



**PRESS RELEASE – August 19 2011**

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**PRESS RELEASE: Call for local volunteers to champion rural broadband**

Gloucestershire's rural communities are being asked to step up and join the drive to bring better broadband to the county.

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 improved broadband to remote rural areas.

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

Improved broadband services will be introduced initially in the Forest of Dean and south Herefordshire, and will then be extended throughout the two counties.

The Borders Broadband project is being managed by a partnership of GFirst, the Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Government agency, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK).

Next month (September) the project team in collaboration with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council will meet parish and market town councils throughout the county.

Local Broadband Champion volunteers will be recruited to work within their local communities, spreading the word about the project's progress, and highlighting the benefits of high-speed broadband.

And they will be instrumental in carrying out a major survey among residents and businesses to provide detailed evidence demonstrating demand for better broadband services.

David Owen, Chief Executive of GFirst, the project's managing partner, said: "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.

"We need to prove that rural communities and businesses need and want high-speed broadband so we can persuade commercial companies to invest in the necessary infrastructure.

"High-speed broadband will open up massive new opportunities for our rural economy, helping firms become more productive and efficient, making the county increasingly attractive to new employers and providing improved services for communities."

If you would like to volunteer as a Local Broadband Champion, please contact Chris Cowcher at Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, [christopherc@grcc.org.uk](mailto:christopherc@grcc.org.uk) or get in touch with your local parish or town council clerk.

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### **Notes to Editors**

Broadband speed is the rate at which data is sent or received through your connection. It is measured in megabits per second, or Mbps.

Many parts of rural Gloucestershire don't yet have access to an adequate broadband service. The Government is committed to ensuring that virtually all homes have access to a minimum level of service, with download speeds of 2 Mbps, by 2015. High-speed broadband can be defined as a service with speeds of over 24 Mbps.

The Borders Broadband project 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.

GFirst, the place promotion agency for Gloucestershire, is a Local Enterprise Partnership working for business, investors, tourism and skills. [www.gfirst.co.uk](http://www.gfirst.co.uk)

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/>