

Super Fast Broadband Internet installation across East Sussex

Background

This paper aims to provide a concise update to the Parish Council on the ‘story so far’ together with the latest implementation updates as they pertain to our Parish.

Starting in 2011 the Government allocated funds to put infrastructure in place to provide Super Fast Broadband (BB) to the majority of homes in the UK. (BB means data speeds in excess of 24 Mega Bits per Second (Mbps))

Funds were given by the Government to BDUK a governing body to be distributed across the country. BDUK in turn gave two tranches of funding to East Sussex County Council (ESCC).

Contract 1	Value £10.6m Target 90% of homes by early 2016 Awarded 2013 and now completed. 270,000 homes added
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Contract 2	Value £6m Target 95% of homes by end of 2017 Awarded 2015 and remains ongoing. 57,000 more homes already added 5,000 more due by end of 2017
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Only BT Openreach (BTO) elected to bid and so remain the monopoly supplier contracted by ESCC. A standard contractual template prescribed by BDUK was used.

Ofcom oversees that all Internet Service Providers (ISP) are given a fair chance to compete for the end customer’s business once any BB infrastructure is in place. Hence, in theory, British Telecom ISP acts wholly independently to BTO.

Status of Contract 2

This was originally due to finish end of 2017 however by September 2016 BTO had only used £4m of the original £6m budgeted. ESCC then agreed to add another 2,900 homes to consume the £2m residual and extended completion to end of 2018.

Award of Contract 3

In 2016, the Government (via BDUK) proposed to local councils to add a third round of contracting to use up Gainshare funds. Gainshare funds constitute monies coming back to local councils from their contractors via a profit sharing mechanism.

ESCC raised a Cabinet paper on 15 November 2016 proposing to use its Gainshare money of £3m as follows: –

- Prioritise those homes/businesses with lowest speeds
- Use multiple and local contractors if beneficial
- Use bespoke solutions where appropriate
- Contractors to give transparency of any plans
- Target is to reach 100% BB coverage by contract end

Tendering for Contract 3 started in May 2017, details are unknown and decision is not expected before November 2017. Contract 3 could run concurrent with Contract 2 if new suppliers are chosen.

Communication of plans

Public progress reports have been scant but a new update was recently posted on the Esussex.org website on 01 Nov 2017. It states: -

- Contract 2 end date confirmed as December 2018
- Ofcom rules are restricting the release of planning information
- BTO confirms will only issue plans 3 months at a time
- Progress reports are listed by BB Fibre Cabinet location because these do not naturally follow parish/village boundaries
- The Ninfield Exchange serves Ashburnham / Penhurst (via Cabinet 8). Post codes TN33 9NX, TN33 9PA, TN33 9PB, TN33 9PD, TN33 9PH, TN33 9PJ are listed as having BB available to end users from this cabinet (to be validated!)

BDUK Subsidy Scheme

BDUK offers a subsidy of circa £400 to any home that has less than 2 mbp/s and where it is likely to stay so. The subsidy is sufficient to fund the initial installation of an alternative broadband internet solution.

There are 2 main alternative solutions: -

- Satellite system – has coverage across the county, speeds of up to 25 Mbp/s but suffers from time lag when browsing and data costs are high. A large satellite dish (approx 1 metre diameter) needs to be installed within 10 metres of the home.
- 3G/4G Mobile Router – uses mobile telephone network but only where minimum 3G exists and preferably using 4G. Speeds up to 25 Mbp/s are achievable but generally much less due to obstacles such as trees blocking signal. A remote antenna can be used but needs a high vantage point.

It is unclear how much awareness there is of the subsidy scheme within our Parish.

Proposed next steps

BB has progressed in East Sussex from 3% coverage in 2012 to just over 95% today. This is in line with Government targets. Unfortunately our Parish sits in the 5% of homes that remain un-served, where BB coverage may not be available until December 2018 or later and where future planning information is hard to obtain.

Going forwards our focus in the Parish Council to help our constituents should be to: -

- Establish open communications with ESCC in order to receive details of plans and status of the remaining part of contract 2. BTO report progress to ESCC Procurement (Katy Thomas) weekly, every Thursday. ESCC Procurement thus should have the information that we need, as best it exists from BTO.
- Demand fair, transparent and timely tendering of Contract 3. This is crucial for us.
- Question whether the funds for Contract 3 are enough as it would be unwise to wait until December 2018 to find out the answer. Simple mathematics based on prior delivery performance would suggest that at least £10m is needed for Contract 3 to deliver it's goal of 100% BB coverage, unless technological solutions evolve in our favour i.e. low cost Fibre To The Pole (FTTP).
- Request BDUK for an update of the February 2016 report that gave details of seven trials of emerging technologies being conducted in rural areas and which is thus very relevant to the Contract 3 decision making process.
- Join forces with neighbouring Parishes such as Brightling in order to secure more attention from ESCC regarding the subject of BB delivery in rural areas.

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