

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 21<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017  
title: BROADBAND IN RIBBLE VALLEY  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
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## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To receive an update update on Fibre Broadband services, its availability, and future proposals for further rollout in the Ribble Valley.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
- Council Ambitions - In addition to Ribble Valley Borough Council striving to meet its three ambitions, it also recognises the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the Borough.
  - Community Objectives – Delivery of services to all.
  - Corporate Priorities - The implementation of superfast broadband and improved speeds for broadband in areas where it is currently not available will assist in sustaining a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley.
  - Other Considerations – A competitive and sustainable economy will assist in the provision of local employment opportunities and business development.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Superfast Broadband (SFBB) refers to a range of measures to ensure businesses and consumers are best able to access the benefits of high speed broadband internet connections.
- 2.2 Superfast Lancashire is an ongoing programme of activity aimed at connecting the county's businesses where digital connectivity speeds remain a constraint, helping businesses to work more efficiently. Faster upload and download speeds also reduces the need for smaller businesses to travel – saving time, money and carbon emissions.
- 2.3 Lancashire's county and district councils, working with Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) made the programme happen by tapping into Broadband Delivery UK and the European Regional Development Fund, to deliver superfast broadband in partnership with BT. Through Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), the government has defined SFBB as a speed of not less than 24Mbps (Megabits per second - the expression used to measure broadband speeds.
- 2.4 Such public investment can only be made in support of the extension of Superfast Broadband in those areas with deemed market failure, which is considered to be postcodes with no provider of Superfast Broadband services. In Lancashire, this

mainly constitutes many rural areas such as those within Ribble Valley, although not exclusively.

- 2.5 The majority of land in Ribble Valley is classified as rural and includes the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Many important tourism assets are located in these rural locations, and agriculture represents the largest single land use in the area, people live in rural villages and "dispersed" communities, including hamlets. Having such a rural land mass presents many challenges to deploying superfast broadband in Ribble Valley; none more so than the distance of properties from broadband enabled exchanges / peering points and an innovative approach is often required for the more remote, rural and sparsely populated areas.

### 3 INFORMATION

- 3.1 The previous Lancashire Superfast Broadband programme began in 2013, which aimed to deliver High speed fibre broadband is being rolled out and giving access to 130,000+ premises, across Lancashire between 2013 and the end of 2015. Superfast broadband enables businesses to make their marketing digital, with the ability to reach customers through new, faster and easier-to-track social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, which many are increasingly using for promoting their products. Superfast Fibre Broadband works at quicker speeds than standard broadband reducing the time taken to download and send files.
- 3.2 Superfast Lancashire is a partnership between Lancashire County Council and BT, with additional funding from the Government's Broadband Delivery UK, as well as the European Regional Development Fund, Blackburn with Darwen Council and Blackpool Council, and has now commissioned more than 500 of the 900 fibre broadband roadside cabinets it is installing across Lancashire. It is running alongside BT's own commercial rollout of the technology.
- 3.3 The network was originally delivered across seven phase. Phase 1 delivers coverage in Blackburn, Burnley, Caton, Chatburn, Forton, Galgate, Lancaster, Leyland and Preston. Superfast Fibre Broadband works at quicker speeds than standard broadband reducing the time taken to download and send files. During this around 40% of premises in the Ribble Valley received Fibre Broadband services through the BT/Openreach commercial rollout, predominantly through the Clitheroe and Longridge exchanges.
- 3.4 Superfast Lancashire completed the main phase of its programme at the end of June 2015 which will have enabled 97% Lancashire homes and businesses to be covered by the fibre broadband network. This roll out has now been delivered. The most recent new connections have been Bolton By Bowland, Chipping, Ribchester and Slaidburn
- 3.5 Also, the villages of Chatburn and Sawley have seen the arrival of high-speed fibre broadband into their villages and the completion of the engineering works means that most of the 500 premises in Chatburn and 150 premises in Sawley are now able to connect to high speed fibre broadband. These are served by exchanges in Chatburn, Mellor, Padiham, Whalley and Wilpshire, with some coverage also being provided in the most rural exchanges in Chipping, Dunsop Bridge and Bolton-by-Bowland. Chipping Parish Council is also planning to extend availability through a project being delivered in partnership with B4RN (Broadband for the Rural North), an organisation that specialises in the design and installation of fibre optic broadband networks.

- 3.6 Currently, the new Superfast Extension programme is now underway and deliver Superfast access to another 12,000+ premises. These programmes will run in parallel to commercial activity delivered by BT and other providers, such as B4RN, and should result in 99% of Lancashire premises having access to Superfast Broadband by the end of 2017.
- 3.7 BT have stated that five years ago, only 17 percent of people in the Ribble Valley could access broadband speeds of more than 30Mbps, and that now more than 86 per cent of people can access those speeds. BT also state that overall, more than 97 percent of homes and businesses in Ribble Valley can access fibre broadband.
- 3.8 All remaining premises are now guaranteed at least a stable 2Mbit/s service by the end of the rollout programme. It is however at this stage important to recognise that whilst the Superfast Lancashire project does aim to extend high-speed broadband to the county's homes and businesses, this does still leave some businesses and homes without access to a high speed broadband service.
- 3.9 The businesses unable to access high speed broadband will predominantly be in the more remote rural areas and concern is being expressed by businesses in these areas that the download speeds they are currently achieving are not sufficient for them to successfully run their businesses.
- 3.10 Many of these rural businesses have to find alternative solutions for their broadband requirements which unfortunately come at a much higher cost than a connection through BT. It is important therefore that we continue to support businesses in our rural areas to ensure that they have the ability to access sufficient broadband speeds and that financial support is available to enable them to do this.
- 3.11 The Council will continue to lobby for broadband issues to be included as part of the Lancashire Growth Programme and support to be offered to existing businesses who require a better broadband connection with which to run their businesses.

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