and low-carbon power for industrial growth

How can we provide reliable, affordable, lower-carbon electricity for businesses opening or developing industrial facilities in Freeports and Investment Zones where grid connections or available capacity are constrained?

Context: Delays to grid connections and limits on available power can prevent businesses from opening facilities, expanding production or installing new equipment. Ofgem identifies network-build times and blocked connection capacity as barriers to timely connections. Ofgem: Connect update-demand connections reform

Scope of solutions: Innovative power solutions in this area could be practical new approaches to supplying and managing electricity, such as local

generation, storage, demand management and temporary supply arrangements while permanent connections are delivered and maintained. Solutions should address capacity, affordability, carbon impact and power quality, including continuity of supply for sensitive equipment.

Applicants should describe, in broad terms, the types of site requirements their solution could meet. Specific information about individual sites is not available at this stage, so indicative requirements and clearly stated assumptions are sufficient.

Applicants should also explain how the solution works alongside the grid and what technical skills or operational capability users need to adopt it. Innovative power solutions in this area could be practical new approaches to supplying and managing electricity, such as local generation, storage, demand management and temporary supply arrangements while permanent connections are delivered and maintained.

Solutions should address capacity, affordability, carbon impact and power quality, including continuity of supply for sensitive equipment.

Challenge 2: Water access for industrial development

How can innovative solutions improve access to water for industrial development where limited availability is preventing sites from becoming viable or attracting investment?

Context: Industrial sites need a dependable water supply of a suitable quality to open facilities, expand production or introduce new processes. The Environment Agency's National Framework for Water Resources identifies limited availability for new abstraction (taking water from rivers, lakes or underground sources) and explains that supply options differ in accessibility, reliability, cost and water-quality requirements.

Scope of solutions: Physical access to water sources is distinct from treatment requirements. Proposals should explain the specific barrier addressed and any subsequent treatments or regulatory/local permissions needed, rather than assume that changing regulation is the solution. Environment Agency: Water Availability-National Framework for Water Resources 2025.

Challenge 3: Supply chain decarbonisation

How can organisations in Freeport and Investment Zone supply chains measure, reduce, monitor in real-time and predict their carbon emissions in an efficient, affordable way?

Context: Businesses need to understand where emissions arise before they can choose effective ways to reduce them and plan future operations. This challenge seeks accessible tools for organisations located in Freeports and Investment Zones and their supply chains, turning operational and supplier data into practical action rather than reporting alone.

Scope of solutions: Applications could include carbon accounting, ongoing monitoring, real-time insights where data allows, and forecasting the emissions impact of operational changes. The focus is organisations measuring and reducing their own emissions, not new governance or enforcement arrangements. Applicants should explain data requirements, monitoring and prediction reliability, measurable reductions and affordability for users with limited specialist skills.

Challenge 4: Environmental mitigation and green placemaking

How can innovative environmental mitigation approaches protect the surrounding environment and support behaviour change while keeping sites operationally viable?

Context: Developing and operating sites can place pressure on nearby habitats, watercourses, protected species and green spaces. Constructions, vehicle movements, lighting, noise pollution, drainage and day-to-day operation can all create local environmental impacts that need to be understood and managed effectively.

Scope of solutions: The opportunity is to develop practical, innovative approaches that improve monitoring, mitigation and environmental management while keeping sites viable. Solutions should demonstrate how environmental protection and enhancement can be embedded into site operations without duplicating statutory requirements or reducing existing safeguards.

This challenge welcomes practical hardware, software and approaches that protect habitats, monitor local impacts or help site teams change everyday

practices. The focus is local environmental protection and behaviour change; carbon measurement and forecasting belong under the supply chain decarbonisation call.

Open Call

Not every operational challenge faced by Freeports and Investment Zones fits the named challenges above.

This open call welcomes innovative SME ideas addressing a specific need of FIZIN, including skills development and building technical or operational capability in a place. Solutions may come from other sectors and apply across industrial sites, ports, airports, rail and logistics settings; they do not need to serve every transport mode. Ideas at any development stage and technology readiness level (TRL) are welcome, from early concepts to established solutions entering a new market.

Applicants must explain why their idea is relevant or transferable to Freeports and Investment Zones, who would use it, its expected benefits and what adaptation or testing would be needed. Applicants should identify whether the idea put forward is software, hardware, a skills or behaviour-change approach, or a combination.

How to Apply



Eligibility Criteria

To apply for the FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme, you must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a UK-registered small or medium-sized enterprise (SME).
- Have a solution, product, service or technology that addresses one or more of the published challenge statements.
- Be available between the 8th and the 19th of February 2027 for interviews (if successful).
- Be available between the 1st and 19th of March 2027 for matchmaking calls (if successful).

The proposed solution should address a clear need identified within the challenge statement(s).

Please note:

- SMEs may apply to more than one challenge where relevant.
- Submitting an application does not guarantee selection, introduction to a challenge owner, pilot opportunity, partnership or commercial contract.
- Connected Places Catapult reserves the right to verify eligibility and request supporting information during the assessment process.
- If applicable, applicants should be able to demonstrate ownership of, or appropriate rights to use and commercialise, the proposed solution.

Competition Dates

- 16 November 2026 - Application open
- 7 December 2026 at 12noon - Application closed
- 28 January 2027 - Technical assessment completed
- 8 – 19 February 2027 - Interviews start
- Mid-late February 2027 - Successful applicants notified
- 1st March 2027 - Matchmaking begins

Application Questions

Application questions for the FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme. Please use these as a guide before submitting; submit your completed application on the SimplyDo Platform.

1. About your organisation

Trading Address

Provide your trading address if different to your registered address.

Full-Time Employees *

Please enter the number of full-time employees.

Parent Company

Provide the name of your parent company if applicable.

Organisation's activity *

Briefly describe your organisation's core activities and expertise.

Word limit: 200

Organisation logo *

Upload your organisation's logo below, the image will be used for promotional purposes so should be a high enough resolution.

Acceptable file formats: PNG, JPEG, JPG, PDF Size Limit: 10MB.

2. Due Diligence

Do you carry adequate employers' liability insurance? *

Only required if number of employees is greater than 1.

Please note that if this is not carried when required, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Do you carry adequate public liability insurance? *

Please note that if this is not carried, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Is the company subject to a County Court Judgement (CCJ) which has not been settled in full? If yes, provide details. *

Please note that if this is not the case, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Please provide details.

County Court Judgement (CCJ) which has not been settled in full

Only fill this in if you answer "Yes" for "Is the company subject to a County Court Judgement (CCJ) which has not been settled in full? If yes, provide details.".

Is your organisation currently operating in the UK? *

Please note that if this is not the case, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Does your organisation comply with all applicable anti-slavery and human trafficking laws, statutes and regulations from the time in force, including but not limited social, modern slavery act 2015? *

Please note that if you do not comply, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Within the past five years has your organisation or any other person who has powers of representation, decision or control in the company been convicted anywhere in the world of any of the offences within corruption, fraud, bribery, money laundering or participation in a criminal organisation? *

Please note that if this is the case, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Is your organisation currently engaged in any material litigation which could impact on its reputation or trade? *

Please note that if this is the case, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Is your organisation in breach of any obligations relating to the payment of tax or social security contributions? *

Please note that if this is the case, your application will not be progressed.

Options: Yes, No

Is any director of the organisation, or person with significant control a politically exposed person (PEP)? *

Options: Yes, No

3. Your Personal Details

Name *

Job Title *

E-mail address *

LinkedIn Profile

Telephone number *

Main point of contact *

Will you be the main point of contact? If no, provide the details of the main point of contact who we can liaise with throughout the application, assessment, and matchmaking process.

Options: Yes, No

Main point of contact full name *

Only fill this in if you answer "No" for "Main point of contact".

Main point of contact job title *

Only fill this in if you answer "No" for "Main point of contact".

Main point of contact email address *

Only fill this in if you answer "No" for "Main point of contact".

Main point of contact telephone number *

Only fill this in if you answer "No" for "Main point of contact".

4. Innovation

Solution Summary *

Briefly summarise your solution in a maximum of 3 sentences. Explain what it does, who would use it and how it could address a practical need in a Freeport and/or Investment Zone. Use clear, accessible language suitable for an introductory matchmaking conversation.

Word limit: 75

Overall Solution *

Describe how your solution works, what is innovative about it and how it differs from existing approaches. Reference available evidence, test results, case studies, or patent information where relevant; distinguish demonstrated capabilities from assumptions. Explain the infrastructure, data, permissions, integration and technical or operational skills needed to adopt it, and any limitations relevant to your selected challenge. Do not include commercially sensitive information.

Word limit: 300

Challenge Area *

Which challenge does your solution address? For the open call, identify a specific need relevant or transferable to Freeports and/or Investment Zones.

Options: Integrated power solutions, Water access for industrial development, Supply chain decarbonisation, Environmental mitigation and green placemaking, Open call

Open Call Details*

If open call, please provide further details with a high-level challenger descriptor.

Word limit: 20

Challenge Description *

Describe the practical need your solution addresses and how it relates to your selected challenge. Explain its relevance to industrial development, site operations, or the local environment, as appropriate.

Word limit: 300

Sector Application*

If transferring a solution from another sector, explain what adaptation would be needed.

Word limit: 200

Solution Application *

In which settings could your solution be used? Select all that apply. Solutions may come from other sectors and do not need to serve every setting or transport mode.

Options: Industrial or manufacturing sites, Ports or maritime settings, Airports, Rail, Logistics or warehousing, Energy or utility infrastructure, Wider Freeport or Investment Zone businesses and supply chains, Community, Other

Solution Application (Other)

If 'Other' please specify below.

Only fill this in if you select "Other" for "Solution Application".

Solution Theme *

What theme does your solution relate to? Select all fields that apply

Options: Power supply and energy management, Water access and use, Carbon measurement and reduction, Environmental monitoring and habitat protection, Skills and operational capability, Behaviour change, Industrial infrastructure, and site operations, Inclusive innovation, Other

Category of Solution *

Choose the category that best represents your solution.

Options: Software or data tool, Hardware or equipment, Skills or learning approach, Behaviour-change approach, Other

Other Solution Category

If you selected "Other", please specify your solution category in 3 words maximum.

Only fill this in if you answer "Other" for "Category of Solution ".

Current Technology Readiness Level (TRL) *

What is your solution's current Technology Readiness Level (TRL)? Select one level using the explanations below based on what has already been demonstrated rather than planned development. TRL measures technology maturity, from initial scientific principles to proven operational use. Ideas at any development stage are welcome; no minimum TRL is required. If TRL is not applicable to a non-technological solution, select "Not applicable" and explain its maturity in the supporting-evidence question.

Options (select one):

- **TRL 1** - Basic principles observed: the underlying scientific principles have been identified and reported.
- **TRL 2 -** Technology concept formulated: a potential technology and its application have been defined but not yet demonstrated.
- **TRL 3 -** Proof of concept: analysis and initial experiments demonstrate that the key functions or principles could work.
- **TRL 4 -** Validated in a laboratory: the technology's basic functions have been tested and shown to work under controlled laboratory conditions.
- **TRL 5 -** Validated in a relevant environment: the technology has been tested under conditions representative of its intended use.
- **TRL 6 -** Demonstrated in a relevant environment: a technology model or prototype has demonstrated its performance under representative conditions.
- **TRL 7 -** Prototype demonstrated in an operational environment: a prototype has been demonstrated in the actual setting in which it is intended to operate.
- **TRL 8 -** Complete and qualified: the final technology is complete and has met its requirements through testing and demonstration.
- **TRL 9 -** Proven in operational use: the final technology has demonstrated successful performance in actual operational service.
- **Not applicable -** non-technological solution; explain its maturity and supporting evidence below.

TRL Supporting Evidence *

Explain why your solution meets your selected TRL, referring to completed research, testing, demonstrations, or operational use as appropriate. Describe the

conditions in which it has been tested, the results and any remaining limitations. If you selected "Not applicable", describe your solution's maturity and evidence of its effectiveness instead.

Trial *

Have you already trialled your idea in a real-world environment

Options: Yes, No. If yes, please provide further details

Word limit: 200

5. Impact

Sustainability impact categories *

Select up to 3 impact categories that your solution most closely aligns with. Focus on potential benefits for Freeports, Investment Zones, their businesses, or supply chains. We value targeted, evidence-based impact over broad claims built on unrealistic assumptions. Please provide one measurable indicator per impact category chosen.

Options: Carbon reduction; Clean energy and energy efficiency; Sustainable water use; Biodiversity and nature; Pollution and environmental quality; Resource efficiency and circular economy; Climate resilience; Environmental monitoring and data; Skills and behaviour change; Sustainable places; Other

For each 'impact category' you choose you must provide one measurable indicator e.g. carbon reduction: estimated CO2 avoided or reduced per year

Positive Impacts *

Describe the practical benefits your solution could deliver for Freeports, Investment Zones, their businesses, or supply chains if adopted. Focus on the environmental, social, or economic outcomes relevant to your challenge, such as reliable and affordable power, improved water access, emissions reduction, habitat protection, or operational capability. Support claims with available evidence, distinguish measured results from estimates, and explain how benefits could be assessed.

Word limit: 100

Negative Impacts and mitigation *

Identify potential adverse effects or adoption risks associated with using your

solution in the proposed setting, including operational disruption, resource use, emissions, habitat impacts or effects on users and communities where relevant. Explain mitigations, dependencies and any matters requiring further investigation with a challenge owner. State if no material adverse effects have been identified, please explain the basis for that assessment.

Word limit: 100

6. Team and Matchmaking Readiness

Matchmaking Objectives *

What would you like to learn or explore through an introduction to a participating Freeport or Investment Zone? Describe the relevant challenge owner or user your solution could be of interest to or used by.

Word limit: 300

Existing Collaborations

If you already work with partners on this solution, please list the organisations involved, their roles and any dependencies relevant to a discovery conversation or future adoption. Include existing relationships with Freeports or Investment Zones, where relevant. If you have no existing collaborations, state "None".

Word limit: 300

Stakeholders *

Who would use, adopt, or influence adoption of your solution in a Freeport or Investment Zone?

Word limit: 100

Next steps for dissemination and adoption *

If an initial discovery conversation establishes a strong fit, what further steps would be needed before your solution could be adopted? Outline adaptation or testing needs, and possible route to adoption. Any future pilot, demonstrator, partnership, or commercial agreement would fall outside this programme, require separate agreement, and is not guaranteed or funded by the programme.

Word limit: 300

7. Additional Information

Barriers for Applicants

What barriers might your team face in applying, taking part in assessment, or participating in discovery and matchmaking conversations? Describe any accessibility needs or practical adjustments that could help you participate.

Word limit: 200

Future Communications *

Can Connected Places Catapult (CPC) contact you about other innovation programmes and opportunities?

Options: Yes, No

Awareness Source *

How did you hear about the FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme?

Options: Email - Connected Places Catapult, LinkedIn - Direct, LinkedIn - Newsfeed, Newsletter - Connected Places Catapult, Other, Other organisation's Newsletter

Newsletter Name

Please specify the name of the newsletter or network through which you heard about this programme.

Only fill this in if you answer, "Other organisation's Newsletter" for "Awareness Source ".

Do you agree to the terms? *

I submit this application on the understanding that any offer of a place on the FIZIN Innovation Discovery Programme is subject to the supporting Application Guidance and programme eligibility criteria. I certify that the information in this application is true and complete. I understand that false or misleading information may result in the organisation's participation being terminated.

I understand that this is a discovery and matchmaking programme with no grant or pilot funding. Participation does not guarantee a match, pilot, partnership, or commercial agreement. Any subsequent collaboration would be outside this programme and subject to separate agreement between the parties involved.

Please select Yes to confirm that you have reviewed and accept the programme Terms and understand the scope of the programme.

Options: Yes, No

Assessment Criteria



How your application is assessed

Criteria

Applications will first undergo an eligibility and due-diligence check.

Eligible applications will then be assessed against seven weighted criteria:

- Challenge relevance and user need - 25%
- Solution quality, distinctiveness and feasibility - 25%
- Evidence and maturity credibility - 10%
- Potential benefits and measurement - 20%
- Adoption pathways and matchmaking fit - 20%

Scoring

Each criterion will be scored according to the following:

- 0: Not addressed
- 1: Weak
- 2: Partially meets the criterion
- 3: Satisfactory
- 4: Strong
- 5: Excellent

Assessors will look for clear, credible and relevant evidence.

Evidence will be considered proportionately to the maturity and type of solution: there is no minimum Technology Readiness Level, applicants do not need to have completed a real-world trial, and non-technological solutions are eligible.

Applicants should explain assumptions, limitations and areas requiring further investigation rather than overstate certainty.

Any Questions?

Get in touch with the team at innovation_funding@cp.catapult.org.uk.

Get involved

Ready to accelerate innovation in transport, built environment, or public services?

Connect with us:

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Connected Places Catapult is part of the UK's Catapult Network, connecting businesses with the UK's research and academic communities to accelerate innovation.

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