



Runner-up: Rural Connect - Broadband Access to Communities entered by NYnet Ltd

The Challenge

Many rural areas of North Yorkshire receive poor or no broadband connection at all. These 'not spots' are prevalent in many remote communities across the Dales and Moors and surprisingly on the outskirts of many of the larger towns in the region. Yorkshire Forward, the Regional Development Agency, conducted a study into ADSL broadband availability across Yorkshire and the Humber.

The study reported that 18% of households in North Yorkshire received less than 2Mbps of connectivity (approx. 59,000 households), the minimum speed of the Universal Service Commitment (USC) recommended by the Digital Britain report. The report also highlighted that many of these areas are 'not spots' - not receiving any broadband at all.

NYnet, formed by North Yorkshire County Council with funding from Yorkshire Forward and the European Union, provides a super-fast internet network to ensure North Yorkshire is not 'left behind' by the rest of the world in the next phase of the internet revolution. By utilizing its fibre network, (created to help the public sector reach its remote sites) NYnet had been looking at ways to connect with local communities by piggybacking from these public sector sites into the community.

The Solution

Some funding was made available from NYCC to undertake 2 pilot community broadband projects within rural North Yorkshire. The funding paid for NYnet to upgrade the fibre connection to a public sector building (usually a school or library) located close enough to the community as well as infrastructure costs for a wireless network.

This building needed to have a fibre connection already supplied by NYnet and it was just a matter of an upgrade of the bearer and router, so that the community Internet service provider could plug into one of the ports on the router. They then attached a wireless antenna or dish and broadcast up to the community.

These 2 projects were successfully implemented into rural villages in the heart of the North Yorkshire Moors. The 2 pilots have been successfully completed in Newton and Stape by NextGenUs and in Farndale implemented by Moors Web. The two projects in the Ryedale District connected a total of 300 households with a potential to reach a further 200. As a result, NYnet on behalf of NYCC was able to attract further funding through the RDPE to install wireless networks in a further 5 communities. NYCC has secured £750k of funding for a further 14 projects across the sub-region.

The Achievement

These projects have been successful because they have demonstrated that with a small capital investment a whole community can be transformed. Having access to broadband is now a vital component of rural living and is viewed as a necessity such as gas and electricity. Without it a community can decline as people will move away and new families will be discouraged from locating there - a form of rural decay.

The projects have seen benefits to both residents and local businesses that have embraced the new technology to improve their lives. Residents have access to social networking technologies to get in touch with the outside world and also to local services such as the Council, County Council, and Citizen's Advice Bureau. Businesses can now run more efficiently because they can expand the services they offer to their clients such as wifi access, online booking and also can take advantage of the products available to make their business be more effective through online advertising and sales.

Most importantly these projects provide access for the pupils of the local school, who need access to research tools for school work and the virtual learning environment now being used by most schools in the Country.