

## NFNPA RAPC 257/15

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 9 MARCH 2015

## THE NEW FOREST SUPERFAST BROADBAND PROGRAMME

**Report by:** Steve Avery, Executive Director

### Summary:

At the last RAPC meeting Members asked for an update on the delivery of the superfast broadband programme within the New Forest. This report sets out the background to the programme, the progress to date in 'rolling out' the programme and the work being undertaken by partner organisations to extend superfast broadband to all parts of the Forest.

### 1. Background

- 1.1 Superfast Broadband is defined as having a potential headline access speed of at least 24Mbps, with no upper limit. Unlike the majority of current broadband connections, which use telephone lines, the fastest broadband connection is delivered by a cable, or fibre-optic, broadband network. These cables are made up of glass and plastic, which allows data to move much faster than along the copper pipes used by home telephone lines (ADSL broadband).
- 1.2 The Superfast Broadband programme is currently being rolled out across the country by commercial operators, such as BT and Virgin Media. Whilst the programme anticipates covering around 80% of premises, the Government is aiming for at least 90% of premises in the UK to receive superfast broadband, with subsequent funding increasing coverage to at least 95% of properties by mid-2019 or earlier.
- 1.3 Locally, Hampshire County Council is working with BT Openreach to deliver 90% coverage by the end of 2015, with a programme to further extend this coverage to at least 95% of premises by the end of 2019. Similarly, Wiltshire Council is also working with BT Openreach to deliver 91% coverage by March 2016. In both counties, the work is scheduled over several phases.
- 1.4 Further information about Superfast Broadband in Hampshire can be accessed from Hampshire County Council's website:

<http://www.hampshiresuperfastbroadband.com/>

### 2. Implementing the programme in the New Forest National Park

- 2.1 The new infrastructure required to facilitate faster broadband includes improvements to the local exchange, new ducting and additional cabinets. Recent national planning reforms mean that the implementation of this new infrastructure can largely be done under 'permitted development rights' and so planning permission is not required, even in a National Park.

- 2.2 The exception is where an installation is proposed within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In such cases, a 'prior approval' is required under Part 24 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). This enables the determining authority to have regard to the "siting and appearance" of any new infrastructure, which in most cases comprises new cabinets.
- 2.3 In June 2013 National Parks England and the commercial broadband operators voluntarily agreed a 'Cabinet Siting and Pole Siting Code of Practice'. This provides guidance on the process of seeking and granting of any approvals required for the siting and design of new broadband infrastructure, such as maintaining a dialogue between relevant parties, considering planning issues and visual impacts and health and safety considerations.
- 2.4 The Electronic Communications Code Regulations further requires operators to notify the Authority for each proposed new cabinet in a National Park. This is not a planning application and the Authority can again only advise on the siting and appearance of the proposed infrastructure.
- 2.5 A number of cabinets require additional permissions and wayleaves, in particular from the Verderers (if sited on Crown land) and the Forestry Commission, and these have been subject to further discussions with relevant stakeholders, including the National Park Authority. This has involved all parties visiting specific sites to identify preferred sites to avoid or minimise impacts on sensitive sites. There are though additional limitations on where the new infrastructure can be located, including the considerations of power availability, need for close proximity to existing cabinets and ability to access the cabinets in a safe manner for future maintenance.
- 2.6 Several cabinets in the early phases have now been successfully installed in the New Forest including those in parts of Ashurst, Totton, Bransgore, Cadnam, Bartley, Winsor, Copythorne, Ower, Breamore, Hythe, Dibden Purlieu, Walhampton, Emery Down and Lyndhurst.
- 2.7 Nonetheless, there are complexities involved with the installation of new infrastructure and utilities in a protected and heavily designated landscape like the New Forest. These have typically involved the need to avoid installations within the SSSIs if an alternative site is available. Where there is no alternative other than installing a cabinet in a SSSI, then Natural England have made it clear that a method statement is required from the applicant company setting out how the impact on the designated site would be minimised, such as providing cabling route and excavation details. Natural England also routinely seek confirmation that no material will be imported on to the site (to avoid the establishment of any inappropriate species within the New Forest).
- 2.8 Another factor to be considered is the loss of designated grazing land in the Forest and this is something that the Verderers are understandably very keen to avoid. Hampshire County Council are working to ensure that the requirements of all the Forest stakeholders are accommodated in a timely manner. The County Council say that the time taken to establish these additional processes has caused a slight delay in the rollout within the Forest but they estimate that the affected cabinets will now go live between April and June 2015.

### **3. Additional broadband coverage**

3.1 To improve broadband services for the hardest to reach rural areas the Government created an additional funding mechanism through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (formerly known as the Rural Community Broadband Fund). The Authority together with Hampshire County Council, BT Openreach and local communities have been successful in securing additional funding of £1,000,000 to bring faster broadband to parts of the New Forest and Test Valley. This will extend the coverage of superfast broadband to a further 1700 properties in the New Forest, including parts of the following parishes:

- Ashurst and Colbury
- Beaulieu
- Burley
- Denny Lodge
- East Boldre
- Boldre
- Lymington and Pennington
- Lyndhurst
- Sway

3.2 However, the dispersed nature of the New Forest communities means that a large number of premises will still be unable to benefit from the Superfast programme as the distance of homes from either a cabinet or exchange makes the cost of running new fibre to individual premises prohibitive.

3.3 To help address this issue the Authority is working with New Forest District Council under the Brand New Forest Campaign to encourage communities to consider alternative means of securing improved broadband services. A recent public meeting in Minstead attracted over 200 people, demonstrating a significant “community of interest” wishing to improve their broadband service. The Authority has also met with the Cabinet Office to explore the possibility of gaining access to publicly owned digital networks provided by Network Rail. More information about the Brand New Forest initiative can be found on the web link below:

<http://www.brandnewforest.com/about-brand-new-forest/broadband/>

### **4. Next steps**

4.1 A further meeting of all the relevant New Forest stakeholders (the Verderers, Forestry Commission, Natural England, BT Openreach and the Authority) is to take place on 4 March 2015 to review the sites chosen for next round of cabinet installations in the Forest and to identify preferred locations.

4.2 An update on the programme in the New Forest is also to be made to the New Forest Consultative Panel meeting on 12 March 2015.

## **5. Recommendation**

**That Members note the report.**

### **Papers:**

NFNPA RAPC 257/15

### **Contact:**

Steve Avery

Executive Director

Tel: 01590 646659

Email: [steve.avery@newforestnpa.gov.uk](mailto:steve.avery@newforestnpa.gov.uk)