

NORTHERN FELS BROADBAND GROUP

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2016

It is some time since NFBG last published a newsletter and much has happened in the intervening time, some of it favourable but most of it not.

Phase One of Connecting Cumbria's rollout of broadband is now all but complete with the remaining activities focused on eliminating anomalies such as where speeds are below expectations or properties which were expected to benefit have no service.

Phase Two has begun its' planning stage but what we do know is that only about a quarter (some 5000/7000 premises) out of around 27000 across the county, not yet connected to superfast broadband will be included in this next phase leaving large areas of rural Cumbria still without broadband.

There is now general acceptance by Government that wireless and satellite broadband are essential parts of the mix in bringing broadband to remote rural areas, ironically having rejected the NFBG Pilot Project because it included the use of "white space" wireless technology to reach more remote parts of the proposed network. Vouchers are available to residents who cannot get broadband through conventional means, or where their speeds are less than 2Mbps towards the cost of installing satellite broadband. The vouchers are intended to be a stop gap measure and will not prejudice any future alternatives and they will be non repayable.

Details of the voucher scheme can be found at www.connectingcumbria.org (next view broadband network providers, then visit Rural Broadband/BDUK Satellite Voucher Scheme 2016/17).

Whilst the vouchers help towards installation costs please be aware that satellite and wireless services currently require users to pay for the data they use as there are no unlimited packages available as with fixed line services. Proceed with care.

On a more positive note about 60% of properties in Northern Fells should have access to superfast broadband at speeds of 24Mbps or more. These are chiefly in the northerly parishes either through fibre to locally based cabinets or 4G mobile broadband from the transmitters at Sandale and Caldbeck.

But a word to the wise: Your property will not automatically be connected to the cabinets and the benefit of faster speeds unless you choose to opt in through your internet provider and in some cases the providers themselves have not bought into the faster service and initially say that faster broadband is not available to your property. In these cases it is worth being persistent and, if need be, shopping around other providers to find a better deal to suit your requirements.

The potential speeds for your property can be checked at www.samknows.com which is a totally independent website.

Another success for Northern Fells has been the construction of two new transmitters, out of only fourteen built nationally under the Mobile Infrastructure Programme against a planned target of 250, at Newlands and Hutton Roof. Whilst neither is fully commissioned yet, and they are still powered by generators pending connection to the mains, initial surveys show promising coverage of mobile telephony and 4G broadband in areas not previously covered.

Nothing definite yet, so watch this space and NFBG will help keep you informed about these developments on their website www.northernfellsbroadband.co.uk

Connecting Cumbria has recently published some interesting statistics showing that only 27.6% of premises with access to superfast broadband have actually taken up the service. This might be because people are happy with their existing service or perhaps because the full benefits are not fully understood.

To help better understanding two workshops are planned which will explain what better broadband can bring to families and businesses. They will help you to get the best from your computer, as well as the opportunity to hear what the future might bring.

These Digital Inclusion workshops will take place as follows:-

18th July at Caldbeck Village Hall at 7.00pm.

5th September at Mungrisdale Village Hall at 7.00pm.

In summary, progress has much slower than NFBG would have liked and there are still too many of our communities without broadband but the committee pledges to continue to work towards universal coverage across our seven parishes.