



## Connecting Devon and Somerset

Briefing, March 11th, 2021

# Programme update

## Airband new contracts

### Summary

- 40,154 homes and businesses earmarked for full fibre connections.
- Anticipated completion by September 2024
- Construction of first link for the new network due to start in July 2021 in Somerset in Cotford St Luke, Staplegrove and Monkton and August 2021 in Devon in Powderham, and between Tiverton and Nomansland.
- Anticipated first homes to be connected, in Staplegrove and Monkton in September 2021
- Too soon to say which premises will be connected.

### Introduction

On December 23<sup>rd</sup> Connecting Devon and Somerset, with support from Government, signed contracts with Worcester-based **Airband** to deliver full fibre broadband to **40,154 homes and businesses** in earmarked areas of Devon and Somerset and require the construction of an estimated **2,419 miles of fibre network**. Delivery will be in phases **between 2021 and 2024**.

This programme update summarises what Airband 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. It also 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. 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 set by Government.

Although the contracts seek 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. Airband has created 60 individual community

projects for these contracts which will form the basis for communication with parishes as the build progresses.

## **Mobilisation**

Timetable: initially January 2021 – April 2021 and then in phases as the roll-out progresses.

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.

During this period Airband is creating the organisation structure, defining the roles and responsibilities, and beginning the process of gathering the necessary resources to deliver the new networks. Airband will also secure sub-contractors, establish the governance processes, communication plans, quality plans, business systems and reporting structure to ensure the programme keeps to the agreed delivery plan.

Community engagement is also started before any of the build phases commence. This includes a detailed community engagement plan, ensuring that communities are kept informed about Airband coming to their area and what happens next. There is also phased approach to direct communications to individual premises informing before, during and after the build of the network, back-up by dedicated pages on the Airband website.

## **Open Market Review Refresh**

Timetable: January 2021 – April 2021

Before the geography of a 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**

Surveys are due to start in April 2021 at Staplegrove, Monkton, Powderham, Cottford St Luke; Halberton to Bradninch, Tiverton to Nomansland; Bishopsteignton and Luscombe, and Marlton and Coombe Fishacre, with all surveying due for completion in the summer of this year.

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 wayleaves and access to highways.

Potential routes will be walked to identify any engineering difficulties and inform the scheduling of the construction. Traffic management requirements are identified and confirmed, other alternative routes are also investigated. For example, where a soft dig may reduce time and traffic management and time.

The status of the existing Openreach telegraph poles are also checked and any defective poles are recorded. Surveys are also completed to check for power (route and source), foliage, environments that may have special consideration and utilities. An essential element will be determining the best starting point for the primary connection to the Internet, known as a “backhaul” which will be the main link for the new network to Airband’s existing infrastructure. All this work contributes to forming the initial design and confirming the best route through an area and the best way to build to a premise.

### **Why is it essential?**

It is essential to ensure that any existing infrastructure, such as telegraph poles, that Airband plan to use are in place and in good condition. It is also important to identify any other requirements for network construction such as land access (wayleaves) or temporary road closures. Measures are always taken to identify different solutions to mitigate any risks or issues highlighted.

### **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.

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