

Notes from the meeting with DCC – High Speed Broadband in Bickleigh Parish

Thursday 13th August at 10am via Zoom

Present: Councillor Barrie Spencer, Helen Nathanson (Parish Clerk), Matt Barrow (DCC)

The purpose of the meeting was to get an update from DCC about the roll out of high-speed broadband within the parish.

The following summarises the discussion:

Openreach is now working with new surveying subcontractors who are using new devices rather than the previous manual system. Progress had been held back by various contractual issues which needed sorting out but they are now back on track. The subcontractors who we will see doing the work are Barden Networks, G4 or Openreach themselves. The survey work should start by the last week of August and will involve about 1 month on site. This means that the service should be ready for customers by the end of this year.

DCC is in regular communication with Openreach and is speaking to them about their communications and community relations. They intend to ask Openreach to allow parishes to attend the update meetings so that we are in direct contact with one another. DCC is committed to ensuring that parish councils are informed about progress and would like us to be closely involved in engaging with and informing the community about the rollout. Openreach has not previously been good at informing customers when fibre is installed so DCC is working with them to improve communications and this is one of the reasons they are keen to involve parish councils.

Covid has not had a direct impact on progress but engineers on the ground are briefed and are working in accordance with guidelines. DCC can give us a copy of the guidelines if it would help to reassure residents whilst the work is carried out.

The way it works is that the contractors will install fibre cables to outside the curtilage of each property, generally by digging a channel but also using existing poles and stringing up the cables. It is then up to customers to access the service via their Internet Service Providers (ISP). The fibre system differs from the previous copper wire system and will provide much higher and consistent speeds to all users. The maximum expected speed is 1,000Mb rather than the current 80Mb. It is more likely that customers will use up to 300Mb initially because most equipment cannot use more than this. However, in time, this will rise and the normal level will readjust in terms of usage and cost. There are presently over 600 ISPs working to deliver Openreach broadband but the new fibre system only has about 15 ISPs at the moment so some people may need to switch provider.

It is unlikely that there will be 100% coverage of all properties because difficulties can arise such as wayleave agreements and landowner permission. DCC is committed to achieving 100% coverage wherever possible so it will always try to find a way to resolve any problems.

Switching to the new fibre broadband will future-proof the broadband service, even though some people may not yet need it. It will also provide a consistent speed throughout the day and one which will not be affected at times of high usage, as is the case with the current service.

DCC has a meeting next week with Openreach specifically about community and communications and Matt will get back to us after this to confirm if we are able to attend the meetings.