

Note of points to be raised at Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Wednesday 1 February 2017

Superfast Broadband

1. Availability of Superfast Broadband was promised 3 year ago, the contract with the supplier has been cancelled and we are back to square one with no realistic prospect of service until mid 2018, at the earliest
2. WODC has decided to:
 - Undertake an Open Market Review to gather the data to assess need
 - Undertake a procurement exercise to understand the exact form the procedure will take and what options there are to deliver the solution
3. I would like to strongly emphasise that this project is vital for Church Enstone and its environs, as it is for the remainder of West Oxfordshire. Some residents, who work from home, only moved here because of the promise of better connectivity. Philip Hoy, a fellow resident, will say more about this in his presentation. This is a serious issue for all. Let's get it right this time, please.
4. I would like to challenge Mr. Barton's e-mail of 24th January 2017 to Andrew Beaney. I have read the rules and I understand where Mr. Barton is coming from BUT I do not accept that the status quo cannot be challenged. If, as a result of doing so, nothing changes then so be it.
5. My request is that WODC look at all options before landing on one solution for the future and I can think of four possibilities and there may be more:
 - **Openreach** – I am sure WODC will be aware of Openreach's Community Fibre Projects. This route may provide a way for the local residents, WODC and Openreach to co-fund the project. That's a three way split of the cost. The residents can consider crowd funding their contribution, Openreach will contribute and WODC gets the job done for a third of the cost it would face through another provider. That leaves WODC with more money to use elsewhere in the District.
 - **Infrared** – there is a company, Wurzel, and there may be others, who can provide an alternative. Such a solution has already been provided in Duns Tew. Again, this could be provided in a three way split of the costs.
 - **Cable solution** – other providers (Similar to Cotswold Broadband)
 - **Mobile broadband** – mobile phone providers could be asked to extend and boost their 4G signals to enable tethering to computers to provide very high-speed access, and at the same time improve mobile phone connectivity
6. I believe a detailed study into the options should be undertaken and a comprehensive report published by WODC in order that residents and interested parties can be clear that all alternatives have been carefully

considered rather than accept the single solution now being progressed.

7. Once the review is completed and a selection made, initial procurement should be undertaken to identify a provider with whom a pilot implementation can be undertaken. It is normal for large-scale projects, such as this, to be piloted. It provides vital data and learning for broader roll-outs.
8. I also believe that WODC should consider a "sounding board" and to use "volunteer members of the district community" to help, for example in gathering data for the OMR.
9. Finally, I strongly believe that communication is vital. There need to be monthly updates to show milestone targets and details of progress. In the absence of these there is a perception, as has been the case to date, of a lack of accountability, development or respect for the needs of those affected by the absence of a solution.

I for one would happily become involved in trying to help move this forward and I am sure there are many retired, experienced, project managers who have time to donate. This is a tough ask for WODC, think creatively about how best to resource this without believing you can only do this internally within the council.

I hope my comments are helpful and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

My family and I moved to Church Enstone almost exactly two years ago now. My wife and I had only recently married, and neither the house she and her daughter lived in in Oxford, nor the house I lived in in Chipping Norton, was big enough for the three of us, so we'd been obliged to find somewhere bigger, and the house we found in Church Enstone was just about ideal.

I run a small publishing company, and most of my work is done from home, a great deal of it transacted over the internet. On a regular basis I have to send and receive files in excess of 5 megabites. At regular intervals, I also have to take part in six-way conference calls with editorial colleagues, four of whom are based in the States.

You might therefore understand why my one big reservation about moving to Church Enstone was its poor broadband service. All three of us had enjoyed not just fast but also reliable broadband connections where we were and when we found out that the best we could expect to get in Church Enstone was a speed of between 4 and 5 Mbps, and that dropped connections were not at all unusual, that was almost enough to get us to forgo making an offer on the house we'd found.

What persuaded us that we should go ahead and buy was what the then owner told us about Cotswold Broadband's promise to connect the village later that year, something we found confirmed on CB's website.

We moved in in January 2015, but knowing that it would be some months before we received CB's superfast connection, we did as our next-door neighbours had done. Joe Reeve runs a very successful plastics business based here in Witney, but he does so largely from home. Unable to rely on the BT service, he and his wife are spending £60 a month on a satellite connection. We followed his lead, and a few days after we moved in, and at considerable expense, had ourselves connected via satellite.

Though this service proved to be more reliable than BT's, the gain in speed was marginal, and since it was costing us a lot more, we chose to cancel the service after the first year was up. By then we had expected to be enjoying CB's superfast service, but their promise had been broken, of course, and the deadline pushed back.

Towards the end of last year, with yet another promised deadline passed, I discovered that although CB was now talking about delivering to Church Enstone in February and March of this year, it wasn't all of the village that was going to be connected. Indeed, the whole of our road – everything inside OX7 4NN – was going to be by-passed altogether. Only a handful of the houses in OX7 4NL were to be the beneficiaries. This was news not just to me but to everyone else in the village, and when I couldn't get (from Cotswold Broadband, Gigaclear, or WODC) a clear idea of why this was, and whether it would only be temporary, I decided to raise a petition.

Fifty of the village's residents signed this petition, which called for WODC, CB and our local MP to do everything in their power to ensure that the whole of Church Enstone be afforded a superfast connection, and with no further delay. This was followed, early in the new year, by the announcement that CB were pulling out, and the whole thing was once again up in the air.

I am one of several householders in the village who work from home, all of us badly hampered by our broadband service. I am also not the only person to move to Church Enstone on the promise that it would soon have a superfast connection.. Julian Hilton-Johnson and his family moved to the village immediately after we did, and he says that he would not have done so if he'd known that we'd be no further forward, two years on, and counting. Though Julian is Vice President of Corporate Relations at MacDonalDs Europe, he works mostly from home, and he is being driven to distraction by the hopeless service we are getting. The average broadband speed enjoyed by people in the UK is 28.9 Mbps, six times what we have to live with, and if that's not galling enough, I am reliably informed that we'd be doing better if we lived in Ghana, where the average speed is 7.2.

I want to make one last point: a handful of the signatories to my petition do not want a superfast connection for themselves, but they signed anyway, understanding that such a connection is vital if people aren't to be put off coming to the village, and if house prices aren't to be adversely affected.

Philip Hoy (Dr)