

Connecting Devon and Somerset

Briefing March 11th, 2021



Programme Update

Wessex Internet Contract

Summary

- 3,618 homes and businesses earmarked for full fibre connections.
- Construction of first link for the new network due to start in mid-April 2021 in **Galhampton**.
- Anticipated first homes to be connected from autumn 2021 in **North and South Barrow, Woolston and surrounding areas**.
- By April 2021 Wessex Internet anticipates being able to identify which homes and businesses are earmarked for connections, subject to final survey.
- Anticipated contract completion by autumn 2024.
- Extensive communications and stakeholder engagement campaign to support roll out.

Introduction

On December 23rd Connecting Devon and Somerset, with support from Government, signed a contract with Blandford Forum-based **Wessex Internet** to deliver full fibre broadband to **3,618** homes and businesses in earmarked areas of South Somerset, covering parts of the **Somerton and Frome*** (2,145 premises) and **Yeovil** (1,473 premises) parliamentary constituencies. The contract will stimulate the construction of an estimated 186 miles of fibre network. Delivery will be in six phases **between 2021 and 2024**.

** The Mendips area of Somerton and Frome is subject to a contract with Truespeed. An update will follow.*

This programme update summarises what Wessex Internet and CDS are doing now in preparation for construction of the new network to start this autumn, and why that preparation is essential and takes time. Whilst the accompanying map shows the broad areas of coverage, this update explains why it is not possible to say with certainty which premises will be connected yet. It's important to note that wherever possible work is undertaken concurrently.

Preparation includes mobilising resources, double-checking any commercial operations in the earmarked areas, and surveying network routing. These last two will greatly determine which premises in which areas are finally to be connected. One other factor determining final connections is a cap on public subsidy per premise which is agreed by CDS with Building Digital UK (BDUK) and the contractor.

Although the contract seeks to connect as many homes and businesses without superfast* broadband as possible not every premise can be included within the public funding available.

**Minimum 30Mbps download speed.*

The accompanying map shows current CDS and commercially-funded coverage and areas earmarked for coverage under the new CDS contracts. However, please note this does not mean all premises in these areas will be connected through this contract. The order by which work starts in each individual area is determined by most economical and effective way in which the programme is delivered. Wessex Internet has created 16 individual community projects for this purpose.

Mobilisation -- December 2020 – April 2021

The first task in any new contract is assembling the additional resources – staff, materials and equipment – a company needs to do the job. This is known as the “mobilisation” period.

Wessex Internet set about its mobilisation plan prior to contract signing to enable it to hit the ground running as early as possible.

Whilst it is a “behind the scenes” activity, building the team resources and systems in good time is pivotal to the successful overall programme delivery and addresses all aspects required to guarantee timely and cost-effective delivery. It includes recruitment of key personnel in programme management, infrastructure planning, construction and engagement with landowners and implementing contracts for all materials and equipment required.

Wessex Internet has a strong community-based approach to building its networks. Work underway by the company includes building a dedicated website for the contract which will be updated regularly. It will complement a three-year community engagement programme that will deliver open and transparent communication with communities in the network build areas at every stage of the process.

Open Market Review Refresh -- January 2021 – April 2021

Before the geography of the new network is finalised, CDS must complete a prudent double-check that all earmarked areas still require public subsidy. CDS conducts a detailed survey, an “Open Market Review”, before going out to tender and checks again after contract award. This is underway now and known as the “Open Market Review Refresh”.

Why is this necessary?

Sometimes during a procurement period an area previously earmarked by CDS as requiring public subsidy is covered by a commercially-funded roll-out or becomes the subject of definite plans to do so. If that happens CDS will look to redeploy public funding to another area still in need of subsidised coverage. Final decisions are taken with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) on behalf of DCMS and in consultation with the contractor.

This process is essential to ensure that public money is spent where the need is greatest and over-building of existing networks is avoided as far as possible. Although rare, occasionally, some limited overbuilding is necessary because premises lie along the most cost-effective route for the new network and avoiding them would make new connections further along the route too expensive to complete.

Surveying -- Spring to Autumn 2021 for the early phases

The term “surveying” does not do justice to the full scale of activity that has to be completed before network construction can begin. Design and planning are also key elements and taken altogether they form the most crucial part of the pre-construction process, determining the build route, efficiency, and timeline.

This is much more than a back room process, it involves talking to landowners and parish councils, gathering all the information and community help needed to come up with the best and most cost-effective route to take for the new network.

As the work develops it will require securing landowner consent and Deeds of Grant as well as access to highways. Potential routes will be walked to identify any engineering difficulties and inform the scheduling of the construction.

Activity

Wessex Internet started the New Year planning the most efficient and cost-effective location to connect the new network with its existing infrastructure. In this early work, the company will construct a main framework or circuit from which spurs will eventually run to connect individual premises.

This primary network and connection to the internet, known as the “backhaul network”, will start in the **Galhampton** area, connecting back to the company’s nearest existing network in **Yarlington** and will eventually create a great loop underground across a large part of South Somerset. Construction will start in mid-April.

The next two areas, **North and South Barrow and Sparkford**, and **Corton Denham and Sutton Montis** will follow.

Planning and surveying work on the southern end of this main framework will start in **East Coker** in this spring (2021) with the build getting underway this summer, connecting back to the company’s existing network at Evershot in Dorset.

Wessex Internet anticipates the first properties to be connected in these areas from the new main framework will be this autumn 2021.

The programme will continue to roll out area-by-area, with the construction team working to structured deadlines. Currently, the main framework build is scheduled to finish in summer 2023 followed by the local build completing in autumn 2024.

Cost cap

CDS agrees a cap on the amount of public subsidy per premise that can be invested in building a new network with BDUK and the contractor as part of the contract award process. The aim is to strike the best possible balance; sufficient subsidy to attract commercial providers whilst achieving the maximum number of premises covered. The subsidy plus a provider’s commercial investment in the contract is what pays for the construction of the new network.

Occasionally unexpected difficulties encountered during construction can increase the cost. If cost exceeds the cap, the contractor notifies CDS who, in consultation with BDUK, must then determine whether to authorise the build or switch the subsidy to other premises.

For all homes and businesses without superfast broadband which cannot be connected under this contract, CDS will work with BDUK and the commercial sector to find alternative solutions. Options

may include the use of vouchers to fund connections, securing additional Government funding or inclusion in the National Gigabit Programme, or attracting commercial investment.

Further information:

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