



It's time to access government cash to bring fibre broadband to Ivy Hatch for the sake of our busy daily working lives, our businesses and our house prices!

At a recent Ightham Parish Council meeting (4/12/2018), Kent County Council's (KCC) broadband officer confirmed that BT is highly unlikely to deliver faster broadband to Ivy Hatch in the foreseeable future, recommending instead that a small working group be formed to explore community-based broadband schemes, eligible for voucher-based funding support.

The government minister that controls funding for broadband rollout recently ended the current programme of support, which would have provided the investment to connect Plaxtol cabinet 3 to fibre broadband. Instead, remaining government funding will be mainly channelled through a voucher scheme, with a very remote possibility of a solution being funded directly by KCC or central government. KCC have been very clear that we should not expect any solution to materialise that does not come from within the community.

We, four local residents who attended the meeting, have undertaken to liaise with potential service providers, KCC, central government and other residents / business owners to pursue cost-effective and timely options for bringing fibre broadband to Ivy Hatch, using the recent successful example of Crouch residents as a template.

To do this, we need to provide both potential service providers (Openreach and Gigaclear) and scheme funders with indications of interest in receiving fibre broadband from Ivy Hatch residents and business owners. This will allow us to set the area to be covered by the project. We intend to submit this list to Openreach and Gigaclear by 31 January 2019.

As such, we will be talking to everyone in the area to explain the process and options in more detail, first by door-to-door conversations, but later via the parish magazine, meetings and other communication channels. We aim to talk to all residents currently supplied by Plaxtol Cabinet 3 (just under 130, according to KCC), but it is worth noting that any scheme will be delivered on a 'fibre-to-residence' basis, as the fibre-to-cabinet option is no longer supported by central or local government funding. This means that the cable will have to run past your property for you to benefit from the project and be connected.

The objective of the project, a "community fibre partnership", is to coordinate a one-off investment to install fibre infrastructure to those Ivy Hatch residents that are part of the project.

We do not need you to make a financial commitment immediately, but the experience of Crouch residents (See below) suggests that the quicker and the firmer the commitment of the residents/business owners, the sooner a project can get off the ground and deliver the quality of broadband that is already available to over 95% of Kent households. However, it is also likely that for the project to be successful sufficient households will be required to make a contractual commitment to buy broadband from the service provider for a minimum period of 18 months.

Crouch – a fibre broadband case study

Openreach is due to start installation work to provide fibre broadband to 80 properties (out of a possible 114) in Crouch in 2019, with approximately £67,000 of the total £70,000 project costs funded by vouchers. These were provided via central government (£3000 per business, £500 per residential home), but alternative voucher funding is now available via KCC, at a rate of £1700 per residential home. The cost of the scheme was less than half that originally quoted, in part due to use of lighter fibre optic cable that can be mounted on poles, which has removed much of the need for below ground work. Openreach were chosen by Crouch residents over Gigaclear, partly due to greater certainty over delivery of fibre broadband for all residents, within 12 months of signing a contract, but also due to greater freedom to choose between providers, once connected.

It has taken roughly six months from forming a working group and legal entity to signing up to the Openreach scheme. Crouch residents created a fund which covers the small shortfall not covered by vouchers but also covers any vouchers that fall away in the meantime. Residents paid in a contribution of approximately £450, whilst larger amounts were made by more motivated individuals on a voluntary basis. This fund is intended to meet any shortfall in funding arising either due to a shortage of vouchers overall, or due to residents moving out of the area and their vouchers falling away as a consequence. It is likely that Crouch residents will receive a rebate on their contribution from unused funds.

Next steps

Not only is fast internet access increasingly important to our everyday personal and working lives, there is increasing evidence that fibre broadband is a vital component of house values.

We believe it is important to act promptly in order to secure funding, because support from government or KCC sources is finite. There are pros and cons to all potential service providers, but we will work closely with KCC's broadband officer to review our options to ensure we identify the best deal for Ivy Hatch residents. We look forward to talking to you on a one-to-one basis in the coming weeks, to discuss your needs and concerns in more detail, but please feel free to contact us to ask specific questions or arrange a time to visit.

What do we need from you now?

If you want to participate or find out more then please get in touch with us so we can include your property in the plan we send to BT Openreach and Gigaclear and/or provide you with further information you might need. We can be contacted on ivyhatchbroadband@gmail.com

You can also call Chris Staples on **07917077019**

Yours in community partnership,

Chris Staples, Chris Hall, Tim Harvey & Mark Chivers - all residents of Ivy Hatch!

Q&A

How much will it cost to bring fibre broadband to Ivy Hatch?

We need to know who wants to be connected to be able to get a price from BT Openreach /Gigaclear. Once we have a firm indication from people / businesses willing to participate, we can ask service providers to provide estimates.

Is the community fibre project expected to make a profit?

No. The project is for the benefit of the community and will not return a profit to anyone participating in it.

What speeds will I get from fibre broadband?

BT Openreach is offering speeds of above 100 Megabits/s (mbs) and up to 300mbs. Gigaclear is offering speeds from up to 900mbs download speeds with equally fast upload speeds. Most people within Ivy Hatch are getting less than 10mbs download and 2mbs upload. For example, the project, if implemented, would be fast enough to stream high definition TV on multiple devices, stream the next generation of 4K TV, allow fast download across multiple devices without any drop off in speed.

Will internet access be more reliable?

Yes – fibre-to-premises utilises a direct connection to the fibre network that runs nationally and connects exchanges and mobile phone masts. The increased capacity of fibre means that download speeds will not be noticeably impacted by the number of people using the network. Speed and intermittency problems, which are particularly noticeable at peak times (i.e. evenings and weekends) on the current copper network, should be addressed. Replacing reliance on the old copper network will also reduce instances of drop out and poor line quality for those that chose to have their phone service delivered over the fibre network.

What are the costs of the broadband packages available?

We are in the process of confirming this with suppliers. However, according to publicly available information prices with Gigaclear range from £35 per calendar month to £75 pcm, and with BT appear to be in the region of £50 pcm. This compares to BT's standard broadband product which is £33 pcm. A minimum contract of 18 months is likely to be required to be able to claim the voucher.

Am I eligible for a voucher to cover the cost?

There are two voucher schemes that can support broadband roll-out. Central government set up the voucher scheme that supported the Crouch project which now provides £2500 per business and £500 per residential household. KCC also has a scheme that offers up to £1700 per household.

I work from home – does that mean I can get a business voucher?

We are still working with the schemes to establish the exact criteria for eligibility, but if you have registered your business to your home address or you run your business from home then you are likely to be eligible. Just working from home occasionally is unlikely to be sufficient to qualify. However, we hope to be able to use vouchers from both the KCC and the central government schemes together to maximise finding support.

What happens if the vouchers are not enough?

We will ask residents / businesses to contribute to the cost. We are confident enough people will want to do that to deliver fast broadband and if the costs are in line with the costs for Crouch we should be able to cover the majority, if not all, of the cost with vouchers.

Will I have to pay extra to connect from the road?

This is something we will have to agree with the suppliers, but Crouch project participants tell us the costs of connection from the road were included in the roll out. This is one reason why we encourage you to show an interest at an early stage as we can then try and negotiate this with the supplier.

If the network gets built will I be able to connect to it even if I don't participate?

This depends on whether the network goes past your property. There is no guarantee that it will be included if you don't participate in the project. We are also hopeful that the residents of Ivy Hatch will not want to profit from the work of others in the community without making a contribution, so if you are keen to be connected to superfast broadband we hope you will join us in supporting this community fibre partnership.

What happens if I move house?

This is something that we need to discuss with Openreach/Gigaclear, but if you are in a contract with Openreach/Gigaclear then it is likely that you will have to pay out the balance of that contract. We will try and confirm the terms of this with the suppliers so that everyone knows where they stand, although it is likely that, based upon the monthly fees referred to above, the cost will be less than £1000.

However, we urge you to also consider the potential negative impact on prices and buyer demand that will arise when it becomes clear to buyers that you are in the less than 5% of Kent households without superfast broadband and, in contrast to the position a few months ago, without the prospect of the government roll-out of fibre to cabinet changing that position.

We are sure there are many more questions that you may have – please get in contact with us at ivyhatchbroadband@gmail.com and we will try and answer those questions.