

MEETING NOTES

AREA BROADBAND MEETING

28th NOVEMBER 2016

Introduction

Open meeting was held at Corbie Hall, Maryculter to look at the current proposals for Superfast Broadband in the areas of Maryculter, Netherley and Durris.

Presenters:

- Roddy Mathieson – Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure
- Sara Budge – from Scottish Enterprise and representing Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) - <https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com>
- Liz Mallinson – Business Development / Programme Director with BT – responsible for delivery of Scottish Government Contracts
- Toby Sandison – Community Broadband Advisor, Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) - Highlands and Islands Enterprise - <http://www.hie.co.uk/community-support/community-broadband-scotland/>
- Kees Witte – Meeting organiser from Maryculter (along with George Tait)

Between 70-100 members of the public were present including MSP's, MP's representatives and councillors.

Roddy Mathieson

Roddy Mathieson chaired the meeting and raised the following key points:

- Aberdeenshire is known to be extremely poor for broadband connectivity due to geographical layout, lack of competition (BT only), lack of a commercial structure and the higher than average number of exchange only lines
- Fibre connectivity is important to the area – not just for broadband purposes but for other requirements (for example, mobile masts use fibre technology)
- All mobile phone companies must provide 90% coverage by the end of 2017 (which should see 40 more masts in Aberdeenshire) and therefore mobile broadband will be more widely available
- The council has no ability to influence telephone installation with respect to new housing

Sara Budge

History

Sara's remit was to explain the history behind the DSSB programme, explain the difficulties and also to consider where we are to date. A copy of her slides with statistics is available – but here are the key points she raised:

- Programme 1 – 95% super-fast broadband coverage by fibre in Scotland will be complete by end of 2017, with an expected 89% of infrastructure built in Aberdeenshire.
- Note that DSSB has a remit to put in fibre *infrastructure* and this does not necessarily translate to connected houses. The infrastructure is positioned to ensure fibre is in place to then allow connections to be made. 80% of connections will be superfast in Aberdeenshire by the end of 2017.
- Programme 1 has generated a budget surplus and DSSB are currently considering which postcodes to include for this (see map discussion below).
- R100 is a separate government commitment to ensure every house is receiving >30mbps (not necessarily through fibre) by the end of 2021

Area map

Sara also presented an area map to the meeting which showed that Durris was covered in 'pink'. It is important to understand what this pink area means to make sure that there are no false expectations – and further clarification from Sara Budge was sought, resulting in the following information:

A map was issued at the meeting which demonstrated (in pink) the areas where a fibre infrastructure is in place. A fibre infrastructure means that the area is made ready for a situation where further work would result in fibre connections. This does not mean that every house in the pink area will have a fibre service in place by the end of the project. DSSB is currently undertaking a postcode review for the additional funds made available to them, which will allow them to build on certain areas of the infrastructure, resulting in more postcodes having FTTC made available to them and it is possible that certain postcodes within the pink area of the map will benefit from that funding - depending on the cost suitability (for example where there are bigger clusters of houses / or dependent upon distance from the exchange). A super-fast service would be available 1.2km from any new cabinet and premises a distance of 1.2-2km from any new cabinet would expect a good uplift on current speed. The postcodes that are not included will then be able to consider other community projects - BT community fibre / Community Broadband Scotland

Short term solutions

Sara explained that there are two sources of short term funding available to those who currently have very poor speeds (<2mpbs) and both of these programmes can be found on

the following webpage. There are some conditions to each programme and individual premises are responsible for understanding the conditions.

<https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com/where-when/the-programme/alternative-solutions/>

1. Better Broadband Scheme – UK Government led; £350 towards installation costs; solutions are Radio Mast, Satellite, Fixed wireless and Community Fibre. Applications can be made to Dec 2017. Applicants must not be part of a current DSSB roll out.
2. Avanti Pilot Project – Satellite solution, due to expire at the end of 2016. Scotland only.

In communication since the meeting, Sara has commented that she would encourage people to take part in these schemes – and any take up of the scheme does not preclude properties from becoming a part of the DSSB roll out in future.

Liz Mallinson

Liz discussed the BT Community Fibre Programme and the main points were as follows:

- BT will part fund a fibre solution along with community funding (i.e. households will contribute or can raise money through crowdfunding).
- If a school is in the designated area, there is an additional grant.
- The better broadband voucher can be used for this.
- Application begins by submitting addresses to BT who would then provide an initial quote.
- At the end of the build BT takes ownership and maintain.
- See <http://www.communityfibre.bt.com>
- Was pushed regarding indicative costs – and suggested £25-£50k for a cluster of 10 houses, depending on distance from exchange.
- Initially indicated that any house in the area could benefit from this but when pushed stated that a quote would not be given for houses that were too far from the exchange (8k was used as an example).

Sara Budge has since the meeting also made the point that if communities want to get started with a community solution they should do so quickly and get the prep done rather than waiting.

Liz Mallinson's slides are available.

Toby Sandison

Toby explained the position of CBS and explained the following key points:

- For the postcodes that are not expected to benefit from DSSB funding – there is a potential source of funding available from CBS
- Multi-solution approach, supplier neutral – so if a community wish to enter this process it would follow the procedure laid out in the meeting and the project would then be put out to tender to various types of technology (fixed wireless, community fibre, etc).
- Toby did comment that fixed wireless has been the preferred option to date due to the fact that it can cover a larger area but Liz Mallinson was keen to remind him he should stay supplier neutral!
- <http://www.marykirk.com> is a typical example (although was funded and project managed in a very different way) and would be a good website for people to go to, to understand this type of solution.
- Communities do need to compete for funding with other areas but funding can be up to 89% with the remainder coming from the community
- Currently 17 live networks with 14 in consultation
- Process can take 18 months
- Postcodes for this area that fall outside of DSSB – and therefore could be eligible for a CBS funded project - should be available from Spring 2017.

Toby has since the meeting agreed with Sara that work should begin on community projects as soon as possible. He has suggested that no application be made for CBS until the postcode release to ensure properties are not 'missed' – but has advised that the initial survey work should be done asap. The survey should include the same questions as was submitted by the NKRCC as it is likely that a CBS application would be joint due to the fact that a likely solution would span two or three different community councils.

Toby's meeting slides are available.

Kees Witte

Kees presented the results of a broadband survey that has recently been undertaken and the slides are available. The questions included were Name, House Name (or address), Postcode, Exchange, Average upload speed, Average download speed, Email address.

Other solutions

There was no information available about privately funded solutions currently available within the area – ie Notspot Broadband Mastband or Caleycom – but the speakers had made it clear in advance that they were project neutral (apart from the presence of BT of course).

Comments from the public

As with most public meetings, there was an air of frustration in the hall with three common questions being:

1. Why have you not put fibre into new properties / when repairing lines? (Liz Mallinson – not commercially viable to do line by line)
2. Do you consider those who are on exchanges that are fibre enabled but are too far away to get fibre to be solved? (Sara Budge – these households may be eligible for better broadband vouchers and are not considered to be solved according to R100)
3. Why do we have to pay for fibre through community fibre projects when the rest of the country is getting it for free? (Liz Mallinson – you can wait for a public solution if you would like, or you can act more quickly and get yourselves a community solution).