



The County Economic
Development Partnership

10 March 2009

Letter of response to the Digital Britain Interim Report

Shaping Norfolk's Future is a business-led partnership that works to create wealth and jobs for the people of Norfolk. A key strategic goal for business is to 'identify and address the ICT issues that will affect their ability to exploit future technological advances'. Our local aim is for 'Norfolk to be positioned at the forefront of internet technology development'. The proposals in the Digital Britain report are therefore fundamental to achieving this goal.

We welcome the five objectives of Digital Britain, in particular the emphasis that it is important 'to ensure that everyone can connect to the digital economy, that its benefits and advantages are available to all'.

However, we would like to be given assurance that the rural communities in Norfolk will not be deprived of the adequate infrastructure,

Norfolk's population in 2007 was 840,700 in an area of 537,070 hectares, a population density of 1.57 per hectare. 32 percent of wards in Norfolk are urban, 68 percent are rural. Research shows that Norfolk, particularly in rural areas, is not fully covered by low level Broadband at present, and the Digital Britain report indicates that we may miss out on the upgrade to fibre (from copper) that is to take place. This lack of infrastructure is a problem for businesses and residents, discouraging investment and placing them at a competitive disadvantage.

We have researched Norfolk's web development and technology businesses which has confirmed a strong and growing sector consistent with the need to create more 'knowledge jobs', a priority set within the 'Regional Economic Strategy'. A mapping exercise has shown that there is an array of businesses located in the rural areas of Norfolk, and we are aware of a strong concentration in the Norwich city area.

These businesses will become uncompetitive if they have inadequate access to the next generation broadband and will probably be forced to migrate from the area.

“Broadband is essential to the development and expansion of our rural industries. To remain competitive in the digital age a reliable and fast broadband connection is a basic requirement.”

James Clabburn, Managing Director, Norfolk Broads.com Ltd

Next Generation Broadband and connectivity are crucial to business and the future prosperity of Norfolk. We look forward to reading the full report in the summer and trust that the specific needs of rural businesses and residents will be appropriately addressed.

Yours sincerely



Mike Burrows
Acting Chairman
Shaping Norfolk's Future



Chris Starkie
Chief Executive
Shaping Norfolk's Future