

## **Parishes and market towns back high-speed broadband campaign**

Communities throughout Gloucestershire are backing a campaign to bring high-speed broadband to the county's rural areas.

The Borders Broadband project is a multi-million pound initiative to secure private investment in a new fast broadband infrastructure for rural Gloucestershire and Herefordshire .

As part of the campaign, a Gloucestershire-wide survey of households and businesses is underway to demonstrate that there is demand for fast broadband services in rural communities. (See [www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband](http://www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband))

And volunteer 'broadband champions' are being recruited to link towns and parishes to the campaign, to highlight the benefits of high-speed broadband, and to encourage households and businesses to take part in the survey.

So far 235 volunteers covering 120 Gloucestershire parishes and towns have stepped up to become broadband champions. And over 2,300 households have completed the residential survey.

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

"We're getting a really good response to this campaign," said Cllr Mark Hawthorne, leader of Gloucestershire County Council. "This is beginning to show that there is real demand for faster broadband in our rural communities throughout Gloucestershire.

"I would urge everybody who hasn't done so already to complete a survey questionnaire, and help us persuade the private sector to invest in the necessary infrastructure."

The Cotswolds Conservation Board, which looks after the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), is also backing the campaign.

The Board's own survey of internet speeds throughout the Cotswolds AONB area shows that nearly half of households in the area have broadband speeds below or at 2Mbps - the Government's acceptable minimum level of service.

Borders Broadband 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.

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 the county's rural areas.

Telecoms companies are involved in a complex tendering process to provide the new broadband infrastructure. A contract is expected to be awarded in late Spring 2012.

## **The survey**

The Borders Broadband residents' survey is available online at [www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband](http://www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband). There is also a separate survey for businesses available online at [www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband](http://www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband) or <http://bit.ly/betterbroadband>. If you run a local business and live in Gloucestershire, please complete both residential and business surveys.

Hard copies of the residents' survey are also available at local libraries, or via parish and town councillors and broadband champions. They are also available from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) – contact Chris Cowcher on 01452 528491. Anyone wishing to volunteer as a broadband champion for their community can also contact GRCC.

*For more details about Borders Broadband see [www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband](http://www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband) or contact Angela Presdee, GFirst, 01452 328309 [Angela.Presdee@glosfirst.co.uk](mailto:Angela.Presdee@glosfirst.co.uk)*

## **CASE STUDY - PURTON**

Villagers in Purton have to keep a wary eye on the weather when using the internet. When it rains, their broadband service drops out.

The community has joined the Borders Broadband project, a county-wide drive to bring high-speed broadband to rural Gloucestershire.

Villagers have also been running their own campaign as poor broadband services leave the Severnside community completely out on a limb.

Dr Philip Pritchard, a GP who heads the campaign in Purton, said: "We are totally dependent on weather conditions down here.

"One of the problems is that the underground telephone lines to Purton are only six inches deep in places. And when it rains, sometimes we lose our broadband service."

The village is 8km from the nearest exchange and Dr Pritchard said most of its 40 or so households have internet download speeds of around 0.4Mbps (megabits per second). The average speed nationally is 6.2Mbps.

Jason and Suzanne Prosser live in the final house on the telephone line out of the Berkeley exchange. Their broadband service only works intermittently, and when it does they only get very low speeds.

The couple are both lawyers and sometimes they have to work from home, but they are hampered by their poor internet service.

"Our internet is better than it used to be," he said. "It used to be down 50 per cent of the time, whereas now it's 20 per cent of the time.

"Businesswise, it's very frustrating. Once I e-mailed something home to work on, but then got home to find the internet wasn't working so I had to drive all the way back to my office in Bristol to do the work.

"Our community really needs a proper broadband service."

## **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.

The Government has set a minimum level of acceptable broadband service of 2Mbps (megabits per second). This is currently not available to 17% of households in Gloucestershire.

Next Generation Access or NGA broadband (NGA means infrastructure that offers access to internet download speeds of at least 30 Mbps) is seen as increasingly critical to the economic and social sustainability of rural areas.

The Borders Broadband project is being managed by a partnership of GFirst, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council, and Broadband Delivery 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](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/>