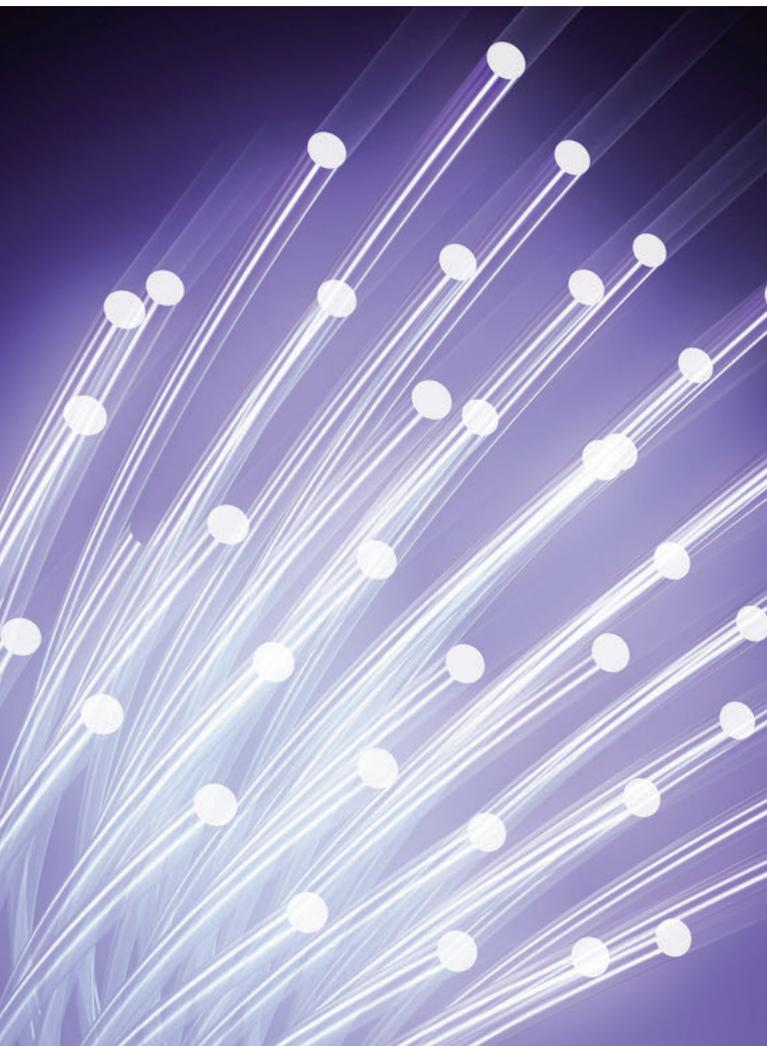




# A winning BID for superfast broadband



Sutton Coldfield Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) was set up in 2012 to make the town centre a place where people want to shop, live and work. It identified that businesses in parts of the town centre were experiencing poor broadband and so working in partnership with BT, they have created a superfast broadband network to benefit the whole business community.

[www.suttoncoldfieldtowncentre.co.uk](http://www.suttoncoldfieldtowncentre.co.uk)



*The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield has a long and proud history. Today, it's a thriving place with around 3,000 businesses. The town centre offers quality retailing, and an active restaurant and nightlife economy. It is also houses many small office, studio and workshop based businesses that provide services of all kinds. The town centre's 400 businesses know that you need to build and maintain the right environment and infrastructure to succeed.*

#### **Working together to boost business**

To help ensure continuing prosperity, town centre businesses agreed by ballot to form a Business Improvement District (BID). The BID's aim is to enhance the town centre as a place where people want to shop, live, work, and relax. It is funded by a levy on local businesses, and is run by a business-led, not-for-profit company. The BID delivers additional services, and is a powerful tool for directly involving local businesses in local projects that aim to improve the local trading environment.

#### **Targeting local investment**

Since inception, the BID has funded many improvements in the town centre. Much of the initial effort has gone into improving the street environment and services in the town centre, and this investment has been to the immediate benefit of the retail business community.

However, from conversations with other town centre businesses, Mike Bushell, Sutton Coldfield BID manager, was aware that half the levy-paying businesses had different and urgent needs. Small businesses relied on the speed and quality of their online connections and communications in order to

compete. Mike understood the opportunities that faster broadband offered to all businesses, and recognised that world class infrastructure would also help attract new enterprises to the town.

### Planning for fibre broadband

Parts of Sutton Coldfield town centre were not covered in the national, commercially-driven rollout of fibre broadband. It became clear that the town was also unlikely to gain any benefit from the Government's intervention programme. Unless the BID took action, town centre businesses would be hampered, unable to work efficiently and effectively, with poor consequences for business competitiveness and productivity.

Mike got in touch with Ian Binks, BT's Regional Partnership Director for the West Midlands, to explore what could be done to make high quality broadband services available throughout the town centre. Together, they agreed that if the town centre needed superfast broadband quickly, the solution would be for the BID to privately-fund the network connections.



Research showed that two cabinets needed to be upgraded. An open access network from Openreach, BT's network division provided the best solution, giving local businesses the opportunity to fulfil their broadband needs from a range of independent providers offering competitive prices and services.

### Benefiting from a superfast infrastructure

The two cabinets were enabled in December 2014, and BT and the BID have worked together to ensure local businesses are aware of the investment and of the benefits of the new services that are now available.

Mike explained, "We funded the two cabinets in order to ensure as many town centre businesses as possible have access to a fibre optic internet connection. Our investment supplements Openreach's commercial rollout programme, which would have missed several of our key business areas.



Our intervention means around 50 more businesses can now benefit from this improved connectivity."

The Adkins Research Group (ARG) was one of the first small businesses to take advantage. Jack Adkins said, "What has really helped boost my business is that the BID committee persuaded BT to install Fibre Optics. For ARG, our fast broadband connection has really helped with our day-to-day business. We now transfer video and audio files four or five times faster than before. A 2-hour duration DVD used to take up to five hours to upload, and that is now reduced to 30 minutes, which is a massive saving in time for ARG."

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Ian Binks, BT's Regional Partnership Director said, "BT is always happy to work closely with local partners to find ways to provide superfast broadband services for places more quickly. We had very good teamwork from both the BT organisation and from the BID team on the ground, and the active support of businesses who wanted it to happen".

### Key Contact

Ian Binks, BT Regional Partnership Director, West Midlands

Email: [ian.binks@bt.com](mailto:ian.binks@bt.com)

[www.bt.com/btregions](http://www.bt.com/btregions)

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