

Broadband Update 23rd September 2014

This is the second news update on the subject of broadband and proposed improvements to the service available to the village. There will be further updates when the situation changes.

Current Status

Medbourne is part of Leicester County Council's (LCC) Phase I deployment plan. This will see BT deploying fibre optic cables as far as the cabinets in the village, known as FTTC (fibre to the cabinet). According to the [Superfast Leicestershire web site](#) this deployment will be complete "by Summer 2015". To save you consulting the map on the web site I can report that the whole central area of the village is covered. The coverage extends past the old railway bridge on Drayton road and well past the Uppingham Road addresses on the B664. However, it does not reach the summit of Nevill Holt or Medbourne Grange. The web site now carries a much-improved interactive map and also a line checker which comes into its own once broadband is deployed. This is a welcome development as postcodes are not sufficiently granular to align with telephone exchange boundaries. LCC will be updating the web site every 6-8 weeks as the Phase I deployment progresses.

I can confirm that the initial survey work in Medbourne has started with a decision being made about the placement of new cabinets. These will be the first things to appear but there is a considerable time delay between seeing these and commercially available superfast broadband. LCC will be publishing a roadmap of the steps between cabinet and full deployment so, when I have this, it will be easier to keep the village up-to-date.

I can also give more information on the expected broadband speed. BT will be deploying fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) with a maximum speed of 80Mbps. Properties within 1.2km of the cabinet should achieve a minimum of 24Mbps. I do not yet have a reliable formula for the degradation in speed over larger distances. However, Medbourne is fortunate that the cabinets are fairly central in the village (opposite the Village Hall) so all properties *should* receive superfast speeds.

Fibre broadband speeds will not be realised by residents and businesses automatically. They will need to contact their Internet Service Provider (ISP) to upgrade their broadband package once the area has gone live. There may be an additional cost through the ISPs which use BT Wholesale; on average this is around £5 per month extra.

Phase II

LCC announced an additional £10.2m of funding (of which £7.4m is for the County with the rest to Leicester City) for a Phase II deployment aimed at connecting the final 6% of rural properties not covered by Phase I. However, achieving the full 100% will be difficult, maybe impossible, for various reasons. In order to get the best possible outcome LCC has opened the bidding process to commercial providers in addition to BT via what they have termed an Open Market Review process. Hence, the £10.2m may be boosted by private investment.

The Welland Valley Broadband Group (WVBG), with whom we parted company in June, have promoted a particular supplier, Gigaclear, to service the white spaces on the coverage map in our area. At first, Gigaclear claimed that it would not be cost-effective for them to service the Welland

Valley unless they had exclusive access to Medbourne and Hallaton which, of course, are already on BT's map for Phase I. This particular suggestion was the cause of our disagreement with WVBG and the reason we were excluded from the group. Since then, Gigaclear has raised the same suggestion directly with LCC as part of the Open Market Review. LCC undertook to consult with the village before making a decision which led to Paul Polito and I meeting with Councillor Simon Galton on September 1st. As we were asked to maintain confidentiality at this stage we were not in a position to consult widely in the village. Before the meeting I undertook a more detailed Gigaclear vs BT comparison and concluded, beyond any doubt, that we should argue very strongly to maintain our position as part of BT's Phase I deployment. It should be noted that, once a commercial supplier is given a licence to deploy to an area, BT may not subsequently compete with them using public subsidy funding.

I can now confirm that there has been a favourable outcome. Medbourne remains part of Phase I, as described above, and is also within an area that may also be covered by Gigaclear in the future. In other words, we could end up in a dual-supplier area – the best of both worlds. I believe there was some “robust” discussion in Council about this issue. The outcome is now definite and has been confirmed in person by Cllr. Galton, Cllr. Tom Purnell (Deputy CEO and SRO for Broadband) and Matthew Kempson (LCC's Project Manager for the whole deployment).

LCC's Open Market Review process is now complete and the next stage is a Public Consultation to be launched on September 29th. At first it appeared that we may need to organise a robust response from the village to this consultation; this no longer appears to be necessary. However, I will review the process and let you know if this conclusion is incorrect.

Gigaclear

As Gigaclear is now a potential supplier to Medbourne I have included some words about them in this newsletter, below. However, for fuller details please see their web site: <http://www.gigaclear.com/>.

Gigaclear is a privately funded company specialising in rural broadband. They offer fibre to the property (FTTP) as opposed to fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) so the speed on offer is potentially higher than BT. Gigaclear need a 35% take-up in an area for commercial viability. They seek an up-front financial commitment from potential subscribers and there is also an installation charge to get the fibre cable from the street to the property. There are several other implications; to understand them fully consult the [Gigaclear web site](#) (you will need to read all the FAQs to get a clear picture).

I would expect Gigaclear to begin testing the market as they would like to confirm 35% take-up before bidding for a contract. For the white spaces on the map that seems a possibility but, for Medbourne, which will already have BT fibre to the cabinet, signing up over 70 properties seems unlikely. Will Gigaclear supply to Medbourne if they don't get 70 properties? I don't know and I expect it depends on what happens elsewhere. Also, please don't assume that signing up for Gigaclear will help our neighbouring villages in the white spaces on the map.

As stated earlier, I conducted a BT vs Gigaclear comparison before meeting Cllr. Galton. It would not be fair to potential suppliers to publish this comparison as it has inevitable gaps and subjective

conclusions. However, if there is anyone in the village that wants to consider Gigaclear in more detail, I would be happy to consult with them.

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