

Case Study: Binfield Heath

Binfield Heath residents raise £56,000 to bring superfast fibre broadband to their community

With no plans to connect the village of Binfield Heath to the superfast fibre network, it seemed the 251 premises that make up the rural community in Oxfordshire would be left out in the cold. But the residents had other ideas.

After discussing their options with Openreach, they got in touch with another village that had privately funded superfast fibre and decided to do the same. With £56,000 needed to upgrade the local network and street cabinets for superfast fibre broadband, the residents formed an action group to raise the funds.

The superfast switch-on went live at the beginning of January 2014 and it seems fibre broadband is already changing the way local people use the internet.

More than 50 times faster than before

Paul Rollason, Binfield Heath parish council chair, says: "What we have now is a fantastic step change from what went before. The fastest download speed anyone could muster pre superfast fibre was around .75Mbps. I personally struggled to get half a Mbit!"

Residents who live closest to the new street cabinets can now take advantage of download speeds of over 50Mbps. The majority can get between 25Mbps and 40Mbps, with outliers still going great guns at between 15-25Mbps.

Upload speeds are generally a quarter of download speeds so that's a real bonus, especially for people working from home.

Gap funded model was the best bet

After doing their homework, the residents of Binfield Heath decided the 'gap funded' model offered by Openreach was by far the best, most risk free and sustainable option.

"Openreach are rolling out most of the superfast fibre broadband around the country, after all," states Paul, "so they should know what they're doing and they most certainly did."

The added advantage of the Openreach infrastructure to communities like Binfield Heath is it's available to all communications providers in the UK, including all the major High Street brands.

This 'open access' promotes healthy competition, keeps retail prices down and allows people to choose the deal that suits them best from any Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC)* provider.

How it works

Colin Brooks, Openreach private funding manager, takes up the story: "The 'gap funded' model we offer communities like Binfield Heath is determined by the number of homes and business premises we need to connect to our infrastructure and what infrastructure is available in the local area. In general, the more premises there are and the more infrastructure which is present, the less it costs the community.

"The communities don't fund the total cost of the cabinet infrastructure. They fund the difference between the commercial cost – based on the number of lines – and the actual price of enabling a FTTC service. We call this 'the gap'. We ask for 50% of the agreed amount up front and the remainder when the work is complete. How communities raise the money is entirely up to them. We don't get involved in that side of things at all."



Initial discussions to signed contract

Colin started talking with Keith Pruden (a senior telecoms professional who lived in Binfield Heath at the time) around a possible technical solution for Binfield Heath, based on FTTC, in February 2011.

“The first discussions were informal and in November 2012, we presented a solution to the community. We only got into the detail as the whole community became involved,” continues Colin. “It turned out they needed to fund 3.5 kilometres of new infrastructure including extensive copper rearrangement on two existing copper cabinets and the provision of two new fibre cabinets. The serving exchange in Caversham was already fibre-enabled, so there were no additional requirements on that front.”

Before the contract with Openreach was signed, the parish council circulated a letter to all the residents of Binfield Heath, inviting them to pledge money for the project and send their cheques to the clerk of the parish council by a certain date. No one needed reminding. The contract itself was signed on 16 March 2013. The rest is history.

For more information visit
www.openreach.co.uk or contact your
Openreach sales and relationship manager.

Note for communities interested in gap funding

Before enquiring about gap funding from Openreach, you should check if your community is scheduled to get superfast fibre broadband as part of the national rollout, or under the government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) initiative.

You can do this at www.superfast-openreach.co.uk for the national rollout or BDUK. If your community isn't on either list, email ngb@openreach.co.uk and we'll come and talk to you and explain everything in plain English.

Note for editors

While Openreach is a BT Group business, it is ring-fenced from it. We don't sell communications services to consumers or businesses. Our customers (the communications providers/suppliers) do that. We provide the network infrastructure over which these services are delivered.



www.openreach.co.uk

The telecommunications services described in this publication are subject to availability and may be modified from time to time. Services and equipment are provided subject to British Telecommunications plc's respective standard conditions of contract. Nothing in this publication forms any part of any contract. Openreach and the Openreach logo are trademarks of British Telecommunications plc. © British Telecommunications plc 2018.

Openreach Limited
Registered office: Kelvin House, 123 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NP.
Registered in England and Wales no. 10690039.
Produced by Openreach.
Designed by Westhill.co.uk

PHME 83417

*Fibre to the Cabinet is where Openreach provides fibre from the serving exchange to street cabinets, and copper from street cabinets to homes and businesses.