

## **Broadband – the situation May 2015**

### **Connecting Cumbria Project**

The situation vis-à-vis the Connecting Cumbria (CC) project remains basically the same. Under Phase 1, the Staveley exchange is due to be upgraded to fibre this May and Kentmere residents have been promised the basic service of 2Mbps by the end of 2015. Cumbria County Council (CCC) is still hoping to provide a better service across the whole of Cumbria BUT that will require funding that does not exist at present so Phase 2 is now being planned.

Connecting Cumbria conducted an Open Market Review (OMR) of suppliers across the whole of Cumbria to establish current and planned (within the next 3 years) commercial coverage of broadband services by existing and prospective broadband infrastructure providers. The information gathered was used to define the scope of prospective intervention (i.e. where there was no prospect of a commercial solution). The information was circulated for consultation. Kentmere was placed in the area where it was deemed that *'there are plans to have a presence of broadband coverage by December 2017 from one or more operators whose plans are unconfirmed at present'*. This meant that we were not eligible for intervention funding as it was deemed that a commercial provider would provide a service. CC have identified Kencomp as a possible supplier, but our subsequent inquiries have indicated that Kencomp have no clear plans for Kentmere and would apparently expect a significant (non -repayable) capital investment from the local community. We wrote formally to object to being placed in the non-intervention area as we did not believe that Kencomp could provide a commercial service to Kentmere. We had a meeting with CC where we expressed our concerns and we hope to have a decision at the beginning of May on whether Kencomp is considered to be a viable commercial supplier. This decision is extremely important as it will decide whether Kentmere is eligible for intervention funding or not.

### **A possible alternative solution**

At the last Parish Meeting in November 2014, I agreed to follow up a possible solution, which was identified by Andrew Yates. This type of solution based on a wireless radio transmission has been successfully implemented in Dufton above the Eden Valley where the scheme provides significantly higher levels of service than the basic minimum guaranteed by CC. Roger Dewhurst and myself have visited the Dufton installation and talked with various other people about the possibility of using a similar scheme for Kentmere.

The scheme would be owned and managed by the Kentmere community (similar to the TV scheme). It involves wireless radio based delivery of broadband, with a transmitter in Staveley, possibly sited at Kentmere Packaging. A number of business lines would need to be rented and installed at the transmission site to provide Internet access. The signal would be transmitted to an intermediate relay station, which has a clear line of sight of the both the Staveley transmitter and the Kentmere TV relay station. The intermediate relay station would require a power supply and would have both a receiver and transmitter. The only feasible location for this intermediate relay station is at High House above Staveley on the east side of the valley. The owners of this property have indicated their willingness in principle to host the relay station. The High House relay station would transmit the signal onwards to a further receiver and transmitter located at the Kentmere TV relay site. From this site (and through its

associated infrastructure) a signal would be transmitted to receivers sited at individual subscribers' properties in Kentmere.

Although such a scheme would be set up on a "not for profit" basis, there will need to be sufficient subscribers to make it viable. Subscriptions will need to cover the costs of ongoing operation and maintenance and any repayment of the initial capital funding that will have to be raised to purchase and install equipment. *The viability of any scheme will therefore depend on the importance that households and businesses in Kentmere place on a having access to higher levels of broadband service than the basic that should be available through Connecting Cumbria.*

The design, installation and testing of the Dufton scheme was undertaken at no cost by a local resident, who had the required technical skills. The initial capital investment in Dufton was around £2000.00, half of which was provided by local investors and half through grant aid. Individual subscribers costs in Dufton are £100.00 for initial installation and either £10 or £15 per month for different levels of service (up to 5mbs download or up 10 mbs download). There are 14 subscribers currently in Dufton. The Dufton service is currently not connected to an upgraded exchange with fibre-based Internet access.

The costs of both establishing and operating a scheme in Kentmere will be significantly higher than those at Dufton principally reflecting:

- the greater level of equipment required;
- the requirement for external support for the technical design of the solution, installation, ongoing operation and maintenance.

At this stage, without having established the detailed technical design and full costs of external support, it is not possible to identify precisely how much higher the costs of a proposed Kentmere scheme will be and to calculate both subscription charges and viable subscriber levels. A Kentmere scheme with connection to the upgraded Staveley exchange should be capable of providing higher levels of service possibly involving download speeds of up to 20 Mbps.

### **A way forward**

Although it has been possible to establish the feasibility of this type of scheme without expert advice, there is a need to develop a robust technical design from which detailed costs can be established. A detailed technical study may cost up to £1000.00.

A fast broadband service is crucial for the future of Kentmere. Although some residents may feel that what they have at present is sufficient for their needs, it is expedient to think further ahead. There is a need to think about what the norm will be in say 5 years time and what younger generations moving to Kentmere will expect/require.

- More and more essential services and official communications are being delivered using the internet
- Fast broadband is essential to anyone who wishes to work from home or run a business.
- Children at school now require good internet access for their school work
- People visiting the area (renting accommodation and using B&Bs) now expect to have a fast broadband service available
- House sales in certain parts of the country are now influenced by the BB speed – it could be an issue in the future in Kentmere

A basic broadband service of 2Mbps is sufficient to send out emails and to browse the web but it does not fully support the ability to transfer or download large amounts of data. For example, you need much faster speeds to

- Use the internet simultaneously with several people in the same household
- Download films or large files on a regular basis
- Use online TV catch-up services
- Upload large files to the web
- Use video-calling services such as Skype

We have identified a contractor with experience in designing and implementing similar schemes.

It is proposed that we ask for donations towards the £1000 required to commission a design, implementation strategy and financial model so that we can define the cost of such a scheme, what the service would provide and the likely costs to subscribers. Without this work we cannot define any of the above issues.

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