

NOTES OF THE WEST DEVON RURAL BROADBAND WORKING GROUP

Meeting held at West Devon Borough Council Offices, Tavistock on

Thursday 24 October 2013

Present: Cllr K Ball, Cllr A Clish-Green, Cllr D Cloke, Cllr J Moody,
Cllr J Sheldon
Robert Plumb – Regeneration Officer
Cllr Tony Barber (SHDC)
Karen Bridgeford (Devon Re-Investment Service)

Apologies:- Jo Rumble (Dartmoor National Park Authority)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Cllr Cloke was elected as Chair of the Group.

2. NOTES OF LAST MEETING/MATTERS ARISING

(a) Advertising on cabinets

This issue had now been discussed with Planning who were of the opinion that planning permission would not be required to display advertisements/information on Broadband cabinets. The position was the same with regard to other authorities in Devon. However, the situation would be monitored. An example of the information it was proposed would be displayed on the cabinets was circulated. This would now need to be signed off by BT before it was displayed. A variation of the information which would be used in National Parks and Conservation Areas was also currently being discussed. This would also need to be signed off by BT once agreed. The information would only be displayed on cabinets in intervention areas and only once the cabinets were live. The information would remain on the cabinets permanently and would be replaced if/when necessary. It was also likely that similar stickers would be displayed when upgrades to cabinets were made.

(b) Guidelines for housing developments

Discussions had been taking place with Forward Planning. Information regarding the provision of Broadband enabling services had been included in South Hams Local Planning policies and it was proposed that the same would happen in West Devon. Discussions were also taking place with Planning. Developers were being encouraged to include provisions for Broadband when building new properties. Efforts were also being made to ensure that all Internet providers were included. However, it was reported that it was unlikely that any of the smaller providers would wish to become involved in the West Devon area. Discussions were also currently taking place with regard to trying to include information regarding upgrades to properties to enable Broadband in Section 106 Agreements.

However, it had been stated that the provision of the necessary infrastructure was a private arrangement between the developer and the statutory undertaker, meaning it could not be included in the Section 106 Agreement. However, further discussions would take place regarding this to determine whether or not it would be possible in the future. A further report would then be given once more information had been obtained. It was reported that BT wanted developers to provide the necessary infrastructure and were currently looking at ways of linking with both developers and Local Authorities. Enquiries would also be made as to whether this issue should be discussed by the Design Review Panel.

Note: Following discussions with Planning staff it is confirmed that the provision of or contribution towards Broadband Connectivity Infrastructure would be allowable under the scope of a S106 agreement.

3. UPDATE ON CONNECTING DEVON AND SOMERSET PROJECT

A briefing document on the current position was circulated. A review meeting had been held on 23 October where it had been stated that good progress was being made. Surveys had taken place in May. 2 cabinets had been erected in August, one in Devon and one in Somerset. As part of phase 1, it was proposed that a further 40 cabinets would be erected during November. A further 35-45 would be erected in December. Parish Councils in relevant areas would be informed 30 days before cabinets went live. They would then be written to again to inform them that the new service was live. They would also be provided with a list of postcodes where the new service would be available. It was reported that it was expected that most of the larger service providers would be involved and making use of the new services.

It was reported that upgrades were currently taking place in Tavistock. However, these were not part of the CDS project. At this stage it was unclear as to whether any funding would be available from the project for the Tavistock area. However, discussions would be taking place with regard to where additional money could be spent in the future. Some of these may include BT Commercial Roll-out areas and towns where there were Business Parks, so it was possible that some money may be available in the future for the Tavistock area.

It was reported that BT had stated that approximately 20% of the areas where the new cabinets were installed would be able to make use of the service. There was some concern with regard to how expectations could be managed in these areas. However, it was stated that in most cases all those wishing to make use of the service would be able to do so. In some cases it may be necessary to install additional cabinets if demand was large enough.

It was not known exactly when the project would be completed. It was being predicted that it would be completed by December 2015. However, some people were predicting it may actually be completed earlier than this. It was reported that some work from other phases in the project was currently being brought forward. This would allow more time to tackle more problematic areas later if required.

It was suggested that a breakdown of the areas that the new cabinets would cover should be provided in the future. This would then make it easier for people to see whether or not the new services would be available in their area.

There was some concern that not all information was currently available on the project website. However, this was due to the fact that not all information was yet available and the project did not want to be providing false/wrong information. It had been agreed that relevant information would be provided on completion of each phase of the project. This would ensure that all information relating to that phase was correct. A map would also be published which would show the areas covered, this would include commercial areas. Information would also be available regarding when likely improvements would be made in areas. However this information would be subject to change and therefore should only be used as a guide.

Regarding whether or not all service providers would be using the service, it was felt that the best way of tackling this would be for anyone who was in an area where the new cabinets had been installed to first contact their provider to see whether or not they were involved. If not, they could then ask whether or not the provider was intending to become involved. If not, it may be necessary for the person to look at finding a new provider. Information on providers who would be involved would be available on the web.

It was suggested that a question/answer guide on Broadband services be included in the next Connect magazine. Further discussions would now take place regarding this.

Action: RP to investigate and advise on copy deadlines/

Regarding “fibre on demand”, it was not clear whether or not this would be available in the future. It was reported it was currently available in some areas of Cornwall and had been made available about a year after the new superfast services had been introduced.

The Group would be kept updated with progress on the project. A link to the CDS website is provided on the Council’s website.

4. RURAL COMMUNITY BROADBAND FUNDING

This funding was being made available from DEFRA for those areas where Broadband services were currently very poor. These were the most rural areas in the country and represented the 10% where the BDUK programme is not expected to cover. Work had taken place with National Parks to look at those upland areas which did not currently have access to fast Broadband. Discussions had also taken place with BDUK, BT and DEFRA. It was reported that there was currently only one exchange in West Devon which would be affected and that was in Postbridge. A bid for funding had now been submitted to DEFRA. It was reported that some other areas had applied for funding, e.g. Brentor and Mary Tavy.

However, these bids had not been successful because they are expected to be at least partly covered by the CDS project roll-out.

It was reported that, after the Government's last spending review, it had been agreed that a further £250m would be provided for the provision of Broadband. Consultations were currently taking place with regard to how this money could be used. Various ways in which the money could be spent were being considered including provision of wireless Broadband, use of alternative suppliers, etc. It was reported that the £250m was actually only half of what would be required to provide services to all areas. At present discussions were taking place on how this additional match funding could be obtained.

5. MEETING ON 6 NOVEMBER

It was reported that a meeting regarding the CDS project was being held at Kilworthy Park at 6.30 pm on 6 November. This meeting is aimed at Parish Councils and community groups. The meeting would be open to anyone who had an interest in attending. It was agreed that information regarding this meeting should be put on the CDS website. South Hams Members would also be informed of the meeting date.

6. NEXT MEETING

16 January 2014, 10.30 am at Kilworthy Park.