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## **Birmingham takes lead in Wi-Fi revolution with BT**

BIRMINGHAM today confirmed itself at the forefront of exploiting digital technology by signing an agreement with BT for the creation of a street-based wireless city communications network.

The agreement forms part of the Digital Birmingham initiative, a partnership of public, private and voluntary sector organisations who share the ambition to establish Birmingham as the leading European digital city by 2010.

The Wireless Birmingham Wi-Fi network will cover a square mile area of the city centre.

Today's formal agreement is part of BT's Wireless Cities initiative, which will see Birmingham leading the way in early 2007, followed by other major UK cities in the first phase of an ongoing programme.

Birmingham's plans are the most advanced of the cities that signed up for the programme in May.

BT will fund the city centre network, with the City Council providing access to its street lamp posts in order to create the essential infrastructure.

In a groundbreaking innovation, people with laptops, mobile phones, hand-held computers and gaming devices using Wi-Fi (the industry standard for connecting devices wirelessly to the web) will be able to access information and services from the City Council free of charge through an internet portal.

The portal will give free access over the network to Birmingham-specific information relating to topics such as health, transport, events, and schools, whilst people are out and about in the city centre.

It will also enable the council to provide free wireless access to educational information anywhere within the city centre including the city's 50,000 higher education students, using the same technology they are familiar with as it is already installed in many schools and colleges.

As well as the free services, people will be able to buy vouchers or subscribe to innovative services such as BT Openzone and Fusion, and a range of new applications and services for consumers and businesses, allowing them to remain contactable, access broadband wirelessly and surf the web whilst on the move.

The City Council will also use the BT Wireless Cities network to pilot a range of pioneering initiatives which will improve the delivery of a range of public services, from the spring. These could include: mobile office devices for Birmingham street wardens, who provide face-to-face assistance and security for the citizens, visitors and business owners of Birmingham; and Wireless CCTV, which will be used for city centre management, security and parking services. On successful completion of a pilot, it is the intention of both parties to formalise an agreement for the future running of the service.

Carefully planned by the project partners, the initial coverage area is to maximise citizen and business benefit by including the professional district, the ICC, NIA and Brindleyplace, Broad Street, the Jewellery Quarter, Eastside, Digbeth, and the main retail areas. Aston Science Park and Millennium Point are also to have coverage from day one.

The development and operational costs of the network will be borne entirely by BT – there is no cost burden on the taxpayer for the provision and management of the network.

Cllr Paul Tilsley, Deputy Leader of the City Council, said: “The Wireless Birmingham agreement is a clear demonstration of how well we have worked in partnership with BT – who are making a significant financial investment to establish this network.

“It shows the commitment both sides of the partnership have to ensuring Birmingham is recognised as at the leading edge of digital developments and that the city becomes the first truly sustainable wireless city in conjunction with a private sector partner.

“The project offers endless opportunities and possibilities – not least of which is to enable us to deliver our services in a creative and innovative way. Many cities have plans to implement such wireless networks, but this agreement shows we are serious about competing on a national and international stage when it comes to establishing the technological facilities that today’s world requires.”

Frank Mills, BT’s West Midlands regional director, said: “It is a real testament to how forward-thinking and ambitious Birmingham City Council is in wanting to reap the benefits that a BT Wireless Cities network can bring. This is one of the first of many licensing and applications agreements BT is planning with local authorities around the UK.

“Key to the success of this agreement has been that BT and Birmingham City Council have worked closely together to ensure we’re not just rolling out a network of hotspots, but guaranteeing that the Council has the right applications in place to make wireless public services work for every resident, every council worker, every business owner and every tourist. We believe that partnering with local authorities is the most successful model for creating a true Wireless City and the people of Birmingham will notice a significant difference in the way they can use the network on a range of devices for entertainment, education and communication, even when they’re on the move.”

Birmingham City Council and BT are founder members of the Digital Birmingham partnership which has the ambition to establish Birmingham as the leading European Digital City by 2010.

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## Notes to editors

Digital Birmingham is an initiative set up by Birmingham City Council and Service Birmingham to encourage people and business to exploit the benefits of digital technologies and is another step forward to Birmingham becoming a leading European Digital City by 2010.