



Community Broadband Toolkit



Version 1.0 (July 2016)

Produced in collaboration with The Brand New Forest Broadband Development Group
& Hyde Community Projects Ltd.



Brand New Forest Community Broadband Toolkit

Introduction

Being able to access fast broadband is increasingly important for all as services be they business, government, education or leisure, progressively migrate to 'online'. Faster broadband stimulates economic growth, allows more flexible working patterns and helps reduce the impact on the environment.

Although the government gap-funded Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) programme will increase the coverage of Superfast broadband (>24Mbps) to approximately 95% of premises in Hampshire by the end of 2018, many communities in the New Forest will be left with slow, inadequate broadband connectivity.

While there is a government commitment to provide every premises with a minimum 2Mbps service; where a fixed line solution cannot be enabled, the only practical remaining option offered will be a subsidised satellite broadband service. This is not a satisfactory solution for many premises as costs can be high, data latency can cause technical problems and the hardware required can be unsightly.

The Brand New Forest Community Broadband Meeting held in Minstead in January 2015 and subsequent registrations of interest on the Brand New Forest website, identified a strong desire amongst communities to bridge the gap between their existing speeds and what could be expected in the coming years, even if this required private investment.

In response to this gap, this Community Broadband Toolkit is designed to act as a straightforward guide for communities in New Forest District (and beyond) who wish to receive a faster, more reliable broadband service, but are unable to as they live or work in areas outside of the commercial and/or government gap-funded upgrades to the broadband network. It is a guide for communities to privately fund and successfully deliver their own broadband solution.

The toolkit is not designed to be a technical manual; any private solution has a wide of choice of technologies available and these will vary depending upon the scale and geography of your project. Instead it will provide detail of the steps to be taken and elements to consider as you seek to improve your broadband coverage locally.

It is important to note that this is the first version of the Broadband Community Toolkit. Work will continue to improve this over the coming weeks and months, particularly as the works in Hyde (see below) develop. Please keep an eye on the Brand New Forest website for further details of this document as it evolves.

Existing Project – Hyde Community Projects

What was achieved?

This document has been produced in conjunction with Hyde Community Projects (HCP) who in 2015/16 devised a scheme to deliver improved broadband to 475 premises in Hyde and Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley parishes. At the time of delivery, this was the largest project of its kind in the UK.

Having mapped their area of intervention, five new fibre-enabled cabinets will be installed providing 80% of premises in the area with superfast broadband coverage and all with an uplifted speed.

How did they achieve it?

Having explored various options, the cost model employed was BT Openreach's community gap-funding scheme (this has similarities to the BDUK model in that Openreach invest what the new infrastructure is worth to them, but the 'gap-funding' is met by local communities. The new infrastructure remains the property of BT Openreach and is maintained by them).

The cost of delivering these proposals was approximately £177,000 (inc VAT), funds which were raised by residents and businesses making pledges based upon what they felt having access to faster broadband was worth to them. Raising this sum of money was no small undertaking, particularly as the cost would need to be met entirely by the residents and businesses within the community. Experience gained from community projects around the county suggested about 60% of premises would join in, with contributions ranging from about £200 for some domestic light-users up to about £5,000 from some businesses.

Understanding the landscape:

Defining the need – What are the issues locally?:

What are the current speeds?

Understanding your current issues regarding Broadband in an important initial step. If the residents and businesses do not feel that existing speeds are a constraint, or there's no particular desire to see them increased then seeking pledges for improvements will be unsuccessful.

Whilst having an understanding of the existing network will become important, it is also valuable to understand what speeds are being achieved at present at various times throughout the day/week. Speeds can be quickly and easily measured using an online tool (e.g. www.broadbandspeedchecker.co.uk). Getting would-be beneficiaries of any improvement will be helpful because it will

- a) allow you to understand the restrictions of the existing network and
- b) provide a tool to promote the value of any upgrade proposed in the future; for example, your current speeds restrict you from using on-demand TV services but the upgrades will allow you to stream HD content.

What are the available options?

- Wait for the BDUK/market provided delivery programme to reach you – Most communities considering these solutions are in the final 5% with no timetables programme for superfast provision
- Use HCC funding – Whilst HCC may be able to provide funding for rural broadband provision the timescales for this are uncertain and the process is likely to be competitive
- Exploit mobile networks – In rural areas mobile coverage is often limited and data costs can become very expensive for the user
- Satellite broadband – This can be an expensive option and technically can cause problems (e.g. latency in signal delivery)
- Community contact with BT – A process which will require detailed and possibly lengthy negotiations but that selected by Hyde Community Projects

How many premises are excluded from BDUK or market driven upgrades (in the final 5%)?

If the local community group has identified that it wishes to undertake a privately backed initiative to improve broadband then it will be important to understand what plans are currently in place to improve broadband through commercial and government backed means.

The HCP scheme encountered difficulties at this stage when unbeknown to them; a cabinet within their proposed scheme was selected for inclusion within the BDUK work programme. Having based their cost models on premises served by this cabinet being included, it threatened to disrupt the entire programme. As such, any community project needs to have guarantees that their proposed coverage is not subject to intervention from elsewhere.

- Gauging the demand/desire amongst the local community for a solution to be found
- Current broadband usage vs desired broadband usage

Preparing the project:

Forming a working group:

From the outset of your project, you will need to ensure that your community group has a broad spectrum of skills. Forming a small but diverse Committee or Working Group will allow decisions to be made effectively and efficiently. In particular it will be valuable to have skills in the following areas

- Finance – Whilst the HCP Project was large in its scale, the sums of money being collected and managed were significant. Even a smaller project will require careful financial management by way of handling the pledges collected and paying contractors at the appropriate time
- Technology – Whilst this toolkit is deliberately not designed to be a technical manual, having members of your community who understand the technology will be a distinct advantage. As plans develop, there will be ongoing liaison with a chosen network provider who will wish to discuss in some level of detail how the solution will be achieved.
- Publicity and Communication – Much of the groundwork with regard to a community project centres around ongoing communication with your beneficiaries. This includes the initial stages of understanding and identifying the need and desire for a solution through to the pledge collection and delivery of the final solution.
- Legal – Throughout the process individual(s) with a knowledge of legal issues will be beneficial. This includes establishing the body who will be responsible collection of pledges through to working reviewing the final contract in place from the chosen network provider.

On the Ground Support (Champions):

The Broadband Champions are local volunteers who will help explain the project and process in more detail if required. Their role is to explain the benefits of a better broadband service explain the Community Project approach and describe how the pledge and funding process will work. They will also listen to any issues and concerns and ensure these are addressed as the project progresses.

On the ground support will be a vital component of your work. Realistically this means knocking on the doors of individual residents and businesses and being persistent. It may well take various visits to speak to people and furthermore convince them that this is a project worth being involved with. People are likely to have a variety of questions at this stage both technical and practical/financial so it's worth ensuring that the people carrying out the visits are familiar with the details of the project (as far as they'll be established at this stage)

Whilst it may take various visits to speak to the 'decision maker' on the premises, you'll also potentially require numerous visits to cover the various elements of your project. This means at a minimum

- Initial awareness raising as to what the project is about and what it seeks to achieve
- Delivering Pledge Packs to those individuals who have agreed to participate or at very least 'potentially interested'

- Collection of pledges and following up those who are still outstanding

Understanding the Benefits

Understanding the benefit of your own project will be important because it will allow you to sell these to people when you're originally setting out your plan. If people can put a tangible value on investing in this scheme then it will allow them to make an informed decision and place a value on what it's worth to them.

- Broadband speeds can now have a direct impact on the value of a property with The Telegraph reported in 2014 that this can be up to 20%. For people that are considering moving house in the foreseeable future this will have direct financial implications as well as making their property potentially less desirable
- Businesses are increasingly relying upon broadband to operate. Businesses which rely heavily on this may well be able to put a direct financial cost on this if they feel their growth is being restrained as a result
- Upgrading the broadband infrastructure will build your community into future upgrades. There's significant uncertainty about how the final 5% of the country will be reached at this time but enabling cabinets to superfast technology will mean that when future network improvements take place, your community will not be at the back of the queue
- Modern day life increasingly depends upon a fast broadband connection. Media services are increasingly being delivered online as are more government services

Raising Public Awareness:

Raising awareness amongst the public is a vital factor in ensuring your project is a success. The beneficiaries of your scheme need to be fully informed of the proposed works, how it will benefit them and what will be expected from them.

- Community Meetings – An initial community meeting is a useful starting point to bring together beneficiaries and explain the project's ambitions. It will also allow members of the public to ask any questions which may ultimately save time and effort as opposed to dealing with individual correspondence further down the line
- Dedicated website – HCP benefitted from having a website people could be signposted to. This served a variety of purposes but primarily it acted as a focal point for all updates (blogs, videos etc.) to be posted as and when new information was available. The website was also used to provide information on how pledges could be made and acted as a reference point for external bodies (e.g. local authorities, business groups) to signpost to when aiding with publicity.
- Social Media – This should complement a web presence and can be used to provide regular update to the project as and when progress is made.
- Posters/flyers – Providing permissions have been obtained, posters within the community can help to raise awareness, particularly when seeking to raise awareness for Community Meetings.
- Pledge packs – These are perhaps the single most important element of raising awareness of your project. It's a chance to provide highly detailed plans of what is being proposed within the community. This should include
 - Maps of the proposed upgrade area
 - Tangible benefits to end users
 - Projected costs of delivering the plan
 - Contact details for project champions

Producing and delivering these packs to individual premises is no small undertaking and this should be considered in advance. Consider the resources required to print these and where assistance can be found.

Choosing your Delivery Vehicle:

When you establish your community project, you will need to identify a suitable vehicle with which to deliver this; it will need to be an incorporated body. In the same way that there is no single technological solution, there is no suggested vehicle as each community's need are individual. Below are a small selection of options available:

- Limited Company – In a limited company, the liability of members or subscribers of the company is limited to what they have invested or guaranteed to the company. A limited company is an organisation that you can set up to run your business - it's responsible in its own right for everything it does and its finances are separate to your personal finances.
- Community Interest Company (CICs) – Designed for social enterprises that wish to use their assets for public good. CICs are designed to be easy to establish and can within themselves a variety of forms including Cooperatives, Community Benefit Societies (as in the case of Hyde Community Projects) and mutual organisations.
- Charity – A charity benefits from tax relief and, in some cases specific grants and funding. It must however have a specific charitable aim and in terms of establishing, is usually more onerous than the aforementioned vehicles.

Information on all structures including information about establishing your organisation can be found on the gov.uk website.

- Researching funding models available
 - Pledge collection is the most common approach in broadband projects and the method utilised by HCP. Even within this model however, there are various options which can be explored. Again, the most common and that utilised by HCP was 'pay what you can afford' or perhaps more appropriately 'pay what it's worth to you'. This will see varying amounts collected with the end result hopefully being that your overall target is reached. It's generally thought that 60% take-up of pledges is a good rate but keep in mind that the amounts people are able to pledge will vary significantly. It's worth making clear during your promotional phase that the amount pledged through this process is strictly confidential; only two people will know the amounts, the pledger and the treasurer. Other methods of collecting pledges are a little more structured. These can include
 - Pay according to Council Tax Band
 - A percentage value of the property
 - Whilst funding is often a time consuming and challenging process, it's possible that you may be able to get assistance with your project. It's difficult to list funding opportunities through this toolkit and funding streams alter on a regular basis. But whether through European sources or from a more local level, once your organisation is established, you can access a free to use business grant search if you're located in the New Forest. The service is provided by the European Information Service Centre and covers all funding across all providers. Simply call 0330 0010375 and explain what your project is working to achieve and the rest will be done for you. You'll be provided with a list of matching schemes and details on how to apply. Any funding successfully identified is likely to require match funding so this will not be the sole source of
It's worth keeping in mind that the process of applying for funding, particularly if EU funding is identified that the process can be lengthy (potentially beyond six months). You'll therefore need to be aware of this when working through the timescales of your project.

Evidence Gathering:

Understanding the area in which you'll be working will be helpful in a number of ways. In particular:

- How many premises are in the area you're focusing on? Once you know the cost of your overall network upgrade, it will give you an idea of the average sum you'll need from each contributor
- What is the split between business premises and residential premises? The amount that businesses or residents are willing/able to pay may vary.
- People currently/wish to home work – An increasing trend is for employees to work from home, even for part of the week. Individuals can however be restricted from doing so where broadband is inadequate. Enabling individuals to home work can improve work/life balance
- How many of the properties are (holiday) lets – This has implications for two reasons. Firstly that when visiting door to door, the inhabitants are unlikely to be in a position to respond to your enquiry and secondly it may alter the value the property owner puts onto improved speeds albeit increasingly holiday lets demand a broadband service.
- Community Facilities – Could it be that your broadband upgrade will enable improved community facilities, for example a public internet facility in the local community centre; what tangible benefit would this have?
- Research funding and support sources to assist with printing, communication and other overhead expenses
- Identifying potential technical providers to work up technical solutions, service provision and delivery times; seeking quotes

Delivering the Project:

- Setting out a clear project plan with defined milestones and target dates
- Mapping, costing and testing feasibility of the proposed solution:
 - Calculating the full budget including surveying, installing infrastructure, ongoing infrastructure costs, costs of running community broadband delivery organization, ISP service etc.
 - Calculating budget in terms of required individual community contributions
 - Using GIS or other mapping system to illustrate and calculate the impacted area of intervention. The use of GIS software was a particularly important tool in the Hyde project as it allowed them to accurately map the reach of their own project. Publically available information about the current telephone/broadband network is limited although some information can be obtained from the website SamKnows (www.samknows.com/broadband). In order to map the full reach of their own network, work was undertaken by the Hyde Group to plot individual cabinets and calculate their reach. This was an important exercise in determining what their community (customers) were likely to receive by way of network improvements.

What are the risks?

The main risks to a project relate to funding. If pledges and cash collected are insufficient then the project will not go ahead. All pledge details should be destroyed and any funds pledged returned.

In the case of Hyde Community Projects, BT Openreach surveyed the village in detail for some months and were confident of their plans and pricing. The contract signed ensured that there can be no additional costs and that service standards were satisfactory. Once the project has started any issues will be the responsibility of BT Openreach. The approach they are taking is proven around the UK.

Overcoming the barriers to developing infrastructure

The New Forest is a unique environment and this brings with it a series of challenges. Its status as National Park with various land protection orders can make the placing of new infrastructure challenging.

When mapping your project, you may identify that some existing cabinets and/or new cabinets are situated on Crown Land. Where this is the case you will need to work with the Verderers and Natural England who have a responsibility to protect the landscape, flora and fauna.

Because the countywide programme is now well established, the Verderers are well aware of the issues regarding siting of new/replacement cabinets. The process can however take some time to work through so it is beneficial to start this dialogue at the earliest possible point.

Where new new/replacement cabinets are to be installed, you will also need to ensure that the relevant planning authority (New Forest District Council or National Park Authority) are aware of your plans. Again, start this process at the earliest possible stage.

The process of selecting a provider is something that will need to be considered. Any level of research will reveal that various providers of this service are available. However, in the case of Hyde Community Projects a shortlist of one was quickly established. BT OpenReach were selected as they would adopt the lines once installed. This not only allows for a complete package to be delivered but also allows for future proofing meaning that any future upgrades will be inclusive on this area and they will not be left behind.

Whilst there are potentially a number of providers available to install you upgrade you may need to consider the 'legacy' of any works carried out meaning that you're not only basing your decision on a cost at the time but also costs to be incurred further down the line when further upgrades to (next generation) improvements are available.

Useful Resources

There are a range of useful resources to guide you through the process. Remember also that you're not the first to have gone through this process and whilst your project is unique inasmuch as your solution is specific to you, there are others who have dealt with the same organisations, difficulties and management issues that you'll face.

- Hyde Community Projects (www.hydecommunityprojects.org.uk) – HCP is the largest privately funded scheme of its type in the UK, this website outlines the details of their project
- GU8 Superfast (www.gu8superfast.co.uk) – A similar project to HCP albeit at a smaller scale. The website has a list of very useful resources as well as explaining the processes. The site also contains lists to various other local broadband projects in the UK
- Sam Knows (www.samknows.com/broadband) – A useful tool to understand at a basic level what the current network in your area is providing. It is likely that a more in-depth analysis is required for further development but it's a helpful starter
- Hampshire Superfast Broadband (www.hampshiresuperfastbroadband.com) – This is the website outlining the plans for government funded (BDUK) improvements. It outlines the proposals under the current contract and which areas are set to receive upgrades
- LGA Up to Speed (www.lguptospeed.org) – The Local Government Association's Broadband website. This contains a speed test including data about existing coverage. There's also some useful resources for local communities

Support Provided

To enable an accurate understanding of the potential your project has, mapping this via GIS will be an important tool. This will help to inform not only the overall reach of any proposed solution but also the cost model which you'll utilise to ensure that the necessary funds are raised. Whilst open source GIS modelling is available to assist with this, depending upon your needs, there may be assistance provided via the GIS Team at New Forest District Council. You will need to provide a written request of the support required following which it will be assessed.

The Pledge Packs will contain a potentially significant amount of information and as such the print demand for this could be considerable. You will need to consider not only the resources required for preparing and collating this information but also that of printing the documents. Again, depending on the specific requirements and timescales assistance may be available via New Forest District Council. Please contact the Employment & Tourism Team with your specific requirements.

The Employment & Tourism Team at NFDC will also be able to assist with the promotional aspect of an individual campaign. This can be through a variety of methods but primarily through established digital channels including eNewsletters and social media. The contact database for both businesses and residents is now considerable so for communicating overarching messages, this could be a useful tool.