Report on Mobile Phone / Broadband Improvements in Lytchett Matravers

By Cllr Andrew Huggins

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At the Feb 2018 Full Council meeting I had undertaken to register an interest in Juice Telecom as an alternative local broadband supplier, and also to register with the mobile phone providers for interest in improved coverage in our area.

I have actually done neither of these, but I have done much “fact finding” which I wish to share with Full Council.

1. Juice Telecom – I have not yet registered with Juice, but I have heard that they might not be a company we wish to involve ourselves with.
2. I thought OFCOM would be the logical starting point for enquiring about improved coverage. If one contacts a mobile provider about a problem, they tend to take it at a granular level and look for a solution at your address (eg Wifi calling / Suresignal ) whereas we are looking for a villagewide solution. OFCOM advised me to contact Arquiva who operate 80% of the masts in the UK for all mobile providers.
3. I spoke to a very eloquent and knowledgeable gentleman at Arquiva who provided me with a lot of information and background.
   1. In general, mobile providers have reached a high level of coverage Nationally with the number of masts they have, and as masts are expensive, they are reluctant to provide more “without a fight”, because the number of subscribers they will cover is relatively low for the cost of a mast (typically £150K)
   2. It takes more than a fibre broadband connection and power to service a mast – it needs a very good connection back to an exchange which must itself have particular equipment fitted. (Many exchanges, Lytchett Minster being one) house O2 masts because O2 (formerly Cellnet) used to be a part of BT when much of the mobile infrastructure was being installed so they plonked a transmitter on their exchange. The Lytchett Water Tower might not be easily serviced as needed.
   3. There is another network, “Airwave”, which is for emergency services. The “Fake Tree” in Lytchett between Huntick and Wareham Roads is one of these. This network is outdated and soon to be Discontinued. EE (now owned by BT has the contract for providing Emergency Service network, and they are committed to providing the greatest spread of cover.
   4. Public network masts are operated by 2 organisations: CTIL (Cornerstone Telecommunications Infrastructure Limited) (Vodaphone and O2) and MBNL Mobile Broadcast Network Limited) (EE and Three). I was recommended that if we are going to stand any chance of success, we need our MP to write to the Managing Directors of each each of these companies.
4. To many of us (albeit non-experts in the field), the logical place for mast(s) would be on the gable end of the village hall roof. Before volunteering this location to anyone, I have emailed Linda Perry, Chairman of Village Hall Committee, asking for the VH Committee to consider whether they would allow this. I have indicated that there \*might\* be possibility of payment by the provider for hosting the mast, and also that willingness is no guarantee that this will ever happen.

**So, as a next step, my proposal which I would like the Parish Council to agree to, would be that I draft a letter and send to Michael Tomlinson MP, which he can send to the MDs of MBNL and CTIL putting across the argument for improved coverage by one or more mobile network.**

**The key reasons would be**

* **Poor/nonexistant mobile coverage in much of the village**
* **Lack of decent Broadband, nor plans to provide decent broadband to the outlying parts of the village, particularly to the west which is served by Wareham exchange, which is many miles away. (so 4G Wifi should be provided as an alternative).**
* **Decommissioning of the 2 phone boxes in the village as part of BT initiative – Cyclists passing through the village on the popular “Lytchett Loop” bike rides do not have the access to emergency phone if needed, and cannot currently rely on mobiles.**

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