

Thursday 1 July 2021

### **Broadband Connectivity**

Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), working with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) has successfully delivered upgraded broadband speeds to over 170K premises across the county. This has been achieved by a combination of funding from LCC, District Council partners, European Regional Development Fund and their contractor, BT.

There have been huge improvements in the levels of overall coverage of what is termed 'Superfast Broadband' (download speeds >30Mb/s) which has risen from 43% of all premises across the county, when we embarked upon the first project in early 2013, to 95% at present and still rising. Despite this, we are very much aware that many areas still do not enjoy Superfast broadband. The need for ever-increasing broadband download/upload speeds up to gigabit level (1000Mb/s) is becoming increasingly evident, particularly with the effects of the on-going pandemic. The pandemic has also contributed to dramatic changes in how we access digital services including working and shopping practices and the way we carry out day to day business/learning.

As a result, government strategy has changed and it is now considered that as we move into the future, there will be a need for all premises to be gigabit capable. Latest government targets are to achieve 85% gigabit capable coverage by the end of 2025, ultimately moving to 100%.

The main commercial operators such as BT/Openreach and Virgin Media, along with the larger privately funded operators such as CityFibre and Gigaclear, are all very active in trying to expand their gigabit offering as quickly as possible in what is a highly competitive market. However, their interests tend to lie in the larger cities and towns and urban clusters where commercial viability looks the most favourable.

Added to this, in Lincolnshire, in common with many other areas across the UK, we are seeing the emergence of smaller privately funded providers who are spending large quantities of money in trying to provide gigabit capability to a number of our larger towns and smaller market towns. We see this as a positive step as it will encourage and assist them to increase coverage as much as possible.

So where does that leave our more rural areas, of which there are many in this huge county? The Government, through BDUK, has launched an initiative to try to provide gigabit capable broadband to what they term the 'last 20%'. This includes those premises that are viewed by providers as being commercially less attractive due to remote location, small premises count and excessive build costs. The project was originally named 'Outside-In' but has now changed to 'Project Gigabit'.

At this point in time, BDUK, working with County Councils, are trying to identify clusters of rural premises in the same geographical area that can be bundled up as a 'lot' and sent out to tender to providers that might be interested in bidding for publically funded contracts to reach these areas. This is very much in its infancy at this point and we do know that any plans for this county are currently in their 'second phase' of any potential deployment. LCC are pressing hard to bring the county forward in their thinking but this is currently a work in progress. However, the BDUK Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme is still very much alive and, having spoken with a number of existing operators and private investors in the county, there is a real appetite for driving schemes forward where sufficient community interests exists. You may know that currently any eligible residential premises can claim £1500, and small business £3500 towards a full fibre connection<sup>1</sup>. LCC believes that interested communities should seriously consider this opportunity because it is seen as a very tangible way of getting full fibre without the uncertainty of waiting for Project Gigabit or a private investor to come along. One benefit of this scheme is that providers who engage with and contract to a scheme have to complete fully within 12 months of signing with a community.

Why do I need gigabit capable connectivity?

- It allows whole families to all be working on the internet, whilst simultaneously streaming video content to several devices and gaming without any slowing up or buffering or negative effect on quality of service
- Working from home with gigabit capability, irrespective of what you need the internet connection for, is a seamless process that never suffers with slow speeds
- More and more services such as online banking, shopping, appointments with health professionals such as doctors are being driven to an internet based service requiring a robust internet connection
- Online monitoring of vulnerable relatives and family is becoming more commonplace and a future-proof internet connection ensures a full range of services are available
- Whilst not necessarily a 'need', full fibre to the home connectivity adds value to a property and it is becoming an important 'must have' when a potential buyer is looking at a property. In a recent survey, 69% of respondents said that would not consider buying a home where no faster broadband existed

Should a community be interested in taking up this scheme, then LCC's broadband team will be very happy to advise and assist in setting up the scheme. We regularly attend Parish Council meetings to discuss concerns and answer questions related to the scheme and will be pleased to continue to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'full fibre' refers to a fibre that connects between the local telephone exchange and the end user, known as Fibre To The Premises (FTTP) and is gigabit capable. Currently, the vast majority of premises in the county which are deemed by internet providers to be 'fibre enabled' are actually only Fibre To The Cabinet (FTTC) which has fibre from the telephone exchange to the local roadside green cabinet and then copper cable to the end user with maximum speed (depending on distance from the cabinet) of no more than 80Mb/s

Further information on the scheme can be obtained at the following link.

[Gigabit Vouchers \(culture.gov.uk\)](http://culture.gov.uk)

The Lincolnshire County Council Broadband Team can be contacted via e mail at

[online@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:online@lincolnshire.gov.uk)