

Rural high-speed broadband campaign steps up

Gloucestershire's villages and market towns are a big step closer to getting high-speed broadband this week, with the launch of a major survey into demand for improved internet services.

Parish, town and district councillors are throwing their weight behind the Borders Broadband project – a multi-million pound initiative to secure private investment in a new fast broadband infrastructure for the county's rural communities.

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

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.

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.

The survey launched this week for households and businesses throughout Gloucestershire will help demonstrate that demand.

"This is a major opportunity for Gloucestershire and a crucial moment for residents and businesses," said GFirst Chief Executive David Owen.

"I would urge everybody to complete a survey questionnaire. We need to prove rural communities and businesses need and want high-speed broadband so we can persuade commercial companies to invest in the necessary infrastructure."

Telecoms companies are already involved in a complex tendering process to provide the new broadband infrastructure. A contract is expected to be awarded in late Spring 2012 with work due to begin soon afterwards.

Improved access to high-speed internet services will be introduced initially in the Forest of Dean and south Herefordshire, and will then be extended to other rural communities in both counties.

Meetings have taken place with parish and town councils throughout the county, and a volunteer force of 'Broadband Champions' is being recruited to link local communities to the project.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY

Households

Please take the time to complete a questionnaire for your household. Those with internet access can also complete it online at www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband or you may get a printed

questionnaire through your letterbox. Copies will also be available at libraries, via local schools, from district or parish councillors or local broadband champions.

Household questionnaires are also available from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC)– contact Chris Cowcher on 01452 528491. The survey is accessible to all - if you need support in completing the survey please contact GRCC.

Businesses

There is also a separate survey for businesses (if you run a local business and live in Gloucestershire, you can complete both residential and business surveys). The business survey is available online at <http://bit.ly/betterbroadband>

For more details about the Borders Broadband project see www.gfirst.co.uk/broadband

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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/>