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## **Better broadband for rural Gloucestershire a big step closer**

The search is on to find the most effective and sustainable way to bring faster broadband to rural Gloucestershire.

An area including large parts of the Forest of Dean and south Herefordshire is one of just four pilot areas in the UK to receive Government funding to bring enhanced broadband access in rural areas that would otherwise not be considered by the private sector for investment.

A complex and demanding multi-million pound contract has been put out to tender today (**Thurs May 26 2011**) by the project partners in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire to find the most viable technological solutions to the area's broadband needs.

The procurement process will engage eligible companies in a 'competitive dialogue' process over several months to seek the best delivery, in the shortest timescale and for the best value.

The companies will be required to deliver 100 per cent broadband coverage initially in the pilot area within two years of the contract being awarded, rolling out to further Gloucestershire rural areas already identified as most in need. At the same time, they will be making significant in-roads to achieving superfast broadband exceeding national and EU ambitions.

David Owen, Chief Executive of the project's managing partner Gfirst, said: "Superfast broadband that exceeds national average speed will bring immeasurable benefits to businesses in the Forest of Dean, encouraging business expansion and fostering inward investment. It will also connect isolated communities and enable local people to access a whole range of public services online.

"The contract notice is a big step towards meeting the pressing need to get 100% access to broadband in the Forest of Dean, while putting in place the infrastructure to bring superfast to the county."

Chas Fellows, Cabinet Member for Economy & Environment at Gloucestershire County Council, said "Gloucestershire aims to offer rural broadband among the fastest in the UK, creating a competitive advantage for business, communities and individuals, with households being able to access a range of online services at their convenience."

**ENDS**

### **Notes to editors**

The Forest of Dean/Herefordshire border area is one of four areas to receive funding from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to pilot the next generation of high-speed broadband in rural areas. Other pilot areas are Cumbria, North Yorkshire, and the Highlands and Islands in Scotland.

Currently the 'universal service commitment' of broadband at speeds of 2 Megabits per second is not available to around 42% of the pilot area's premises.

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/>

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

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)

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