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Gloucestershire ahead in race for rural broadband

Rural Gloucestershire is ahead of the game in the national race for faster broadband.

The Government's announcement (today) of £363m to improve broadband in rural areas includes cash already allocated to Gloucestershire via the local Borders Broadband project working in collaboration with Herefordshire.

Managed by a partnership of Gloucestershire's Local Enterprise Partnership GFirst, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Government agency Broadband Delivery UK, the project is making good progress.

Potential suppliers of broadband infrastructure are already involved in the complex tendering process, seeking the best delivery in the shortest timescale and for the best value. A contract is expected to be awarded in May 2012.

An area covering large parts of the Forest of Dean and South Herefordshire was among the first in the UK to receive Government funding last Autumn, to bring high-speed broadband to rural areas otherwise not considered commercially viable.

Improved broadband services will be introduced initially in the pilot area of the Forest of Dean, and will then be rolled out throughout rural Gloucestershire.

Gloucestershire's funding allocation is £8,070,000 to 'pump-prime' improved broadband services in the county.

Local parishes and market towns are being consulted, and Local Broadband Champion volunteers being recruited to work within their local communities.

They will pass on information on the project's progress, highlight the benefits of high-speed broadband and provide evidence of demand for better services.

A spokesperson for the Borders Broadband project said: "The Forest of Dean was among the first areas chosen for introducing improved broadband services to rural areas, making Gloucestershire very much ahead of the game.

"We are now entering a very exciting phase, one where our rural communities can really begin to play a vital role in the arrival of faster, better broadband services in Gloucestershire."

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Notes to editors

The high-speed broadband pilot is being managed by a partnership of GFirst, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and BDUK.

The Gloucestershire/Herefordshire border area was among the first areas in England to receive funding from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to pilot the next generation of high-speed broadband in rural areas.

BDUK was set up by the Government to implement its policy of increasing access to broadband for households, business and communities in poorly served areas across the UK.
<http://discuss.bis.gov.uk/bduk/>

GFirst, the place promotion agency for Gloucestershire, is a Local Enterprise Partnership working for business, investors, tourism and skills. www.gfirst.co.uk