

# Leading car park business hands contract to city firm

By CHRIS STARKIE  
Business editor

Norwich IT support company Blue256 has won a major contract with the UK's best known car parking business - NCP.

NCP has awarded Blue256 a three year contract to support and design its IT systems, as well as implementing its network infrastructure nationwide.

It's an important national contract for Blue256, which is looking to grow its client base locally and nationally.

Simon Lawford, Blue256 managing director, said he believed his company had won the contract because it is able to give a more personal service than its competitors, but delivering corporate results.

He said: "This new contract represents yet another expansion of our business nationally and clearly demonstrates the confidence that companies such as NCP have in our company's ability to deliver the highest level of IT services.

"We continue to demonstrate solid revenue growth in our business by securing new contracts.

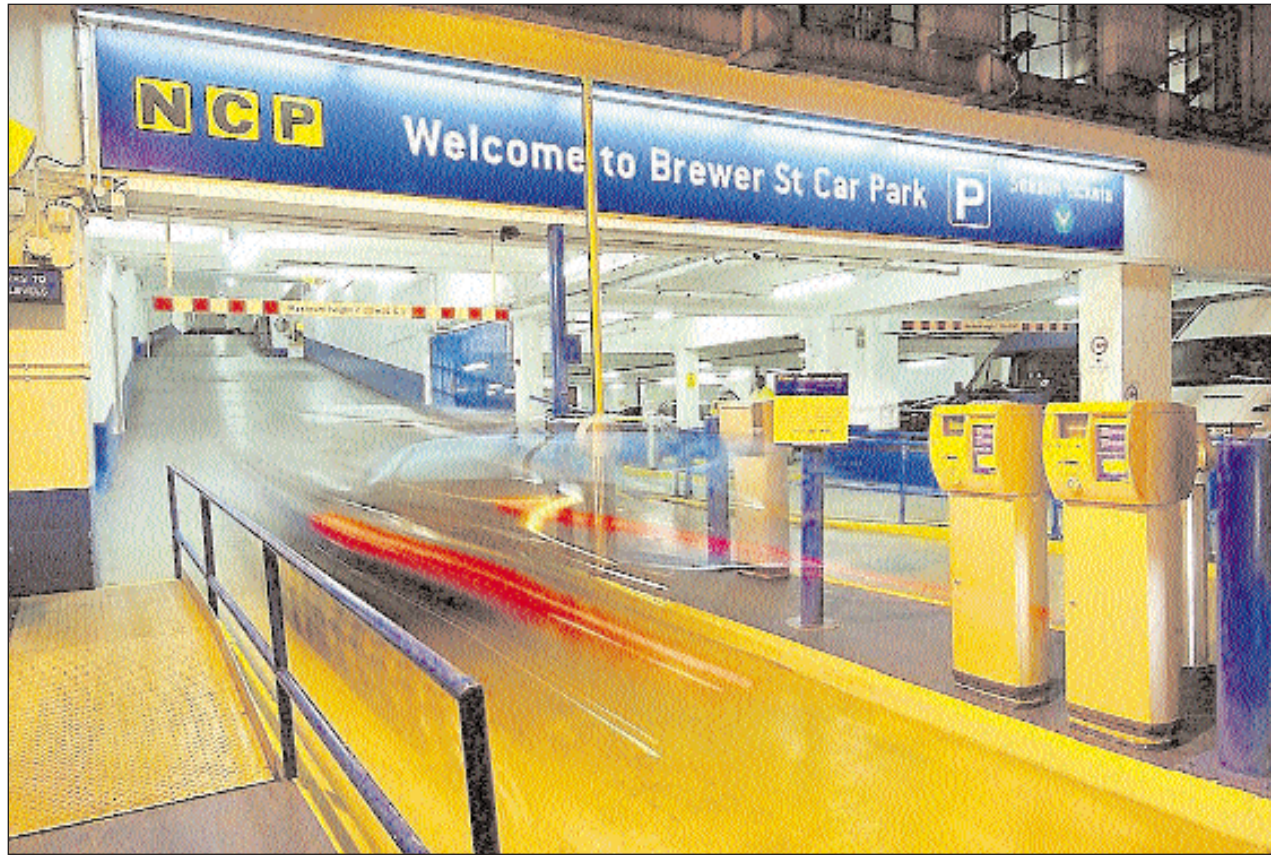
"Because of our excellent team we made a net profit year on year since being established.

"Due to our success we are now expanding our team by recruiting more people onto our Blue256 Helpdesk.

"The growth of our company has largely been via recommendations from already satisfied clients."

Blue256, which was founded in 2003 by Mr Lawford, already boasts a number of major clients including Norwich City FC, the Desira Motor Group, Oasis Healthcare and Pasta Foods.

The business has doubled its



CONTRACT AWARD: Norwich-based company Blue256 has won a major contract with parking business NCP.

turnover every year since it was launched and is looking to pass the £1m mark this year.

Mr Lawford said: "I worked for a number of IT companies and then decided to give up my job and go travelling with my wife.

"When we came back I set up the business and we have managed to pick

up a good number of clients locally.

"With the success of the NCP contract we are looking to build up our client base with some of the bigger companies in East Anglia and further afield."

The company specialises in IT support and consultancy for small

independent firms and multi-site organisations across the UK.

Blue256's services range from maintenance and support, managed services, network security, equipment supplies, 24/7 help desk, wireless networks, consultancy, full internet services, office refurbishment and project management.

## Blow to Standard's £4.9bn bid for insurer

Standard Life's £4.9bn bid to land insurer Resolution was dealt a major blow yesterday after the firm's largest shareholder stepped in with a higher offer on a dramatic day in the City.

When the day began, Resolution was still in favour of an £8.5bn merger with life and pensions firm Friends Provident, but switched its allegiance to Standard Life just ahead of a midday Takeover Panel deadline.

Standard Life's offer for the UK's biggest manager of closed-life funds was then trumped by a 720p-a-share pitch from privately-owned Pearl Assurance, pricing Resolution at £4.94bn.

Pearl has also upped its stake in Resolution to more than 24pc - meaning it is now in a position to all but veto the Standard Life offer, which needs approval from 75pc of Resolution's shareholders.

Resolution told its shareholders to "take no action" after Pearl announced its higher offer proposals.

Pearl, which is owned by financier Hugh Osmond, highlighted that Standard Life's offer was "uncertain" because almost a third of its bid was made up in shares, exposing Resolution's shareholders to "significant downside risks".

But Standard Life said it would become one of the UK's leading life and pensions firms with about 7m customers if its bid won through.

## Workshops planned on public sector contracts

Breckland Council is running a breakfast workshop in Thetford next month for small and medium-size businesses to learn more about public-sector contracts.

They will hear first-hand how local companies successfully won contracts with Breckland and other councils in Norfolk against national competition. The workshop will also include tips on how to price a tender. "One of our key

priorities is to encourage local businesses to flourish," said Paul Claussen, the council's executive member for economic development.

The event takes place on November 21 at the Innovation Centre, Croxton Road. Registration is at 7.45am, followed by breakfast, with the workshop at 8.30am-10am.

Call 01362 656870 or e-mail economic@breckland.gov.uk

## Housing market blamed for slide in business sales

New business sales at insurer Legal & General slipped yesterday amid a weakening housing market and a fall in corporate annuity sales.

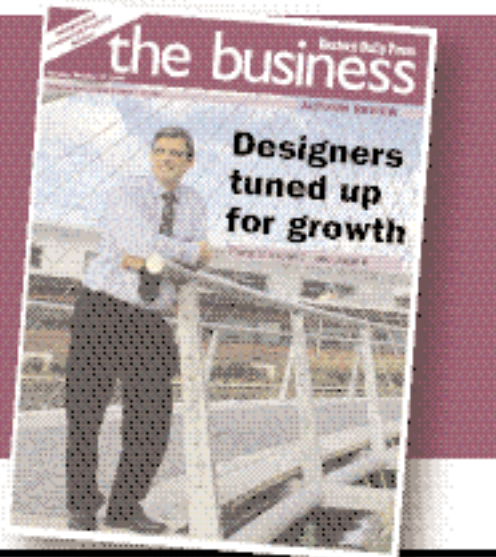
The group said total UK sales - which account for most of its business - for the nine months to September 30 fell 9pc to £1.09bn from £1.21bn the year before.

A housing slowdown, volatile equities and the credit crunch have made investing tough for

consumers, it said. The softer property market meant individual protection sales - including mortgage related business - grew by a "robust" 1pc in the nine months. The pace of housing market activity over the next 12 months remains uncertain, L&G said.

It added: "Industry sales of individual protection will likely struggle to grow over the next year if current housing market conditions persist."

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