

B4RN community fibre broadband

Update 16th May 2018

Many will be aware of the ongoing efforts of a group of volunteers working to improve the telephone and broadband connectivity in our village and the surrounding area. On 22nd April 2015 a village meeting was held in Tivetshall with Karen O’Kane from Better broadband for Norfolk to discuss connecting Tivetshall to the Superfast broadband network. We later learned that we were one of the last villages to be accepted onto this scheme as, following a private meeting with Matthew Hancock (minister for digital), we discovered the government had concluded that fibre to a village cabinet was not going to be sufficient in the near future. The government is now looking to install fibre to the property as a solution to the ever-growing demand for higher speeds of connectivity and to assist it’s roll out of 5G mobile phone technology which simply will not work over old copper cable infrastructure as it requires fibre land line links to work. The only problem with this is that they will once again concentrate their efforts and expenditure on the larger towns and cities and as before the small rural villages will be the last to get any upgrades.

Fed up with waiting for BT to install fibre to the cabinet which we were promised back in 2015, then spring 2016, then summer 2016 etc. on July 4th last year we decided to join the B4RN community broadband project to bring pure fibre to people’s properties giving a service of 1,000Mbps upload and download to each property in the village that wished to take the service.

Following months of planning and many village meetings here and in surrounding parishes we began work to place our first fibre cabinet on it’s base at the Scole Community Centre on 27th December 2017. Route maps had been drawn up and many hours spent with our fantastic local land owners who are very supportive of our efforts.

During some of the coldest and wettest weather in this area for many years the volunteers proceeded to work in January and February to install approx. 7km of ducting bringing the fibre out of the ground on the South side of the A143 at Billingford and across the main road through several fields to the community centre in Scole. On Wednesday 28th march 2018 we switched on a live service at the centre which currently runs at 1,000mbps, on a test on my 5 year old lap top I recorded a download speed of 942.75Mbps with an upload speed to match.

I would like to personally thank all those who have been involved so far, without the volunteers knocking on doors, digging, printing leaflets, burying duct in the ground all the councillors who have got on board with this project and of course

the local land owners and all those too numerous to mention at this time, we would not have got this far.

This has transformed the way in which you can now use the internet and the Wi-Fi hotspot we have created around the car park of the building already has several regular users who can now download their work content to offices in London and all over the world without having to travel there in person to present. On Friday between 7.00pm and 10pm the community centre is open to those wishing to try the service for them selves and it is rapidly gaining a number of local followers. (except for this Friday when the centre is pre-booked for an event). Some of you may have heard the BBC radio interview we did from the community centre using a Voip connection (using the internet to call rather than a traditional land line, something BT is beginning to roll out for the future). We used my smart phone sat on the table between us and it was just like having the presenter sat next to us, it was as clear as a bell.

Like all projects of this nature this has not been with out it's difficulties and many of us have aged with the frustrations that come with working remotely from the head office of B4RN. We have proved the system works, far exceeds the service offerings of any competitors and at just £30 per month it is one of the cheapest services at this speed. The system is future proof so unlike a BT fibre to the property at around 130mbps and £78 per month will not be out of date in the next few years as B4RN can be upgraded to 10,000Mbps or even 100,000Mbps when required.

Going forward B4RN are to employ a full time 'liaison and planning' person based around Diss to assist the roll out in this area and we are in discussions to clarify some points of the project hence we have not been able to hold any further village meetings until we know the exact details.

Once the details are made clear I urge you all to get involved, there is something for everyone to do in helping bring this to our village and when it arrives you will not hear broadband mentioned again as an issue, it just works faster than you can so the frustrations of the famous spinning wheel will be forgotten. A small team totalling around 16 volunteers installed 7km of duct in approx. 10 working days, and we now have a live service, just imagine what a larger group of villagers could do and look at the map to see how short a distance we are from the cabinet at Scole. Thank you all for your involment so far.