

How York Set the Agenda for Super Connected, Safe Online Spaces and became Friendly WiFi certified

York, often referred to as an "outdoor museum" due to its incredible heritage and history, draws seven million tourists each year. To maintain its appeal and enhance its innovative reputation, the City of York Council embarked on an ambitious initiative to become a "Super Connected City."

This transformation began in 2015 when York's Super Connected City programme was launched. The programme aimed to provide comprehensive WiFi access throughout the city, including the city centre, parks, buses, older people's homes, libraries, and community hubs. The initiative aimed not only to modernise the city's digital infrastructure but also to ensure that both residents and visitors could enjoy seamless connectivity across York.

Recognising the importance of safe WiFi, **Roy Grant, City of York Council's Head of ICT, Super Connected Cities & Digital Innovation**, led the charge. He emphasised, "It's hard to imagine how much has moved on since 2015. With our provider North, we were at the forefront of providing free WiFi in urban spaces. Nowadays, people take this service for granted, but it also significantly influences their decisions, especially for overseas visitors who face high communication costs."

Despite the initial enthusiasm, there was resistance to the idea of public WiFi. Some residents expressed concerns about security, with a few even vowing never to visit York again if public WiFi was implemented. It became clear that ensuring people knew the WiFi was safe had to be a priority.

To address these concerns, York undertook a comprehensive project to implement the appropriate filters and safeguards. This effort ensured that the public WiFi was not only accessible but also safe for all users, particularly children. Roy Grant recalled, "We knew that the filters were already in place to make our access safe, but our residents and visitors were in the dark. That's when North introduced us to Friendly WiFi, and we knew immediately we had found the answer."

The introduction of Friendly WiFi certification was a game-changer. This certification clearly showed that the public WiFi met recommended filtering standards, particularly in protecting children from inappropriate content. As soon as the Friendly WiFi signage appeared, indicating that the WiFi was certified child-friendly, the programme gained widespread acceptance. "Pretty much as soon as we started to put the signage up, the programme was universally accepted and we've never looked back," Grant remarked.



York's achievement in becoming the UK's first Friendly WiFi city garnered national attention, including headlines in major newspapers. Since then, the city has continuously supported the Friendly WiFi initiative, ensuring ongoing compliance and actively promoting the certification across the city and beyond. All communications regarding the WiFi provision, whether at bus stops, in marketing materials, or in overseas travel advertising, prominently feature the Friendly WiFi symbol.

Mark Lowe, Strategic Director of North, expressed pride in their role, saying, "Being the public WiFi provider for the first city to be certified with Friendly WiFi was a huge accolade for us. We are proud to be a supplier recognised for taking online safety so seriously."

Bev Smith, Director of Friendly WiFi, commended York's proactive approach, stating, "The team at City of York Council set the tone for the UK in terms of driving the online safety agenda through its digital programme. They were a pleasure to work with from the start and as our first city, we still enjoy a close working relationship with Roy and his team. They are extremely passionate about Friendly WiFi and protecting kids and young adults online. They have always prioritised ensuring that Friendly WiFi plays a visible and tangible part in York's digital programme, both in the UK and overseas. They are a testament to a city embracing new standards in this digital age."

York has not only maintained its commitment to online safety but has also been proactive in encouraging other cities to become Friendly WiFi certified. The city's leadership in this area has set a benchmark for others to follow, promoting safer online spaces across the country.

For more insights into York's public WiFi success, watch this video: [York's Public WiFi](#)

