AGENDA ITEM No. ......6...... **NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL**

REPORT

To: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	Subject: LANARKSHIRE ON-LINE BUSINESS DIRECTORY
From: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT	
Date: 26 NOVEMBER 1998 Ref: DR/REP.489	

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report seeks approval for the Council to contribute to the production of an Internet-based on-line version of a Lanarkshire Business Directory in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council and the Lanarkshire Development Agency.

2 Background

2.1 Members will recall that both a published and digital version of the North Lanarkshire Business Directory have been produced.

2.2 An Internet-based version would be a progressive stage in the on-going development of the Business Directory and in the provision of local company information to a wider audience.

2.3 The Internet or World-Wide-Web (www) has developed rapidly since the beginning of the 1990s to emerge as one of the key electronic mediums for the transfer and dissemination of information around the globe. With the rapid growth in the number of households connected to the Internet, both public and private organisations are recognising its potential as a powerful tool for communicating directly with their publics. It is forecasted that the UK alone will have 12 million Internet users in the year 2000.

2.4 South Lanarkshire Council have already launched an on-line version of their published Business Directory as part of their own Economic Development Website . This is a fully searchable on-line database enabling both simple keyword searches and more complex searches to be undertaken.

2.5 The Lanarkshire On-Line Business Directory would be based closely on this existing on-line version of the South Lanarkshire Business Directory . It would combine both Councils' present business listings databases to produce a Lanarkshire-wide listing of companies.

3 Lanarkshire On-Line Business Directory

3.1 A Lanarkshire On-Line Business Directory would offer global access to information on companies across Lanarkshire. Individuals from around the world with Internet access would be able to quickly search for and print out up to date details of Lanarkshire companies and their area(s) of business activity.

3.2 Through offering global access to Lanarkshire companies' details, the on-line Business Directory could assist in the development of trading links and commercial partnerships between local businesses and companies throughout the UK and overseas.

3.3 The on-line version could help stimulate greater interest in the North Lanarkshire economy and assist in attracting further inward investment. Companies searching for a business location could consult the on-line Directory and obtain an accurate picture of the number of similar enterprises and potential customers/supply-side companies that already exist in Lanarkshire.

3.4 The creation of an on-line business directory may reduce sales of the published and digital versions of the North Lanarkshire Business Directory over the long-term. However, it is vital that the Council continues to take advantage of the latest technological developments in order to satisfy the needs of its customers and improve the quality of the service it delivers to them. The on-line version will help the Council meet the growing demand among individuals and organisations for fast and easy access to accurate information on the North Lanarkshire business community.

4 Contents of the Lanarkshire On-Line Business Directory

4.1 The on-line Business Directory will feature a wider range of local businesses with more current details than either the published or digital versions. It will hold the details of approximately 5800 Lanarkshire businesses (3300 North Lanarkshire and 2500 South Lanarkshire companies) listed within their various sectors of business activity.

4.2 An on-screen feedback form - to allow visitors to express comments including notification of new/change of business details - and a visitor help file - which will provide full guidance on the use of the search facilities - will also be important features of the on-line directory.

4.3 An on-line version may also offer the option of a map of the Lanarkshire area where users can click on a chosen area to bring up details of companies based there.

5 Using the On-line Directory

5.1 The on-line version will be a fully searchable on-line database with a user-friendly interface to enable users to access information rapidly. Internet users will be able to undertake information searches by keyword or by company name, area, turnover (where available), number of employees, company category, company sub-category and by location.

5.2 Users will also be able to go through the on-line version to reach the individual Websites of the partner organisations involved in the project.

6 Overall Production Costs

6.1 The Lanarkshire On-Line Business Directory is the fourth phase of the Business Information Systems project. The five phases are listed below.

- Phase 1   The development of the North Lanarkshire Business Listing Database.

- Phase 2   Published North Lanarkshire Business Directory

- Phase 3   Digital version of the North Lanarkshire Business Directory

- Phase 4   Lanarkshire On-line Business Directory

- Phase 5   Second edition of published version of North Lanarkshire Business Directory

6.2   The initial development costs for the On-Line Business Directory - £7000 - have already been absorbed by South Lanarkshire Council as part of the development of their own Website.

6.3   Additional development work to move from a South Lanarkshire to a pan-Lanarkshire on-line directory will have to be undertaken. This will involve the redesign of the existing on-line version to incorporate the data for North Lanarkshire companies and to ensure that there are no inconsistencies between the data.

6.4   In addition, further development work will be required if the option of a clickable map search facility for users is to be a feature of the on-line version. The costs for this additional development work would be split between the other project partners - North Lanarkshire Council and the Lanarkshire Development Agency.

6.5   It is estimated that the total costs for the development work to redesign the existing on-line version will amount to £3,525. It is estimated that the total costs for the development work to produce a map search facility will amount to £1,900.

6.6   The costs of updating and maintaining the on-line directory, once established, would be split between the three partner organisations thereafter. Details of these particular costs will be reported to Committee members in due course.

6.7   Outlined below is the total income and expenditure figures that relate to the project's five phases. Some of the income and expenditure has yet to take place but is included to give an overall picture. Members may wish to note that, at present, with the completion of the third phase of the project, income from the project (£29,975) still exceeds expenditure (£28,476). In addition, as outlined in the table below, it is projected that income will still exceed expenditure at phase 5 of the Business Information Systems project.

6.8   BUSINESS INFORMATION SYSTEMS : Income and Expenditure (ex.VAT)

ACTIVITY	INCOME	EXPENDITURE
Phase 1 : 1996 Production of NL Business Listing Database		£12,105
Phase 2 : 1997-1998 Business Directory • Income from Advertising • Income from Sales • Postage on initial free distribution • Postage costs for sales • Production of Business Directory Update	£18,800 £ 3,640	£1,500 £1,018 £ 625
Phase 3 : 1998 Digital Directory • Income from Sales (actual) • Income from Sales (forecast) • Production of 1000 copies • LDA contribution to production costs	£ 1,065 £ 3,000 £ 3,470	£10,515
Phase 4 : 1999 On-Line Business Directory • Development costs (50% of total development costs)		£ 2,713 (estimated)
Phase 5 : 1999-2000 Business Directory : Second Edition • Update of Database • Income from Sales/Advertising (forecast)	£15,000	£10,000
TOTALS	£44, 975	£38,476

7   Maintenance and Updating

7.1   To ensure that the on-line directory contains accurate information, companies will be able to enter their new/change of details on an on-screen feedback form and return this to the Economic Development Unit for updating of their business listings.

7.2   In addition, both Councils have access to Thomsons Directories' New Connections database service which provides data on new and moved businesses across the UK.

7.3   A telephone survey of all companies on the North Lanarkshire Business Listings Database and a programme of mailing change of details forms to companies - both to be undertaken by the EDU - will also help maintain the accuracy of the business listings. Details of this research will be reported back to Committee members in due course.

8   Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of this report and :-

(a)   Approve the development of an on-line version of the Business Directory.

(b)   Seek a further report in due course to provide an update on the progress with this project.

(c)   Approve a contribution of no more than £ 3,000 towards the total costs of developing this project, to be funded from existing resources.

Stanley C. Cook
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

For further information please contact David Rodger, Marketing Officer on Tel : 01236 616367.