



JAMES'S BROADBAND INFORMATION SHEET



Faster broadband is an essential driver for economic growth and is vital to so many of the things we now do at work and at home. This information sheet aims to explain the broadband process locally and to help you access the fastest possible speeds.

THE SUPERFAST BROADBAND ROLLOUT

What is superfast broadband? Superfast broadband is a stable internet connection of 24 megabits per second (mbps) or better.

Who is doing what? The superfast broadband rollout is delivered in one of two ways depending on where you live and the result of an open market review.

- **The commercial rollout.** In larger towns, the network providers like BT Openreach or Virgin Cable decided that the rollout of a fibre network was commercially viable and so they are delivering that under their own steam.
- **The state aid rollout.** In other, more rural, areas the population density meant that the market was unlikely to provide and so the Government with our local authorities is funding the delivery of broadband. Locally, this is being delivered by Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) who work for Devon and Somerset County Councils and Plymouth City Council as well as Torbay, North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset unitary authorities.

What is the State Aid Rollout programme? The Government has set targets for each phase of the national rollout. Phase 1 was to be completed by the end of 2016 and required that 90% of premises across the country would be connected to superfast. Phase 2 was to connect the next 5% and is to be completed by the end of 2017. The final 5% is the subject of ongoing debate in Westminster!

Am I in the commercial or state aid rollout areas? In the Wells Constituency, the commercial rollout was in parts of Burnham-on-Sea, Highbridge, Street, Glastonbury and Shepton Mallet. You can find out whether you live in a commercial or state aid rollout area by visiting the Connecting Devon & Somerset website at www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk. However, as at February 2017, be wary of their maps for confirming

DID YOU KNOW?:
The state aid contracts with BT Openreach include a 'claw back' determined by the uptake of superfast broadband contracts. So if more than 20% of the properties in your area sign up for superfast - with any ISP, not just BT, then BT Openreach pay back a proportion of the taxpayers' money they've received to do the rollout in the first place.



anything other than whether you're in the commercial or state aid rollout areas. If you're in a black/dark grey area, you're in the commercial rollout. If you're in a light grey, green, orange or blue area, you're in the state aid programme.

Have I got superfast broadband already?

If you're unsure, you need to do a speed check; I think the best is through Ookla at www.speedtest.net. If you're getting download speeds of 24 mbps or better, you have. If you're getting speeds slower than that, visit the Openreach 'Where & When?'

website at www.homeandwork.openreach.co.uk/when-can-i-get-fibre and enter your postcode or landline telephone number.

Why am I getting slow speeds when the Openreach website says I should get superfast?

Two options:

- The connection of fibre optic cables to the network in your area doesn't automatically upgrade your service. If the Openreach website says you're connected, you need to contact an Internet Service Provider – like Sky, TalkTalk, BT, Plusnet and many others – to switch to a fibre enabled internet service.
- Or you've already got a fibre enabled superfast contract but there's a fault with your line in which case you'll need to complain to your Internet Service Provider (ISP).

I phoned an ISP but they said I'm not able to access superfast even though the Openreach website said I could?

This happens sometimes – please let me know when it does so that I can get grumpy at BT Openreach. It also probably means you're at the end of a 'Long Line' – read on.

The Openreach website was wrong or it says they're "exploring options"? If you live in the commercial rollout area and this is the case, please let me know so that, again, I can get grumpy at BT Openreach and campaign for your property to be released to the state aid programme. If you live in the state aid rollout area, you may be connected in Phase 2 of the Connecting Devon & Somerset programme and/or you may be eligible for a voucher to immediately improve your connection.

Why is the Connecting Devon & Somerset mapping misleading? Two reasons:

- In Phase 1 of the state aid rollout and in the commercial rollout, BT Openreach have been delivering a technology called **Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC)**. This means that a green street-side cabinet near to your home or business has been connected by fibre optic cable to your local telephone exchange. However, between the cabinet and your property, the



broadband signal travels through the existing copper-wired telephone network. Whilst travelling through the copper network the signal degrades and so the further you live from the cabinet, the slower your connection will be. As a general rule, if you are more than 1.2km from a fibre enabled cabinet, you are at the end of a **'Long Line'** and you're unlikely to get superfast broadband speeds. Alternatively, a small number of properties are connected directly to the exchange rather than to a street-side cabinet. These properties cannot access superfast until a cabinet has been installed. However the CDS mapping was done by postcode not individual property meaning that all areas served by a particular cabinet were shown uniformly as connected (green) regardless of whether some parts of that area were too far away or wired directly to the exchange.

- And it's currently out of date because it shows the situation at the end of Phase 1. Some commercial areas (black/dark grey) have now been handed back to state aid rollout whilst areas shown as **'out of programme'** (light grey) for Phase 1 will now be under consideration for Phase 2.

But if I'm shown as green on the map, they'll think I'm connected and forget about me?

CDS know what the line speeds are for each individual property and this data informs their decisions on which areas and properties to connect in Phase 2. They know that there are some communities and many individual properties that are at the end of long lines and await a superfast connection even though the cabinet they're connected to is already upgraded.

What is happening with Phase 2? The Phase 2 contract has recently been awarded to Gigaclear who will be deploying a different technology as part of their contract. Instead of using FTTC, they'll be doing Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) which will potentially mean ultrafast speeds – rather than just superfast - for those connected in this part of the programme. The Phase 2 rollout will begin in April 2017 and will be completed by the end of 2019.

Am I included in Phase 2? Connecting Devon & Somerset haven't yet confirmed which areas will be included in this phase of the contract nor the order in which they'll be connected.

However, you can register your interest through the Gigaclear website at www.gigaclear.com. I strongly encourage you to do this and to encourage your neighbours to do the same.

And in the meantime? If your connection speeds are slower than 2 mbps you will be eligible for a voucher from CDS. The voucher is worth £500 and is intended to fund a connection of at least 10 mbps. Claiming your voucher does not exclude you from being connected to superfast under the state aid rollout at a later date.





What can I buy with my voucher? The vouchers can only be spent with certain companies who are accredited to the voucher scheme. They fall into two groups:

- **Individual Solution.** The voucher can be used to fund a solution just for your property like satellite or 4G. Both have their pros and cons but I've been particularly impressed by the 4G technologies offered by some of the accredited companies.
- **Community Solution.** You can pool your vouchers with your neighbours in order to procure a solution for your whole community. FTTP and wide area wireless solutions are available through the voucher scheme.

How do I apply for a voucher? You can apply for a voucher through the CDS website although please note that applications are currently paused until the Phase 2 work programme is confirmed. Applications should re-open in April 2017.

What if I'm not included in Phase 2? The Government has already announced that by the end of the decade there will be a Universal Service Obligation (USO) of 10 mbps. This makes it your right to be able to access broadband of at least that speed. The debate in Westminster is over exactly how that is delivered. Some believe that BT Openreach should be given the responsibility to deliver those speeds to all in the same way as the Royal Mail are required to offer a mail service to every UK property. To do that, it is likely that they would employ a technology called G-FAST which squeezes faster speeds from the existing copper network. Others believe that the USO should be delivered through a voucher scheme much like the one operated by CDS, allowing individuals or communities to procure the solution that works best for them. My preference is the latter.

But the USO isn't superfast? The USO is not superfast but it will represent a step change in connectivity for the properties within the final 5%. These are the hardest to reach properties in the whole of the United Kingdom and are likely to have the very worst speeds at the moment. Guaranteeing them a connection of at least 10 mbps means that they can stream live TV and perform all other routine office and home tasks. In time, the Government will move on to an ultrafast broadband rollout but it is my view that the 10 mbps USO should be in place first and that as each improvement is rolled out in the more easy to reach areas, the USO should be revised upwards so that the digital divide does not become any wider. 5G and subsequent mobile technologies might make the requirement for wires redundant altogether but until that happens, I'll continue to campaign for the fastest possible connections for all who live and work in the Wells Constituency.

FAULT REPORTING: I've had lots of casework from local residents and businesses who have found it impossible to get BT Openreach and/or the Internet Service Provider to fix their broadband or phone line. Please do try to complain through the normal procedures in the first instance as many problems can be sorted by your ISP or telephone provider from their call centre but if the problem persists or the companies just aren't properly engaged in sorting out your problem, please do let me know. We can escalate complaints on your behalf and tend to get quick resolution.