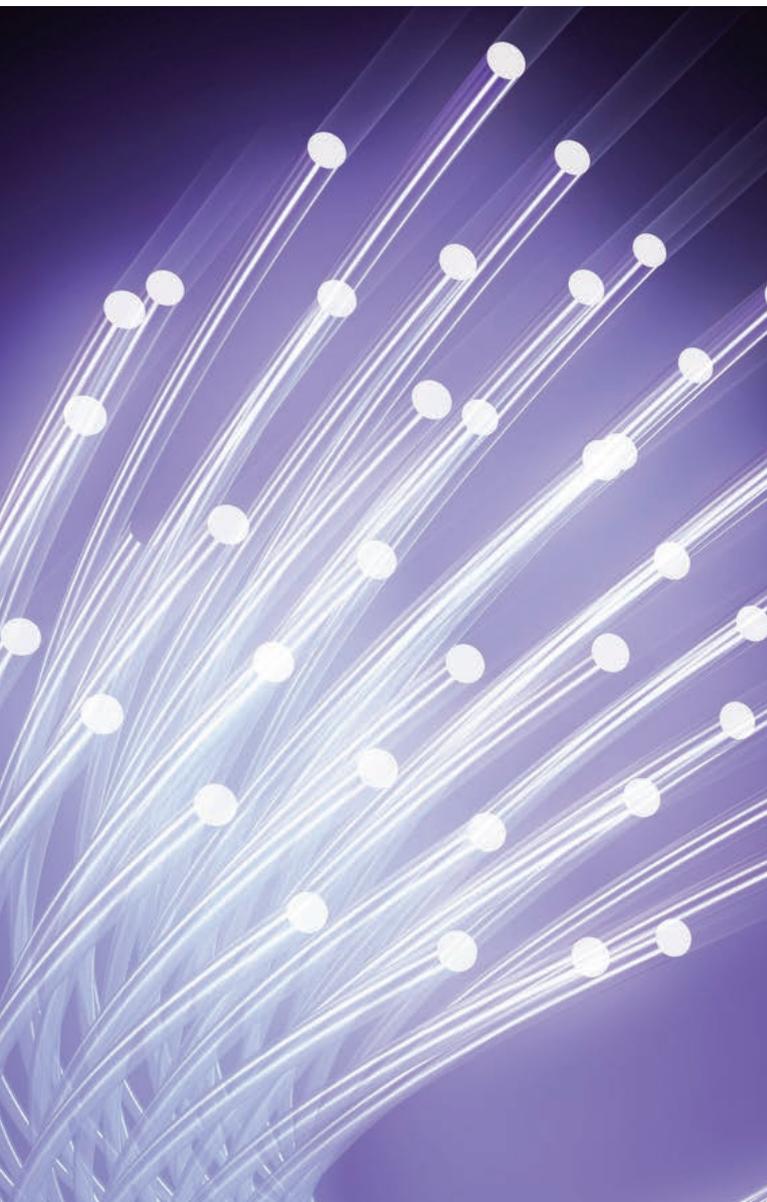




Village powers own fibre broadband



They say 'When you want something done, do it yourself'. The 120 households that make up Ashley village in Northamptonshire wanted superfast broadband. And they did not want to wait until 2017/18 for connection.



Stephen Castens from the Ashley Broadband Fundraising Campaign explains how the community came together to close the funding gap.

“Broadband speeds are extremely important in a rural community such as Ashley, and villagers understood the benefits of being connected to the fibre network. When we found we needed to raise our own funding to get broadband quickly, we managed to raise £15,000 in under four weeks to guarantee access to fibre broadband for Ashley homes and businesses.

The lack of high speed fibre broadband is one of the biggest barriers facing rural small businesses everywhere. Faster download speeds help companies improve their productivity and efficiency, and compete on a level playing field. Life with superfast broadband would be very different for those working from home or whose small business is based in the village.”



Standing up for what you want

“We’ve always taken a keen interest in bringing fibre broadband to Ashley, but we were disappointed by the likely wait. We were out of reach of our nearest planned connection, and it seemed the opportunity might pass us by for several years. BT said it would be happy to contribute some additional investment for extending fibre to Ashley, but that still left us with a ‘funding gap’.

If we wanted fibre broadband in 2015, we had no choice but to raise the money to join the programme ourselves. The Ashley Broadband Fundraising Campaign was launched by a group of villagers who were passionate about broadband, and who were able to put in the necessary effort.

We had to move quickly because the £14,800 offer price was only available if we committed to being part of the work schedule for the second quarter of 2015. To undertake the connection at a future date would have cost in the region of £47,000.”

Choosing the best approach

“We didn’t choose BT without first considering our options, and we consulted our residents at every stage. We researched the alternative supplier approach to securing high speed broadband services by inviting another provider to give a presentation locally.

We listened carefully to the outline of upfront customer costs, and the service implications of having a single broadband provider. We noted the risks to service should the provider fail to generate and maintain sufficient take-up.

We compared this with the open access to all providers that the BT solution offered. Villagers made their preferences clear, opting for certainty, competitive pricing and a choice of products from a wide range of providers. We achieved widespread local support for signing a contract with BT.”

Working together to plug the funding gap

“These are still difficult times for the rural economy, and people do not have money to spare for every good idea. But the overwhelming support for securing BT’s Superfast Broadband at the earliest opportunity meant that our fundraisers received pledges from the Ashley community.

We raised £15,000 in less than four weeks, which is a fantastic achievement that shows the strength of our resolve – we are lucky to live in such a dynamic village community.”

“It’s proof for other rural communities that people acting together and investing in local services can succeed.”

Looking forward to fibre broadband services

“Now that our 50 per cent deposit for ‘gap-funding’ has been paid, and the contract signed, a fibre to the cabinet solution will be coming to Ashley in Spring 2015.

Once the new infrastructure is available, residents and businesses will be able to order fibre broadband services from more than 160 service providers. People can choose the service that meets their particular needs, and gain access to free market pricing to ensure better value for money.

Our fibre to the cabinet solution will be installed and maintained by Openreach with minimal disruption to village life. Download speeds will vary from 30Mbps to 80Mbps at network level. Customer service speeds will depend on the product, the distance from the cabinet and internal wiring in the property. Openreach has agreed to work closely with us to make sure that we actually achieve these estimated speeds.”



Supporting rural communities

Owen Moody, BT’s East Midlands regional director said, “We welcome the opportunity to bring the benefits of fibre broadband to local communities such as Ashley. An ‘open’ network available to all broadband service providers on an equal basis offers villagers highly competitive pricing and products from a wide range of providers. The community has shown great vision in coming together and seizing this one-off opportunity to connect to the fibre broadband network.”

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