

Roll out of higher speed broadband in Bruisyard, Cransford, Rendham and Sweffling

Notes of the meeting held in Bruisyard Village Hall on Thurs 22 January 2015

This meeting was a follow-up to that held on 19 Feb 2014. These notes should be read in conjunction with that of the previous meeting. Present were Peter Ingram, Director of the 'Better Broadband for Suffolk' (BB4S) programme, Jonathan Chown BB4S Programme Manager and representatives nominated by the Parish Councils of Bruisyard, Cransford, Rendham and Sweffling. Peter Ingram reported on the following key changes since the previous meeting;

- Under the first contract which was awarded to BT, the contractual target was to reach 100k premises with higher speed broadband by Nov 2015 out of the ~140k premises not addressed by the BT commercial programme. By the end of Dec 2014 over 70k premises had been reached and the programme was on track to achieve the contractual target by Sept 2015.

- High speed broadband was now defined by the BB4S programme as a download speed of >15Mbit/s.

- Under this first contract, fibre was extended to Rendham and high speed broadband will be available shortly to premises within a 2km copper route from the cabinet which is opposite the local BT exchange in Rendham.

- Funding of £30m been agreed for a second contract of which £15m was from central government and matching funds from the County Council (£10m) and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (£5m).

- This second contract (referred to as the 'extended programme' in the previous meeting) was again awarded to BT but disappointingly was not signed until 31 Oct 2014 as the contractual negotiations took 9 months to complete. This second contract will now result in >95% of premises being reached by early 2018 rather than 95% by March 2017 as mentioned at the previous meeting.

- The consequence of this delay is that the survey and design work will not be completed until end October 2015. Until this is done the phasing of the work and the geographical areas to be served will not be finalised. Deployment will start in Nov 2015 and complete by March 2018.

- Of the areas currently served from the first contract, take up of the high speed service has been encouraging at 17.5% and there is growing confidence this will exceed 20% by Spring 2015. When take-up exceeds 20%, the investment made by the programme can be recovered from BT. These funds will then be used to further extend the programme.

- Mark Bee, Leader of Suffolk County Council had now made a commitment that 100% of premises in Suffolk would be reached by high speed broadband by 2020. It was believed that funding for a third round programme (ie. a 3rd contract) would be committed after the May election to achieve the 100% target by 2020.

- For the second contract a number of new technologies were being trialled to prove that they can be deployed at scale.

- a microwave wireless backhaul solution (at Witnesham) to avoid the need to lay the fibre cable to a remote cabinet.

- remote nodes (as mentioned at the previous meeting) at a village near Hadleigh. This had been a very successful pilot and the technology would be ready for scale deployment from July 2015.

- fibre to the DP (distribution point ie. pole where copper wires connect directly to the premise). This trial was being held at St James near Metfield and would deliver download speeds of up to 1Gbit/s.

- The commitment that all premises unable to receive a min 2 Mbit/s service could opt for a guaranteed 2Mbit/s service under the first contract for delivery by Dec 2015 would now only be made to those premises which would not be addressed by the second contract. The period over which the min 2 Mbit/s service could be requested has however been extended to 2018. The solution being proposed was a satellite internet service with a voucher being given to have a satellite dish installed. The ongoing costs of this solution to the customer were however unclear – also whether it would be a wholesale service enabling the customer to choose the internet service provider.

- The current lack of information on the potential coverage of the high speed broadband service over the 4 villages was of considerable concern to the representatives. The point was made that nearly all premises in Bruisyard, Sweffling and Cransford currently have a download speed of <1Mbit/s with some premises unable to receive any broadband service. Even this limited service was subject to regular interruptions with routers typically having to be reset every few days. The delay to the second contract would be a major disappointment to many in the 4 villages and the lack of information on when an acceptable broadband service would eventually be provided was a huge concern. It was noted that as other areas were now fortunate in being able to access a high speed service, many young people in the 4 villages are now finding that they are being disadvantaged in their educational studies which increasingly require a good and reliable broadband service.

Next steps

A further meeting will be held in November 2015 when the outcome of the second contract 'survey and design phase' are known. This meeting will be brought forward to an earlier date by Peter Ingram and Jonathan Chown if at all possible.

David R Smith

24 Jan 2015