

Welcome to the fourth issue of the CitizenFirst Newsletter which sees the focus of Eindhoven Region in the Netherlands and the ICT Projects of the Regional Government.

Last month Cambridgeshire County Council hosted a CitizenFirst Workshop on Next Generation Broadband on 28 February 2007 in New Hall, Cambridge, UK.

Broadband is still a major issue for our rural & peripheral areas in Europe and it is great to see the Europe Commission's recognition of the invaluable work of communities and service providers that are tackling this issue. On the 14th & 15th May 2007 the Commission will host a European Conference on "Bridging the Broadband Gap: Benefits of broadband for rural areas and less developed regions".

As part of this event forty projects will be exhibited showcasing successful rural broadband delivery in regions across Europe.

For more information contact the Commission's website:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/broadband_gap_2007/index_en.htm



Tom Kirby,
 Project Manager, CitizenFirst
 Director, Mid-West Regional
 Authority, Ireland

Broadband as a carrier for regional development

In the city of Eindhoven governmental services, healthcare institutes and a number of businesses have cooperated to realize a managed dark-fibre infrastructure. This so-called "broadband ring" runs through the city of Eindhoven and connects the participating companies, institutes and neighbouring villages, enabling them to use broadband internet services.

To date over 100 connections have been made to this broadband ring in the city of Eindhoven. At the same time this ring forms a base for the rest of the Eindhoven region to connect to. It is out of this Eindhoven Ring that the Regional Broadband Rings Project has emerged.

A good example of a local broadband initiative is the "OnsNet" project in Nuenen where through a cooperative model a "Fibre-to-the-home" initiative has been realized. The project managed to connect over 7,500 homes to optical fibre in a period of only three months. With this connection these homes got access to fast internet (100Mbps), television services and phone services all from OnsNet.

Current situation (at the start of 2007)

Several municipalities have come forward to explore the possibilities of broadband as a carrier for economic development.



Figure 1: Broadband ring in the city of Eindhoven

Regional Broadband Rings

In the Eindhoven region the Eindhoven Regional Government has started the project Regional Broadband Rings in which the goal is set to construct a ring of managed dark fibre by 2010 through the entire region, along all 21 participating municipalities. This ring will then form the base to which all regional municipalities can connect with their local initiatives.

Remarkable is that especially the municipalities which are adjacent to the city of Eindhoven (close to the existing ring of optical fibre) are starting to develop. The chosen strategies of these parties of course vary, mostly due to differences in population or types of companies operating in that region.

Interview with John de Roij - Project Manager at the Eindhoven Regional Government

Background

The business past of John de Roij can, basically, be divided into four segments in which he spent most of his time on ICT developments. After working as a Systems Developer and gaining approximately fifteen years of experience in several commercial jobs at a number of large international computer suppliers he has made the transfer to the world of telecommunication. Recently however, he decided to put his knowledge and experience to use within the Eindhoven Regional Government in the position of Project Manager Economy. In this article he gives his vision on broadband in an economic perspective for the near future.

Broadband in economic perspective
Based on the Lisbon goals the Eindhoven region has developed a vision called Brainport. >

In this vision it is projected that the Eindhoven region will develop itself to become the leading knowledge and innovation region of the Netherlands. In this context, an optical fibre infrastructure is considered a basic facility. Brainport does not only target the major companies but is also targeting smaller businesses. Besides the issue "work", the topic "living" is also mentioned in the Brainport strategy. This means that the broadband network should also reach homes and social organizations such as healthcare and education. In plain words: the broadband ring has to reach all the way through the region (as shown in the figure).

A glance at the future

It is possible to take a look into the future for the different target groups: the inhabitants, the social organizations as well as the businesses. The businesses will, through using the broadband network, be more able to react to economic developments. The social organizations will be able to regroup their care and form closer co-operations which will have a positive effect on their service level. And last but not least, education will be able to use new and innovative tools in educating the next generation which will play a big role in the Brainport strategy coming true. In the near future all homes will be connected to an optical fibre network. This means that the inhabitants will be able to use this network not only for internet, making phone calls or watching television but also for social purposes. This way people will be able to "attend" church services, soccer matches of children and grandchildren, etc..



All this provides numerous opportunities for reinforcing the economic vitality of the region. ○

Teleportation as a digital bridge to reinforce livability in small communities

Positive qualities of living in the countryside are the peace, nature and a strong social cohesion which reveals itself through frequent contact with neighbours and a strong participation in club life. However, the poor accessibility and the deteriorating service level stimulate the development of creative solutions to reinforce the livability in rural areas.

A nice example of a creative solution that might stimulate the livability in small communities is teleportation. Teleportation is the digital transfer of a lifelike image of a person and the projection of this image in a different location. This person now has a "tele-presence" and he (or she) can now communicate with the people that are physically present at this place in a way that hardly differs from >

the ordinary direct contact: the communication takes place in "real-time", face-to-face, and with eye contact. The time difference between the lips moving and the sound is hardly noticeable, thanks to the use of optical fibre for transferring the signal.

On the High Tech Campus in the city of Eindhoven this concept is being used by ABN-AMRO. It is completely in step with the innovative surrounding (the business park of the High Tech Campus has won the 2006 prize for best business park). The bank (ABN-AMRO) has set up an office here where clients can use the bank's services by means of teleportation.

To do so, the client takes place in the teleportation room at the High

Tech Campus and talks to a staff member of ABN-AMRO who is physically somewhere else. By connecting to different banking systems at the same time it's possible to discuss documents which the bank employee can, if required, have printed out from a printer in the teleportation room. This system enables people working at the High Tech Campus to sort out their bank transactions while at work without having to visit the central bank office which is located in the city centre of Eindhoven.

The teleportation system as discussed provides clear benefits to people working at the High Tech Campus. By varying the services and products that are provided through teleportation this system can also deliver a higher service level to small communities and hence reinforce the livability in these areas. In the coming months further application possibilities will be explored. ○



The city of Ieper installs public computers to bridge the digital gap

With the CitizenFirst-project, the city of Ieper is working on the digital inclusion for all its citizens. Several activities have already been set up. Jef Verschoore, the alderman of the city of Ieper who is involved in this project, expands on some of the recent initiatives.

I strongly believe in the possibilities of new technologies to bring government information closer to the citizen. By means of the CitizenFirst-project we try to make as many inhabitants as possible of Ieper familiar with these new media. Our target groups are people who have little or no knowledge of computers and internet, such as senior citizens, disabled people, unemployed youngsters or the underprivileged.

At this moment courses are being organized for disabled people. Within this target group there is a lot of demand for an individualized approach because each handicap is different and requires an individualized teaching manner. Our local CitizenFirst-initiatives have proved to be very valuable for this target group. That is why we think to further this project by setting up a knowledge centre concerning ICT-help for disabled persons.

Are there currently actions set up towards the global population of Ieper?

Apart from setting up our city "community" website and the existing forums for youngsters and local social policy and the PC-courses that are now running, public computers will be installed in the course of this month. At this moment already 4 computers are being installed: in the borough Hollebeke, in de Spiegel, a local meeting

point for disabled people managed by WVA, in the youth centre and in the city hall. In each location 2 computers are being installed together with a printer. The citizens can consult the city website of Ieper, use the internet, send e-mails, use the word processor and print for free. At the tourist board we are installing an information kiosk (PIAP) for the general public.



What are the criteria on which the selected locations for public computers are based?

It is the purpose to back the public computers by organizations which are willing to take on a kind of godparenthood over these PCs. In this way, the local non-profit organizations for disabled people and the youth centre will for instance become godparents of the public PCs, respectively in the local meeting point for disabled people and the youth centre. The village community Wegwijzer will take on the godparenthood in Hollebeke. We have chosen to work with godparenthoods because in this way also guidance, education and help is provided around these computers. We hope that in doing so, as many people as possible will get access to these new technologies.

At present, 4 locations have been decided on, but 2 more configurations are still available. Shortly, we will launch an appeal to organizations of other village centres to apply for godparenthood. We hope to be able to select the two last locations from these candidates.

Announcement

International CitizenFirst Conference
September 13-14, 2007 - In Ieper, Belgium

More information in the next newsletter



ICTHelps...

As part of the Citizen First project, Katho, a college of higher education, renders assistance to www.icthelpt.be.

The partners of this project (Katholieke Hogeschool Kempen, Blindenzorg Licht en Liefde, Die-'s-Lekti-kus, KOC, Modem and WAI-NOTvzw) have decided, with the support of Cera, to cooperate to design a site where people can search interesting information and where people can also post their experiences themselves. By means of a review system (by which experts screen all incoming articles) the site is automatically provided with content and remains up-to-date and reliable.

CitizenFirst is one of the participating organisations and is also responsible for writing articles and for the content of the site.

Pupils, teachers, special needs coordinators, parents, ... looking for adjusted ICT-help for specific needs, for tips about software and hardware and clever tricks for disabled people have been able to consult www.icthelpt.be since 15 February 2007.

If we aim at inclusive education where also children who need extra support can attend regular schools, then this forum will be an ideal way to get to know one another and to share experiences.

The "A-BARD* European Broadband for Rural Development - Policy Briefing Workshop", was held in Brussels, on 30 November 2006. This final A-BARD event brought together 43 Commission and Regional policy makers, academics and stakeholders working with broadband and broadband applications in rural areas. Its objective was to present the project's findings on the use of broadband for rural development across Europe, and to discuss the implications of the EC rural policies in the context of its recommendations.

There was a general agreement with A-BARD's recommendations which balance top-down and bottom-up approaches, and are summarised as follows:

1. Define an ambitious European e-rural strategy as an integral part of sustainable rural development policy
 - > Allocate public funding where there is "market failure"
 - > In 2010 and FP7, include specific infrastructure, ICT use and RTD initiatives for rural areas
2. Stimulate business and technical competition in the rural broadband market
 - > Every user should have a choice of 2 or more broadband access options
 - > Stimulate public sector demand aggregation in rural and remote areas

3. Develop sustainable connected rural e-communities to stimulate demand and broadband take-up
 - > Enhance regional leadership and local champions
 - > Promote and support awareness ("know what") and training ("know how")
4. Provide services and content that rural users want ("Killer Applications")
 - > Local content
 - > Entertainment
 - > eBusiness, eLearning, eHealth, eGovernment

* A-BARD (Analysing Broadband Access for Rural Development) was a Scientific Support to Policies (SSP) Coordination Action in the EU Sixth Framework Programme. A full report can be downloaded from www.a-bard.org

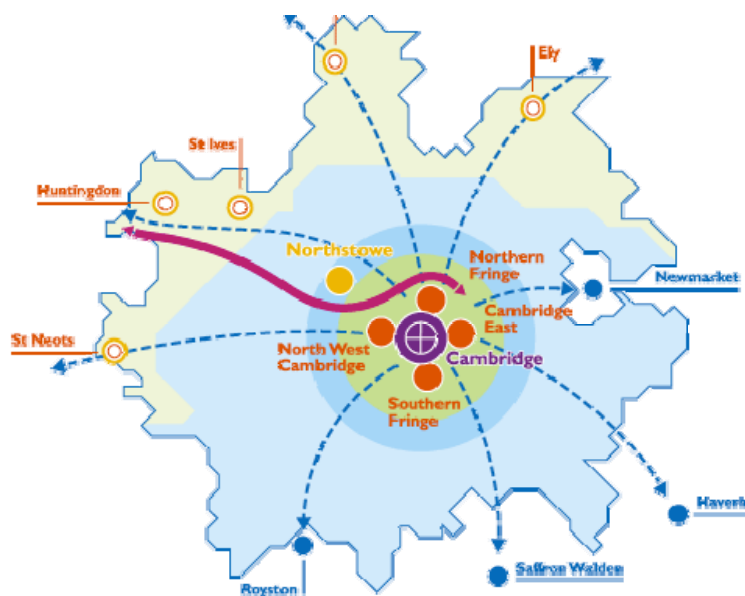


Cambridgeshire's digital vision

The population of Cambridgeshire will grow significantly over the next few years, with plans for 47,500 new homes by 2016. This will bring radical change in terms of the expansion of existing communities, migration and rural/urban shifts. There will be a new market town, Northstowe, as well as a number of sizable new developments on the fringe of Cambridgeshire. There is a real risk that services to the citizen will lag behind growth and of the development of new forms of exclusion.

A key challenge for us therefore is how to provide 21st Century services over a 21st Century network to help the major new developments in Cambridgeshire develop into cohesive communities. The CitizenFirst project has enabled us to undertake detailed work on the technical and commercial issues involved in doing this.

Given the large scale of house building that is taking place in the county, this work will clearly benefit a large number of Cambridgeshire's citizens directly. However we believe that it will have a much broader impact. The focus on the new developments has allowed us to start with a clean sheet of paper, free from legacy thinking, and is enabling us to identify the service sets, technology infrastructure and partners that would best serve our citizens and build inclusive communities. Our vision is to design inclusivity into these new developments from the start and then to use the learning and partnerships gained to spread the approach into existing settlements throughout the County.



The CitizenFirst project is a project funded by the INTERREG IIIB North West Europe Programme.

More information on the CitizenFirst project: www.citizen-first.net

More information on the INTERREG IIIB NWE-ENO Programme: www.nweurope.org

Lead Partner / Project coordinator: Mid-West Regional Authority Friar Court, Abbey Street, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, Mid-West Region, Ireland Contact: collinsmwra@eircom.net

