

Summary of Current Position on Broadband 15 July 2018

Zone A: Copsale

The new cabinet in Copsale has now been live for some time and I have not heard of any problems other than the expected speed limitations of around 24Mbps at the extreme distances from the cabinet, and the non-availability at even further distances such as the Coltstaple area at the north end of Broadwater Lane. For more details about the Coltstaple area, please see Zone H below.

Zone B: Park Lane, Maplehurst

Apart from some teething problems due to insufficient capacity being connected initially, I am not aware of any problems in this area, which now has Fibre to the Premises provided by BT.

Zone C: Lower Beeding numbers on and around Hampton Cottages, Maplehurst

The Better Connected team has stated that they are expecting the final part of the planning process to take place in the next couple of weeks for the new FTTP network that will connect properties around Wheelers and Hampton Cottages. An Openreach engineer will be undertaking a check of the area on foot to ensure that the plans to be issued to the sub-contractor are in order. After that, the works will be issued to the sub-contractor and works should then begin on building the network.

I am assuming that this coverage will be achieved by extending the Park Lane zone around the corner, but I have no definitive information on that. It would be very helpful if residents in this area could let me know of anything they are told by BT and what service they are being offered. This will help us to understand how much of the area is covered by the FTTP scheme, as opposed to the service being offered from the Harriotts Hill cabinet.

Zone D: Horsham numbers in Sedgwick area

In the Sedgwick area, the Better Connected project is building a new 'fibre to the premises' network to provide services to properties connected to the Horsham exchange. Works on the fibre network have begun locally but works remain to connect the network to the wider Openreach network. These 'spine' works have begun but Openreach have encountered some engineering challenges and are exploring alternative ways of connecting up the network without having to install extensive lengths of new ducting. We are told to expect to have news on this area in the autumn.

Zone E: Mannings Heath and Monks Gate

I am not aware of any works in Mannings Heath and would be interested to hear from anyone who is on the edge of the FTTC coverage and still struggling with a poor service.

Similarly, although I believe that the service in Monks Gate has been upgraded, I would like to confirm what speeds are now available in MG and how far to the south that service now extends. If you live in that area, do please get in touch.

Residents in Monks Gate should also have noticed an improvement in the 4G mobile signal following the installation of the new mast at Monks gate on the A281.

Zone F: Cowfold numbers in the south of Maplehurst

A new cabinet, Cowfold cabinet 5 has been constructed near the junction of the A272 with Maplehurst Road. The 'spine works' are almost complete for this cabinet but a small amount of new ducting is required and the first opportunity to access the road to do that is in September. Once

the engineering works are complete, works will need to take place to transfer all of the lines onto the cabinet. As this requires a small amount of downtime, Openreach has to agree a date with the internet service providers who have customers in the area for the works to take place. As third parties are involved this process can take up to three months. However, WSCC state that they have seen the process speed up of late so they advise us to keep an eye on their website from October. This cabinet will provide improved services to properties connected to the Cowfold exchange *at the lower end of Maplehurst Road and to the south and west of the cabinet*. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Maplehurst residents will see any improvement, except where the re-connection of the wires in the cabinet results in a lower resistance path back to the exchange. Clearly, the limits on speed caused by the length of the line will not be altered.

A number of us in Maplehurst have been using 3G/4G services from EE or Vodafone, with resulting speeds of between 20 and 60Mbps download. This remains a workable solution for those with very poor connections and no short-term prospect of any upgrade. The cost is about £30 per month, typically with a 50Gb/month limit on data. The best of these services is still from the EE mast south of Maplehurst, as EE owns twice as much radio spectrum as the other operators and can offer faster speeds.

Zone G: Lower Beeding numbers south of Harriotts Hill Cottage but north of Hampton Cottages

As many people will have seen, a new cabinet, Lower Beeding 4, has 'gone live' in the last couple of weeks. This provides improved services along Nuthurst Street from Harriotts Hill southward and into Gaveston. Here again, it would be useful if residents in the area could let me know what speeds they can achieve following the change. It would also be useful to know which properties are excluded from that scheme. Note: on the map I issued last year, Zone G included Nuthurst up to the pub and beyond. I have now had to amend the zones in the light of the Cabinet 4 works, so that Harriotts Close, the school and pub and houses in between will now be shown as a new zone, marked as Zone J. (see below)

Zone H: Colstaple

There are a number of properties at the north end of Broadwater Lane, in the area around Colstaple Farm, which are too far from the Copsale cabinet to receive a good FTTC service. They are actually fairly close to properties to the west that receive their connection more directly from Southwater exchange, but that is not where they are connected. I am not aware at present of any plans to cover this area with an improved service, but please let me know if you live there and have heard something more hopeful from BT.

Zone J: Harriotts Close and Nuthurst Street north of Harriotts Hill Cottage.

Approximately 25 subscribers in this area are now in discussion with BT about a community-funded upgrade. The project is being led by Mike Hoare, and is likely to include the school and the pub together with a number of residential properties.

Alternatives to BT

We are still in contact with Zoom Internet, who could potentially be a provider of wireless internet connections to the area. If any of you have been walking near Chanctonbury Hill recently, you may have seen their vehicle and some dish aerials on the Downs. They were providing internet connections for an event called the Big Church Day Out at Wiston and they will be there again in August for another big event called David's Tent. They have, for some time, been working on a more permanent solution for the Wiston area and this would also cover areas to the north such as

ourselves. They are seeking accreditation with a company called Arqiva, with a view to putting an aerial on the Arqiva mast on Truleigh Hill. It is however a complex process but they are making progress. Zoom are also seeking planning permission to erect their own mast on Truleigh Hill, but this is in its very early stages.

Another alternative solution is for us to build our own fibre network. Whilst this sounds very ambitious, it has been done by many communities around the country, particularly in rural areas. Whether or not we can complete such a scheme at a reasonable cost depends on several factors.

Firstly, and very obviously, the more people join the scheme, the lower the cost per resident. On the face of it, the fact that large parts of the parish are now supplied with fibre-based services would seem to limit the number who would be interested. However, most of the area will still only have FTTC, with speed limited in many cases to less than 40Mbps. If we were to install our own system, it would provide Gigabit level connections (1000Mbps) with the capability of going even faster in the future. It is for Gigabit schemes such as this that the latest government grants are targeted. The current voucher scheme allows each business to claim £3000 and each resident £500 as part of a group project. I am discussing with suppliers the possibility of running fibre to a single point in the parish from which we could install and manage the final connections to residents, and we are also looking at the possibility of the supplier installing the complete system.

The second major factor is concerned with land ownership and access. In order to run fibres, usually underground, across private land, would require wayleaves negotiated with the land owners. If any landowner wanted to be difficult, he or she could force us to go around the outside of their property, adding to the cost. One of the jobs we need to do fairly urgently is to draw up a map showing who owns which areas of land. If anyone would like to assist in that task, do please get in touch.

Further information

The West Sussex Better Connected website may be found at:

<http://www.westsussex-betterconnected.org.uk/>

WSSC also publish cabinets and new FTTP structures and the areas they cover as they 'go live' :

<http://www.westsussex-betterconnected.org.uk/assets/file/26062018%20Website%20cabinets%20spreadsheet.pdf>

The Broadband Team have explained that is very hard for them to provide a high level summary of the areas they are working in as they are connecting smaller 'pockets' of properties than they were at the start of the project. If you are unable to find out what the situation for your property is from their website, you can email them at broadband@westsussex.gov.uk with your full postal address and landline number and they will be happy to let you know if there are plans in your area.

You can contact the WSSC Broadband Team at

West Wing, County Hall, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1RQ

Email: broadband@westsussex.gov.uk

We do have a couple of contacts at BT, but it is usually easier to obtain information from the West Sussex team, who meet with BT on a weekly basis. Finally, you can always ask me at bb@lindfield.org or 07484606006 and I will do what I can to help

Alan Lindfield
15 July 2018