

BROADBAND IN SHROPSHIRE

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Summary

This report provides an update on the work being completed to improve broadband within Shropshire. It outlines the Council's submission to Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) wave 2 bid round and the high level broadband strategy for Shropshire. Due to the expected timing of when the Council is likely to hear about whether we have been successful with this bid, it may be possible to provide a verbal update at the meeting.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:-

- A. Cabinet notes the progress made to date as regards addressing broadband coverage in Shropshire.
- B. Endorses the approach being adopted in the Broadband Strategy.
- C. Authority is delegated to the Corporate Director Places, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Service Transformation and Organisational Development and Economic Growth and Prosperity, to agree the potential offer of funding from BDUK resulting from the Wave 2 bid if this is forthcoming.

REPORT

Background

1. An effective, reliable, secure and fast communications infrastructure is increasingly essential to life in both rural and urban communities. It is important that all of our communities and businesses are able to benefit from the convenience online services provide. There is a requirement to do more than just bridging the digital divide –communities and businesses need to have tools to fully access public services and commercial opportunities. Businesses in

particular cannot compete nationally or globally without greatly improved broadband speeds and reliability.

2. There remains a commitment from Central Government to ensuring that virtually all homes receive the minimum level of service of 2Mbps by 2015. It is recognised that the solutions used to deliver 2Mbps will in most cases deliver far greater bandwidth so 2Mbps would be the minimum speed available. As a result super-fast broadband and the universal service objective have been aligned.
3. Shropshire has many 'not spots' (areas unable to receive broadband) and 'slow spots' (areas that although they are able to access broadband it is slow). Appendix A shows the estimated ADSL speeds within Shropshire.
4. £2 million has been included in the capital programme to improve broadband in Shropshire.

Government Strategy and Funding

5. In December 2010 the Government published 'Britain's Super-fast Broadband Future' which states its ambition for a digital hub in every community in the country. This is part of an £530 million strategy to provide the best broadband network in Europe by 2015.
6. The Digital Britain report 2009 recognised that 30% of the country would require public support to receive super fast broadband. The Government are committed to delivering super-fast broadband into areas where commercial investment alone will not deliver broadband and are taking a new approach to delivering broadband connectivity in rural and hard to reach areas that the market will not provide for.
7. Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) is the delivery vehicle for the Government's policies on broadband and managing the waves of funding. BDUK's goals include facilitating the delivery of universal broadband and stimulating private sector investment to deliver the best super-fast broadband network in Europe by 2015.

BDUK Submission

8. Shropshire Council submitted a full bid to BDUK as part of Wave 2 on 18 April 2011. Members of the Shropshire Council project team have subsequently been interviewed by BDUK on the bid documentation as part of the selection process. A decision on the bid is due on 27 May.
9. If Shropshire are not successful in this wave BDUK have stated that where local authorities have super-fast broadband as a development priority, they will continue to work with them to create and a deliver a super-fast broadband infrastructure with funding available to achieve this.

10. The Shropshire Council bid focused on providing broadband to all rural not spot areas in Shropshire within the first phase. Subsequent phases would be focused on delivering high speed broadband to the market towns, key settlements and as much of the remaining geographical areas as possible with the funding available.
11. The bid was supported by both the Shropshire Business Board and Marches Local Enterprise Partnership Board.

Shropshire Broadband Strategy

12. Alongside developing the bid a broadband strategy is being written. In brief it is focused on the following areas:-
 - A vision for Shropshire and the strategic benefits that Next Generation Broadband could bring
 - Acknowledgement of what is there now (performance and infrastructure);
 - What the aspirations of Shropshire are – in terms of performance and benefits of Next Generation Access but shying away from technology;
 - How the aspirations for NGA tie into existing economic development strategies, the Local Economic Assessment “Spotlight on Shropshire” and the Marches Local Enterprise Proposal and Business Plan;
 - Funding issues, what might be available, how to go about getting it, match from both public and private sector;
 - Explanation of state aid as an issue and how to go about getting approval; and
 - Stake-holders commitment to delivery, partnerships (Marches LEP, Public/Private etc).
13. Reference is made to where social enterprises have worked with the local authority to deliver community based broadband to residents and businesses. This approach links into the digital hub concept where high speed broadband is delivered to a community hub (this could be a public sector building) and the community then work together to deliver to homes or businesses.
14. Within the Governments’ broadband strategy reference is made to the growth area in broadband being people accessing the internet whilst on the move (mobile broadband). It is becoming increasingly important (and people are expecting) in a modern society to be able to access the internet from not just at a fixed computer but from a wide range of mobile devices e.g mobile phone. To achieve this, mobile coverage will also need to be improved within Shropshire. Improvements to mobile coverage is a frequent point raised during parish consultations where residents in some areas are frustrated by poor or a lack of mobile coverage.

15. To help inform and direct the strategy, a round table event with senior managers from Shropshire Council, Shropshire business board and LEP was held in conjunction with BT. The event:

- Explored the opportunities presented by high speed broadband for the Council to redesign the delivery of services and meet the changing demands of citizens whilst delivering efficiency savings;
- Helped to further develop an understanding of super-fast broadband and its contribution to economic growth and sustainable communities; and
- Discussed engagement with communities and businesses so all are aware of what is being planned and the rationale behind this approach to start the process of demand stimulation.

Industry Developments

16. BT have recently announced that the Shrewsbury exchange will have superfast broadband deployed. Oswestry and Baschurch (winners of race to infinity) were already included in the rollout programme. Works are due to be completed in these areas by the end 2012.

17. The Council continues to put pressure on BT to include other Shropshire exchanges in their superfast broadband rollout programme. Appendix B shows the proposed levels of superfast broadband (information taken from Point Topic December 2010)

Next Steps

18. Many of the next steps will be governed by the BDUK decision. If Shropshire are not successful we will need to consider an interim solution because addressing rural broadband will remain a key deliverable.

19. A website (www.connectingshropshire.co.uk) has been built to assist in data collection and communication with communities. Where this approach has been used in other regions the feedback has been positive. The website will allow communities to see what is being delivered, track progress and understand the benefits that it will bring them. Arrangements will be made for those members of the public who are currently unable to access the internet so they are able to access the resources available on the website, provide their ADSL speed details and gain updates on the project.

20. An executive summary of the broadband strategy will be sent to all town and parish councils so they are aware of what is being proposed and delivered. A regular communication notice will also be sent as part of on-going communication to all stakeholders.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

White paper, 'Britain's Super-fast Broadband Future December 2010.
Lord Carter's Digital Britain Report June 2009

Economic Development Broadband Business Survey September 2009

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal

The BDUK pilot will require environmental appraisal.

Risk Management Appraisal

A risk management appraisal will be undertaken.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

A widespread Local Councillor led consultation to assess need, demand and potential take up is envisaged.

Cabinet Members:

Martin Taylor-Smith Portfolio Holder for Service Transformation and Organisational Development.

Mike Owen, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and Prosperity.

Local Member

N/A

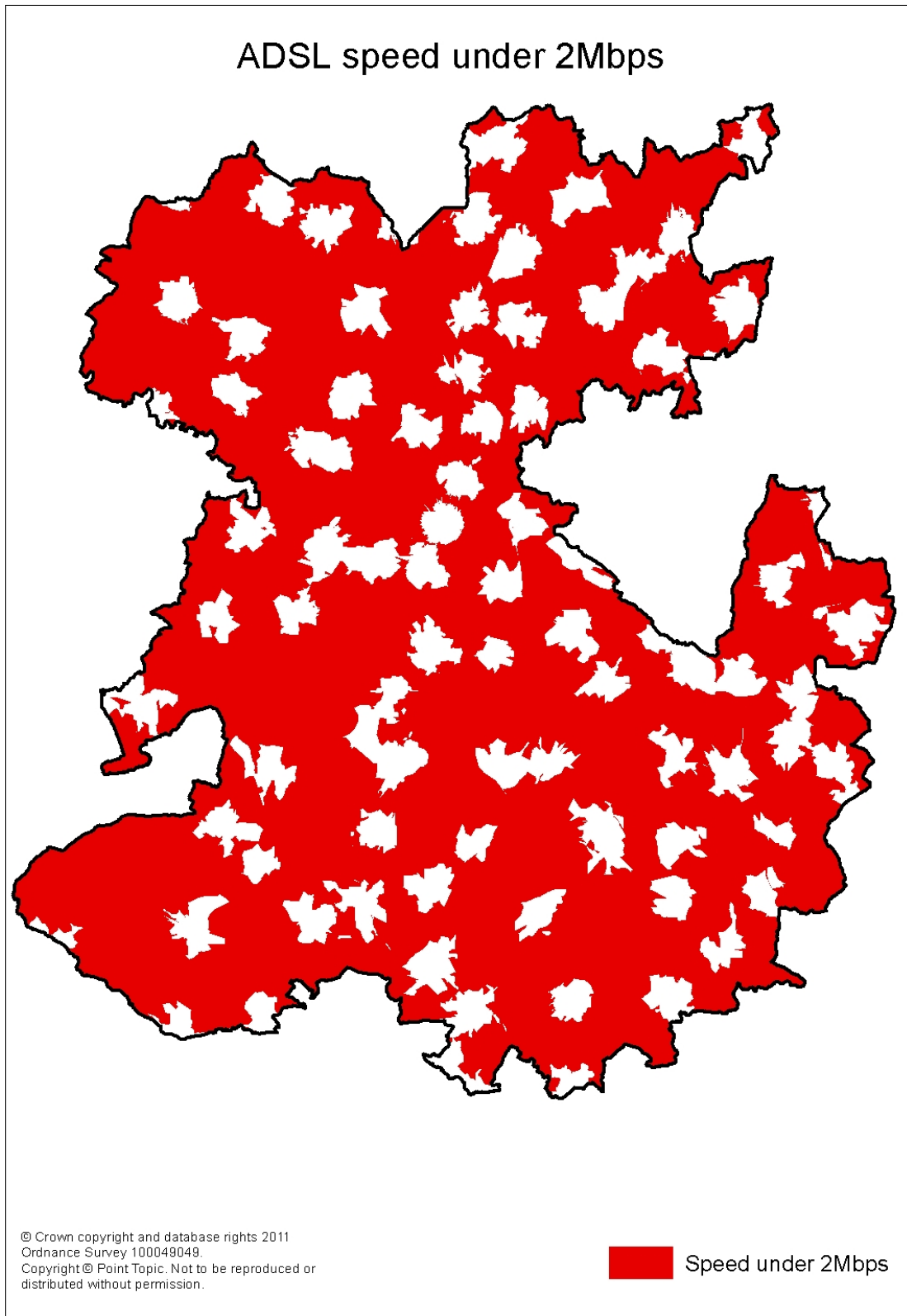
Appendix

Appendix A – Broadband speeds in Shropshire

Appendix B – Proposed next generation broadband access in Shropshire

Appendix C – LJC Briefing Note

Appendix A – Broadband speeds in Shropshire (Data from Point Topic December 2010)



**Appendix B - Proposed next generation broadband access in Shropshire
(Data taken from Point Topic – December 2010)**

