

Update on our application for Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP)

A week or two ago we received an email from the Rural Engagement Officer at OpenReach.

Those of you who waded through the bulletins from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, may have predicted more mobility of the goalposts. What has happened is that Ofcom has divided rural areas according to how difficult they are to reach with fibre. Those areas that are not too difficult to reach are designated "Ofcom Area 2". Areas that are more difficult to reach are designated "Ofcom Area 3". We are in Area 3. Groups that are in Ofcom Area 2 will no longer be eligible for the grants after 31 March 2021. For this reason, OpenReach is prioritising their applications ahead of ours.

Since we are in Ofcom Area 3, we WILL be eligible for the replacement scheme, which is called the UK Gigabit Programme and which comes into play in April 2021 but we must expect yet more delay. Furthermore, we still don't know what the value of the grant will be nor whether Hampshire County Council will continue to top it up.

There is one faint light of good news: mysteriously, the quote from OpenReach has reduced to £619,461.00 with no material change in the number of properties to be served.

Here is the text of the email we received. It was followed by the list of properties to be covered and the revised cost estimate. We have checked it and it cross-checks with the list we submitted to OpenReach with our application.

Hi Tom (Haye)

Apologies. We have got to prioritise the communities who are not going to benefit from the new voucher scheme as we need to do all we can for them. As your community will benefit from the new scheme it has been delayed. I do have some information on the new estimate though. It just hasn't been put on an official estimate yet. I have posted the details below though.

Last week a meeting was held between Flick Drummond (our MP), Hugh Lumby (our Hampshire County Councillor) and Glenn Peacey (HCC lead for Hampshire Superfast Broadband). We have been pressing all three of them for a report of the meeting but it's clear from the following reply, received from Cllr Lumby, that it was inconclusive.

Evening Jason (Bridgen)

We are waiting to hear what the arrangements will be after 31 March, the expectation is that it will be announced in the budget next week. I don't know the position for HCC once the existing budget runs out but I suspect we will need to see what the BDUK position is. (BDUK refers to Building Digital UK, which is the part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport that is charged with delivering broadband networks to the nation).

I know it's frustrating but I think we will all need to wait a bit longer.

As soon as we have more information, I'll update you.

Graham