Annual Review 25/26

October 2026

Space Park Leicester

From Infrastructure to Impact

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Foreword

Will Wells

CEO, SPACE PARK LEICESTER

A decade ago, Space Park Leicester was an ambitious idea. Having been involved in shaping and advocating for that vision, it is particularly rewarding, one year into my role as CEO, to reflect on how far we have come.

Today, Space Park Leicester is a nationally important centre for research, innovation and enterprise, at the heart of a thriving UK space sector and leading its growth in the Midlands.

Our impact reaches from scientific discovery at the farthest reaches of the universe to technologies and businesses with applications here on Earth. We are attracting international organisations, nurturing ambitious new ventures, creating high-value jobs and opening opportunities for students and communities.

The period covered by this Annual Review is bookended by the UK Industrial Strategy, published in June 2025, and the UK Space Strategy, published in September 2026. Both present significant opportunities for Space Park Leicester.

Their emphasis on sovereign capability, security, industrialisation, commercialisation and regional clusters reinforces our role in translating scientific discovery into economic growth, developing advanced technical capabilities, attracting investment and strengthening the UK's space industry.

But this is also a platform for what comes next.

From Space City, Leicester's Innovation District, we have an opportunity to place innovation at the heart of Leicester and Leicestershire's future growth.

This Annual Review demonstrates both our progress and our potential. I am immensely proud of our colleagues and partners, and confident that our greatest impact still lies ahead.

400+
Person Community

£20M
Research Awards

£73M*
Total Annual GVA

*Calculated using the UK Space Agency benchmark of £129,000 labour productivity per space sector employee

Resident Partners

UK SPACE AGENCY

OPEN COSMOS

Vantor

CGI

AWE NUCLEAR SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES

framatome Space

PERPETUAL ATOMICS

National Centre for Earth Observation
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

USRA

HYBRID GEOSPATIAL

CATAPULT Satellite Applications

TWI

SPACEWEAR
ASTRONAUT EQUIPMENT

AIRBUS

EARTHSENSE
TRUSTED AIR QUALITY INSIGHT

THIRD PLANET ORBITAL

FRONTIER Space Technologies

REMOTE SENSING & PHOTOGRAMMETRY SOCIETY

SHIELD SPACE

BARRETT AEROSPACE

esa BUSINESS INCUBATION CENTRE United Kingdom

MERIDIAN SPACE COMMAND

RISE

JONES CONSULTING

Omnidea
AEROSPACE TECHNOLOGY AND ENERGY SYSTEMS

Messium

AEGION

Pinnacle
outstanding worldwide logistics

BIOXHALE

ZEEKO Ltd

Executive Summary

The past year has seen significant progress for Space Park Leicester. Building on the University of Leicester's long-standing international leadership in space science, Earth observation and space engineering, Space Park Leicester has continued to mature as a nationally important centre for research, innovation, enterprise and skills.

The year combined major scientific achievements with increasing evidence of practical impact. Leicester researchers contributed to new satellite missions, advanced technologies for lunar and planetary exploration, developed new approaches to space power and space-based artificial intelligence, and strengthened partnerships with national and international agencies. The successful launch of the European Space Agency's SMILE mission was a particular milestone: its Soft X-ray Imager (SXI) was the first complete space instrument delivered using Space Park Leicester's facilities.

Space Park Leicester also strengthened its role in translating research into commercial and economic value. Industrial demand for Technical Services grew substantially, the European Space Agency Business Incubation Centre continued to support 3 new ventures; Community Membership opened the ecosystem to a wider range of businesses; and the Executive Guide to Space established a new professional education offer.

Partnerships remained central to delivery. Space Park Leicester welcomed ministers, government agencies, industrial partners and international delegations; supported national discussions on the future of space science; and secured the decision of the US-based Universities Space Research Association to establish its UK presence in Leicester.

Within the University, refreshed governance, business planning and performance management have provided stronger foundations for future growth. A major review of Space Park's Engineering, Consulting and Technical service function was undertaken. When implemented it will provide the foundations for a transparent service offer to both internal researchers and external users.

Space Park Leicester is increasingly serving as a convening point through which researchers, businesses, investors, government and students collaborate to generate scientific, commercial and societal impact. Its contribution now extends from world-class research and space missions to incubation, spinouts, inward investment, regional innovation and public engagement.

2025/26 at a Glance

Research & Discovery

SMILE mission launched with Leicester-led instrumentation

£10M
Leverhulme Centre for Humanity & Space commenced

€2M+
More than €2 million for James Webb Space Telescope planetary research

Space Park launch microscopic worms to the International Space Station

Major progress in Earth observation, lunar science & space power

£20M
Research awards for space activity

Innovation & Enterprise

£250K
Technical services orders

£73M
Wider economic impact & £52M direct GVA

New REALM space-AI service developed

Executive Guide to Space CPD course launched

3
ESA Business Incubation Centre ventures supported

Hosted Leicester Innovation Festival & East Midlands Tech Week

People & Partnerships

400+
Space Park underpins 400 jobs

3
Government & ministerial visits

50
Structured student opportunities

UK space-science roadmap event hosted with UKSA

International delegations Florida & Canada

USRA selected Space Park for its UK presence

Impact & Growth

30
Organisations hosted with the community

93%
Partners would recommend Space Park to another space-sector organisation*

£6M
Perpetual Atomics secured £6M investment

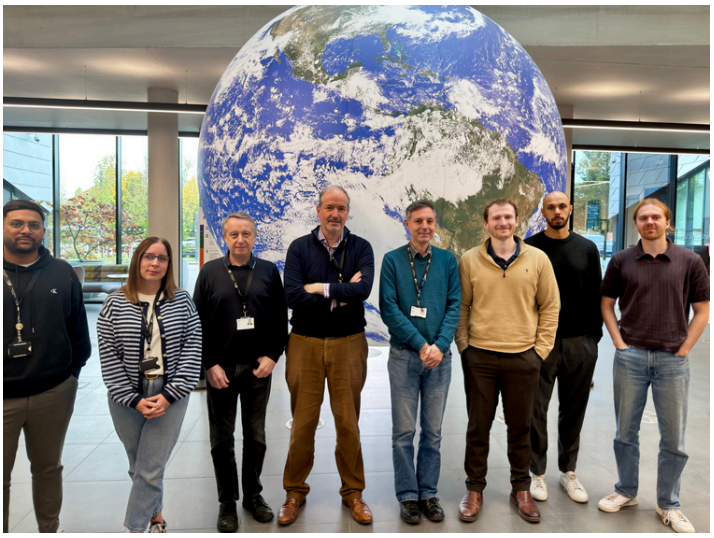
2ND
UK's second-largest space innovation campus**

7
Foreign Direct Investments

90%
Partner occupancy

> ***Great location, supports our business image, staff very helpful and we feel seamlessly integrated in such a small time***
>
> *Paul Richards, Framatome*

AWE & Space Park Leicester



AWE NUCLEAR SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES

Strengthening technology & talent for the future

AWE and Space Park Leicester are building on more than two decades of collaboration, bringing together expertise in space, science and engineering to develop new capabilities and support innovation. Their shared history includes work on the Beagle 2 Mars lander and vibration testing for the Mid-Infrared Instrument (MIRI), now aboard the James Webb Space Telescope.

Over the past year, AWE secondees have joined Space Park Leicester, strengthening knowledge exchange and collaboration with researchers, partners and businesses. The partnership has also supported AWE's recruitment of technical talent from across the East Midlands, creating opportunities for early-career professionals in high-value science and engineering.

Multi-axis test rig

Collaborative research is exploring areas including radiation modelling and laser-plasma interactions, while work is progressing towards more sophisticated environmental testing techniques. This includes combined thermal, vibration and multi-axis testing to improve the fidelity and confidence of future system qualification.

Together, AWE and Space Park Leicester are developing new technology, skills and capabilities that will contribute to the UK's future space and advanced engineering ecosystem.

A Year of Progress

Business Plan

Space Park Leicester was established to bring together research excellence, industrial collaboration, specialist facilities and education within a single environment dedicated to advancing space-enabled research and innovation.

During 2025/26, the organisation continued its transition from a newly completed research facility into a mature and increasingly outward-facing research and innovation centre.

A refreshed vision and Business Plan clarified Space Park Leicester's purpose and the value it delivers to four principal communities: the University and its students; industry and investors; government and funders; and the region. The Plan also broadened Space Park's remit, positioning it as an innovation precinct supporting interdisciplinary research, enterprise, technical services, education and partnership development across the University.

Organisational foundations were strengthened through clearer executive leadership, governance, KPIs, delivery planning and commercial reporting. New product-led approaches were introduced across Technical Services, co-location, events and Executive Education. This has created a stronger basis for accountability and growth while providing a clearer picture of both performance and future opportunity.

The year also demonstrated the breadth of Space Park Leicester's role. It enabled internationally significant research; provided specialist engineering and testing capability; supported start-ups and spinouts; created opportunities for students; convened national and international partners; and contributed to regional innovation and inward investment.

2ND

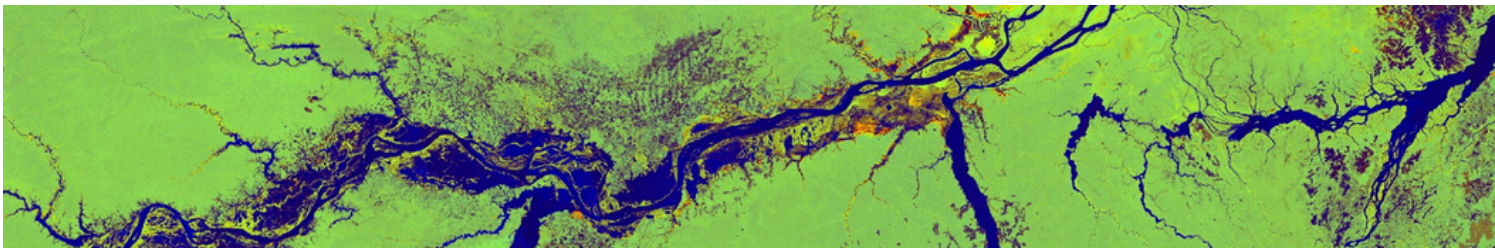
Largest UK dedicated space innovation campus

£20M

Research awards

> Space Park Leicester is a unique facility in the Midlands with excellent facilities and teaching staff.
>
> ***Nicola Deards, Midlands Aerospace Alliance***

Research & Discovery



Highlights

Research excellence remains at the heart of Space Park Leicester. During the year, researchers delivered important scientific and technological advances across space instrumentation, planetary science, Earth observation, space power, artificial intelligence and space biology. A record £19.7 million was secured in awards for space research, reflecting the strength and growing impact of Leicester's research community.

- SMILE launched successfully in May 2026, carrying the Leicester-led Soft X-ray Imager – the first complete space instrument delivered using Space Park Leicester's integration, cleanroom and testing facilities. The mission will examine how solar wind interacts with Earth's magnetic environment
- The University secured more than €2 million in European Research Council funding for Leicester scientists to use the James Webb Space Telescope to study giant planets, building on Leicester's internationally recognised planetary-science capability
- The £10 million Leverhulme Centre for Humanity and Space continued its development at Space Park Leicester, creating 42 research positions and bringing together science, engineering, social science, law, arts and humanities to examine humanity's relationship with space
- A further £1 million AHRC doctoral award was secured to support interdisciplinary research connected to the Leverhulme Centre for Humanity and Space
- A collaboration between the University of Leicester and TWI advanced ISPARK, the UK's first in-space robotic welding capability, following a £1 million UK Space Agency award
- Leicester research helped send microscopic worms to the International Space Station, supporting research into how spaceflight affects muscle and ageing – with potential implications for human health on Earth
- The National Centre for Earth Observation secured continued support for the UK Earth Observation Data Hub, securing the service for at least four years and supporting access to Earth observation data for research and innovation
- Leicester scientists identified three giant exoplanets and developed a new catalogue to classify asteroids from satellite data, contributing to our understanding of planetary systems
- A new carbon-monitoring satellite, developed with significant Leicester scientific involvement, launched to improve understanding of atmospheric carbon dioxide and plant photosynthesis
- Earth-observation research continued to address climate and environmental challenges, including wildfire risk, forest carbon, peatland management, methane emissions and land use.

Impact in Focus: SMILE

Turning world-leading research into a space mission

SMILE provides a compelling illustration of the value of the University of Leicester's investment in Space Park Leicester. The mission has translated decades of Leicester expertise in X-ray astronomy and space science into a complete flight-ready scientific instrument, developed, integrated and tested using the Park's engineering and cleanroom facilities.

The Soft X-ray Imager (SXI), led by the University of Leicester, is one of four instruments aboard SMILE. It will provide the first-ever X-ray observations of Earth's magnetic field, allowing scientists to study how the solar wind interacts with the magnetosphere and, ultimately, improve our understanding of space weather.

Its successful launch on 19 May 2026 marked a major milestone for Space Park Leicester and demonstrated the journey from scientific research and specialist infrastructure to an operational international space mission.

Crucially, SMILE has also established a team at Space Park Leicester with the specialist capability to deliver complex space instrumentation. The skills, facilities and experience developed through the mission provide a platform for future scientific missions, commercial projects and collaborations – creating lasting capability well beyond a single spacecraft.

1ST
Instrument delivered using Space Park Leicester facilities

£13M
UK Space Agency funding supporting delivery of the SXI

19 MAY 26
SMILE launch date from Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana

1ST EVER
X-ray observations of Earth's magnetic field enabled by SXI

Innovation & Enterprise

Highlights

"Britain can be the world's leading innovation nation. We are an innovation nation. But I today set the national goal to be the world's leading innovation nation... The important thing is just to be clear about the assets that we have right now because they are to be found in every single region and every single nation of the UK... space research in Leicester... The university assets we have in this country are perhaps our strongest base when it comes to being a world leader in innovation."

Prime Minister Andy Burnham, Innovation Nation Summit, 9 October 2026

During 2025/26, Space Park Leicester placed increasing emphasis on translating research, facilities and technical expertise into products, services and commercial opportunities.

- Space Park supported three ESA Business Incubation Centre ventures. Welcoming Shield Space, a specialist space infrastructure security business, while agri-monitoring company Messium progressed towards graduation and Frontier Space completed its first orbital biotechnology mission, demonstrating the progression from incubation to in-orbit commercial activity
- The Midlands Space Cluster is anchored by Space Park Leicester, and, as part of the UK Cluster Ecosystem, has been funded for a further four years by the UK Space Agency
- Demand for technical services at Space Park doubled from the same period last year
- Space Park Leicester launched REALM, a service helping organisations develop machine-learning systems optimised for the power, processing and operational constraints of space applications
- The first commercial Executive Guide to Space was delivered, providing a three-day professional programme exploring how missions are designed, built, launched and operated
- Perpetual Atomics, QSA Global and the University of Leicester achieved significant milestones in americium-based space-power technology, including production of the first full-scale americium-powered radioisotope heater-unit core. The partners have also expanded their footprint at Space Park Leicester as the technology moves towards scale-up
- French nuclear power specialist Framatome joined the Space Park Leicester community, further strengthening links between Leicester's growing space and nuclear technology clusters
- Community Membership was introduced, providing start-ups, SMEs, researchers and organisations in adjacent sectors with a flexible route into the Space Park ecosystem and its growing network of expertise and facilities.

Impact in Focus:
Perpetual Atomics

From university research to global space business

Perpetual Atomics is a strong example of research translation through the Space Park Leicester ecosystem. The University spin-out has secured approximately £6 million in external investment to develop advanced radioisotope power technology with strategic potential for long-duration lunar and planetary missions. Its progress brings together university research, specialist technical facilities, private investment and industrial expertise, helping to develop a nationally important sovereign capability in space power.

The company is now expanding its international presence. At the Farnborough International Airshow in July 2026, Perpetual Atomics announced the formation of a Florida subsidiary, marking an important step in establishing a global footprint and positioning the business to access growing opportunities in the international space market.

£6M
External investment secured

2026
Florida subsidiary established

Partnerships & Global Influence

Highlights

Space Park Leicester's value increasingly lies in its ability to bring together organisations that would not otherwise work together. The Park now convenes researchers, businesses, government agencies, investors, students and international partners around shared scientific, technological and economic opportunities

- Government engagement included visits from Europe and North America Minister Stephen Doughty, senior UK Space Agency and DBIST representatives, Liz Kendall MP and Science Minister Baroness Lloyd, showcasing Leicester's research, missions, commercialisation and national capabilities
- The University and ispace signed a Payload Service Agreement to deliver a Raman spectrometer to the lunar surface on a future commercial mission
- Space Park Leicester hosted leading figures from the UK space-science community and UK Space Agency to help shape a new national roadmap for the discipline
- The Institute for Space convened UK planetary scientists to explore a potential future mission to the Saturn system
- New organisations joined Space Park Leicester from aerospace, advanced engineering, defence technology and professional services, broadening the community and creating new opportunities for collaboration: USRA, Rise Search, IDE Systems, Shield Space, Barrett Aerospace, Framatome and Jones Consulting
- Space Park Leicester hosted Leicestershire Innovation Week and more than 50 business engagement events, strengthening connections across academia, industry and innovation
- The University represented Leicester on the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Innovation Board and EMCUA Innovation Board, helping shape regional innovation strategy
- International engagement included Commercial Space Week, Space Tech Expo USA, DBIST delegations to Taiwan and Australia, and connecting Japanese space start-ups with UK partners
- Midlands Space Cluster funding was extended for four years, supporting Leicester's leadership in growing the regional space economy

Impact in Focus:
USRA at Space Park Leicester

From university research to global space business

The decision by the US-based Universities Space Research Association (USRA) to establish its UK presence at Space Park Leicester is a significant endorsement of Leicester's growing international position in space research and innovation.

USRA brings together 124 universities to advance research, technology and education in space science and aeronautics. Its new UK entity will create opportunities for research collaboration, talent exchange, technology development and stronger links between universities, government and industry across the UK and Europe.

The partnership builds on the University of Leicester's more than 20-year relationship with USRA and its role in establishing Region X, the organisation's first geographic expansion beyond North America. Professor Richard Ambrosi became its first European trustee in 2023. Space Park Leicester provides a natural home for this next phase, connecting USRA with Leicester's expertise in space science, instrumentation and space nuclear power, while opening new opportunities for transatlantic collaboration.

1ST
USRA entity in Europe

20+
Years relationship with the University of Leicester

Students & Skills

Highlights

Space Park Leicester continued to connect students, researchers, professionals and the wider community with opportunities in space research, innovation and industry. Through placements, skills development, public engagement and new routes into the space sector, the Park is helping to develop the talent and skills needed for the UK's growing space economy

- 50 student opportunities were delivered during 2025/26, including 19 industry placements, 24 undergraduate projects and six SURE placements, providing practical experience across research, engineering and commercial activity
- A new Masters & Postgraduate Project Showcase connected 50 students with work-based learning opportunities, with plans to expand in 2026/27 SEEDS
- A new internship platform connected students and graduates with space, engineering and technology employers, alongside the University's micro-internship programme.
- Professional development included the Executive Guide to Space, the National Space Academy Careers Conference and new doctoral opportunities through the Leverhulme Centre for Humanity and Space
- Space Park Leicester delivered a broad public engagement programme exploring space biology, climate science, planetary exploration, AI, space heritage and satellite constellations
- A COP30 community event brought together local audiences to explore the University's climate research and the role of science in addressing environmental challenges.

50
Student Opportunities

40
MSc Project Students based at Space Park

Regional & National Impact

A growing engine for regional innovation

Space Park Leicester is becoming an important part of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland innovation ecosystem, connecting university research with business, government, investment and talent.

With more than 25 organisations and around 90% occupancy, the Park supports jobs, investment and innovation while contributing to wider UK priorities in research, advanced manufacturing, defence, climate resilience and economic growth.

Campus community

400+ people

Wider economic impact

£73m*

*Space Park Leicester generates £51.9m directly and supports a further £72.7m across the wider economy.

From research to growth

Space Park provides a platform for:

- Start-up incubation and spinouts
- Commercialisation and specialist facilities
- Inward investment and co-location
- Student and graduate talent
- Business, government and academic collaboration

As the region strengthens its innovation economy, Space Park Leicester is helping turn research excellence into businesses, investment, jobs and productivity, while strengthening the University's civic contribution and national profile.

> The building and facilities are impressive and anyone working in the space sector would enjoy the relaxed but academic environment.
>
> There's also lots of breakout areas for people to collaborate.
>
> ***Maria Evans, EarthSense***

What Partners Say

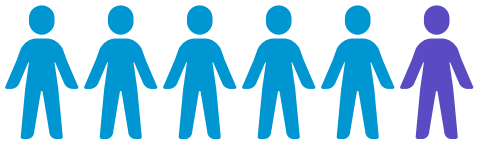
Space Park Leicester's impact is increasingly visible through the experiences of the organisations that make up its community. Our first partner Impact Survey highlighted the value of facilities, connections, expertise and opportunities, with partners describing the Park as a catalyst for collaboration, growth and access to new markets.

Partners highlighted the role Space Park Leicester plays in connecting business, academia and government, while providing a credible base from which organisations can develop their capabilities, build relationships and pursue new opportunities.

93% likelihood to recommend Space Park Leicester to another space-sector organisation

83% rated Space Park's contribution to their growth and success as moderate or significant

78% said Space Park was important, very important or essential to enabling recent growth or successes



What partners value most

Facilities

- Access to specialist facilities, laboratories, meeting space & a credible professional base

Connections

- New relationships across business, academia, government & the wider space sector

Opportunities

- Access to markets, customers, supply chains, international opportunities, events & collaboration

Expertise and skills

- Connections to University expertise, research capability, talent and specialist knowledge

A strong foundation for future growth

The survey also points to the areas where Space Park can create even greater impact: access to talent and additional facilities, research partnerships, investment, customers and international markets.

The message from partners is clear: Space Park Leicester's value extends beyond its physical facilities. Its greatest strength is its ability to bring people, expertise and opportunities together — creating the conditions for organisations to grow and for the wider space ecosystem to thrive.

ISPARK:

Welding the Future of Space

Developing the UK's first in-space robotic welding capability

The University of Leicester is leading ISPARK – the Intelligent SPace Arc-welding Robotic Kit, a pioneering project developing the UK's first robotic welding capability for use in space, in partnership with TWI Ltd.

The project secured £560,000, including £485,000 from the UK Space Agency, through the National Space Innovation Programme (NSIP) Call 2. ISPARK was one of 17 projects selected from more than 560 proposals.

The technology combines AI-powered robotics, autonomous control, space engineering and digital-twin modelling to enable robotic welding in the challenging conditions of space. Vacuum trials will help validate the system ahead of future use in orbit.
In the longer term, the technology could enable repair, assembly and manufacturing in space, helping extend mission lifetimes, reduce waste and support a more sustainable space economy.

The project brings together Leicester's expertise in space engineering and AI robotics with TWI's world-leading welding expertise, demonstrating Space Park Leicester's role in connecting academic research with industry to develop technologies for the future of space.

£560K
Project Value

£485K
UKSA Funding

Our People, Our Community

Great places are ultimately about people

Space Park Leicester is more than a place to work. It is a diverse and welcoming community, bringing together people from different organisations, disciplines, countries, cultures and backgrounds.

Throughout the year, we celebrated achievements, created opportunities to connect and collaborate, and encouraged our community to make a difference both within and beyond Space Park.

A community that...

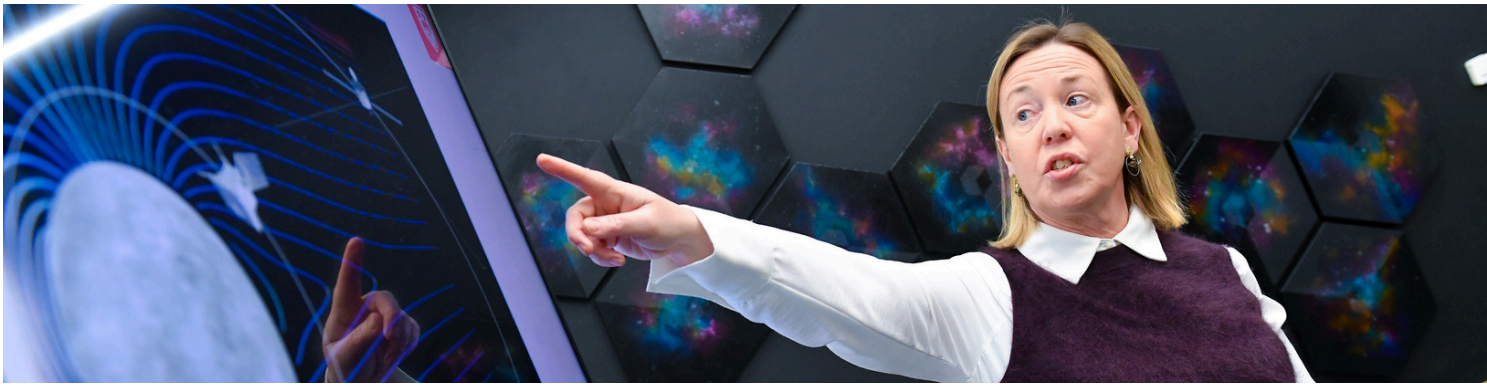
- Celebrates diversity: Our diversity is one of our strengths. Celebrations including Diwali supported by our partner CGI provide opportunities to share cultures and traditions, bringing colleagues together and helping to create a community in which everyone feels welcome
- Celebrates achievement: Behind every achievement at Space Park are talented and committed people. This year we celebrated colleagues completing their PhDs, alongside many other professional and personal milestones. We also said goodbye to our Café Manager as she embarked on an exciting new chapter, leaving Space Park to train as a nurse
- Connects people: Innovation thrives on connection. Space Park Conversations, the Warmer Network, our Open Day have created informal and formal opportunities for people from across the Park to meet, exchange ideas, build relationships and simply enjoy being part of the community
- Supports our community: Our sense of community extends beyond our buildings. Colleagues have volunteered their time through a local litter-picking initiative, while our events and engagement activities help strengthen connections between Space Park Leicester and the communities around us.

> The venue is perfect for individual or group working, centrally located, easily accessible and has modern facilities.
>
> ***Bradley, AWE***

Looking Ahead

Developing the role of space in the UK's national security

Space Park Leicester enters 2026/27 with strong momentum. Research programmes continue to grow, new commercial opportunities are developing, and the organisation has strengthened its governance, strategic direction and approach to performance.



26/27 Priorities

- Growing research in Space: health; defence and security; policy
- Expanding Technical Services and commercial research
- Converting the commercial pipeline into sustainable income
- Attracting new co-located businesses and international partners
- Developing Executive Education for UK and global markets
- Supporting incubation, spinouts and inward investment
- Increasing student placements and graduate opportunities
- Strengthening SPL's role in regional innovation
- Continuing to convene government, industry, investors and researchers around nationally important opportunities
- Delivering on the role as Innovation Precinct for the whole university.

Space Park Leicester has moved beyond the successful delivery of an ambitious physical asset. It is now demonstrating how infrastructure, research excellence and purposeful partnership can generate scientific achievement, commercial opportunity, skilled people and economic impact.

Contact Us

Phone

+44 (0)116 373 6060

Email

enquiries@space-park.co.uk

Website

www.space-park.co.uk

Address

Space Park Leicester
92 Corporation Road
Space City
Leicester
LE4 5SP
United Kingdom

Space Park Leicester

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