

News from County Councillor Dr Marie Strong

Not surprisingly I have continued to receive questions regarding broadband provision so I will try and summarise the current situation. I hope readers will appreciate that the Wells Division covers a town and some 36 parishes and hamlets and whilst what follows is a general summary I endeavour to inform separate parish councils regarding the many variations which exist as BBfN rolls out.

Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN):

Getting fibre broadband across Norfolk and particularly rural North Norfolk is not an easy task and so I am pleased to note that phase one was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. The number of people in Norfolk with access to superfast broadband (25Mbps or above) has progressed in under three years from 43% in 2012 to more than 80% and more than 185,000 properties in the county have access to a fibre connection. The first areas to benefit from phase two will be able to access improved broadband by March 2016 and work continues to enable more areas to access fibre. You can see the current progress of the project across Norfolk at <http://www.betterbroadbandnorfolk.co.uk/map.aspx>

Choosing to move to fibre broadband:

Some people have yet to upgrade to fibre where it is available – sometimes because of the continued belief that it will happen automatically. However there is no automatic ‘switch’ and no one has to upgrade. However if you want to know if you could upgrade this is what you need to do:

Enter www.betterbroadbandnorfolk.co.uk, use your telephone number, follow the link through to check if you can access fibre; if the answer is yes you will then see how many ISPs (internet service providers) are offering fibre broadband in your area, what packages are available and at what price. You can then decide if you want to upgrade, which provider you prefer and proceed with arrangements.

Choosing to remain with copper broadband or if fibre has not been enabled where you live:

If you are happy with your existing provision there is no need to do anything. If you are unhappy with the service for which you contracted, such as speed, contact your ISP. If there is no improvement send them a formal complaint; if there is still no satisfactory outcome you need to contact Ofcom. However your provider may not be able to offer you better speeds so ask your neighbours what speeds and service they are receiving. In many cases near neighbours are getting radically differing speeds from different providers – an example being a difference between 0.5Mbps and 7Mbps. The latter speed I am told by a number of residents is adequate for their needs and hence they are not moving to fibre. The website www.betterbroadbandnorfolk.co.uk shows not only fibre availability but also ISPs offering copper broadband in your area.

Access to less than 2Mbps:

I have received questions about the satellite broadband press release. It relates to a government initiative designed to meet its commitment that all properties in the UK have access to at least 2Mbps.* BBfN is committed to supporting the government in relation to what I am told is a small number of properties in the county who have access to broadband speed of less than 2Mbps and are unlikely to receive a fibre connection in the near future. In these instances people can apply for a subsidy towards the installation and setup of basic satellite broadband. ‘Basic’ means the ability to send and receive emails and pay bills. For full information yet again access www.betterbroadbandnorfolk.co.uk, check if you are eligible and if so make an online application. You will note the government insistence that applications must be online in order to receive the subsidy. I have checked the on-line form and it appears to require very little broadband capacity but if there is a problem with capacity at home the local library staff will assist in making a link for free.

Exchange Only Lines:

Some properties receive broadband via an exchange. This is an historic situation relating to copper broadband and exists throughout the country. Properties were connected via the nearest suitable apparatus when their telephone lines were originally installed. If a local cabinet existed it was used, if not the connection was made directly to the local telephone exchange. A number of such properties have now been fibre enabled, however some have not and this is something about which I am seeking more information.

All for now and with good wishes for a healthy and happy 2016

*A recent ministerial announcement has extended the promised capacity but this initiative relates to the existing commitment to access of at least 2 Mbps for which money is already available.