

Fibre broadband

Many people in the parish seem to be unaware of the current position regarding fibre broadband and what the Parish Council can and cannot do to facilitate the provision of this facility to Ashendon.

We are reliant on the Connected Counties Programme to provide BT fibre broadband to Ashendon and have been disappointed with the delays which have occurred. Nevertheless, they are in the process of obtaining tenders from BT and AVDC has identified Ashendon as one of nine preference areas for installation. A response from BT is expected within the next three months (that is, by November). District Councillors will be advised as soon as the information is received.

The parish council has lobbied hard for Connected Counties to provide fibre broadband to the village especially as they mistakenly told us that we were included in the previous programme. District Councillors Michael Rand and Paul Irwin are in regular contact with the director on AVDC Corporate Board who is responsible for the £600,000 that has been offered by AVDC for the match funding towards the supply of fibre broadband to the prioritised villages. She is well aware of our concerns and expectations.

Feedback from some parishioners is that they would prefer fibre to be installed by BT because they will then have the ability to use BT as a provider or to use other companies such as TalkTalk. Nevertheless, Councillor Michael Rand did contact an alternative company, Gigaclear, who advised that they would not be making any further installations in the HP18 postcode area.

The only other remedy in the hands of the parish council is to install our own fibre connection. This would seem to be a last resort and we would need to employ a company to plan, execute and manage it although it is just possible that we could use local labour to dig trenches to take the supply. Unless we had a majority of people in Ashendon who were willing to pay for this, it would seem to be a non-starter.

There also seems to be a misapprehension that, once fibre is installed, everyone will automatically have faster internet. This is not the case; those that want faster internet will have to register and pay a subscription. I have spoken to several parishioners who have said that they would not be prepared to pay more than they are paying now.

Village Networks provide a wireless service to Ashendon, particularly, but not exclusively, to those who have clear sight of Westcott Venture Park. They would probably be more inclined to put effort into providing a service to more properties using relays if we were not to get a fibre connection. The capital they would need to invest would be wasted if an alternative were provided and present subscribers cancelled their contracts. Villagers can also get fast internet using satellite dishes. These can be expensive to set up and run but do provide a reliable service. Other villagers are using 4G and are happy with this.

A number of people have expressed concern that the Parish Council is not doing enough but the majority of people have not expressed any concern. We do not know whether this is because they are complacent, they are satisfied with the slow internet they get, they are happy with their alternative provider (e.g Village Networks, satellite, 4G) or that they do not wish to pay a subscription for fast internet.

I propose:

- We await the decision of Connected Counties before considering alternative means of providing fast internet to Ashendon.
- We survey households in Ashendon to see whether or not they would subscribe to faster broadband if it were available and whether, if all else fails, they would contribute to the installation of our own fibre network
- We decide how we communicate with our parishioners so that they are aware of what we have done, what we are able to do, what the alternatives are and to update them on the current position

Kevin Nash

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