



PRESS RELEASE – October 10 2011

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Businesses: Make the case for high-speed broadband

Businesses throughout rural Gloucestershire are being urged to help bring high-speed broadband to the county, with the launch of a major survey into demand for improved internet services.

Borders Broadband is a multi-million pound initiative to secure private investment in a new fast broadband infrastructure for the county's rural areas.

The project was awarded £14.4 million for Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, making this one of the first parts of the UK to share £530 million Government cash for rural high-speed broadband.

Borders Broadband is managed by GFirst (Gloucestershire's Local Enterprise Partnership), Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Government agency, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK).

Major private sector investment is vital to the project's success. Public funding is being used to attract a commercial telecoms supplier and persuade them there is significant demand for fast broadband in rural Gloucestershire.

Companies are involved in a complex tendering process to provide the new broadband infrastructure.

A contract is expected to be awarded late Spring 2012 with work due to begin soon afterwards, starting in the Forest of Dean and south Herefordshire, and then extending to other rural communities in both counties.

"This is a major opportunity for our business community," said GFirst Chief Executive David Owen. "I would urge every business to complete a survey questionnaire, so that we can prove that rural businesses need and want high-speed broadband."

Peter King, spokesman for Gloucestershire and West of England FSB said: "Poor broadband speeds and inconsistent services are strangling Gloucestershire's businesses.

"High-speed broadband is a must for any company in the 21st century and we really need this if local businesses are to compete on a level playing field."

New statistics from the FSB show that fast and reliable broadband is crucial for small businesses. The research finds that 13 per cent of small businesses would consider moving to an area with faster broadband.

To complete the questionnaire, visit <http://bit.ly/betterbroadband> If you run a local business and live in Gloucestershire, you can also complete a separate residential survey, and find out more about the Borders Broadband project at www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband

CASE STUDY: Firm needs more speed

A painfully slow broadband service is proving a major obstacle for Cinderford business Designer Signs.

The company produces signs, banners, vehicle graphics & labels for clients throughout the UK and relies on sending and receiving artwork in large files via e-mail and the internet.

Partner Carol Tiley says the Forest of Dean's poor broadband service reduces the quality of the work she sends clients for approval.

"It's so frustrating," she said. "We have to reduce the size of the files we send, sometimes several times, so that they are small enough to send over the net.

"This means that clients aren't seeing the work at anywhere near the quality of the finished product."

Carol says clients elsewhere in the UK with faster broadband don't realise how poor internet services are in the Forest of Dean.

"The arrival of high-speed broadband will really make a big difference to our business, making us more productive, and allowing us to show clients the full quality of our work," she said.

ENDS

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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

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/>