

Note of Village Broadband Meeting – Friday 17th February 2017 – Penselwood Village Hall

1. Introduction – by David Warburton MP

The national rollout of superfast broadband is now entering Phase 2 and the government want the final 5% of the country covered by superfast broadband by 2020.

Voneus and Gigaclear were mentioned as possible alternative network providers.

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CD&S) have a new voucher scheme starting in April 2017.

Assurance given that David would do everything he could to assist us in achieving a solution for Pen.

2. Overview of Current Position – by Tony Harrison

Introduction to other speakers:

- Matt Barrow of Connecting Devon and Somerset
- Shaun Dale of BT Open Reach (also representing BT Community Fibre)

Village contacts are: Jane Ashman, Alex Juckes, Geoff Parcell and Tony Harrison.

Wessex Internet

Alex Juckes has been liaising with Wessex Internet. They now have fibre to Pen Ridge Farm, with a fixed wireless dish pointing towards the Church area of the village and are ready to connect properties in that area. They have a direct line of sight to 14 buildings (not all of which are houses).

Wessex Internet have also provided a price to install a fibre connection from Pen Ridge Farm to Pear Ash Farm and to connect properties in the Pear Ash Lane area.

They are still working on a solution for the Underhill area of the village.

There is a concern that Wessex Internet are unable/unwilling to provide a community-wide solution (despite having been asked for one) and because they grow 'holistically' from existing infrastructure, they can only initially provide a service to one end of the village. They are also 'cherry picking' households who they know to have vouchers and therefore money to invest in new infrastructure.

Further detail will be posted on the village website.

BT Open Reach

A meeting was held in the Village Hall almost exactly 2 years ago with BTOR and CDS and very little appears to have happened since!

A desk top evaluation of the viability of putting fibre into Penselwood was carried out between January and June 2016 by BT as part of the CD&S Phase 1 roll out. The outcome has never been published on the CD&S website but enquiries made by Jane in July 2016 revealed Pen had been rejected and despite attempts to discover why, no reason has been given. Subsequently it transpires that the records BT were using to undertake this desktop exercise were incorrect and may well have affected the outcome.

We are seeking a community-wide solution to at least VDSL standard. That is fibre to copper, up to 60 mbs/sec (the level above this being VDSL or fibre to premises and speeds of 600 mbs/sec).

What we are seeking to do is put in place new/improved infrastructure that enables individual householders to purchase an end product that suits them.

Ideally, we would like a new infrastructure in place by the end of 2017.

Tony and Geoff have been in contact with BT Open Reach and there are two issues which have been 'uncovered' and for which BTOR have accepted responsibility:

- 1) BT Open Reach have our cabinet incorrectly labelled on their online records as being fibre enabled. In fact our cabinet (top of Coombe Street) spurs off a cabinet in Bourton that is fibre enabled. The connection to the Coombe Street cabinet is via 2 cables, one made of copper and one made of aluminium, meaning, as we all know, Pen Selwood is not Fibre Enabled.

This meant that the desktop analysis of Pen did not include us in Phases 1 or 2 of the Superfast rollout, as they thought we were already receiving a fibre service.

This information is also being used by other third party providers (who use the BTOR infrastructure to provide their service) and also explains the wording that some people have received back in response to their voucher applications.

BT have therefore been marketing products, such as BT Infinity 1 & 2 based on the assumption they could already provide Superfast broadband to the village when they can't.

Kim Mears, Director at BTOR has explained that even if there were plans to put fibre to our cabinet in place (and currently there aren't) – it would take up to 2 years to get it installed.

- 2) Of the 2 cables that feed our cabinet from the Bourton cabinet – one of these is copper, but the other is aluminium and this is faulty – leading to outage/fluctuating connections for many.

This was 'uncovered'/admitted when Tony asked BTOR to explain why he was obtaining connection speeds of 32 mbs down and 5mbs up whilst his near neighbours got nothing like this.

Tony has proposed to BTOR that the faulty cable to the village cabinet is replaced with fibre.

BT Community Fibre

BT Community Fibre have since been asked to provide a quote for providing a community-wide solution to our infrastructure – this was provided on 9th February 2017 – a copy was on display in the lobby of the village hall and has been uploaded onto the village website.

If the installation proceeds, most households in the village would be upgraded to 'up to 50mbs/sec' with properties further away receiving 'up to 25mbs/sec'.

The design includes 2 new cabinets – a replacement cabinet at the top of Coombe Street, outside Long Lane Stables and an additional cabinet somewhere near the Church.

The scheme is costed at approx. £75,000.

Jane Ashman explained that when she had looked into budget costings for improved infrastructure she had been advised by CDS/BTOR that this was capped at £17,000 per household. It was clarified that this was in fact £1,700 per household.

3. Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) – by Matt Barrow

Phase 1 of Superfast rollout for the 2 counties is 90% complete.

Phase 2 areas are just being agreed/defined and at the moment (by April 2017) but there are no plans to include Pen.

Gigaclear has secured the contract for rolling out Phase 2.

Superfast broadband is defined as 24mbs/sec or over.

Given the evidence that has been provided today, Matt intends to ask Gigaclear to re-consider quoting to provide a Superfast rollout for the village.

It is written into the contract with BT that the state pays for much of the infrastructure rollout and when take up of contracts exceeds 20% that BT then has to payback/share a % of its profits. This is known as Gainshare. This money has to be re-used on further broadband infrastructure projects. This has now exceeded 32% and is rising. He therefore thinks there is a good case for Pen to benefit from this, especially as the installation of new infrastructure is not allowed to be demand driven, but is supposed to be provided to all properties.

Phase 3 has 100% commitment by the government, but as yet, there are no funds on the table for this.

CDS Voucher Scheme

Under the current voucher scheme, we have 21 approved, 15 rejected and 5 in appeal.

Original proposal (set in 2011) was that anyone with a speed of less than 2mbs/sec should be eligible. CDS did ask for this to be raised to 5mbs/sec, but this was declined. However, it has been confirmed that anyone with a speed up to 2.9 mbs/sec will be eligible.

Matt acknowledged that the wording in some of the standard emails was less than helpful and is going to try and have these reworded.

Matt urged anyone who had not yet applied to do so and anyone that had been declined to appeal.

All that is needed is a screen shot showing your speed is less than 3 mbs/sec to be eligible.

Please contact Matt at CDS or Geoff Parcell or Alex Juckes if you need any help with this.

The current voucher scheme is not closed, it has just been 'paused' and will reopen on 1st April 2017 for new applications.

The deadline of 31st March 2017 still stands if you are purchasing a 'stand-alone' solution for your household broadband – such as a satellite dish. However, if you are looking at a community-wide scheme (such as Wessex Internet's fixed wireless solution) then this is being extended.

BT are currently not approved installers under the voucher scheme, so they cannot be used for the BTOR solution currently on the table. Discussions are ongoing as to whether they might be in the future.

4. BT Open Reach/Community Fibre Partnership – by Shaun Dale

It was confirmed that BTOR have 3 action points over the next couple of weeks following this meeting:

- 1) Community Fibre Partnership have provided a quote for 2 new fibre enabled cabinets, but need to undertake a physical inspection of the wires/cables throughout the village network to ensure that they can deliver the speeds quoted.
- 2) BTOR will review the status of the existing network on the far side of our cabinet – to ascertain what needs to be done with the aluminium cable.
- 3) The Community Fibre Partnership quote is based on ‘worst case’ scenario and there may be better ways to deliver suitable speeds to residents. Therefore, other options are to be considered.

Across the UK nearly 200 Community Fibre schemes have been delivered. These have used National Vouchers (we don't have National Vouchers available to us in this area).

The length of copper cable between the fibre/fibre cabinet and property are now critical.

£440 million has recently been pledged by government to enable 100% of households to have Superfast broadband by 2020.

5. Roundup - by David Warburton

David confirmed he will put pressure on BTOR and Connecting Devon and Somerset to use the Gainshare pot (£4.8M currently) for funding the Community Fibre proposal. He will also investigate if Gigaclear can include Pen Selwood in Phase 2 of the Connecting Devon and Somerset rollout as an alternative option.

A figure of £4.8 million has been mentioned as being in the Gainshare ‘pot’.

Jeremy Cox asked David whether the £440 million recently pledged by government was available to spend? David advised that there was ‘money’ available from various directions.

Tony, Jane, Alex and Geoff will remain in contact with those participating and will update the Pen Paper and Village website with further news

Note by Alex Jukes – 21st February 2017.