

REPORT ON BETTER BROADBAND PROJECT FOR OXFORDSHIRE



INTRODUCTION

The government has recognised that fast reliable broadband internet access is now essential for homes to benefit from online services and for businesses to compete globally. Across the UK broadband speeds have increased in cities and urban areas as infrastructure investment is more commercially viable in these areas. This has left many rural areas receiving far slower speeds, and unable to access many types of online services. In order to bridge this gap the government has made £530 million pounds available to stimulate commercial investment and bring high speed broadband to rural communities.

This investment has been managed through a national program called Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK). In Oxfordshire the County Council has carried out a procurement exercise jointly with BDUK to find a commercial partner to develop the necessary infrastructure.

CONTRACT AWARD

In August the County Council announced that BT had won the contract to bring faster broadband to rural Oxfordshire. A two and a half year program to upgrade existing infrastructure will now commence. Investment of £25million has been announced, with £10m coming from the County, £4m from BDUK and £11m from BT. The program aims to deliver superfast broadband to 90% of premises across the county by the end of 2015. Superfast broadband is defined as more than 24 megabits per second (Mbps). This should be fast enough to enable users to stream video, share high quality photos, download large files quickly and use video conferencing applications. According to Ofcom, the average broadband speed in Oxfordshire is currently 12.3Mbps

The plan will bring fibre optic broadband from telephone exchanges to the nearest BT street cabinet. This is known as Fibre to the cabinet (FTTC). The exact speed you will receive depends on your distance from the cabinet. The closer you are, the faster the speed which you will receive.

EXISTING PROVISION IN EYNSHAM

The telephone exchange in Eynsham was upgraded to an asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) in 2005. According to BT it should be possible to receive up to 24 Mbps currently with a BT broadband package. Actual performance is likely to be much less than this and will vary due to a number of factors. These include:

- ⌚ How near you are to the exchange¹
- ⌚ The length and quality of any phone wiring extensions in your home
- ⌚ The processing speed of your computer and router or modem
- ⌚ The speed of connection between your computer and modem or router (wireless connectivity is slower than a wired solution)
- ⌚ The time of day (evenings are slower, when more people are accessing the network)
- ⌚ Whether you are sharing your connection with other devices such as smart phones or games consoles

¹ Eynsham's exchange is located at the top of Queens Lane.

- ⌚ Whether you have software running in the background

The asymmetric part of ADSL means that its faster to receive or download information than it is to transmit or upload information. This was fine eight years ago when most internet traffic was being downloaded. However today people want to upload photographs, send large documents and use video conferencing services (such as Skype), which all require a fast upload speed too. This has made the existing ADSL network almost redundant.

There are other solutions available. Virgin Broadband is available in some parts of Eynsham via a fibre optic cable. Virgin offer speeds of up to 120 Mbps to both download and upload information.

Other alternatives rely on accessing the internet via mobile services on the 3G network. Typically these speeds are only around 4 Mbps, although the provider 3 has recently launched an ultrafast product which can get up to 11 Mbps. Availability of these services in Eynsham is as follows:

- ⌚ Half of Eynsham is covered by Three's Ultrafast network (mainly the eastern half of the parish)
- ⌚ Everything Everywhere (Orange & T-Mobile) has 3G coverage across Eynsham
- ⌚ Vodafone's 3G coverage is very limited
- ⌚ O2's 3G coverage is good outdoors, but not indoors

IMPACT OF BETTER BROADBAND PROJECT ON EYNSHAM

A map has been produced to show where in the County superfast broadband will be rolled out, although it should be noted that it is based on information available when the project commenced. Unfortunately the map is not very clear as it's been produced at a very low resolution, but an extract of the impact on Eynsham is shown below.

Key

- ⌚ Grey = Fibre Broadband currently available
- ⌚ Blue = Council supported fibre rollout by end of 2015
- ⌚ White = Between 2Mbps and 24 Mbps available by 2015 (i.e. not in scope of the project)

Eynsham appears to be almost fully covered by the plan, however it is subject to change. BT are currently scoping the work to be carried out, so we don't yet know when work will start in Eynsham, or anywhere else. This scoping work will take until December 2013 by which time the map may look different to now.

It should be noted that even when this project is completed, there is no guarantee that speed of 24 Mbps will be achieved given the factors referred to in the previous section. However the upgrading of the cabling into the Eynsham exchange means that anyone accessing Broadband via their telephone line should get a much faster connection than they do currently.

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