

Sydenham Parish Council

Minutes of Broadband Meeting 19th February 2013
Sydenham Old School Room

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Mr Paul Stancliffe, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Councillor Nick Carter.

Councillor Carter then outlined the various stages of installing Better Broadband. Oxfordshire County Council is currently in the middle of the procurement exercise to appoint the company which will provide the high speed broadband network throughout the county. There was recently a very informative meeting at Chalgrove arranged by MP John Howell at which Bill Murphy, the MD of BT Next Generation Access, outlined what BT are doing nationwide and what they would be able to do for Oxfordshire if appointed.

The next stage for Oxfordshire County Council will be a board meeting at the end of this month, when the exercise of moving forward from the probable 70% coverage of the commercial market to 90% will be discussed, together with improvement for community premises such as schools, libraries etc. The board meeting should agree the next step of engaging with a preferred bidder for providing the network throughout the County. From March onwards there will be a new phase of negotiating with the provider as to which postcodes will be in the justifiable intervention areas (Lot 1) and how these areas will overlap with the schools and community premises (Lot 2).

In June there will be a cabinet meeting to finalise contracts with the provider.

Currently the Broadband Champions are getting updates via newsletters, and there has been a lot of engagement within rural areas. There are roughly 200 out of 350 parishes within Oxfordshire that have Champions looking after their interests. It is planned that another meeting will shortly be arranged at County Hall with the Broadband Champions.

Some areas in the country have gone freelance and have negotiated their own broadband, engaging with Defra for funding, or have secured their own seedcorn funding first. This can be an expensive route to take. Councillor Carter can provide contacts for following this line of action, but advised that it might be better to wait for the main roll out this summer as he is quietly confident that this area will be included in Lot 1. As the Chinnor exchange is the third largest in the county, it stands a good chance of being included, and being near the top of the list.

The ultimate aim is to have fibre optic cable run to the green cabinets. These cabinets will need to be replaced with larger units than the existing ones.

Questions were then taken from the meeting:

What will be the timescale for the rollout? - at this stage it can't be given, but if the contracts are confirmed this summer, the aim is to have the project completed by the end of 2015. Councillor Carter is looking to obtain a rough idea of timetable as soon as practically possible to allow people in certain exchanges an idea of what to expect.

If Broadband gets in to the exchange in Chinnor, what about coming out to the surrounding villages? - This will depend on the existing infrastructure and if/how it will need to be improved. The condition of the ducting will be unknown in some areas. The fact that we

have 'improved copper' already in Sydenham will help, and underground tubes are already laid from the Inn at Emmington to the village green.

How is the £10m of funding from OCC allocated? - This will be done on a postcode basis, and in relation to the postcodes agreed with the provider as needing new infrastructure.

Will the provider need to survey in advance or will they have a shrewd idea of costs? - Likely to be a bit of both. Lot 2 (The Oxfordshire Community Network) will not be rigidly separate from Lot 1. It will be up to individual schools if they are Academies and wish to opt out and find a different provider. For non Academies, they will need to focus on what they require and how it can be brought about.

Would it help or hinder to get a Defra grant? - Either we will be in the 70% of the natural market, or we will be in the area beyond that which will have some degree of public funding - there will be no overlap or duplication. Islip have started a process of their own, as they were so far from their exchange, but they have spent private money, not a Defra grant.

Who sets the priorities - is it done by numbers, or by distance from the exchange? By OCC or by the provider? - Both. This will be the next phase of the negotiation. Exchanges will be done as a whole, not in part. The criteria for OCC and the provider will not be known until the provider is chosen. OCC are likely to push for population based criteria while the provider will probably be more cost based. Ultimately OCC is the client and the provider is bidding for the funding money that OCC holds. Chinnor is geographically easy to connect, and it is hoped that the number of people on the exchange will sway the decision. The quality of the line will depend on the distance to the nearest green box, so there may be a need for extra boxes as well as upgrading the existing ones. In some areas this has caused planning issues in conservation areas due to the increased size of the box. However if a District Council is putting in funding, it is logical that they will not be unreasonable when it comes to planning applications for boxes.

Will the number of businesses on the exchange affect the decision for roll out? - Businesses from home will only count if paying business rates. There are a lot of people in the situation of working from home who will not count as businesses but will be affected.

Once the areas are decided and funds are available, does the area have to bid for funds? - No, the roll out will just happen and we won't need to take action.

The meeting finished with a summary:

The advice for now is to wait, as there are no initiatives that we can take. This may change once the provider is chosen and detailed discussions take place as to which areas will qualify for funding. In early March the decision will be made on the provider, and this decision will be cascaded out. This is the stage at which Councillor Carter hopes to hold the meeting at County Hall, at which it would be helpful to have technical advisors from the provider present, and also Ed Vaizey MP.

The whole scheme should be completed for Oxfordshire by the end of 2015. For this area, being a straightforward one, we should know as soon as possible. Once the provider is chosen, Councillor Carter will be involved on our behalf (probably by then as our councillor due to the new boundary changes), as well as undertaking his role for the whole of the county.

Councillor Carter will try to provide ongoing information of any progress.

One of the villagers suggested that in the meantime, individual home owners can look at improving their own home efficiency - e.g. the number and quality of extension wires etc. If anyone wants help with this please contact parish.council@sydenhamvillage.net