

Connecting Devon and Somerset

Torrige Briefing October, 2017



Programme Update

Summary

Torrige is a priority area for Connecting Devon and Somerset. There are currently 34,648 premises (homes and businesses) in Torrige District. To date, an estimated 31,365 premises have access to or are planned to have access to superfast broadband by the end of 2019.

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) delivery

CDS has, so far, provided 14,282 premises in Torrige District with access to superfast broadband in Phase 1 and plan a further 5,036 for completion in Phase 2 by the end of 2019. The phase 2 delivery is via a contract with Airband. The company is building a fixed wireless network for CDS providing homes and businesses with access to superfast broadband speeds of at least 30Mbps.

Airband's construction programme is divided into stages: Survey & Design; Acquisition and Planning; Build; Go Live. Airband is currently working through the Survey & Design phase in Torrige and due to complete at the end of October.

Commercial delivery

CDS estimates that the commercial sector has, so far, provided superfast access to a further 10,777 premises in Torrige District out of 12,047 planned. However, this analysis is based on figures provided by commercial providers in an Open Market Review (OMR) completed in June 2016.

A further OMR is underway and when completed will provide a more up to date picture of commercial delivery and future plans.

The commercial sector is not legally obliged to provide CDS with details of its planned investments. However, it should be in all parties' interests to share information.

Government targets and CDS' role

Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), a part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), is responsible for implementing the Government's policy on superfast broadband roll-out which consists of three stages:

- to provide superfast broadband coverage to 90% of UK premises by early 2016 and access to basic broadband (2Mbps) for all from December 2015 – "Phase 1"
- to provide superfast broadband coverage to 95% of UK premises by the end of 2017 – "Phase 2"
- to explore options to provide superfast coverage to the hardest to reach parts of the UK - "the final 5%"

It is important to note that Government targets represent an *average* coverage for the UK as a whole and are not set at a district level. They include all broadband infrastructure funded wholly by the commercial sector as well as public-subsidised programmes such as CDS.

Around two thirds of all broadband infrastructure built or planned across the CDS region is commercially funded and without public subsidy. The higher proportion of CDS-subsidised broadband infrastructure in Torridge District reflects lower levels of commercial investment. However, now that our Phase 1 contract has completed, it is encouraging to see Openreach still extending fibre coverage through their own private investment, building on the infrastructure we have already brought closer to rural areas through our Phase 1 subsidy.

CDS' role has always been to fill the gaps in rural communities and businesses where the private sector cannot build the commercial case to invest. It does this by gaining information from the market on their likely rollout plans over the period of any proposed public intervention.

The information returned from private companies is used to draw up an area that we are allowed to invest in under European State Aid law, the areas outside of private plans being eligible for public subsidy. CDS then awards public subsidised contracts to companies through competitive tender to build the infrastructure needed. Under State Aid procurement regulations, any contract has to be technology neutral and can only be awarded to companies offering so called next generation access (NGA) technologies. Broadly speaking this includes any technology capable of delivering a minimum of 30Mbps+, and encompasses both fibre based technologies as well as fixed wireless technologies.

For more information about the Government's broadband policy visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/broadband-delivery-uk>

About CDS

CDS is a local government-led broadband programme, the biggest public funded broadband programme in England. It is supported by funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the EU's European Regional Development Fund, the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and local authorities across the region, and includes investment from commercial partners.

Partner authorities are Devon and Somerset County Councils, Bath & North East and North Somerset unitary councils and Mendip, Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane, Teignbridge and West Somerset district councils.

Subject to final assurance, the latest data indicates that following Phase One of the CDS programme:

- Around 327,000 homes and businesses are now able to access faster broadband
- Around 282,000 have access to superfast speeds (note this represents an over achievement on the contractual Phase 1 superfast target of 279,000 connections agreed with BDUK)
- Take up is 39.7% -- 129,931 homes and businesses – above national average 31%.

Phase Two

In Phase Two, CDS' aim is that over 60,000 additional homes and businesses will be able to access superfast or ultrafast speeds by the end of 2019 under phase 2 of the CDS programme.

Contracts for Phase Two were split into six lots, five were awarded to ultrafast provider Gigaclear and one to superfast wireless provider Airband. (See accompanying map).

These are major engineering projects and require considerable pre-construction survey and planning.

Communities can check on the CDS website if they are in the Phase 2 rollout <https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/line-checker/>

Vouchers

The deadline for using existing vouchers expired on September 30. CDS will review the need for a second voucher scheme subject to available funding. This is to ensure public funding is targeted to achieve best value. Meanwhile, residents and businesses can register their interest in a potential future voucher scheme now by emailing CDS at broadbandvoucher-mailbox@devon.gov.uk

Homes and businesses that are connected under the voucher scheme are still eligible for inclusion in future phases of the CDS main programme.

For further information about the scheme and suppliers see <https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/cds-broadband-voucher-scheme/>

Additional investment by CDS

CDS is able to invest to additional funding from the EU European Regional Development Fund and from the Government's Broadband Delivery UK agency to increase superfast broadband coverage.

Our additional funding also includes public subsidy returned by BT as a "gainshare" or dividend from increased customer take-up of internet services. The sums involved are likely to be millions of pounds which will buy a lot of additional coverage for communities currently without a service.

We are currently in discussion with BT about the final amount our communities and businesses can expect to benefit from.

We will provide further updates of any extension to the coverage already planned.

Broadband speed definitions

Ofcom defines the following services:

- Standard broadband services have download speeds of between 10 to 30 Mbps;
- Superfast broadband services have download speeds of 30 Mbps or more; and
- Ultrafast broadband services have download speeds of 300 Mbps or more.

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