

3. John Owens

Email 1

I must make comments regarding the latest publication of the Neighbourhood Plan. The section on Broadband contains inaccuracies and misinformation.

I did point these out in the pre-Christmas 'consultation' and made submissions supported by external references. Nobody chose to contact me subsequently.

The overall implication of the sections in the plan is that our Parish is doing 'ok'.

It is not.

Our parish is in the lowest 25% of Leicestershire for broadband connectivity speeds. We are in an even worse place compared to national statistics.

I do not know who authored this piece but as a co-founder and Project Manager of Rural Web, which provided our village network when BT would not, and which guided Leics. CC through their Superfast rollout, I feel confident that I might know some things worth considering. I did volunteer help to Peter Searancke, which has been ignored.

Only last year I triggered an investigation with Leics CC which resulted in their project manager eventually telling me that all new projects are to be at the 'Ultrafast Broadband' or '1 gig' level. Councillor Snartt may confirm this activity and result.

This time I provide a marked-up copy. It is disappointing to see the misinformation reach this level of exposure.

John Owens

Attachment 1

Communications

Broadband

154. Societies across the globe have developed to be reliant on high quality communications, networks and infrastructure. At the heart of this is high speed internet connectivity together with mobile phone technologies. This is a major driver for business opportunities, access to essential public services, education and personal leisure. In the wake of Covid 19 and the Government's social isolation policies, working from home has become the modus operandi; and will likely continue as restrictions are relaxed. 155. All dwellings and businesses in the parish should be capable of accessing high speed internet. Though terms such as "super-fast broadband" are often used, the term "broadband" actually refers to a particular technology for delivering Internet connectivity. What will matter to future residents is not the technology but the ability for each of e.g. four members of a household to separately and simultaneously access facilities such as video conferencing, watching 4K TV and high-speed gaming.

156. Currently the fastest Internet connections in the parish at reasonable cost use "fibre to the cabinet" (FTTC- not currently available in the parish, nor are plans for it imminent). Fibre optic cables provide ultra fast Internet connections to seven street cabinets from which connections to houses and businesses are over copper telephone cables. The maximum Internet throughput depends on the length of this copper cable, the routing of which for historic reasons is not always obvious. In recent years a download speed of 24 or 30 mega-bits per second (mbps) – often dubbed "super fast broadband" – has been considered acceptable and probably 90% of current premises are able to receive this. However, to allow for ever-increasing requirements it is suggested that new premises should be capable of receiving say 50mbps at reasonable cost.

157. Forthcoming "5G" connections from wireless masts may be adequate but this Parish must use whatever means possible to press for improvements to the supply of highspeed internet. Given the importance of connectivity to enabling a sustainable local economy, it will be important to ensure that the Parish does not lag behind high-speed internet development nationally.

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Telephony

158. Woodhouse has a Grade II Listed telephone kiosk, decommissioned by BT a few years ago. Woodhouse Eaves has a live telephone kiosk. 159. Mobile phone signals can be poor, depending on the provider, and there are some absolute black spots for both phone and broadband. As granite and forestry are prevalent within the parish, universal access to good signals is possibly a difficult problem to resolve. 160. There are several mobile phone masts, one is part of the recently uprated emergency network. None is particularly visible enough to spoil a view. Nationally, there are moves to force providers to share masts. A recent application for another mast appears to have been put on hold. One of the outlying dwellings moved to a satellite link as broadband providers were unable to improve the situation. Other outliers struggle with slow or intermittent signals. Meanwhile, the local educational establishments benefit from sharing the Joint Academic Network, which is not available to the general public. 161. The parish had volunteers who set up their own broadband network and some have continued to support local people during and beyond the more recent expansion of broadband to the parish that was/is coordinated by the county council.

Commented [JO1]: Suggested addition. ...and whatever becomes the norm in households over the time of this project. The pandemic has shown a need for simultaneous home working (often 2 adults) and home schooling (often 2 children, simultaneously. Governments, the industry and local Councils refer to the new standards as 'Ultra Fast' or '1 Gig' and allow for a wide mix of suppliers, including cable.

Commented [JO2]: Suggested addition prior to Currently. 'The village has one supplier of broadband, BT Openreach. The village exchange has not been opened to LLU (a system whereby end-user suppliers install their own capacity). Cable is not present in the village though the commercial challenge to bring cable in is not overwhelming within a strategic sense. Currently...'

Commented [JO3]: Typo. Should read (FTTC) . Whereas FTTP is not currently..

Commented [JO4]: Unwise terminology as this is used for end-user packaged speeds. The speed from exchange to cabinet may be even higher

Commented [JO5]: Incorrect implication: Download speeds in excess of 20 mbps are widely available in the village but many homes, possibly with only two people, opt for a cheaper package of around 30Mbps

Commented [JO6]: repeat

Commented [JO7]: Incorrect implication. 5G is not intended to supply household 'broadband' but primarily high speed data connections to phone and devices in the Internet of Things.

Commented [JO8]: '....support the County Council and local people..'

Commented [JO9]: Should be in the broadband section, not telephony.

POLICY BE7: BROADBAND AND MOBILE PHONE INFRASTRUCTURE - Proposals to provide access to superfast broadband (high speed internet) for the Parish will be supported.

Every individual dwelling in new housing developments should have a connection installed capable of supplying broadband operation at download speeds of at least 30 megabit and upload speeds of at least 10 megabit (as at the date of publication) or better to reflect higher minimum speeds that may be recommended through the lifetime of the Plan. New developments of more than 3 properties must guarantee that the additional new connections will not negatively impact existing users.

Improvements to the mobile telecommunication network that will serve the Parish will be supported. Where new masts are installed, these should be shared where possible by more than one provider.

Any infrastructure improvements, possibly requiring above ground network installations, must be sympathetically located and designed to integrate into the landscape, i.e. not be in or near to open landscapes.

Commented [JO10]: Incorrect terminology. All premises now have access to superfast broadband. Leics County Council refer to their next targets as 'Ultrafast' and any subsidised project must achieve this even at the present time. I have correspondence that supports this.

Commented [JO11]: Suggested alternative - Proposals to provide access to Ultrafast Broadband (high speed internet via cable, fibre or alternative) for the Parish will be supported.

Commented [JO12]: This figure is low compared to the average already achieved in the parish.

Commented [JO13]: Suggest revision to read 'Capacity of the local network is often an issue, most noticeable at pre-pandemic peak times. New developments....'

Email 2

To Mr. Neil Davidson

Neil you do not know of me but you might have heard me referred to, even in friendly terms, as an irritant. Even so I ask that you read the attached document with an open mind. I know it is long but if there is goodwill towards getting this section of the plan to reflect current and known truths I will happily work with somebody to shorten it.

John

To Charnwood Borough Council

I have been told, with clarity, that the Parish Council wishes to have no contact with me on this matter and I must raise this subject with you under the section 16 regulations.

I formally say that the broadband section of the plan out for consultation contains typos, misunderstanding and material errors. More importantly it conveys a picture of 'happiness' that is not true. My comments must be passed on to the inspector.

<<...>>

I ask you the same as I ask Neil, please read the attached with an open mind and work for amiable correction.

Kind Regards

John

John Owens

Attachment 2

As a co-founder and project manager of an organisation that pulled in over \$110 of funding or support in kind for our village I have not lost my interest in the subject of Broadband. I keep in touch with developments and potential funding. In 2020 I consulted CBC and LCC on this subject and feel that I am relatively up to date.

Before drawing up this document I consulted with the remnants of Rural Web who built a local network and formed partnerships and working relationships with Loughborough University, emda, Leicestershire Council, we also assisted Leicestershire Council in their rollout of 'Superfast' broadband. We keep up to date with developments and improvements. We have recently had dialogue with the project manager for Broadband at Leicestershire Council, and David Hankin at Charnwood Borough Council, about next developments.

I think that we are well placed to know our community and speak for their interests and know more about this area of technology than the consultants or the wider advisory group. Our submission is also in line with goals established by and for Charnwood Borough Council

Please substitute the section on Broadband with this more accurate and clear set of words.

Internet considerations

The service commonly referred to as Broadband should be considered as a utility. As such there are planning considerations when new building developments are being considered, for the new dwellings themselves and for their neighbours.

The Broadband Environment

Our Government has established a national target of 1 'gig' as the modal household speed. This can be achieved by many technologies: fibre, cable and radio waves. It should be noted that as the commonly available 'speed' rises so do the demands for speed rise, by the content providers themselves (BBC, Netflix, Call of Duty etc.)

Our village once achieved speeds that most of the country had access to, but only by community action. A group known as Rural Web formed and though their project ended some time ago their market knowledge lives on.

Currently 75% of our County can receive speeds of '1 gig', '1000mb' or the Umbrella term 'Ultrafast' Broadband, the national target. Our villages are in the 25% who have already lagged behind and cannot access such speeds without personal investment in the several £1000s.

Some definitions of terms are needed. At the time of writing the fastest Internet connections in the parish at reasonable cost use "fibre to the cabinet" (FTTC) and can provide 'Superfast Broadband, technically defined as 20-100mb. The speed available to a dwelling is affected by the length of copper wire connecting it to the aforesaid cabinet. Some dwellings in the village may be beyond reach of this and limited to the 10mb Universal Service Obligation.

If only for cost reasons many of our villagers may be currently happy at speeds of 30-50mb, though that would probably not be adequate for the likely *average family scenario of 1-2 home-workers, 1-2 gamers and online students and alongside that 1- 2 entertainment streamers* –all possible simultaneously in the sort of 5+ person family that many new house builds are designed for.

Supply and Local Government Initiatives:

Our village is connected by one monopoly supplier, BT Openreach. The exchange is not even unbundled to other suppliers (an arrangement know as LLU). As noted above: we are already in the bottom 25% of Leicestershire and this will get worse as current plans by Leicestershire County Council are to direct subsidies toward those with the very lowest speeds (between 20 and 30mb) and leapfrog them to 1000mb, commonly referred to as '1 gig' or 1gb. Discussions with Charnwood Borough Council confirm that there are no current plans for investment to help villages like us, nor to draw down subsidies that are implied by Government publicity. Charnwood Borough Council has a goal to be amongst the best for broadband connectivity does ont even have dedicated resource monitoring and managing this arena as confirmed by documented conversations involving CBC and Leics. CC and copied to our Councillor, Mr. D. Snartt.

The Planning Control environment:

There are proposals being discussed within Government that all 'new builds' should have the capacity to use 1 gb. but we must expect these to be watered down for practical reasons such as rural exchanges like ours.

Many other communities have inspired or directed developers to work with Broadband suppliers (usually BT Openreach or Virgin Cable) either in kind, as part of the site development, or by monetary subsidy.

Opportunities:

- We also have 5g via wireless transmission, though it's primary aim is to serve the newest of mobile phones with higher speed data. Long term this wireless technology will also serve the 'Internet of Things'; connectivity between cars and traffic lights, fridges and on-line ordering etc. This technology is unlikely to be regarded as carrying the bulk of broadband to the home, at least for the first half of the term covered by this plan. Things may change rapidly as the availability of mass produced equipment and/or dedicated broadband suppliers using 5G may emerge.
- Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) is not on general offer in our village and that is one way to achieve high quality, high speeds (1000mb).
- Virgin Cable is also not available and that technology is also capable of meeting the '1 gig' target. Previous research and recent anecdotal evidence suggests that a Cable offering could be achieved without overwhelming investment as a major trunking cable passes nearby.
- There will also be high speed, high quality, connections to the schools and Beaumanor Hall. In fact Rural Web gained approval from the County Council to access these private networks on a trial basis, but did not use them.
- Finally there is a dedicated, high quality, high speed, feed into the site of Welbeck Sixth Form college, which is due to close soon.

Capacity:

The narrative above is almost solely framed in terms of speed. The 'elephant in the room' is capacity because that is commercially confidential information. Our village demographic is more aged than average and as mentioned elsewhere we have under-occupancy of properties. Both factors mitigate any capacity problems compared to the situation when more of the larger houses reflect the norm for their size. The 'average' family described above (in italics). What is 'enough' now will not be in the time period covered by this plan.

At the Planning Control stage we must consider Broadband capacity in the same way as we do other things: Parking, School places etc.

Unlike other utilities which have tightly defined measures, our monopoly supplier has very loose 'bandings' of commercial promises. Any sudden new load could take satisfaction levels for a wide range of neighbours from 'acceptable' to 'very frustrating' without the supplier having a commercial pressure to react. The suggestions below merely ask for this likelihood to be flagged up at Planning Control stage. The responses need not be highly accurate and need not breach confidentiality. One could envisage a simple 5 point scale from 'Impossible at current capacity' to 'Easily achievable within current capacity'

So, what can we hope for?

1. All dwellings will in any case be subject to the guaranteed minimum offering (10mb). Some may fall within new rulings from Government (the 1 Gig' promise). All will need attractive headline speeds to be marketable. Some developers may work with suppliers to improve the offerings into their development.
 - a. Any large scale development could plausibly trigger the introduction of Cable (and thus competition) into the village. Our authorities should consider that opportunity at planning stage

2. We can ask that any development of above, say 10, bedrooms must show that they have consulted BT Openreach, or any other current supplier to the village at the time, and that efforts to mitigate any degradation of service to neighbours' property have been considered.

This capacity issues are relevant. If 16 properties are built on the site of Selby's yard there could be a significant degradation of supply to all dwellings served by that cabinet. Conceivably this might mean dropping from the middle of a guaranteed service range to the bottom of it. BT Openreach as a monopoly supplier may have no incentive to mitigate such a problem and even if they do it might take a long time.

It is within the capacity of a Neighbourhood Plan to ask for such issues to be identified at planning control stage rather than a creeping failure later.

- Our Parish Council should establish a Broadband Champion; whether within the Council or a specialised reporter as with the newly appointed Environment and Heritage officer. This 'champion' could be a group or a person. The role would be to keep abreast of opportunities and developments, formally act as ambassador for the PC with suppliers, such as BT Openreach, and potential suppliers and potential community activist groups as well as local councils.

This would give support to our desire to be 'Open to Broadband' and a wish to have access to what most of Britain has access to, and not fall further below our current lowest 20-25%