

Neighbourhood Planning

Guidance Note 37

Broadband

November 2017



This guidance note has been produced to give parish councils in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire some background on Herefordshire Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Central Government's aspirations for future broadband provision under the Fastershire project, the current "gap" between aspirations and reality at present, and provide some guidance on approaches to future-proofing broadband provision in new developments that should be considered by parish councils.

Context

Access to good broadband is vital in today's world. It is intrinsic to growing a sustainable local economy, vital for education and home working and an increasingly central part of community cohesion and resilience, particularly in rural areas. In addition, local authorities and other public services are increasingly reliant on digital infrastructure to provide services and interact with residents.

Parish Councils and their Neighbourhood Development Plans have a pivotal role to play in encouraging developers to 'future-proof' their developments by installing high speed broadband infrastructure. This means not just ensuring a premise is ready to receive high speed broadband into the home or business, but also that network is actually in place deliver high speed broadband to the premise.

In addition to the reputational and wider economic benefits of ensuring that residents are able to access high speed broadband when they move into new developments, there is also the issue of avoiding the costs and frustrations to occupiers of future retrofitting if the infrastructure is not fit for purpose.

Government aspirations and National Policy context

The Government recognises that, reliable broadband internet access is essential for homes throughout the country to benefit from online services, and for UK businesses to compete globally. It aims to achieve a transformation in the country's broadband access, with everyone in the UK able to access broadband speeds of at least 2 megabits per second (Mbps) and 95% of the UK receiving far greater speeds (at least 24Mbps) by 2017, and it is also exploring options to extend the benefits of fast broadband to remaining areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which came into force in 2012, recognises the importance of infrastructure in delivering sustainable economic growth, and states that 'the development of high speed broadband technology and other communications networks also plays a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services' (Paragraph 42).

The NPPF goes on to say that 'in preparing Local Plans, local planning authorities should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including telecommunications and high speed broadband' (Paragraph 43).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Challenges

Although Government and the NPPF both support and encourage the inclusion of high speed broadband, there are no statutory requirements which support this aspiration.

From 2017 EU Legislation will specify that new build and major renovations of buildings will need to be high speed ready, however, exemptions will be allowed for historic buildings, holiday homes or where the cost to do this would be disproportionate, meaning that smaller and rural developments are likely to be excluded.

Herefordshire Council & Gloucestershire County Council aspirations

The Fastershire project was established as a partnership between Gloucestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council to overcome the market's failure to provide high speed broadband in hard to reach areas of both counties. It uses funding from a range of Local, Central and European government funding sources to match private sector funds and deliver the infrastructure required to increase the availability of high speed broadband.

The project has developed a strategy <http://www.fastershire.com/about-fastershire/strategy> which outlines the approach adopted by Fastershire to increase the availability of fast broadband across the counties of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. The vision for this strategy is that:

"By the end of 2019/20 all residents and businesses in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire will be able to order the broadband service they need and a high percentage will be using faster broadband to do more online, boost business growth and achieve their potential."

Current situation

Phase 1 of the project enabled 83% of premises in Herefordshire, and 82% in Gloucestershire, with access to speeds of 30Mbps or over. This coverage has been achieved through commercial investment and a project contract delivered by BT.

Through phase 2 of the project it is expected that the coverage in Herefordshire will reach 95%, and 97% in Gloucestershire through a contract with Gigaclear.

The Fastershire broadband project aims to increase coverage to more than 95% of existing premises through further programmes.

Commercial providers such as BT and Virgin will invest in connections to new developments, and new developers will often liaise with network providers to ensure that happens. However, sometimes small builds will not see that the provision is needed, and it ends up that new owners of premises have to make their own arrangements to have the broadband network installed. Also, if the property is not in the premise data (issued by the Ordnance Survey) for the Fastershire area when contracts are agreed, then it is likely there would not be funding to reach these premises.

Technology options for developers

It is important the developers not only make sure that a premise (work or home) is ready to receive broadband, but also that the network is in place to reach the premise – this is to ensure that new developments, of any size, benefit from broadband connectivity otherwise they could miss out or be expensive for the new owner.

There are six major technologies that can deliver superfast speeds:

- Fixed line broadband, which includes:
 - Fibre to the cabinet (FTTC)
 - Cable (hybrid fibre coaxial)
 - Fibre to the premises (FTTP)
- Fixed wireless
- Satellite
- Mobile broadband

Some suppliers use a number of these technologies, and some mix technologies in their infrastructure in order to lower deployment costs.

Openreach and Virgin Media have by far the largest number of customers in the UK, and the greatest coverage bar satellite suppliers. However, there are a large and growing number of alternative suppliers both in cities and in rural areas that can provide superfast broadband services.

More information on each of these technologies can be found in the governments New build homes: superfast broadband connectivity options document:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514746/160407_New_build_homes_brochure.pdf

Incorporating broadband provision in to Neighbourhood Development Plans

Given the clear social and wider economic benefits of ensuring that high speed broadband is included in new developments, a greater number of parish councils are including supportive broadband policies within their Neighbourhood Development Plans. In Herefordshire these include:

- Dorstone – Policy DNP IN1
- Little Dewchurch – Policy LD INF1
- Pyons Group – Policy PG9
- Brilley – Policy BR6
- Leintwardine Group – Policy LG6

These can be found on the following link

<https://myaccount.herefordshire.gov.uk/neighbourhood-areas-and-plans>

Once adopted these policies form part of the statutory development plan and are used to judge planning applications. However, none of these policies are mandatory and therefore cannot compel developers to install high speed broadband infrastructure on new developments.

Fastershire would strongly encourage parish councils to insist developers install high speed broadband infrastructure on new developments, without this, and the uncertainty of future public funding to cover any new builds in high speed broadband availability, we could see the number of properties without access to suitable broadband continue to increase. A developer should consult any neighbourhood plan before making a submission, and it makes it easier for parish councils to make requirements when it is already included in a neighbourhood plan.

Neighbourhood Planning guidance notes available:

Deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan

1. Which is the right tool for your parish
2. What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan
3. Getting started
4. A guide to procedures
5. Funding

Plan Production

6. Developing a Vision and Objectives
7. Generating options
8. Writing planning policies
9. Environmental Assessment
10. Evidence base and information requirements
11. Implementation and Monitoring
12. Best practice community engagement techniques
13. Statutory consultees
14. Writing a consultation statement
15. Planning and other legislation
16. Web enabling your plan
17. Using OS based mapping
18. Glossary of planning terms

Topics

19. Sustainable Water Management in Herefordshire
20. Guide to settlement boundaries
21. Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites
22. Meeting your housing requirements
23. Conservation issues
24. Recreational areas
25. Renewable energy
26. Transport issues
27. Community Infrastructure Levy

Additional Guidance

28. Setting up a steering group
29. Creating a questionnaire
30. Community facilities
31. Conformity with the Local Plan (Core Strategy)
32. Examinations of Neighbourhood Development Plans
33. Guide to Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendums
34. Tourism
35. Basic Conditions
36. Your plan - Contributing to sustainable development
37. Broadband