Taking Dundry into the 21st century

Where do we go from here?

In our last update two weeks ago, we explained why your Internet connection is so slow: Because your data has to travel all the way from Bishopsworth (or for some 01275 users from Lulsgate) via copper wire.

Glass fibre cables offer much higher speeds and ultimately we will see this installed in every home. However, we are a long way off from such a solution. As an interim stage, glass fibre will be brought closer to our homes into roadside “cabinets” and the last mile is still covered by copper. This will not provide maximum speeds but enough increase to be sufficient for the immediate future until further improvements can be achieved.

BT Openreach, the company installing and maintaining this infrastructure with the help of government funding, has set up a plan to get initially 90% (Stage 1) and then 95% (Stage 2) of the country connected - see statement:

http://www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/rural-broadband/

Dundry has always been on the list of upgrade areas, but it is very far down at the bottom. Stage 1 has almost been completed and no funds were allocated to us. A decision on stage 2 is due in June this year about further procurement in early 2016 and completion to be expected by the end of 2017. So far, there is no promise or commitment that we will benefit from this.

Our Options

1. Wait and See

We could just accept that we are not a high priority and hope to get faster broadband installed by 2017. No extra expense or effort is involved, but it might not happen.

2. Private “Gap Funding”

The majority of the Dundry area is connected to cabinet P48, which is located halfway up Broadoak Hill, near Middleway Lane. The problem is that this cabinet needs to be replaced and a power supply installed.

In determining whether to do this, BT Openreach looks at commercial viability, i.e. installation costs vs. financial returns from the number of properties connected. This is deemed unfavourable, but we can improve our situation by raising enough money to bridge the gap. BT have told us that the overall installation cost is £45,000. If we were to raise £38,000, they will do the work. However, there are no grants available and all funds must be gathered privately.
We are in touch with a local authority officer who has advised and helped another community with such a project and who will get us in touch with the village of Claverton where each household paid £1000 in order to get faster Internet.

It must be said, however, that upgrading P48 will only give us a moderate speed improvement from the current 2mbps to an estimated 5-10 mbps, which is OK for most applications currently used, but not great. It would reach most of Dundry, but some areas - most notably those with 01275 numbers - would lose out.

Another solution might be upgrading sub-cabinet P48/2, located in Andruss Drive. This would be cheaper (as no power supply is needed here) and would give the main village much higher speeds, perhaps up to 50mbps, but it would totally exclude East Dundry and other areas!

3. Government help

To confuse matters further, there is a government initiative under the European Commission State Aid to help rural communities with their broadband connection.

In our case, the programme is called “Connecting Devon and Somerset” (http://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/). But they are not allowed to step in if the area is covered by BT Openreach, which we are, albeit far down the list. So unless BT finally tells us that they cannot do anything for us, the initiative will not help and even then it can take quite a few years.

4. Other Providers

We know that Virgin Media is very active in our area. They have their own fibre network and may be able to connect Dundry, instead of BT Openreach. We will try to talk to them, but do not have any further information yet.

5. Community Network on a leased line

Using a completely different scheme, we could buy a leased business line from BT. This would be a single fibre cable running to the centre of the village, installed and maintained with priority over residential lines, but at a much higher cost. What we do with this line is then up to us. For instance, we could set up a wifi network covering our whole area, perhaps even extending to other parts of the valley.

This single line would give us very high and stable speeds that can be shared between all users.

We are actively considering such an option, especially since it does not need to be used forever, only until all homes are fully fibre connected in years to come.

However, this is a fairly big commercial venture and we need a good number of firm commitments from local residents so that the costs (roughly estimated at £25,000 for installation plus continuous running) can be covered. So far, only 38 households have responded to our questionnaire, which is not enough to give us a mandate.

As you know, we intend to make the broadband issue our main discussion point at the APM on 27 April and we will invite representatives from a company who can advise on such a community option.
In the meantime, please spread the word about our survey


and encourage more people to get involved.

Your Dundry Broadband Initiative

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