

PR 5610

For Immediate Release

31 July 2006

## **Media Call - Norfolk Open Link – UK's Largest Free Wireless Network Goes Live in Norwich**

Date: Tuesday, August 1                      Time: 11am

Location: The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich

Photo/Media Opportunity

Live Norfolk Open Link demonstration at The Forum. Photo opportunity with Patrick Hacon, Chairman Norfolk County Council, Staff Midwife Carol Greef, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust and Sam Stubbs, Norfolk Youth Parliament.

Norfolk Open Link – UK's Largest Free Wireless Network Goes Live in Norwich

Norfolk Open Link, the largest community wireless broadband network in the UK, goes live in Norwich tomorrow (Tuesday, August 1). It is the only network in the UK that offers free mobile internet access for public sector employees, the business community and the general public.

This £1.1 million two-year pilot project, running from August 2006 to April 2008 to evaluate the impact and potential of mobile technology, is managed by Norfolk County Council and is fully funded by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA).

The network covers most of Norwich city centre, to a 4km radius from County Hall, as well as key sites to the east and west of the city: Broadland Business Park, University of East Anglia, Norwich Science Park and Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital.

More than 200 small aerials have been fixed to lamp posts to create the network, with the main internet connection on top of County Hall.

Later this year, Norfolk Open Link will be extended to up to 28 rural locations in the South Norfolk Council area, making it the first wireless broadband network to pilot both rural and urban locations.

Norfolk Open Link's website [www.norfolkopenlink.com](http://www.norfolkopenlink.com), provides information on the network area and how to access the service. Anyone with a wireless enabled laptop, personal digital assistant (PDA) and internet enabled mobile phone will be able to use the network.



Public sector services like health, education, police, fire, public transport and social services will be developing a range of projects to help evaluate the system. The network will provide more opportunities for mobile and home working, helping staff to access information on the move. It will also aid collaboration between organisations.

The Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH) is working on a project to use wi-fi technology to help community midwives in their day-to-day jobs.

Partners in the project are: South Norfolk Council, Norwich City Council, University of East Anglia (UEA), Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, Norfolk Constabulary, The Forum Trust, Norwich City College and EEDA.

The project gives small Norwich businesses and the general public the chance to trial a wireless system free of charge. A portal page on Norfolk Open Link's website, linking to tourism websites, will boost the local visitor economy.

The project is not allowed to compete with commercial wi-fi services, so the access speed for businesses and the public has been set at 256 kilobits per second, with public sector staff accessing at 1mb per second. Each session has also been limited to an hour.

Patrick Hacon, Chairman Norfolk County Council said: "We are very excited about the possibilities that Norfolk Open Link presents for the county. The pilot project will aim to harness the potential wireless technology can have in enhancing the delivery of our public services and stimulating business and private use of wireless technologies."

John Snyder, EEDA board member, said: "The city now has a twenty first century infrastructure which will allow it to exploit the opportunities offered by mobile digital technologies to the full. Assisting in the development of new innovative Information Communications Technologies (ICT) in the East of England is one of EEDA's key priorities. The launch of Norfolk Open Link will bring many benefits to businesses and individuals living and working in Norwich. "

Eppie Zandvoort, South Norfolk Council's Cabinet Member for the Economy said: "The switch on is great news, and will prove a fantastic opportunity for business, the economy and for the thousands of ordinary people in our community. When the network spreads to South Norfolk later this year, we will be able to offer connectivity to more people and offer a giant technological leap over the barrier of rural isolation that affects so many. The network will be especially beneficial to many of the businesses we depend on for jobs and prosperity, and also creates opportunities to run learning courses and improve access to tourist information where network coverage exists."

Alex Jadavji, Synetrix Chief Executive said: "This is a hugely exciting project, with massive implications, not just for the public sector, but for every citizen in the country. We are delighted to have been selected to deliver the key elements of the solution – the design, delivery and management of the wireless network. We are fully committed to using all our knowledge, experience and capabilities to ensure the project attains the level of performance, reliability and success demanded by the community of Norfolk."



Caroline Williams, Chief Executive of Norfolk Chamber of Commerce said: "Technology is the life blood of business in an increasing global market place. A facility that enables businesses to download information and connect with their customers whilst away from the office is a great move forward."

Andrew Stronach, Head of Communications Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust said: "Our project involves giving wif-fi enabled laptops to two community midwives so they can pick up their email whilst working out in the community. The other major benefit will be for the midwives to be able to input the information from their visits to pregnant women into the laptop and then securely upload the information to the NNUH. The big benefit for community midwives will be having to spend less time making trips to the hospital in order to enter patient information or access email."

The project is supported by the INTERREG North Sea project BIRD aiming to support best practice in supporting regeneration via Broadband use.

## **Notes for editors**

### Technology

Synetrix, ([www.synetrix.co.uk](http://www.synetrix.co.uk)), an experienced provider of integrated applications and managed services for the public sector, has designed and installed the wireless network.

The wireless network was designed with the specific requirements for the Norfolk Open Link project, to deliver maximum coverage, enabling continuous roaming, within strict safety guidelines. More than 200 small Telabria APM 300 aerials have been fitted high up on existing street furniture, such as lampposts and buildings, to create the network. Each aerial has a reception radius of up to 300m and they have been located to deliver maximum coverage in the required areas. The aerials feed signals back to nine 'backhaul' sites, which then link to the project's central 40Mb internet link based at County Hall.

Synetrix is a well-established and key partner for the UK public sector, having already designed large scale, regional multi-service networks for local authorities and education. More recently, the company has been focused on working within communities, delivering powerful and sustainable infrastructures and helping to councils develop applications that affect the way services are offered by the public sector and accessed by the community. In addition, this helps to provide sustainable regional investment that enhances the economy and have a direct and positive impact on many individuals within the community and the public sector.

### Safety

There are no safety issues with wireless network equipment. A study carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), for the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), found that at times there can be greater background radio intrusion from television



and radio transmissions than from wireless network access points. As a precaution, all aeriels have been sited high on lampposts and buildings.

#### Cartledge

As part of the Norfolk Strategic Partnership, Cartledge, owned by May Gurney the Norwich-based support and construction services company was awarded the pilot scheme by Norfolk County Council to amend the current streetlights in order to accommodate the new equipment. All columns were checked for suitability before the equipment was installed.

#### **Political Contacts**

Shaun Murphy, Leader of the Council, Chairman of Cabinet and Leader of the Conservative Group, on 01263-731420

Irene MacDonald, Leader of the Labour Group, on 01485 572915

Barbara Hacker, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, on 01603-451421

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