

# Broadband in the Upper Deverills

## History

In **2008** the Upper Deverills Parish Council established a Broadband Action Group with the brief of trying to improve the poor service that is provided to the three villages. This reflected concerns expressed by local residents who either had very slow speeds or were unable to connect to broadband at all. During the first year the Group secured some minor improvements to the existing network which improved access and reliability. This meant that speeds in the Upper Deverills slightly increased but settled in a range from around 0.3 to 1.5mbps.

The Group also carried out surveys in **2009** and **2010** which showed that speeds remained relatively low and that less than a third of residents were happy with the service being provided. This information was used to raise concerns with the infrastructure provider (BT Openreach), the local authority and the local MP. The Broadband Acton Group also investigated options for improving the service through either private companies or a community approach but without being able to make much progress because of the small numbers involved.

The Parish Council also made representations to the Review chaired by Lord Carter in 2009, arguing that, as with other policies, rural areas were seriously disadvantaged by the proposals in "Digital Britain". It was pointed out that the countryside is valued not only by those who live here but also by those who enjoy recreation and other opportunities and that surely it was right that priority should be given to maintaining a reasonable level of basic infrastructure in areas such as this.

In general the submission welcomed the focus on broadband but also said that the proposed Universal Service Commitment for up to 2 Mbps to be effective by 2012 was too slow and suggested that more rapid progress could and should be made towards universal connectivity. It was also felt that 2 Mbps should be the absolute minimum requirement given the expectations about the use of this technology for communications in the future. The final report on Digital Britain can be found here: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm76/7650/7650.pdf>

With the change of Government in 2010 the programme was delayed but both national and local government recognised the importance of providing a modern and faster broadband network. As private companies would not find it profitable to improve the service in areas like ours, some public intervention and funding is necessary.

Subsequently Wiltshire Council announced that it was planning to begin a significant programme of investment so that more residents and businesses could have access to super fast broadband and in **2011** they carried out their own survey. The general results showed, not surprisingly, that many Wiltshire residents felt that they needed super fast broadband. It was also considered that this requirement was likely to increase as more services and facilities become available through the web and require greater capacity in the system. Parish and Wiltshire Councillors also recognise that provision of this facility may be an important contributor to sustaining villages for the future. Wiltshire

Council secured £4.66m in government grant towards proposals to provide Faster Broadband in areas that were not commercially viable.

In **2012** Wiltshire Council announced that it had selected BT to provide broadband upgrading throughout the county. Under these proposals the Council is aiming to ensure that a minimum of 91% of all premises should be able to access superfast broadband by 2016. This is defined as a download speed of a minimum of 24 megabits per second (mbps).

By then the remaining 9% of premises will be provided with a minimum speed of 2mbps. So whilst this may be a small improvement and probably provide greater reliability, unlike superfast broadband it will not enable video streaming, easier transmission of large files etc.

Also in 2012 the Broadband Action Group made a submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications which had launched an Inquiry into the provision of superfast broadband. For their report, which highlighted concerns that some communities might loose out see

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/communications-committee/news/governments-broadband-strategy-risks-leaving-communities-behind>

### **Latest News**

After further investigations and surveys in early **2013** we received good news and bad news. The good news was that Brixton Deverill will get superfast broadband (though speeds for each premise are not yet certain) through a link back to their exchange at Sutton Veny. The bad news was that Kingston and Monkton Deverill were “more challenging for BT” due to the distances of the cabinets to the exchange at Maiden Bradley.

Updated details about Wiltshire’s programme are at the Wiltshire On Line web site at <http://www.wiltshireonline.org/broadband-update>

Currently Brixton Deverill has a target date for delivery of Faster/Superfast Broadband by late 2014.

In the early summer of 2013 the Government were also inviting bids for grant from the Rural Community Broadband Fund which could assist a few communities who will not be getting Superfast Broadband to get that provided. The Upper Deverills PC submitted a grant application to the Government’s Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF) to provide Superfast Broadband in Monkton and Kingston Deverill. The application particularly emphasised the importance of upgrading broadband to help sustain these communities and the fact that Kingston and Monkton Deverill would be disadvantaged compared to other local villages.

At the end of September it was revealed that our “Expression of Interest” had successfully passed the first hurdle. The Broadband action Group now have to do much more work to take what is only a preliminary assessment to the next stage with many issues that would need to be resolved if the bid is ultimately to be successful. Amongst these is the need to produce firm evidence that sufficient numbers of households would sign up to Superfast Broadband; assisting in securing wayleaves and sites for the green roadside cabinets that would be required; and securing some additional funding as the grant may only cover 75% of the capital cost.

Discussions are taking place with Wiltshire Council and BT Openreach as their contribution is vital to the project progressing. A final stage application will probably be made in early 2014.