

West Berkshire Community Broadband

When I came to this village almost 20 years ago, I had lived through 1980's Britain and the changes that had brought and I thought Community was a word that had passed into disuse. For the first 15 years of being here, I met few of my neighbours and travelled to work in London, Manchester and other far flung reaches of the country. Like many I left early, came home late and really didn't understand the Village I had moved too.

I was lucky enough to retire from corporate life early and many of you will know me as the chap that for the last few years pops around to fix a tap, mend the electrics and help with the computer.

A while ago Mick, Rob and I were discussing the dire state of our local broadband and its negative impact on the community. It reduces education, reduces opportunity for the local people and forces people to travel to work who otherwise could effectively work from home. At the end of that conversation we had a plan: but looking back we started something else for us all – a new sense of being part of and wanting to contribute more to our community.

During the fundraising I met all of the Parish and Church Councils and we have all met many more members of our community over the course of rolling out the network across Sulhamstead Hill, Englefield and White House Green.

That network is in and working well, as I write the system tells me that the entire network is running perfectly and at peak times this evening we were running at 35% usage on our network: Plenty of spare to grow with.

We have also passed our financial targets which means we are self sustaining. We are very pleased to make this happen so quickly as we charge half of what an equivalent service provider would for a similar service. It was always key for us that the network would be inclusive and affordable for all within the community. If we are lucky enough to make a profit it will go back into our community.

We are now putting live network into Wises Firs and Shortheath Lane. Rob, Mick, Martin and I are still around and still installing customers and we don't want to stop doing that because we enjoy it; but we would like to install people a little faster and to that end we are looking for volunteers. So if you feel you would like to feel a little bit more of your community, meet a lot of your neighbours, learn some new skills and laugh a little along the way please get in touch.

If you are reading this and you are already a customer of West Berks Community Broadband then a really big thank you from myself and the local community. Because on this journey we have all found we really do have one.

Andy

West Berks Community Broadband

By the Community: For the Community