The MK citizen initiative merges urban data analytics with local community action and open innovation approaches.

The Citizen Innovation team is made up of researchers from The Open University, community outreach experts from Community Action: MK (CA:MK) and designers from Graymatter. Together we are developing a new understanding of how to facilitate citizen-led innovations that make local communities more sustainable.

Smart City projects too often focus solely on technological solutions to address urban sustainability issues while ignoring the existing community and grass-roots initiatives. As part of the MK:Smart initiative, we are developing two different approaches, harnessing the collective intelligence of local citizens to co-create a sustainable future for Milton Keynes.

The first approach involves an engagement programme where Community Action: MK’s Community Mobilisers go out into communities to talk to people about their issues, interests and ideas and record impacts of interventions and activities. We then analyse these conversations to generate an understanding of city-wide priorities. We have built on, enhanced, and begun analysing the bank of over 20,000 dialogues collected by CA:MK before and throughout the project.

The second platform is an online ideation platform, Our MK (www.ourmk.org), supporting citizens in playing an active role in urban innovation, from the crowdsourcing of initial ideas through to funding and supporting particular ideas to turn them into a reality on the ground. We have gathered over 100 different ideas from citizens and have already funded more than 10 projects proposed by citizens through this mechanism. You can find out more about these on the Our MK website (www.ourmk.org).

This work demonstrates how digital tools can be harnessed to enable citizens to take the lead and design and run smart city initiatives, with implications for Smart City projects across the UK and internationally.