

COMMUNITY ULTRAFAST BROADBAND PROJECT

Dear Resident / Business Owner

As you may know, the current broadband service in our area is simply not good enough for most people's requirements. Currently, there is also no plan for improvement.

As a result, a small group of local residents with the support of the Parish Council is looking to undertake a Community Project, which will be supported by the Superfast Worcestershire Broadband Team – superfast@worcestershire.gov.uk. If successful, this will bring a fibre to the premises ultrafast broadband network to our community.

Ultrafast broadband network, delivered via a fibre to the premises infrastructure, will offer speeds of up to 1,000 megabits (depending on a chosen package) and we are looking to utilise Government grants to fully pay for the required works. Access to the full fibre technology would therefore offer a fully future proofed solution and speeds hundreds times faster (depending on a chosen package) than the current infrastructure. More information on the grant scheme is available here: www.gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/rural.

The upgrade could cost you nothing, thanks to UK government funding. But requires individual households and businesses to come together as a community. It may even increase your property value through access to this future proofed network.

In summary, the Gigabit vouchers can be used by businesses and the local communities surrounding them to contribute to the installation cost of the ultrafast network. Small and medium size businesses can claim up to £3,500 each and any residents included in the group project can also benefit from up to £1,500 per premises towards the overall cost.

To take this forward together we ask that you register your interest as soon as possible, please email Adrian Parker who is leading the project for Elmley Castle, Kersoe and Netherton. Jim Douglas is the lead for Bricklehampton which is a separate scheme. Provide your contact details and indicate whether you are a "business" or a "resident".

Following GDPR regulations you are consenting that your information will be shared with Worcestershire County Council, Openreach and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Please do not hesitate getting in touch as the scheme is proving very popular and the funding won't last long.

Adrian Parker – adrian.parker@elmleycastleparishcouncil.gov.uk

Jim Douglas – arkadia1@aol.com

FAQ's

The UK government has a voucher scheme to help communities upgrade their phone and broadband infrastructure to "full fibre", if they currently receive less than 100Mbps.

To date (September 2020), 950 premises, including small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) in Worcestershire have secured over £2.2m worth of Government's vouchers towards the cost of installing full fibre gigabit-capable (100 Mbps+) broadband through the Gigabit Voucher Schemes. This means that well over 2,200 premises have already benefitted from this scheme just in Worcestershire alone. Over 150 more projects are already set up and at various stages of getting formalised.

Rural premises with broadband speeds of less than 100Mbps can pool the vouchers worth up to £3,500 for each SME and up to £1,500 per residential premise to support the cost of installing new gigabit-capable connections that more than double their broadband speeds.

Additionally, from September 2020, Worcestershire County Council is investing £1m to step up its drive to get high-speed broadband out to the most rural parts of the county. The funding will 'top-up' the Government's existing Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, to help people in hard-to-reach locations get a fast, reliable broadband service. The funding will be used to match the level of funding available under the GBVS, so that eligible businesses can now apply for up to a maximum of £7,000 and eligible residential properties up to £3,000. **But hurry - The Rural Gigabit Connectivity Voucher Scheme will only remain open for new applications until March 2021 (or until the £200m funding runs out).**

The following Frequently Asked Questions focus on use of the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Voucher to support 'community schemes' facilitated by 'Openreach', as this has been the most frequently used operator by communities to date. In Worcestershire 'Airband' have also been proactively working with communities to access vouchers across Worcestershire and a number of other suppliers are registered with the Government to access vouchers. If after reading the below, you have questions about other operators please contact the team or visit: <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>

Frequently Asked Questions (and answers):

What is a community scheme?

1. Community projects aim to upgrade everyone on ageing copper lines or low speeds off fibre to the cabinet solutions to full fibre broadband to your premises. Enabling you to get any broadband speed of up to 1,000 Mbps (1Gbps) depending on a chosen package. This will essentially future proof your network for many generations to come, part of a national network, with all maintenance the responsibility of Openreach.
2. The upgrade could cost you nothing, thanks to UK government funding. But requires individual households and businesses to come together as a community. It may even increase your property value through access to this future proofed network.
3. Once your community project is organised, all you need to do is to respond to one email from the government to confirm your "Gigabit Voucher" (https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk). Then Openreach take care of everything else.

4. Following the upgrade, dependent on package chosen, you should not have to pay any more than you do now for broadband. If you are with BT, Zen, TalkTalk or soon SKY then you simply call them after the infrastructure upgrade has been completed and renew your broadband deal. If you are with any other telephone/broadband provider, in the short-term you will need to switch to one of the providers offering FTTP packages: <https://www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/fttp-providers> . **So please take this into consideration if entering into new 12 or 18 month contracts in the next few months, as upgrading is part of the voucher requirement.**

Aren't government grant schemes like this complicated to apply for?

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have worked very hard to make this "micro" grant as easy for communities as possible. As a result, all that is required is a simple spreadsheet for the community or a community lead to fill in (logging the details of who want to be a part of the scheme).

What exactly is happening?

Superfast Worcestershire is supporting proactive communities to set up projects to get Openreach to upgrade the old copper network with fibre all the way to the property. Upgrades are delivered through "Openreach Community Fibre Partnerships" and deliver ultrafast future-proofed broadband. You don't have to pay anything towards this upgrade and shouldn't have to pay any extra for your telephone / broadband service.

What will this upgrade cost me?

If there is sufficient demand in your area NOTHING... We will do our best to advise you to allow your community to get the scheme delivered and get it fully funded through the Rural Voucher Scheme. Every home is eligible for a £1,500 voucher (plus up to a further £1,500 top up from September 2020) and every business run from home is eligible for a £3,500 voucher (plus up to a further £3,500 top up from September 2020). The cost of your new telephone/broadband subscription should remain the same, it may be cheaper or occasionally a few pounds more for a much, much improved service. It is worth remembering that you will be paying the same for a telephone and broadband service that is CONSIDERABLY more reliable, consistent and faster. Should there be a gap, after all grants are secured, there may be a need for a small contribution from the community. Alternatively, we can work with a supplier to review scope or come up with a better alternative.

Will my monthly cost go up after a Full Fibre upgrade?

The cost of your new telephone/broadband subscription should remain the same, it may be cheaper or occasionally a few pounds more for a much, much improved service. It is worth remembering that you will be paying the same for a telephone and broadband service that is CONSIDERABLY more reliable, consistent and faster.

I'm not too fussed about broadband, why should I care?

There's a genuine community dependency with Openreach Community Fibre Partnerships. Every home is eligible for a £1,500 voucher (plus up to a further £1,500 top up from September 2020) and every business run from home is eligible for a £3,500 voucher (plus up to a further £3,500 top up from September 2020). Some properties cost a few hundred pounds to upgrade and some many thousands, or even tens of thousands. But with the right scale of project and combined vouchers, whole communities can be upgraded. Even if you are not that bothered about an upgrade, you would be helping homes, families and businesses in the area that desperately do. Additionally, the requirement for full fibre networks is only going to

increase. Proving this infrastructure now protects for the future, increasing both the value and appeal of homes.

Who are Openreach?

Openreach build and maintain telephone cables, ducts, cabinets and exchanges;

Do I need to upgrade with BT?

NO, not at all. You can upgrade with any provider selling fibre to the premises service using Openreach's infrastructure: <https://www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/ftp-providers> .

What is full fibre?

Broadband to the vast majority of properties involves fibre to the cabinet in your street, then copper between the last stretch from the cabinet to your house. This is called "Fibre to the Cabinet". Some properties have "Exchange Only" lines, meaning copper runs all the way from the exchange to the property.

Full Fibre is when the connection from the exchange all the way to your property is fibre. This enables you to receive any speed of broadband up to 1,000 Mbps (1 Gigabits per second).

Currently, only c. 9% (September 2020) of Worcestershire premises have access to this fully future proofed infrastructure.

Where can I learn more about Openreach Community Fibre Partnerships?

<http://communityfibre.openreach.co.uk>

Where can I learn more about government funding for Full Fibre?

<https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/rural/>

Am I eligible for the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme?

All premises classified as 'rural' are eligible for £1,500 (residential) and £3,500 (business) vouchers, as long as your current broadband is below 100Mbps. You can refer to [Defra's rural / urban classification](#) for an indication whether your area is classed as 'rural' (please note this is not always accurate, so it is always best to double check with our team). These amounts can be 'topped up' from Sept 2020. This is true even if you have benefitted from a £350 "Better Broadband" voucher in the past for 4G, satellite or fixed wireless services. In order to qualify for a voucher grant, you must take a new broadband connection. In addition, it must at least double your current broadband speed. The contract for service that you enter into with your chosen supplier must be for a minimum of 12 months.

What qualifies as a business?

"Businesses" include any micro/small/medium business or organisation (e.g. charity, voluntary organisation) and any sole trader registered at their home address. But does not include those working from home employed by large companies/organisations. Vouchers may only be used for eligible connections at premises from which you actively trade or (in the case of residential beneficiaries) reside. This may be your registered office and/or trading address(es) in the case of SME beneficiaries.

What do I have to do?

It depends, how proactive and actively involved you want to be. If you do not have a 'community lead' then you will need to identify one or consider stepping into the role yourself. If you are considering being a community lead or are unsure if there is a community lead in your area contact the Superfast Worcestershire team at superfast@worcestershire.gov.uk. If you have a community lead then requirements on you are very limited, other than respond to contact from your local 'community lead' confirming interest and providing some basic information upon their request. You will also need to respond to an email sent by the UK government confirming your interest. This allows Openreach to receive your voucher funding when the infrastructure is built. No voucher funding comes to you directly.

What am I committing to?

Your only commitment, once the upgrade is complete, is taking out a 12-month broadband subscription with your chosen telephone/broadband provider: <https://www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/fttp-providers>. The broadband package you take has to be 30 Mbps or faster and must at least double your current broadband speed. After this initial 12-month contract you have no other commitments or tie-ins. Even if you are a business – you can simply upgrade to the cheapest fibre package. At present, the cheapest broadband service is approximately £23 month, including line rental. You can look at other options and consider cashback deals too.

Can I stay with my current telephone / broadband supplier?

If you are currently with any of these providers: <https://www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/fttp-providers>, then yes. Following the infrastructure upgrade you just need to call your provider and get a new deal, even if you are part way through your contract with them, they can simply upgrade you. If you are with any other supplier, you will have to honour your contract, although they may allow you to terminate early.

If you are with anyone else (such as PlusNet, EE, Virgin Media, TalkTalk, SSE or Post Office) then you will NOT be able to stay with them at the moment. However, these providers could become available over the coming months and years. Some, including SKY and Vodafone have already announced their plans for FTTP.

How does this compare with other solutions?

Full Fibre / Fibre to the Premise is the ultimate broadband solution. It is not affected by weather like copper or wireless/mobile services and its speed is practically unlimited. Full Fibre is faster, cheaper, more reliable, more stable and more consistent than any other broadband solution be this fixed wireless or mobile/4G. All properties should get a Full Fibre upgrade in the next 5 to 15 years if government ambitions are realised. Openreach Community Fibre Partnerships guarantees your upgrade much sooner, within 12 months.

Will my current service be disrupted during the upgrade?

No. Your current telephone/broadband service over your old telephone line will continue to work before, during and after a full fibre upgrade.

When this goes ahead what will I see happening in the area?

Openreach engineers will install new cables along the road, in underground ducts or pole-mounted overhead, then new fibre cables will be run directly to your house. You will get a small box installed inside your house, similar in size to your current telephone socket. Planning and surveying is likely to take 3-6 months, followed by the actual build.

When will this upgrade happen?

The process of generating interest in the community and getting quotes and a fixed price, can take around 1 to 3 months. After that is complete, suppliers will aim to upgrade your infrastructure within 12 months of your project being formalised. Once your infrastructure build is complete, your community will be notified, and you will be able to place an order with your chosen service provider.

What happens to my current telephone line, and once upgraded can I go back to using my old line?

Your existing copper telephone line will be left in place for now. After your initial 12 months commitment to getting a 30 Mbps or faster broadband service, you could choose to go back to slow copper broadband. Though we can't think of any reason why you would want to!

Will this involve digging up my garden?

It is unlikely. Running new cables to your house is likely to follow your existing route and existing ducting or overhead lines.

Will I have to change my phones, phone number or house wiring?

No. You can continue to use your existing phone handsets, telephone number and internal wiring, but ensure you discuss this with your chosen supplier.

Will I need to buy any additional equipment?

No, once you upgrade your package, your service provider will send you a new router. Nothing else will be required.

What is the voucher top up scheme all about?

From September 2020, Worcestershire County Council is investing £1m to step up its drive to get high-speed broadband out to the most rural parts of the county. The funding will 'top-up' the Government's existing Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, to help people in hard-to-reach locations get a fast, reliable broadband service. The funding will be used to match the level of funding available under the GBVS, so that eligible businesses can now apply for up to a maximum of £7,000 and eligible residential properties up to £3,000.

In some cases, the voucher amount was not enough to pay for the infrastructure upgrade. This top-up funding means many more schemes can be funded, providing this future-proofed connectivity to thousands more homes in the most rural locations which are otherwise unlikely to get it for many years.

The funding for the vouchers in the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme with Worcestershire County Council's Top Up will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis until the end of March 2021, when the scheme will close. **So hurry and set up your scheme today!!**

So, just to re-cap:

- Register your community with Openreach: <https://www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/community-fibre-partnerships> . Please note other suppliers may offer similar schemes – you may want to consider these too, e.g. Worcester based Airband: <https://www.airband.co.uk/community/suggest-a-project/> .
- You will be asked to add premises you want to include in your community project.

- Openreach will provide an initial quote (normally within 10 days). You will be asked to check the premises as Openreach may tweak the premises list (if some premises are e.g. served by a different exchange).
- Once you agree the project scope, Openreach will provide the final cost (it is likely to take 1-3 months).
- Once you are waiting for the final quote – don't waste this time and establish the demand for the improved service across your project area.
- Once you have the final quote and sufficient demand – you will be asked to share it with Openreach.
- DCMS will then review your premises (voucher list) and send you an email asking to confirm your interest.
- When all vouchers are confirmed - this effectively ringfences the funding for your community.
- Lastly – if you are able to raise 30% above the final quote – you may be able to proceed without the need to sign the contract with Openreach. The 30% buffer will be used as risk mitigation only. If you cannot raise 30% above the quote, your community will be asked to sign a contract with Openreach. In order to do it – you may have to set up a Community Interest Group (CIC).
- Lastly – you may want to contact Superfast Worcestershire team on superfast@worcestershire.gov.uk, as we are aware of over 150 projects across Worcestershire and we may be able to point you towards a community lead in your area.