

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**THURSDAY 24 APRIL 2014**  
**ROLLOUT OF HIGH SPEED BROADBAND**  
**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND STRATEGIC HOUSING**  
**(Contact: Will Barton, Tel: (01993) 861482)**

(The report is for information)

**1. PURPOSE**

To update members on the rollout of High Speed Broadband in West Oxfordshire.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That, the report be noted.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. Access to high speed broadband is getting more and more important. Gadgets and appliances – phones, TVs, tablets, games consoles – work best with a good internet connection. But as we share photos with friends online, stream HD movies, video call with family or colleagues and download games or play them online, traditional broadband connections find it harder and harder to cope.
- 3.2. For businesses it is upload speeds that really make a difference. Businesses need to be able to upload work files to colleagues and clients. Many small businesses now make use of “Cloud Computing” to store their material securely online, reducing the need for expensive servers. Again this requires a high speed broadband connection to work effectively.
- 3.3. There are further important areas that are still largely untapped, such as tele-care where an individual’s health can be monitored remotely, that are entirely reliant on high speed broadband.

**Rollout**

- 3.4. It is estimated that “the market” will roll out high speed broadband to approximately 70% of premises in the country without subsidy. The Government, recognising that most of the remaining 30% (known as “the final third”) is in rural areas and also recognising the importance of high speed broadband to these areas, set aside £530m through Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to subsidise an extension of the rollout. Counties were allocated funding from this provision. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) was allocated £3.8m from BDUK and added £10m of its own to make a fund of £13.8m. OCC followed a similar procedure to other counties across the country and ran a procurement to extend the rollout of high speed broadband using these funds.
- 3.5. As a result of this procurement exercise, OCC has signed a contract with BT to increase the coverage of high speed broadband in Oxfordshire to approximately 90%. In West Oxfordshire this figure will be closer to 88% of premises due to the rural nature of the district. The rollout to premises included in this phase is just starting now and will be completed by the end of 2015.

- 3.6. Rural parishes are understandably keen to know when their communities will be able to access the high speed service. OCC and BT have set up a joint website at [www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk) which includes the most up to date information.

### **District contribution**

- 3.7. OCC's contract with BT included an option for district councils to contribute funding to further extend the rollout of high speed broadband in their areas. As a result, district councils were asked to submit a £sum that they could contribute to extend the project. BT would then model the £sums contributed and announce by how much they could extend the rollout in each district.
- 3.8. The Council considered forecasts submitted by OCC and determined that £1.6m was likely to deliver a significant extension of the rollout before the level at which the cost per premises rises exponentially. The initial modelling has been completed and shows that £1.6 would take West Oxfordshire to 94.5% coverage but still leave over 2,600 premises without high speed broadband.
- 3.9. The Council made it clear that it would consider other options to ensure that the £1.6m delivered the best value for money and enabled the maximum number of premises to be connected. Officers have therefore been exploring an alternative option (which could potentially lever in further external funding) to allow a comparison of coverage achieved for the Council's money. The work is not yet complete so a comparison is not yet possible.
- 3.10. However, the situation is further complicated by the fact that the Government has just announced another round of funding known as "Super Fast Extension" or "SEP" to help deliver rural broadband to more premises. Oxfordshire has been allocated £2.15m and this funding has to be matched locally. Although the SEP funding doesn't have to be used to extend the BT / OCC project, it could be used for that purpose. This means that BT will need to undertake a further modelling exercise to determine the level of coverage with funding from district councils matched by SEP for a true comparison to be possible.
- 3.11. The Council is liaising with other Districts to ensure that we identify any further opportunities to get the best deal for our communities. It is estimated that the Council will be in a position to announce its preferred route for investing later in the year.

### **Northmoor**

- 3.12. Members will be aware that there is a separate project to roll out high speed broadband in Northmoor. The village established a community broadband group and successfully applied to DEFRA for a Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF) grant. WODC agreed to act as accountable body for the parish and, as part of this role, oversaw the procurement exercise to select a company to build the network in the village. This procurement exercise has just been completed and local company GigaClear have been selected to do the work. This should take place this year.

## **4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS**

None applicable.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Council has committed up to £1.6m to extend the rollout of high speed broadband to as many premises in the district as possible.

## **6. RISKS**

There is a risk that £1.6m is not enough to roll out high speed broadband across the whole district. However, the Council is looking at options to leverage further funding to extend the rollout as far as possible.

## **7. REASONS**

The rollout of high speed broadband fits with the Council's priority to work in partnership to sustain vibrant, healthy and economically prosperous towns and villages with full employment.

Head of Planning and Strategic Housing

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Background Papers:

None