

Connecting Cumbria

through superfast broadband



As you may already have heard the two further milestones have been reached towards the delivery of the Connecting Cumbria project, the agreement of a strategic roll-out plan and the award of a business support contract.

At a meeting on the 30 January Cumbria County Council's Cabinet agreed the strategic roll-out plan. This plan resulted from lengthy consultation with our partner organisations about how best to prioritise roll-out and implementation.

We considered a number of measures including access to services, competitiveness of businesses and reaching the most remote areas. However it was clear that to focus on only one of these areas would inevitably exclude others. In a county where improving all of these areas is important to our sustainability and future prosperity we could not rely on only one to drive our strategy. After careful consideration it was agreed that the principle that should underpin our implementation and roll-out should be maximizing the available funding we have secured to achieve the highest possible level of coverage across the county. This approach benefits everyone rather than focusing on one specific group and we believe represents the best value for the whole of Cumbria. This will now form the basis on which the detailed roll-out plan will be developed.

Also in January the county council awarded the contract to deliver an integrated business support programme to Commendium, a locally based firm. Commendium will work with small and medium sized businesses across the county. They will help these businesses to understand the benefits that superfast broadband offers as well as providing the practical help and advice they may need to maximize the opportunities superfast broadband offers. This will support economic growth and business development throughout the area.

Together these two milestones mark yet another significant step along the way of moving Cumbria to the forefront of the digital age.

Councillor Elizabeth Mallinson

Cumbria County Council's Cabinet Member for Organisational Development and ICT portfolio holder



Strategic roll-out agreed

At Cumbria County Councils Cabinet meeting on Wednesday 30th January the Strategic roll-out plan for the Connecting Cumbria project was agreed.

Following consultation with elected members, partners and stakeholder groups a recommendation was made that optimising the funds available to maximize the coverage of superfast broadband, be the key principle underpinning the approach to implementation.

Stakeholders were presented with a number of options upon the three priorities of Improving the competitiveness of local businesses, Removing barriers to improve access to services, Reaching those in the most isolated locations and Improving connectivity and cohesion within communities. The feedback from the groups was unanimous and focussed on two aims. It was felt that above all; ensuring maximum grant is brought into the county was a priority. Then beyond that requirement it was felt that our overriding issue was removing barriers to access to services. Therefore the scenario that will be taken forward shows higher weighting given to the factors that indicate areas where barriers are most prevalent.

Now that this strategy has been agreed it forms the guidelines for the detailed roll out plan. We will work with BT to ensure the agreed plan provides the best match to these strategic requirement whilst delivering the 100% basic broadband and 93% superfast coverage we require. It is anticipated that this work will result in the first announcements of roll-out schedules in the Spring, the information will be at a postcode level with phase information to show when the work is planned during the 2 and half year roll out. Information on a property by property basis will be available in advance of detailed work starting on the ground and local circumstances are fully understood. For those areas that are predicted to be in the 7% that will have basic broadband coverage, the project team will be working with local elected members, hub coordinators, local businesses and other community activists to establish if there are other local solutions that can be developed to improve the service.

Cumbria Tourism

Cumbria - The Lake District is one of the best known and respected tourist destinations in the UK. It is also used as an 'attract' brand by Visit Britain in its overseas marketing campaigns – though only half of the UK's international visitors get anywhere beyond London! The travel and tourism market is truly a global market, one which is fiercely competitive and fast moving. Growing tourism in Cumbria is very reliant on making the most of digital marketing and overcoming the perceived and real communications challenges facing the County.

Increasingly the key to attracting new and returning visitors to the area is through the wide range of digital marketing and social media channels, producing formats that compatible with an ever increasing range of applications be they pc, tablet, mobile, kiosk, internet, tv etc... It will be no surprise that the tourism industry - perhaps more than any other sector in Cumbria – is hugely dependent on digital technology for web-based marketing, on-line booking and customer contact. It is not surprising then to find that the tourism operators are hungry for the introduction of superfast broadband in Cumbria.

Last year Cumbria Tourism conducted an online survey of the tourism industry to find out more about their needs; almost 250 businesses responded. We found them to be well briefed on the benefits of broadband and keen to make greater use of technology when capacity allows – particularly for marketing and sales on websites, wi-fi for customers and e mail. One typical respondent replied

“Our guests are bringing as many as three devices each which require wireless internet. We desperately need faster broadband to service our guests’ ever more demanding use of the internet”

At present almost one third of tourism businesses receive speeds less than 2mb. 86% are not currently receiving what could be classed as superfast broadband so there is a huge appetite for the new capacity; 46% are keen for speeds of more than 20mb for maximum benefit to their business. Three quarters of tourism businesses regard higher speed connections as crucial to the future of their business.

As the County's Destination Management Organisation, Cumbria Tourism is itself in urgent need of faster download and upload broadband services. Our London based national partners, our suppliers and our members increasingly utilise high bandwidth film, photographic or other large files. Our visitors expect instant communication and slick website and booking processes. So Cumbria Tourism itself faces similar challenges to many hundreds of businesses. The Connecting Cumbria project will provide support and guidance for businesses seeking to utilise superfast broadband, Cumbria Tourism will endeavour to keep the tourism sector aware of progress and support as the project proceeds across Cumbria.

Ian Stephens



ERDF Business Support Programme

Running alongside the Connecting Cumbria project, but separately funded via ERDF, will be an integrated Business Support Programme. CCC has now completed a tendering process and Cabinet agreed on 10 January 2013 to award the contract to Commendium Ltd. This contract is anticipated to start March 2013.

The Business Support Programme is aimed at stimulating take up by eligible small and medium enterprises (SMEs), allowing them to take maximum advantage of the opportunities superfast broadband offers.

Commendium Ltd will be assisting SMEs to fully understand the commercial benefits and provide practical support to realise these. A range of support will be offered including engagement events, 1-2-1 advice, ICT diagnostic reviews and project support, seminars, workshops and signposting.

The programme will target eligible SMEs in high value added sectors and those with growth potential. A full list of ERDF defined eligible SME's can be found on the Connecting Cumbria website at www.connectingcumbria.org.uk/FAQs.asp

Richard Walters, Managing Director of Commendium said *"Commendium are delighted to have been awarded the contract for the ERDF Business Support Package and look forward to working with the Connecting Cumbria team on what is such an important project for the county"*.

Readers will be provided with a more detailed update on the work of the Business Support Programme in the next edition of the newsletter."

Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF) Update

In the last edition we told you how we were working with 6 communities to make an application to DEFRA's Rural Communities Broadband Fund. Community engagement in the basic data collection for the project is a key indicator that RCBF expect to see in all this application by the county council

The data collection is complete. It has shown the challenges we face in the main project and some very valuable lessons about the quality of the base data which we will discuss with our supplier. The Parish Council's, hub coordinators and broadband champions have put in many hours hard work to make this a success.

Well done and thank you to all concerned.

The data will now be collated and additional information gathered will be used to develop the business case. This is due to be submitted to RCBF in April.

Stay connected!

There are lots of ways to get in touch with us and stay up to date with what's going on.

By phone: 01228 221128

By email: info@connectingcumbria.org.uk

Online: connectingcumbria.org.uk

On Twitter, follow us: [@connect_cumbria](https://twitter.com/connect_cumbria)



Connecting Cumbria – How's it done – now available on the website

Have you seen our video presentation explaining the possible technical solutions for Cumbria?

This presentation gives information on the options available to Cumbria and also the challenges that we face. It is easy to understand and takes away some of the mystery around how it all works for those of us who struggle to understand the technology.

If you haven't seen it take a look at www.connectingcumbria.org.uk



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