



Titel
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Norfolk Open Link Case Study

28/06/08

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**European Community
European Regional
Development Fund**



Interreg North Sea Region

Author

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PART A - IDENTIFICATION

1 - Name of the case

Norfolk Open Link

2 - Acronym of the case

NOL

3 - Case Presentation URL

<http://epractice.eu/cases/NOL>

4 - Case Logo

5 - Web address of the case

<http://www.norfolkopenlink.com/>

6 - Type of initiative

7 - Country of the case

England

8 - City/region

Norfolk - East of England

9 - Start date 01/09/05- End date 31/03/08

10 - Date on which the case became operational

July 2006

11 - Case Abstract

Please provide a brief abstract of the case (Max. 300 words)

Research into demand for broadband by Norfolk County Council and EEDA – as well as the work of the NOMAD national e-government project into mobile working – established the potential need for wireless cities. This

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research has been duplicated in other parts of the UK, Europe and the world and is particularly applicable in areas where there is low provision of wired broadband.

As a result of the research EEDA agreed to grant fund Norfolk County Council to do a wireless pilot in Norwich and market towns in the neighbouring rural area of South Norfolk called Norfolk Open Link to test demand in real life.

The aim was to develop a well-branded, good operating system that delivered wireless technology and was clearly promoted to both generate use of, and highlight the work of, a local authority to drive this topical sector forward.

PART B - DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

12 - Case domain

13 - Topic

14 - Tags

Broadband, wireless

15 - Sector

Please identify the sector within which your case operates.

Multiple choices are allowed. Hold down the Ctrl key to add choices to your selection or to remove choices from the selection.

16 - Policy Context and Legal Framework

The work sits under EU policies for broadband services

17 - Target Users or Group

General

18 - Description of Target Users or Group

Public and private sector broadband users

19 - Scope

20 - Status

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The initial pilor project is completed. Negotiations are ongoing re a commercial sustainable selivery of the services.

21 - Language(s)

English

PART C - PROJECT SIZE AND IMPLEMENTATION

22 - Type of initiative

Wireless Broadband

23 –

A consortium was formed of key public sector stakeholders in local government, health and education to act as “anchor tenants” of the Norfolk Open Link wireless network. A service provider was then procured and a Wi-Fi network constructed covering the historic core of Norwich, the University, Hospital and other key public sector buildings and a major industrial estate as well as 21 hotspots in South Norfolk. The service offered free public access at 0.25mps and higher bandwidth to public sector users.

This was launched and gained extensive coverage (documented in the Evaluation report and DVD and pack available on the BIRD website) and enjoyed high levels of use throughout its pilot phase.

The above mentioned evaluation report then looked at the commercial, technical, legal and economic issues from the report and recommended seeking a private sector partner to maintain and extend the service, which is now in the process of being procured.

Presentations were made to potential private sector network operators and detailed discussions are now underway with two following an initial evaluation.

24 - Description of the way you implement and manage your initiative

The work was managed PRINCE2 under a county board of stakeholder bodies.

24a - Technology choice

The service uses wifi provided by Synetrix Ltd.

24b - Technology solution

See above.

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25 - Funding source

East of England Development Agency and Norfolk County Council

26 - Implementation

Norfolk County Council received £1.35m funding from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) to develop a two-year pilot project, operational from July 2006

27 - Yearly cost

The service aims to be commercially self sufficient.

PART D - IMPACT, INNOVATION AND RESULTS

28 - Please provide indications of real or expected impact and benefits; if possible with figures

The evaluation report shows considerable public and private sector demand for the service. Despite enthusiasm, there were not high levels of public sector use for mobile working and the Project team and Partnership concluded this was because moving to mobile working needed considerable process re-engineering which was not possible in the pilot timescale. However partners are committed to continuing this re-engineering if the re-procurement is successful.

More importantly it concluded that there is enough demand for a sustainable private sector service if there is public sector anchor tenancy demand such as that demonstrated in Norfolk Open Link.

One of the private sector partners has since started to develop a local wi-fi offer for more remote area based on shared purchase of services from a base station based on the work in the pilot.

On average, there were 27,000 monthly connections to Norfolk Open Link.

28b - Economic effects

Detailed economic effects are contained in the End project evaluation report

29 - Track record of sharing

Presentations were made to several conferences and a number of local authorities visited Norfolk to see how the project was delivering. Its findings are feeding into the DC10Plus next generation broadband work.

On the official launch day August 31 2006 national BBC spent a day broadcasting from Norwich using the system, and interviewing residents and

key officers in their news programmes. Segments appeared in BBC breakfast, lunchtime and 6pm news, BBC Online and BBC News 24.

Victor Keegan, Technology Editor, from The Guardian visited Norwich to interview key officers involved in the project and test out the operating system for himself and this resulted in the following week's column – ***"I have seen Wi-Fi's future, and it's free"***

Channel 5 sent the Gadget Show to Norfolk to test the system and as it coped with all the different appliances, they have launched a campaign, using Norfolk Open link as the base for all cities to campaign to introduce wireless technology.

After meeting three individual councils, and offering advice to many others, we decided to host a one-day seminar at County Hall on wireless technology outlining key learning's and our approach to help other local authorities develop wireless technologies. Thirteen local authorities attended.

Following the media coverage, to increase national exposure, the project team presented at the following digital conferences:

- Wireless Cities Conference London - 1 Aug 2006
- Wireless Cities Conference, Cannes France - Nov 30/Dec 1 2006
- Project Nomad seminar, London - 6 Dec 2006
- e-gov conference, World Trade Group, London - 7 March 2007
- Shared Services in the Public Sector conference, London - 19 April 2007
- Wireless Cities Conference, London - 23/24 May 2007

In total more than 50 articles and interviews portrayed Norfolk County Council as not just leading the way for local authorities and companies looking to implement wireless networks but also those looking to generate economic development in their area.

30 - Lessons learnt

Wi-Fi or Wi-Max networks offer a boost to economic development and digital inclusion in non-cabled areas and can support public sector re-engineering around mobile networks. Public sector bodies working together can provide anchor tenancy income to justify private sector investment where there is not a pre-expressed residential and commercial demand. However the legal issues around competitiveness and state aids is still complex and has areas of uncertainty and further work is needed at a national and European level to provide templates for local action. The Norfolk Open Link evaluation report provides some useful information to support this. (Open Link Evaluation on the It's Learning Platform).

On average, there are 27,000 monthly connections to Norfolk Open Link and this is steadily increasing.



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