

Digital Connectivity

When Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) implemented its first fibre enabled cabinet during summer 2013 there were two infrastructure providers that deployed fibre infrastructure capable of delivering Superfast broadband (24Mbps+); BT Openreach and Virgin Media. Commercial investment from these two companies provided access to Superfast broadband for 42% of Norfolk properties.

To date, BBfN has seen access to Superfast broadband increase from 42% in summer 2013, to 95% of Norfolk properties during spring 2020. These figures are taken from the independent organisation “Think Broadband” data.

As well as continued investment from Openreach and Virgin Media, new broadband infrastructure providers have also started to implement in Norfolk.

The BBfN Programme signed a third contract during 2019, as a result a further £13 million will be invested to implement Fibre to the Premises for over 10,000 Norfolk properties that do not have access to Superfast broadband. As a result, by spring 2023, Superfast broadband coverage across Norfolk is expected to increase to 97%. Provisions within the BBfN contract provide rebates from BT if take-up of services using BBfN funded infrastructure are higher than expected. This has already provided over £5 million Better Broadband for Norfolk funding, helping to reach 95% Superfast coverage. An expected further £11 million will contribute towards the third BBfN rollout, along with a £2 million grant from DEFRA which will provide access to Full Fibre for some of Norfolk’s significant rural businesses. Overall, this will allow the county to move towards its aim of achieving 100% coverage.

UK Digital Strategy

In July 2018 the Government published The Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review that set clear, ambitious targets for the availability of full fibre and 5G networks.

The aim is to see 15 million premises connected to full fibre by 2025, with coverage across all parts of the country by 2033 and that the majority of the population will have 5G coverage by 2027. The review addressed key questions about the evolution of the UK’s digital infrastructure such as the convergence between fixed and mobile technologies, and the transition from copper to full fibre (gigabit-capable) networks.

As a result of The Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review, the Chancellor announced a £5 billion commitment to fund gigabit capable broadband for the 20% of UK premises that would be unlikely to receive commercial access to gigabit capable broadband. The Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC) programme began on 19 May 2019 and will run until the end of March 2021.

The RGC programme aims to assist Building Digital UK which is part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport , and partner organisations, in delivering nationwide gigabit-capable connections in locations that are unlikely to benefit from commercial investment.

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Full Fibre

Working with partners NCC has secured circa. £8 million in 2019 via the Government's Local Full Fibre Network programme and a further £2m in 2020 from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This will provide Fibre to the Premises for over 400 public sector sites, and importantly also offers potential for nearby homes and businesses to access Full Fibre connectivity via a Government Gigabit Voucher Scheme:

Scheme for rural properties with speeds of less than 100Mbps

The £200m RGC programme, remains open for new applications until 31 March 2021 (or until the funding runs out).

The scheme is accessible through broadband service providers who have registered to provide connections through the scheme.

Homes and businesses in rural areas of the UK may be eligible for funding towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband when part of a group scheme.

Rural premises with broadband speeds of less than 100Mbps can use vouchers worth £1,500 per home and up to £3,500 for each small to medium-sized business to support the cost of installing new fast and reliable connections. These are available at the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme website.

Gigabit-capable broadband connections offer the fastest and most reliable speeds available, and the Government is committed to a vision of a digitally connected Britain.

Planning Regime reforms

Planning Regime reforms will support the mobile industry in the rapid rollout of 4G technology, to help reach more people, more quickly.

The Electronic Communications Code

The Electronic Communications Code regulates the telecommunications sector, reforms will put digital communications infrastructure on a similar regime to utilities like electricity and water. The aim is to ensure new technologies like 5G can be rolled out more quickly and benefit more people.

Mobile connections

There are four main mobile network operators (MNOs) in the UK; EE, O2, Three and Vodafone. Coverage is increasing both nationally and locally over 2G/3G/4G and now 5G. Coverage improvements have been relatively slow in rural parts of Norfolk reflecting the less stringent business cases for investment in areas as there are fewer residents. The most significant improvements in rural coverage will be delivered through the Shared Rural Network programme which is described below.

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Shared Rural Network

The Shared Rural Network (SRN) will see the four main mobile operators and government jointly invest £1bn in improving mobile coverage in rural areas. The target is to deliver 4G coverage to 95% of the UK by 2025. The work started in 2020, initially with £500m investment from the four MNOs to share masts in areas where there is coverage already available from one or more MNO, but not all four. The next stage will entail a further £500m investment from government to fund coverage improvements in areas where there is no existing coverage.

Through shared and new infrastructure, the Shared Rural Network is planned to increase the parts of the UK that get 4G coverage from all operators from 66% to 84%, improving consumer choice.

The mobile operators expect the Shared Rural Network will extend mobile coverage to an additional 280,000 premises and for people in cars on an additional 16,000km of the UK's roads, boosting productivity and investment in rural areas

Norfolk local authorities will continue to work proactively and collaboratively with the

MNOs and their network build partners to improve mobile phone coverage including fast data services availability over 4G & 5G services.