

Project Gigabit teleconference

**Start: 11am
May 14, 2021**

Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Working on issues of common concern to the 39 parishes
across the Blackdown Hills of Devon & Somerset

Chair: Heather Stallard MBE

Coordinator: Dr Catherine Bass

Speakers: Bruce Payne and Graham Long

<http://blackdownsonline.org.uk/>

If you have a question?

Please type your question using the Zoom chat function at the bottom of your screen 

We will come back to you at the end of the presentation and ask you to put your question.

We will try and answer every question asked, time permitting.

Please keep your microphone muted 

March 19, 2021



Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) announced the first areas of the UK that will benefit from “**Project Gigabit**” before 2025

Project Gigabit is the **£5B** investment to get gigabit capable (up to 1,000Mbps) broadband to everybody in the UK, announced by Boris Johnson at the last election

Dorset, Cornwall, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Hampshire will all benefit from this investment before 2025

But not Devon & Somerset which are described as being included in “**future phasing**” (after 2025)

Why?

Note: Unlike the ongoing Superfast broadband programmes (minimum 30Mbps) which have been managed by county councils through organisations like CDS, Project Gigabit will be run and managed centrally by the BDUK department within DCMS.

March 30, 2021

The Blackdown Hills Parish Network asked our two MP's Neil Parish & Rebecca Pow:

Why?

The answer came back: "*Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) requested they be included in a future tranche of the funding - **as to not interfere** with the broadband contracts currently being undertaken by Airband, Truespeed and Wessex Internet.*"

Are CDS really saying that because they have been so slow in putting the Phase 2 (rural) Superfast broadband programme in place, they do not want DCMS invest in Gigabit Capable Broadband in Devon & Somerset before they complete Phase 2 - (due to be completed by 2025, if there are no further delays)?

i.e. Do CDS not want taxpayers in Devon & Somerset to benefit from Project Gigabit investment before 2025 because the two counties cannot cope with two projects running at the same time? **Really!**

(Dorset, which DCMS has confirmed will get Project Gigabit investment is still rolling out Superfast broadband, just as Devon & Somerset are)

April 14, 2021

We now know that CDS's request that Devon & Somerset be excluded from Project Gigabit was made in their response to a call for comment on Project Gigabit roll out made by DCMS on Dec 22, 2020.

The call for comment went out to all Local Authorities, Local Bodies and Network Companies. (*CDS are listed as one of the respondents*).

Surely most replies would have been “***how soon can we get it***” and “***how much investment can we get***”. Not for one moment was it anticipated that CDS would say “***we prefer Devon & Somerset to be included in a future tranche of funding (after 2025)***”.

What right do CDS, DCC & SCC have to prevent investment in the two counties by central government?

CDS is one of the worst performing Local Bodies

DCMS call the organisations set up by County Councils to run superfast and other locally run broadband programmes, “Local Bodies”.

CDS were allocated £27M by the Treasury for the Phase 2 (rural) superfast programme in 2012. Having failed three times to put successful contracts in place with suppliers, CDS finally signed contracts with their last three suppliers in December 2020.

When the BHPN met with Digital Minister Matt Warman in Feb 2020, he confirmed that CDS was the worst performing and slowest Local Body in the UK. Neil Parish MP has made similar comments.

Remember, Project Gigabit will be run by DCMS from Whitehall, not by CDS in Exeter. **So why are CDS allowed to delay it?**

This week CDS issued a four page rebuttal:



Remember that unlike the Superfast contracts, Project Gigabit contracts will be let and managed by DCMS centrally.

CDS say they actually said to DCMS: “assuming there is no overlap intended with our live contracts delivering gigabit solutions we would say [we want it] quickly to support our economy and communities”. **Why do CDS even think overlap may be intended by DCMS?**

CDS go on to say “the live [CDS] contracts have the scope to be added to through the national gigabit funds and which may be a better option to consider to extend reach and accelerate delivery”

But CDS live contracts only require 30Mbps min. performance. If suppliers use GPON (as BT do) to split one fibre between ~30 properties, those contracts can never guarantee gigabit capability. The inference here is that CDS want control of all broadband investment in the two counties and don't want DCMS coming into their patch contracting/managing their own suppliers. If not, why after 8 weeks are CDS, DCC, SCC not banging on DCMS's door saying “Include us now”?

If this is why CDS gave a less than positive response to the Dec 2020 call for comment then there is now even more reason for our MP's and Councillors to go back to DCMS and get Devon & Somerset included in Project Gigabit before 2025.

Project Gigabit schedule: (estimated dates)

Starting **March 19**, an OMR will be being conducted in the areas that will get funding before 2025. An OMR is an Open Market Review where each potential network supplier is asked to provide details of their commercial roll out plans for the next 4 or 5 years (in commercial confidence).

This enables areas that will benefit from commercial investment (and those already benefiting from Gigabit capable broadband) to be excluded from roll out plans since state aid cannot be used to compete with ongoing commercial investment.

Once the OMR is completed in **June**, Invitations To Tender (ITT's) will be written by DCMS and published, probably by **August**.

Network companies will then have until **October** to submit tenders after which a short list will be created, due diligence commenced and contracts awarded at the **end of 2021**, at the earliest.

There is still time get Devon & Somerset involved and the OMR completed in the two counties

Note: No payments are made to successful suppliers until after they connect properties at the agreed rate per month, supplying each with between 300 and 1,000Mbps broadband.

During March at BDUK (DCMS):



Raj Kalia, Chief Executive of BDUK, quit without any job to go to. He was the driver behind Project Gigabit. Prior to joining BDUK he worked for Dido Harding at Talk Talk. His LinkedIn entry says “open to work”.



Justin Leese, Programme Director, quit and joined Spectrum Internet, a Cardiff based ISP as CTO. At BDUK, he headed up the Superfast Broadband project and oversaw CDS and other county programmes.



Paul Norris, Executive Chair of BDUK has taken on the roles of Kalia & Leese now they have left. He has previously been responsible for the various BDUK Voucher schemes and is an ex Nomura & Lehman Brothers banker.

What can be done about this?

Publicise the problem (CDS have refused to talk about this to MP's and the BHPN - citing purdah)

Lobby MP's and Ministers Dowden & Warman to get Devon & Somerset included in Project Gigabit, **urgently**.

Lobby County Councillors, District Councillors and anyone else who will listen, **urgently**.

Because a report from OFCOM and CEBR published April 28 says that providing ultrafast fibre to all UK properties by 2025 would boost UK productivity by £59B and create employment for 1Million people.

That's a ROI of 12 times the initial investment!

But not in Devon & Somerset as things stand.

The BHPN continue to seek meetings with MP's

And finally:

Please sign the petition and get everyone else to sign it:

Simply type:

“Change Gigabit Devon Somerset”

Into Google

WE CAN DO THIS!



Questions?

Please keep your microphone muted until asked to speak.
If you have a question please raise your hand and unmute your microphone when asked to put our question.
Please put your microphone on mute again after asking your question.