

Cherwell District Council

Executive

1 February 2016

Progress of Superfast Broadband

Report of Head of Strategic Planning and the Economy

This report is public

Purpose of report

This report explains the progress made to date by the 'Better Broadband for Oxfordshire' programme, and how Cherwell District Council's contribution from now until December 2017 will extend the availability of Superfast Broadband to businesses and homes across the district.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the financial contribution of £545,000 from the New Homes Bonus being made by the Council to extend the availability of Superfast Broadband to homes and business premises across the district by December 2017.
- 1.2 To support the investigation of alternative solutions towards extending the availability of Superfast Broadband to all premises as soon as possible through continued work with businesses, communities and partner organisations.
- 1.3 To consider in due course the most effective use of the remaining £455,000 of new Homes Bonus to address the most hard to connect premises.

2.0 Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Cherwell District Council recognises the importance of securing Superfast Broadband coverage across the District in support of the growth of the economy and also for improved access to online services by the communities of Cherwell.
- 2.2 Cherwell District Council has joined the 'Better Broadband for Oxfordshire' partnership between Oxfordshire County Council, BT and Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK). Details of the national scheme are provided at <https://www.gov.uk/broadband-delivery-uk> and explained locally at: www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk

- 2.3 The first phase of the programme – launched in 2013 and totalling £25 million - was made up of £10m from Oxfordshire County Council, £4m from the Government (BDUK) and £11m from BT. It built upon the existing commercial footprint in the county with the aim that at least 90 per cent of all business and residential premises (64,500) would have access to Superfast Broadband speeds of at least 24 Mbps by the end of 2015.
- 2.4 In February 2015, a second phase was announced (to begin in January 2016) of an additional £5.1 million of further funding: £1 million from South Oxfordshire District Council, £545,000 from Cherwell District Council, £250,000 from the Vale of the White Horse District Council, £200,000 from Oxfordshire County Council, £1.2m from BT, and £1.95m from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Superfast Extension Programme (SEP). This enables the programme to roll out fibre broadband to an additional 6,500 premises.
- 2.5 In November 2015, further funding of £5.58 million was also added to enable 4,600 additional premises to access Superfast Broadband: £2 million from the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP); £120,000 from the South East Midlands LEP (via Cherwell District Council); £168,000 from Oxford City Council; £2.2 million from the Government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) programme and £1.1 million from BT.

3.0 The Council's Investment in Superfast Broadband

- 3.1 Phase two of the 'Better Broadband for Oxfordshire' is now underway (from January 2016). By using Cherwell District Council's investment to encourage others to also invest, as explained above, it aims to secure an extension of the planned coverage and exceed 95% coverage of premises able to access Superfast Broadband by December 2017.
- 3.2 The estimate of additional coverage in Cherwell for phase two of the programme, combining SEMLEP and Cherwell investments, is 3,069 TPP (Total Premises Passed).
- 3.3 Detailed planning has been undertaken and has been translated onto an interactive map and postcode checker. This map is available for public view at: <http://www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk/cms/content/coverage-map>
- 3.4 Estimated dates of delivery are shown but it is important to note that these dates are *estimates* and may be subject to delay, due to technical difficulties such as access to power or easements, or may be brought forward following more favourable site surveys.
- 3.5 The maps helpfully integrate all information relating to the additional (phase two) funding received from partners including this council. They also include a number of business parks which were prioritised by Cherwell District Council for connection as a result of this investment as centres for local employment and have been included where viable in the currently mapped data. Overall, the aim has been to extend coverage to as many premises as possible, both business and residential, through the resources the Council has made available into the partnership.

- 3.6 Over the coming months, after planning and surveying has been carried out, engineers from Openreach – BT’s local network business – will start laying fibre optic cable and installing new road-side fibre broadband cabinets. The dark green cabinets will serve as a physical sign that superfast broadband is imminently due to be available. Once technical issues have been resolved, a sticker will be placed on the cabinet to inform people that orders can now be placed.
- 3.7 Businesses and residents choosing to upgrade will be able to get download speeds of up to 80 megabits per second (80Mbps) and upload speeds of up to 20Mbps (subject to local conditions). Because the Openreach network is ‘open,’ there is a choice of fibre broadband providers, with more than 140 currently operating in the UK.
- 3.8 Communication with businesses, parishes and householders continues day-to-day, with answers to frequently asked questions being shown at: <http://www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk/cms/content/faqs>
- 3.9 In co-ordination with Oxfordshire County Council’s specialist team (partly funded by CDC), enquiries are responded to. The Senior Economic Growth Officer also attends the regular contract management meetings with the County Council, BT and BDUK whereby implementation is monitored and any matters can be considered. Meetings are also held between officers and Cherwell’s Lead Member for Financial Management and will continue to be arranged to ensure the views of this Council are reflected in the delivery of the programme over the next two years (and beyond).

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The Council’s decision to invest £545,000 from Cherwell District Council’s New Homes Bonus Economic Growth reserve will extend Superfast Broadband across the district over the next two years. This is an important contribution as it has attracted further funding from Government (BDUK), SEMLEP and other partners.
- 4.2 The Council’s funding is part of over £35million being invested within Oxfordshire by the end of 2017. The percentage of county homes and businesses able to get superfast fibre broadband will be increased to more than 95 per cent (over 75,000) when combined with earlier phases of the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire programme and BT’s commercial roll-out.
- 4.3 The estimate of additional coverage in Cherwell for phase two of the programme, combining SEMLEP and Cherwell investments, is 3,069 TPP (Total Premises Passed).
- 4.4 The final 5 per cent of premises will be more challenging to connect as they will typically be more isolated and require use of alternative technologies due to the cost of laying fibre optic cable. The Council should therefore maintain its close involvement with the Programme over the next two years, during which time solutions to assist remaining premises can be investigated alongside further initiatives expected from Government.

5.0 Consultation

None on this report

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To not contribute to the extension of the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire programme was rejected by the Executive as it was considered important to maximise the availability of Superfast Broadband across the district due to market failure and the availability of match funding from external sources.

Option 2: To invest the full £1 million of Council's New Homes Bonus in phase two roll-out was rejected because it has the potential to be more effectively used in a third phase to draw additional funding from partners to assist the final 5 per cent of premises.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The Council has already agreed the funding for this programme. The Lead Member for Financial Management and the Director of Resources have agreed the details of this extension programme.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

- 7.2 Further to Council agreeing to the funding of this programme, the Lead Member for Financial Management, the Head of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) and Team Leader – Property and Contracts have agreed the details of this extension programme.

Comments checked by:

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8.0 Decision Information

Financial Threshold Met: yes

Community Impact Threshold Met: yes

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

The provision of Superfast Broadband is central to the Corporate Plan by providing the essential infrastructure to support economic growth and access to services.

Lead Councillor

Councillor Ken Atack, Lead Member for Financial Management

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	None
Background Papers	
None	
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