Neos NETWORKS

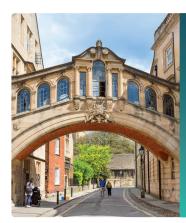# Laying the foundations for Oxfordshire's smart county

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council's partnership with Neos Networks enabled them to leverage connectivity right across the county to create the "Smart County"

For over a decade, Oxfordshire County Council has been hard at work upgrading broadband connectivity across the county through its Digital Infrastructure Programme. The council produced a vision for a 'Smart County,' and through a series of projects including Better Broadband for Oxfordshire and Businesses in Rural Oxfordshire. Since then it

has connected more than 100,000 premises to gigabit capable connectivity and is now one of the most connected counties in the UK, Oxfordshire continues to deliver on its commitment to improving digital and social inclusion for the communities it serves.

"We see Neos as a key strategic partner who can help our remit around enhancing Oxfordshire's digital infrastructure foundations now, and well into the future. With Neos' help we have strengthened Oxfordshire's credentials as one of the UK's most connected counties. Neos has been the ideal partner in sharing in our vision for a smart county, and for leveraging connectivity to bring new opportunities to businesses and residents within our communities."

Craig Bower, Oxfordshire County Council's
Digital Infrastructure Team Programme Director

The challenge

In 2021, Oxfordshire County Council secured funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), as part of the GigaHubs project. Oxfordshire's project would mark the first of its type under Project Gigabit, with £5m investment from Oxfordshire County Council and circa £2m investment from the DCMS.

While 98.4% of Oxfordshire had access to superfast broadband at the time, this initiative aimed to significantly improve connectivity for 175 public services sites, many of which are located in rural locations where fibre connectivity is both difficult to facilitate and expensive to provision. The majority council-funded project would see new full fibre broadband infrastructure built to help lay further foundations for a 'Smart County.'

Oxfordshire County Council engaged in a procurement process and Neos Networks was selected to facilitate the build of new network into a range of sites including schools, GP practices, fire stations, libraries, leisure centres, community centres and museums. Critically, Neos was awarded the contract for its ability to aggregate and manage multiple broadband suppliers to deliver the best and most cost-effective solution for the council.

Over 20 years, Neos will act as an aggregator bringing together several connectivity suppliers including Openreach, Virgin Media Business and regional AltNet Gigaclear. In doing so, Neos is leveraging existing and newly built infrastructure as well as its own dark fibre estate to connect the sites in scope. The new infrastructure will also encourage the build of Fibre-to-the-Premise services by AltNets in the region.

The outcome

By the end of 2023, the project will be complete, with Neos having significantly improved connectivity for buildings providing public services across the region. The project has enabled the council to migrate to lower cost, faster broadband connections for its office buildings. It is also realising its ambitions for equipping community centres to become 'community working hubs' offering enhanced community services, health and social care support and reducing the need for people to travel further afield to access these services. Additionally, Oxfordshire says the project will assist it in meeting its objective for net-zero carbon emissions by 2030.

The completion of the GigaHubs project will mean that over 1,500 km of fibre has been provisioned, establishing strong foundations for Oxfordshire's 'Smart County' goals. This new digital infrastructure will also enable future innovation such as drone corridors, connected vehicles, and other 'Internet of Things' services.

A wide range of public services sites across the region are already benefiting in a variety of ways, for example Faringdon Library has noticed a positive benefit on its service delivery. The library is experiencing faster speeds on public computers and staff PCs. The improved Wi-Fi connection is also supporting flexible working, meetings and hot desking for visiting staff. Mollington Village Hall was able to install a smart thermostat to control its heating remotely. And they say they now have plans to create a hub for people that regularly work from home, so they don't feel so isolated.

For Oxfordshire, the outcomes of this project have focused on inclusivity, creating opportunity, and bringing communities together.

About Neos Networks

Neos Networks provides class-leading connectivity and data centre services that deliver very high performance, cost efficiency and a competitive edge.

The company owns and operates a UK-wide network with access to 90 commercial data centres and over 600 Points of Presence. It offers commercial security with unrivalled in-house engineering resource.

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