

## **Re Community Fibre Partnership - Fibre to Premises Broadband.**

Councillors will be aware as a result of e mail communications since the last meeting of the following progress.

2 of the 4 schemes have now progressed to the next stage. These are Cotheridge/Church Lane ( 55 addresses) and Little Green (27 addresses). This means that Open Reach have applied for the government vouchers, and will then contact those who have signed up. OpenReach will then plan the work in and announce the timeline, which is expected to be no less than 12 months from the announcement.

Getting to this point has not been possible without the extra support offered by Worcestershire County Council (through the top up fund) and the efforts of a number of local councillors.

The 3rd scheme comprising of 15 addresses (Cotheridge/Broadwas) has yet to reach viability however the WCC team are providing extra support and are hopeful this can be achieved. News should be available shortly.

The 4th scheme (Broadwas) some 120 addresses, remains significantly short of reaching the threshold even with the WCC top up. With the help of some local residents and councillors the following has been undertaken

- Details promoted on social media (Next door) this has resulted in one new sign up and potentially 2 more which are being followed up
- A plan for the above group to call on all addresses that have not responded (88) with a revised information sheet (attached) and an invitation to consider signing up. There are currently 6 people who have volunteered to do this.
- The increasing seriousness of the Covid pandemic has meant we are currently checking that we are able to put appropriate precautions in place and that the activity falls within the (changing restrictions and conditions), but it is hoped to be able to progress shortly and conclude the exercise by the end of January.
- If we can get enough sign ups to produce a voucher value of c£20k then it is likely with the Top Up Fund that this scheme will be able to proceed.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer in his recent spending review reduced the funding set aside for Full Fibre Broadband and reduced the target figure set by government for roll out by 2025 (government's manifesto pledge to provide full-fibre or gigabit-capable broadband to every home and business in the country by 2025, this means that it will be less likely that there will be a similar opportunity in the near future to obtain funding and support.

It also has to be reported that there was as a result of misunderstanding and inadvertent potential breach of GDPR, as the Parish Council in its role as the legal entity was required to advise all those who had signed up of the next stages. I made an incorrect assumption that the clause in the contract provided for an open e mail to those concerned. This turned out to be incorrect and an apology is being organised. There were no complaints, however as a separate matter the PC will need to consider whether there is a requirement to report a breach to the ICO. An apology and explanation to those concerned is being organised.

Just 18% of properties, or 5.1 million, have access to the fastest broadband, which connects them to the network with fibre-optic cables. The UK was ranked 47th in the world for speed last year, just behind Grenada, the Bahamas and Portugal. The level of prosperities in rural and isolated areas is well short of 18% and despite the main fibre network, many rural properties are a long way from the "green cabinets" that link into the main network, which means that their speeds are often slow

and that when more than one task is undertaken and or more than one user is on line these slow even more.

## **Summary**

2 of the 4 schemes which represent the the majority of addresses in the parish (Open Reach systems are not coterminous with parish boundaries), are now across the threshold and await the final contracting stage and the announcement of a start/finish date.

The smaller Broadwas/Cotheridge scheme looks hopeful and has been picked up by the WCC team, in part because the addresses buffer up with other schemes.

Despite repeated attempts to convey to the 120 addresses in Broadwas the benefits and potential of this opportunity, sign up is still significantly short of the threshold. Some of the reasons for this are most likely to do with demographics ( for some people understandably internet access is not a significant matter), the fact that most but not all get good speeds already and for some there is a reluctance (again understandable) to incur a short term increase in cost for their service. As a result there remains a need to convince people that this is an opportunity that may not come along again for some time, and that it is more likely in the future that communities who have full fibre connections will be more attractive in terms of investment and the value of properties in general. It is hoped that more local residents will also recognise that without more people stepping forward all will loose.

Councillors are asked to note the above report and to continue to support efforts to get the remaining 2 schemes across the line.

Richard Burrows  
Parish Councillor.

4.1.21