

23 February 2016

Agenda Item: 10

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

BROADBAND PETITION - ASKHAM

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to propose a response from Economic Development Committee to the petition regarding broadband services in Askham. A petition of 37 signatures, organised by the residents, was presented to Full Council on 14 January 2016 seeking local government help to provide superfast coverage to Askham.

Information and Advice

2. The Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire (BBfN) programme is well on track to delivering its ambitions of 95% of premises in the county (when combined with planned commercial coverage) being enabled with access to superfast broadband (24Mbps and above) by 2016 and 98% coverage by 2018. The Basic Broadband for All scheme, launched in December 2015 will also ensure that 100% of properties can access basic broadband services (at least 2Mbps).
3. Nottinghamshire County Council is the lead Authority for the programme in Nottinghamshire but improved broadband speeds are not something which the Council has a statutory responsibility for. The Council has a responsibility to ensure that the money available under the programme is used to maximum effect and that the works undertaken: (a) supply a network capable of delivering superfast broadband speeds to the optimum number of properties and (b) is of high quality.
4. All 23 premises covered by the petition do not currently have access to superfast broadband speeds, with most only receiving a maximum speed of 2Mbps. The government recognises that speeds below 2Mbps are not sufficient for ordinary web browsing, shopping and video streaming/calls (e.g. iPlayer or Skype) and has therefore instigated a 'Universal Service Commitment' pledge. Under this pledge, premises with speeds below 2Mbps can now access a satellite broadband solution through a voucher scheme, with up to £350 towards the costs of installing and maintaining a satellite broadband connection reimbursed to the consumer.
5. Committee received an update on the satellite voucher scheme at its meeting in January.
6. The residents' frustration is very much appreciated. However Committee members are aware that the BBfN programme will not deliver superfast broadband speeds to 100% of premises due to the significant costs involved. The satellite broadband scheme offers a viable

alternative to those premises that will not benefit directly from a fibre-based solution. Satellite services are being improved and enhanced all the time and some can now offer superfast speeds.

7. In terms of the specific premises in Askham that are covered by the petition, they are connected directly to the Gamston exchange and not to the fibre-enabled cabinet in the village. There are currently no plans to provide access to fibre broadband to these premises through the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme due to the prohibitive costs of the work required to rearrange the local telecoms network.
8. However, residents could consider applying to BT's 'Community Fibre Partnership' programme, which enables communities that are not covered by fibre broadband solutions to request a solution design from BT which could then be part-funded by the community. Further details are available here: <http://www.bt-ngb.com/community-fibre-partnerships>. In addition, most of the 23 premises covered by the petition should be eligible for the satellite voucher scheme as referenced above. Further information on this scheme is available on the County Council's website: <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/business-employment-and-benefits/better-broadband-for-nottinghamshire-programme/basic-broadband-for-all/apply>.
9. Finally, as with other petitions relating to the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme, it is worth noting that efficiencies are accruing to the programme and that in the future these may be used to extend fibre coverage further into areas that are not currently scheduled to benefit from the programme. The County Council cannot offer guarantees that Askham will benefit from such investment but it remains a possibility, albeit not before 2018.
10. It is important to restate the position on the existing Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire (BBfN) rollout. A finite sum of money has been made available to the programme. The contracts we entered into with BT are for them to achieve maximum coverage across the County with the money available. The rollout plan BT produced and are working to is to achieve exactly that. Maximum coverage with the money available. Clearly to ensure maximum coverage their rollout plan is based on several factors including the cost of the civil engineering work required, as well as the number of properties passed.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

11. It is a requirement of the Council that petitions presented to Council are considered by the relevant Committee(s) and that a response to the lead petitioners is discussed and prepared accordingly.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described within the report.

Financial Implications

13. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

14. That the Economic Development Committee:

- a. notes the receipt of the petition
- b. agrees that a response as set out in paragraphs 6-10 be sent by officers to the petitioners

Report of the Chair of Economic Development Committee

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Matt Lockley, 72446

Constitutional Comments [CEH 12.02.16]

The recommendations fall within the remit of the Economic Development Committee. A report on the outcome should be taken to the next Full Council meeting.

Financial Comments [SES 12/02/16]

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Basic Broadband for All: Satellite Broadband Subsidy Scheme, report to Economic Development Committee, published 19-01-2016

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Tuxford, Councillor John Ogle