

PROJECT UPDATE

November 2013

Connecting Cheshire is a £31m council led programme to bring fibre broadband to 96% of premises in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. This will bring superfast fibre to over 80,000 additional premises mainly in our outlying and rural areas by summer 2015.

Introduction

The purpose of this update is to inform you of the publication of a map showing where Connecting Cheshire will be rolling out fibre broadband over the next 2 years and to update you on the work required to facilitate deployment.

Coverage

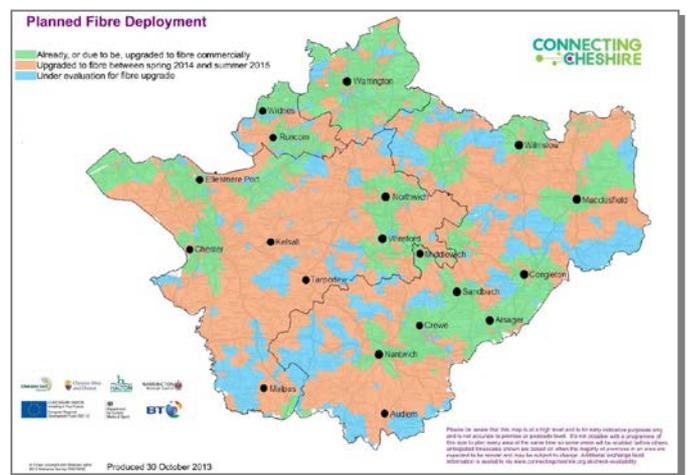
The map illustrates where communities throughout the county can expect the high-speed technology to arrive by the end of summer 2015. The map is available to view on our new website at www.connectingcheshire.org.uk/check-availability.

The Connecting Cheshire programme will reach over 80,000 additional premises in mainly outlying and rural communities. The map also shows where more than 80% of premises, mainly in urban areas, are already able to access fibre broadband, and those areas still under evaluation.

Deployment Plan

The Connecting Cheshire broadband programme will be delivered by Openreach - BT's local network business, following the signing of our infrastructure contract in April 2013. A massive 875 miles of fibre-optic cable will be laid – more than the distance between Lands end and John O Groats. This will be a significant engineering challenge to upgrade the county's infrastructure including the commissioning of new roadside cabinets. As a result of the programme, broadband speeds will increase significantly, 96% of Cheshire premises will have access to speeds of up to 80Mbps¹, whereas Cheshire's current average downstream speed is 16Mbps (Ofcom UK Broadband Speeds Report; June 2013).

The final 4% of premises are under evaluation and the project is seeking additional funding or technological solutions to facilitate their upgrade to high speed broadband as soon as practicable, however these areas will see faster speeds as the project aims to deliver 2Mbps or more to all homes and businesses by the end of 2016 via enhancements to the existing copper network. This will be as a significant speed boost for our most remote homes and businesses as 12% currently receive less than 2Mbps.



¹ 80Mbps is the wholesale speed. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) may use different speeds in their advertising. Individual line speeds will depend on network infrastructure and the service chosen by the ISP.

There are a range of factors which impact on the viability of our upgrades to fibre within the Connecting Cheshire programme; these include the number and density of premises, the deployment cost, the proximity to existing fibre infrastructure and whether eligible small or medium sized businesses would be served – which is a condition of our European funding.

Current Position

On behalf of Connecting Cheshire, BT Openreach's work on designing the fibre infrastructure is well under way to ensure the most efficient and rapid roll-out. This includes surveying all the underground ducts serving homes and businesses so that they can map where the fibre, new ducts, street cabinets and additional overground equipment will be sited.

First Phase Announcement

The first phase announcement will take place on 6th December, when we will make public which specific areas will be included in our first stage roll-out with further phased announcements thereafter. We will be inviting representatives from these communities to a briefing event to explain more about our deployment plan, and we will hold similar events for our subsequent phase announcements, so please don't worry if you are not invited to our first phase briefing.

Homes and businesses in at least 20 telephone exchange areas will see upgrades as part of the first phase and be able to contact their Internet Service Provider to order a switch to fibre broadband from the end of March 2014 onwards. BT's network will be open to all communications providers on an equal wholesale basis and so Cheshire consumers and businesses will benefit from a highly competitive market, in turn bringing greater choice and lower prices.

Street Works

As the pace of the project picks up you may see lots of BT Openreach vans and engineers as they begin the roll-out. A key element of our infrastructure deployment is the positioning and building of over 450 new green roadside cabinets. These will house the necessary communications equipment which will provide high speed broadband connectivity to homes and businesses. These new cabinets will be positioned within 50 metres of the existing cabinets and are of a similar size and shape.

Any delays in the commissioning of the new cabinets will put our ambitious roll-out plans at risk. As such the Government has removed much of the 'red tape' related to the commissioning of these cabinets to assist in the rapid deployment of fibre networks across the country.



We hope they will be a welcome sight in your community, as a visible sign of the Connecting Cheshire programme. Once ready for service we look forward to working with your community to help raise awareness of fibre availability and help everyone exploit the benefits.

If you require any further information please contact us at info@connectingcheshire.org.uk

www.connectingcheshire.org.uk

