

Update on Superfast Broadband and improved Mobile Phone Coverage in Lytchett Matravers

23 June May 2018 Cllr Andrew Huggins

Broadband:

Recap: Openreach are working to provide Superfast Fibre to the core of Lytchett by the end of 2019. This will not include about 80 properties who are “just too far” from the BT green cabinets but for whom Michael Tomlinson MP and Dorset Superfast are seeking DEFRA funding to have a solution for. There are also another 80 who are harder to serve because they are further out and/or to the west side of Lytchett and served by the Morden exchange. These 80 are the ones we are focussing on serving.

Rob Ward and I have done much work on this – meetings with Pete Bartlett (Dorset Superfast) and a Telephone meeting with Openreach and with Wessex Internet who are the two companies who appear to be able to provide Fibre broadband to these properties.

There are other solutions offered by Juice and Voneus, but these are WiFi solutions provided by masts. Whilst these provide a service, they will not be as good as fibre broadband. If anyone wishes to pursue these they may do so and the service may provide additional connectivity options for residents, possible much sooner, but as funding is generally available “per property” for one solution we would rather pool the funding into the gigabit Voucher scheme and get true fibre broadband installed.

In brief, Openreach would take about 15 months to complete a rollout, typically by running new fibres pole to pole along existing routes, whereas Wessex Internet would run new fibres underground linking to their current nearest point (Winterborne Zelston, just the other side of Charborough Park) and they could complete the installation in 8 months. Wessex have a policy of NEVER paying wayleaves for running fibres across landowners fields. So to help Wessex identify landowners I spent a useful evening with Cllr Wendy Meaden identifying all the landowners around Lytchett in areas which would be affected.

There are pros and cons of the two companies and their solutions which we will discuss with Pete Bartlett, (who has to remain impartial) this Monday 25 June. We have asked the two Cos to provide a quote for the installation which we expect to receive within a month or so – this will be subject to the number and exact location of the premises which wish to subscribe. It is LIKELY that due to the indicative interest we have gathered from our door to door canvassing, that the gigabit vouchers will fully cover the cost of installation. However, as Pete mentioned when he presented to the Parish Council, there is a small chance that there might be a shortfall, in which case we may look to the Parish council to cover this.

A key point here is that this is viewed as a “Community Scheme” and a lot of the legwork needs to be done at our end in identifying customers and drumming up support. The providers themselves do not mailshot premises or go knocking door to door to get people to sign up. Rob Ward and I have knocked door to door and we have placed notices on the Parish Council website and social Media which have pulled in a worthwhile amount of interest.

We have arranged for a meeting on Wednesday 18th July in the village hall and we will be leaflet-dropping and emailing those in areas where this may serve. At this meeting, or preferred provider, Wessex Internet, will give a presentation of the proposal and the requirements/obligations on customers. These include:

They have to take a minimum 12 month contract at 100MB (typically costing around £60/month)

If a non VAT-registered company, whilst they get £3000 in gigabit voucher funding, they will have to pay the VAT which amounts to about £600.

As this is a community Driven scheme, I would like it to be recognised by the Parish Council as a Working Group (currently just myself and Rob Ward would be the members) as it gives us additional credence with the suppliers (we are already utilising the PC website and social media). It seems reasonable since this all spawned from our presentation to the PC by Pete Bartlett following pleas to the PC from Residents (MP) on the subject. However, if we do so, will the working group be empowered to make major decisions such as the provider we go with and provide updates to council – we don't want to delay this with bureaucracy.

Also, the event at the village hall may well just involve our preferred provider if we have made a decision at that time. The reason for this is that we feel that if we give the public a choice, some who did not get their choice may withdraw which would leave us financially "short" this we may be asking the Parish Council for a top up grant, whereas if we make an informed recommendation and present one option with the reasons why, we can hopefully get all to support that solution, with greater benefit for all. The community is keen to move this forwards asap, and whilst we have a "gut feeling" of the solution that we will end up with, we need to keep options open in case information comes out of the woodwork which necessitates a rethink.

Would the Parish council be able to pay for this hall booking with only one provider? Due to their business model of not paying wayleaves, we don't believe it would be right to ask them to pay for hall hire (£25-30).

I can provide a lot more information on all of these points if anyone has questions, but in the interests of brevity I shall end this report here.

Mobile Phone Coverage

As requested our MP has written to the 4 mobile companies and the 2 mast operators.

To date O2 have responded that their coverage is adequate, but they will look at the masts to see if they can tweak the positional direction to improve coverage, and Vodaphone have responded acknowledging that their level of coverage in Lytchett is only good "in car".

Both companies do not perceive a problem in Lytchett as they don't receive complaints (!).

I will be writing a Link and Parish Magazine article imminently!

CTIL, one of the mast operators, has said that if the village hall write to them offering the village hall as a location for a mast, they will review it.

