

BRAG Steering Group meeting – BDUK/broadband update

Current position

Buckinghamshire Business First is working hard to deliver high quality broadband across the county. This work has been ongoing for a considerable period of time with a particular focus on detailed research (mapping and analysis of existing broadband provision), survey work linked to demand stimulation and commercial awareness, liaison with BT to facilitate the acceleration of exchange upgrades (superfast/fibre), development of a wireless 'pilot' project in Aylesbury Vale and direct liaison with wholesale broadband suppliers. We are now embracing the opportunity to deliver 21st century broadband infrastructure to Bucks through a working relationship with BDUK (the agency set up to deliver the Government's aspirations for broadband provision).

As such, we are developing a revised Local Broadband Plan which provides the basis from which to access the BDUK funding. Through a combination of BDUK, local authority and commercial broadband intervention, we are aiming to ensure that at least 90% of the county's premises receive superfast broadband (up to 40 mbps), with the remainder achieving speeds of at least 2 mbps using a number of alternative technologies (wireless etc). This will be targeted primarily at areas where the market will not deliver based on existing commercial drivers (so-called 'white spaces').

Activity within the last few months sees us in a position where we are close to gaining full LBP approval. Some of the key outcomes are listed below:

- We have agreed to work in partnership with our colleagues in Herts (Herts CC/Herts LEP) to deliver a joint project, under the guidance of BDUK. This is necessary to give the project the required economies of scale and critical mass in order for it to be commercially attractive during the procurement process. A joint LBP is now being developed which will articulate project scale, cost, governance, shared resources and timetables for delivery.
- This approach has the full support of BDUK and they are providing direct officer support to pull the submission together. BDUK are keen to use this as a template for other areas where similar collaboration will be appropriate. We hope this will accelerate our progress and ensure we are at the front of the pipeline.
- The approach has full political support from both Bucks CC and Herts CC Leaders and a very good working relationship has developed at officer level. Broadband is a top priority for both counties and the partnership reflects our support to other Herts initiatives (Herts LEP/'Maylands' Enterprise Zone etc).
- The existing Bucks LBP is being used as the template (due to its advanced state and at BDUK's recommendation) from which Herts can 'bolt on' their data, background information and other local intelligence. This work is underway.
- We are currently analysing BDUK's data in order to better understand the recent allocation announcement for Bucks and MK (£2.1 million). This will allow us (and Herts) to resolve any discrepancies with local data and scale the project appropriately – in terms of the number of premises served, specific geographies and therefore the overall delivery costs.
- With support from BDUK and colleagues in Herts, we are working to submit our LBP by late October – we would expect imminent approval and confirmation of the funding agreement thereafter. Nigel Sims is helping to manage BCC expectations as well as confirming likely match-funding requirements (CAPEX and revenue) which will need full Cabinet approval and underwriting for the project's 3 year duration.

- It is anticipated that the project will officially begin in early 2012 – this will involve formalising working agreements with Herts CC (governance), developing a joint project team and outlining a detailed approach to core activities such as demand stimulation and 'digital inclusion'. There will also be a significant research and mapping exercise in preparation for full procurement.
- The LBP will utilise BDUK's 'umbrella' EU framework which is expected to be in operation by May 2012. We hope to tender the joint Bucks/Herts project to wholesale broadband providers by late summer 2012.
- Much activity has been taking place around this – PR and media enquiries, liaison with 'mobilised' community groups and interaction with BT and other partners.

In relation to the 'East of Vale' project, BBF has been working to deliver a wireless solution in AVDC. This is centred on Wingrave Business Park – this location was selected after substantial research and survey work suggested a need for improved connectivity combined with a local appetite for enhanced performance. The project is now in the process of being implemented with a new wireless service available to a number of surrounding communities, such as Wingrave itself, Slapton, Mentmore, Ivinghoe Aston and Horton – this is being delivered by Village Networks. Local customers are now benefitting from this new connection and it will be further improved following the installation of fibre infrastructure to Wingrave Business Park.

It is BBF's hope that via the BDUK project, we can bring high quality broadband to as many people as possible – this is an example as to how this may be delivered in practice, dependant on a number of variables which will dictate the technology/infrastructure used (geography, topography, population density etc.