

To: Homes and businesses in the Ewhurst and Ellen's Green area

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Is your broadband connection still too slow?

THE ISSUE: An estimated 10% of us still do not have access to so called "superfast" broadband services, and some connections are still so poor that even basic Internet use is intermittent and painfully slow.

BACKGROUND: The BT Openreach upgrades in 2012 provided an acceptable service for most, but since then I have been searching for potential solutions for the remainder. Existing "fibre broadband" services are Fibre To The Cabinet (FTTC), so the speed & availability depends on the line length from the cabinet, and its quality. Read my previous articles at www.ewhurst-broadband.org.uk (or click the approved link from the parish Council web site under "Communications" at www.ewhurst.org).

THE OPPORTUNITY: Recently I have been looking at the BT Community Fibre Programme as a possible way to improve broadband performance for those of us too far from our cabinet to achieve "superfast" speeds. The programme is open to "communities" below the BT "superfast" threshold (25 Mbps) where there are no plans already in place. It uses the "gap funding" model, where BT contributes the "commercially viable" cost and the community raises the remaining funding. The community can potentially opt for Fibre To The Premises (FTTP), which currently supports 40, 80, 110, 220, 500 and 1000 Mbps connections, and which provides the same service speeds to every home covered, whatever the line length. The 40 and 80 Mbps FTTP services typically cost the same as their FTTC equivalents. Alternatively the community can choose additional FTTC cabinets, which aims to reduce copper line lengths to the point where everyone gets between 25 and 78 Mbps. With either option you can choose your ISP and package in the usual way.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO: The next step is to compile a list of premises currently below 25 Mbps. There is no commitment at this stage; BT need the information to define the area to be covered, cross check with their own and SCC plans, and to work out the ball park costs to the community. The community then decides whether to launch a Community Fibre Partnership. If we do not continue, then we still have the hope that SCC will include some or all of us in their next phase, but in that scenario we will not have any influence over the choice of FTTP or FTTC, and the SCC target is only 15 Mbps.

WHO SHOULD REGISTER: If the Community project goes ahead, then of course the new service will be available to everyone in the area covered, whether they register interest now or not, and whether they contribute to fund raising or not. However, if you do not register interest at this initial stage then there is a chance that your area may not be covered as a result. Even if you do not anticipate ever needing better broadband performance yourself, remember that the available broadband speed has a significant impact on property value and saleability. Whilst the BT Community Fibre Programme only applies to homes and small businesses where a 25+ Mbps fibre broadband service is not already available, I will be pleased to receive details of any others interested in local FTTP, so that I can keep you informed of future developments and register your address.

HOW TO REGISTER: BT is asking for the following details:

- Name, address and postcode
- Landline (or broadband line) phone number
- Cabinet number (find this at www.dslchecker.bt.com – or I can help)
- Current download speed (Mbps, check this at www.speedtest.net for example)

Please send these details by email to register@b4sh.org.uk or by post to my home address above. I will only use them for our Community Fibre application and to keep you informed by email. Discover more at www.b4sh.org.uk. Thank you for reading.