

News from County Councillor Dr Marie Strong

I am receiving a number of enquiries regarding broadband – both poor service and the future. Forgive me if you have read some of the following before but I have tried to bring together some of the information and added an update. I will start with some practical information provided by a resident following a visit from a BT engineer. I have not verified the information but you could try the suggestions and as I always recommend check with your provider or BT: In each house, the physical telephone wire terminates in a 'master' socket inside the junction box and is the socket which engineers access to test the line. Any extensions within the house are connected to the socket which appears on the face of the box, i.e. beyond the master socket. Anything attached beyond the master socket has the potential to cause problems in the form of a reduction in signal rate or corruption of it. The mere resistance caused by adding an extension socket (even with no phone plugged into it) will cause the signal flow-rate to drop. It is for this reason that BT and ISPs recommend that if we use a wireless router it should be attached to the master socket rather than an extension.

The resident was only receiving 0.2 Mb although advised it should be 4.00 Mb. The engineer disconnected all extension leads and the answerphone (since they have caused problems possibly through 'noise' developing through its power supply or the deterioration of its parts). A test was taken and the download speed rose to 3.7 Mb and may go higher since the actual signal received at the master socket was running at around 7.0 Mb. The router has now been moved from a secondary socket to a master socket although the extra wiring will probably cause a small drop in the signal.

The Engineer suggested anyone with a lower signal than anticipated, or lower than neighbour, to check whether extension sockets, phones or answerphones are affecting the speed. Ask your ISP for advice and if necessary ask them to send a BT engineer to inspect your equipment

I always recommend that if you are not satisfied with the service you are receiving contact your provider and challenge them as to why it is not meeting your expectations. Inform them you are looking elsewhere. Ask your neighbours what speeds and service they are receiving. It has been frequently found that near neighbours are getting radically differing speeds. Ask BT what they can offer – whatever they can provide should be available to the other providers.

As you will read below the minimum speed access all properties should eventually achieve is 2 Mbps. However the Programme Director Better Broadband for NNC is now investigating the speeds each area might expect. When that task is completed we will hold a meeting, similar to the earlier meeting at Binham, to share that information. Whilst it would be I would love to bring better broadband to all my rural parishes in the blink of an eye there is no way that can happen. Indeed that power does not even lie with the NCC's Programme Director. Regarding the Better Broadband for Norfolk Programme European Union State Aid legislation places an obligation on the County Council to achieve as much broadband coverage across Norfolk as is possible for the investment available. BT's design reflects this requirement and therefore determines when and where infrastructure will be deployed to achieve the maximum benefit for Norfolk.

I am assured BBfN is on schedule and within budget. Obviously we all want to know when better broadband will be reaching us. However, as a recent case proved, there is a danger in releasing information before it is certain there will be no obstacles in bringing BBfN to a specific town, parish or even street. Another 'tranche' of areas to receive better broadband has been released - not in our division this time but already parishes such as Letheringsett have BB up and running. In the meantime keep checking on www.betterbroadbandnorfolk.co.uk for the next and subsequent tranches (groups) scheduled for BB. And here is a tip: once you see your parish on the website look out for the new and larger broadband cabinets. When you have spotted the new cabinets contact your provider and ask when you can get better broadband. (There seems to be a delay between the new system being activated and customers being informed as to their choices.)

For those requiring a little more technical information here goes:

The Better Broadband for Norfolk Programme will predominantly implement Fibre to the Cabinet infrastructure, which is the most widely deployed technology in the UK as it offer the best value for money. This technology offers speeds of up to 80 Mbps. The speed does slow between the street cabinet and the property, but still offers much faster speeds than current entirely copper based connections. For instance, properties at approx 1 km from the cabinet expected to receive Superfast speeds of 24 Mbps+, with properties at 1.5 km expected to receive speeds of 15 Mbps. It is possible that a small number of properties are so far from the cabinet (over 2.5 km) that speed will degrade to below 2 Mbps, in such cases the Better Broadband for Norfolk programme will deploy an alternative technology to ensure access to at least a minimum 2 Mbps.

By the completion of the Better Broadband for Norfolk programme at the end of 2015, 83% of properties will have access to speeds of 24 Mbps+ with all other properties having access to a minimum 2 Mbps and above.

Speed reductions are no greater on overhead copper than they would be in copper carried through ducts. If you service provider has identified a problem with the connection to your home it should raise a fault with BT Openreach.

Finally wishing everyone a happy, healthy and peaceful Christmas

Dr Marie Strong

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