

# **Minutes of an Extraordinary Allensmore Parish Council Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2015 at 12.00 noon at Allensmore Village Hall      Draft v1.1**

**Present:** Cllrs Jim Lawrence, Jeremy Lawrence (Chair), C Watkinson, D Cooke, S Lawrence and T Cramp (Vice Chair and chairing this meeting)

**In attendance:** Mrs A Wright (Clerk), Ward Councillor Jon Johnson, Ward Councillor Graham Powell, Matt Lloyd BT Fastershire Project Director, Natalia Silver Project Director from Herefordshire Council and 35 members of the public.

## **1. Introduction and welcome by the Chairman**

The Chair of the Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting, Cllr Tony Cramp, welcomed everyone to the meeting. He gave a brief overview of the situation regarding Broadband services in the area. Allpay have announced that their broadband service is no longer a viable business. They will make no new investment and some existing infrastructure will be decommissioned. Allpay are the only provider of non-satellite based broadband available to some households in the parish due to the distance of households on the Hereford exchange from the exchange. Around 120 households in the parish use their service in the 5 years since they took over and replaced the equipment, previously provided by Access Broadband, – and there is gratitude that they did so.

The immediate impact on the parish is that one transmitter will be shut down with about 15-20 households losing the service following receipt of a letter giving 30 days notice (it is believed that no such letters have been received as yet). In addition, no new customers will be taken on – including those new residents of a house currently receiving the service and clearly there is no long term future for the service.

A major provider of broadband to the county is BT on its own and also in conjunction with the Fastershire Programme.

Cllr Cramp then introduced the parish councillors to those present and also Ward Cllr Powell - Cabinet member with responsibility for Economy and Corporate Services and Broadband lead for Herefordshire Council, Matt Lloyd – Fastershire Project Director at BT and Natalia Silver Fastershire Project Leader at Herefordshire Council.

## **2. Apologies for Absence**

There were apologies received from Cllr Steve Williams.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

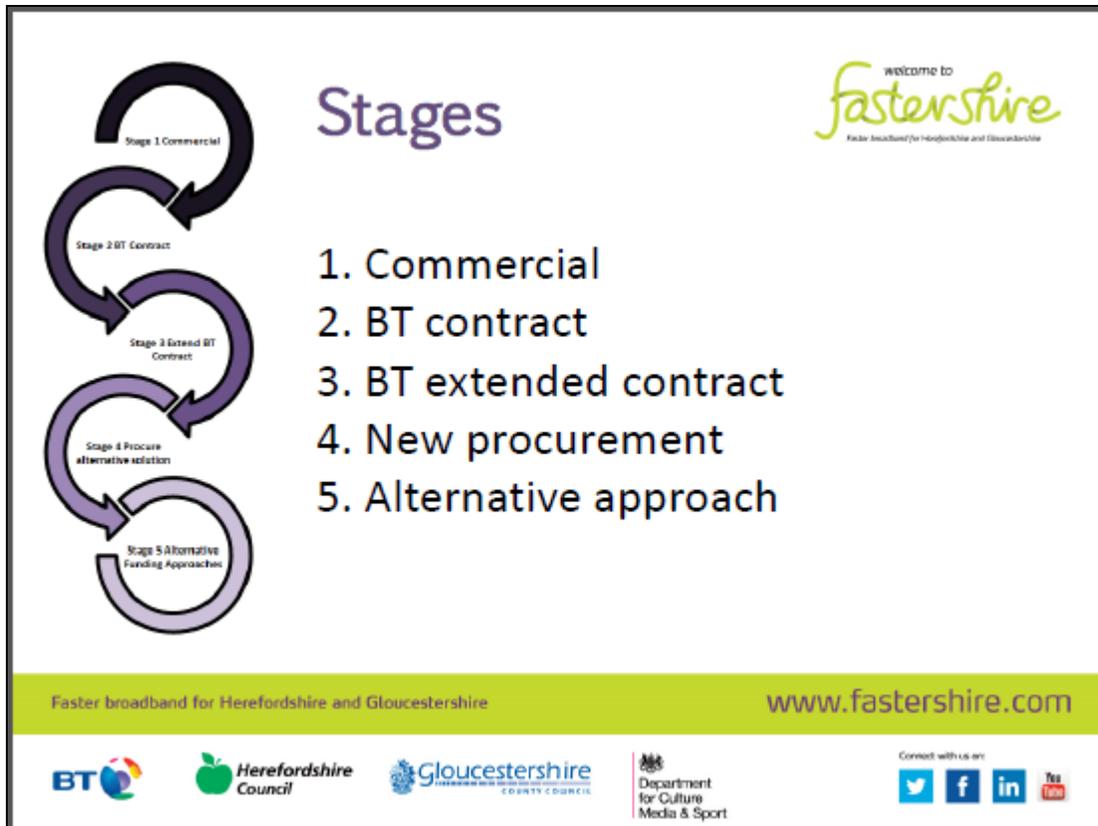
## **4. To welcome and then hear information from Mr Matt Lloyd, Fastershire Project Director from BT, Cllr Graham Powell and Natalia Silver from Herefordshire Council regarding broadband provision in the area**

Ward Cllr and Cabinet Member Graham Powell opened the presentation by explaining that there was realisation of the vital aspect of the broadband service to the area. He said that he was confident that a solution could be found to bridge the gap and find a local solution to the 15 to 20 properties likely to be affected. He explained what the Fastershire Program was about and how an Open Market Review (OMR) had been undertaken to inform the area ultimately that would be delivered to under the program.

Cllr Powell gave some facts and figures regarding the contract between Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and BT. He said that by the end of 2016 the county would be 90% broadband enabled. Herefordshire had proved to be a difficult county to deliver to due to sparsely populated areas and yet all areas being inhabited. Fibre to cabinet had been used but also some more remote customers were served by exchange only or fibre to premise.

Additional money to extend the contract had been sought and it was noted that since 2011 when the initial OMR was carried out parameters and technology had changed. See slide 1. By the end of 2016 it was hoped that additional procurement would fill in the final 10% but it may take until 2018 to achieve this.

A slide show was provided and key slides are included in these minutes.



Clr Powell explained that Allpay had never been a long term solution to broadband provision due to insufficient capacity. Allpay are a private commercial company. Their decision to terminate broadband contracts will be a commercial one.

Natalia Silver, Project Director for Herefordshire Council then explained that she had been working on the Fastershire Project since the beginning and gave a recap on processes. The Open Market Review procurement process had only incorporated fibre technology companies and this did not include Allpay who used different technology. BT was the only company planning to use fibre technology in Herefordshire. Gloucestershire had used Virgin also. Public funding had been used to provide the fibre network but the area was confined as to where the fibre could go. Area 11 as defined was due to complete by December 2015. Distance from the cabinets was important and the further away from the cabinet the more the service would drop down. This is illustrated by slide 3 in these minutes. The closer to the cabinet the higher the speed obtained.

Matt Lloyd, Project Director for BT then spoke about the BT investment into the infrastructure to increase broadband throughout the UK. The Government had realised that there had been a two tier digital economy and had sought to uplift rural provision and so Fastershire was born.

The OMR had been undertaken on a geographical basis and the response had been fed back at post code level.

There was a lengthy discussion around cabinet 73 and the power supply issues to it. It was suggested that the adoption, by a body such as a parish council, of the nearby telephone kiosk (on the A465 near to Belmont) may be a solution to getting power to the cabinet. This option would be investigated and progressed.

A question was asked regarding moving the cabinet. It would no longer be commercially viable if moved. A potential solution could be a secondary connection point (pillar) known as 73/1 near to Goose Pool. BT would need to enter into dialogue with the community regarding this. The council cannot spend its funds as they cannot legally spend money in the area (white area as designated commercial) on Slide 2 as they would be falling foul of the European State Aid Regulation.

A further question was asked: Could Herefordshire Council subsidise Allpay to keep the service going? The answer is no, Allpay are a commercial entity and not eligible for aid.

The green zone on the Slide 2 was the Fastershire zone and was moving slowly towards the white (commercial) zone. Matt stated that by the end of 2018 BT should be able to provide superfast broadband to all who need it. There is a bursary scheme run by Herefordshire Council who may be able to assist if broadband can be demonstrated to be business critical. There will likely be a governmental spending review in November and the question will be asked regarding additional broadband funding. Fibre is being installed in Winnal via the Wormbridge Exchange and also in Clehonger. The area could look at a local solution if not wanting to wait until 2018. Community funding had enabled connections in similar circumstances in other parts of the country. For example Oxford residents (100 homes) had raised £20,000.00 to fund a local connection. BT would contribute and the gap in cost could be met by the community.

A Question was asked as to why half of the Cobhall area was in the green zone and half in the white? I.e. some in the intervention area (green) and some outside of it. The answer was that the money available does not allow cover with fibre to all. There was some discussion on minimum commitments to "meg" output with a 2 megabit level being a BT commitment. It was commented that satellite technology could also be used to achieve a minimum 2 megabit performance. Targets were fibre by end of 2015, 2 megabit minimum for all by end of 2016.

Two links are included here to look at bursary scheme etc. on Fastershire website.

<http://www.fastershire.com/how-to-go-faster/satellite>

Businesses:

<http://www.fastershire.com/fastershire-your-world/faster-business/faster-business-in-herefordshire>

In summary, at the outset of the Fastershire Programme, it was identified that households served by the Hereford Exchange would be covered by BT under their normal commercial terms with a few exceptions on the fringes e.g. parts of Cobhall (area in white in slide 3 below). Other areas (that need subsidy to deploy) would be covered by the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Councils' Fastershire Programme of which BT was the major partner in Herefordshire. Since the area in white is a normal commercial deployment, the Fastershire Programme cannot intervene and provide deployment subsidies (falls foul of trading legislation). Again, since the area in white is subject to normal commercial deployment, BT will apply their normal commercial approach. This means that they will only deploy within those area that meet their commercial criteria. This means that certain areas, including parts of Allensmore have been caught in a frustrating gap – it is not sufficiently profitable for BT to deploy there but since they are in the BT commercial deployment area, the Fastershire programme cannot legally subsidise any deployment.

The potential to provide power from the nearby payphone kiosk (if adopted) to the cabinet, can reduce the cost of enabling the cabinet to a level which makes deployment viable for BT and would provide high speed Broadband to those within 1-2km of the cabinet (in this parish and others, too) but more distant houses in the parish would see a lower broadband speed, falling to little or none for the most distant.

A future review, and contract negotiation, is likely to result in areas within the BT commercial deployment area (i.e. Hereford exchange) which are unable to receive 2mbs minimum becoming eligible for intervention by the Fastershire programme. However, it is likely to be 2017-2018 before this becomes applicable.

Thanks were extended to Matt and Natalia for their contributions and information.

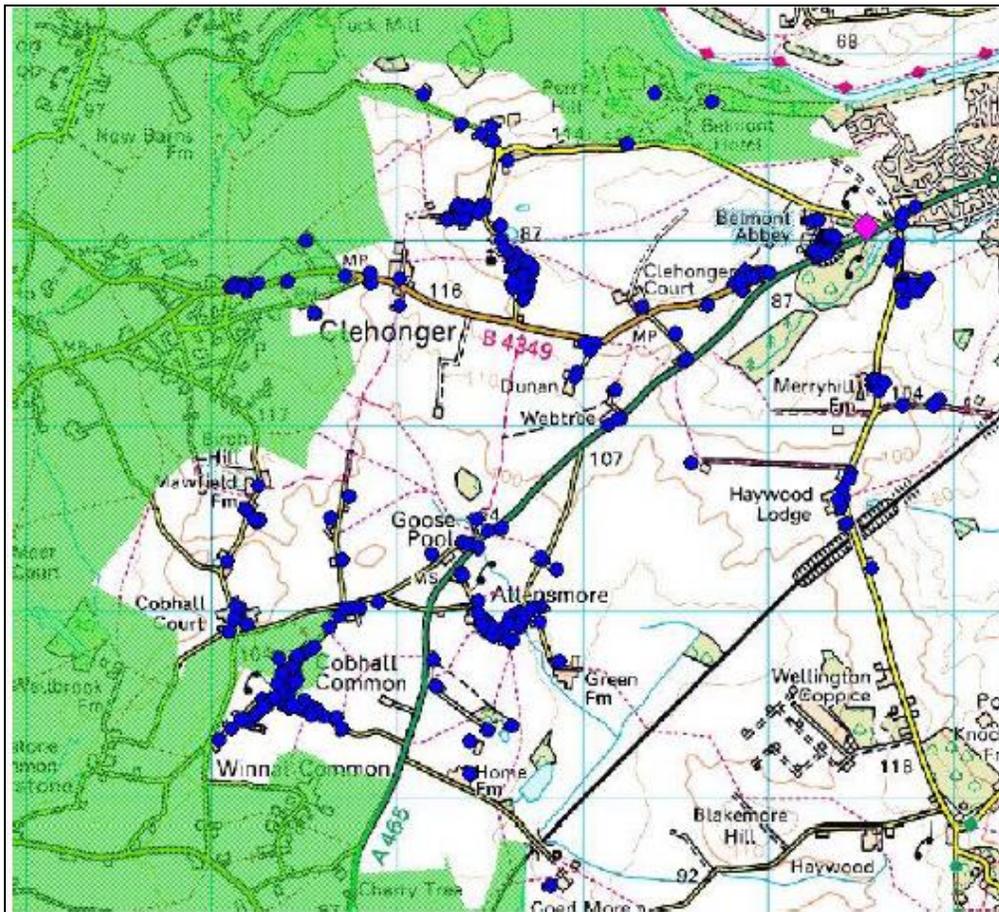
Cllr Powell commented that he had a personal issue with community funded schemes as the council tax payer is being asked to "put their hand in their pocket again". He explained that Jesse Norman MP was now part of a committee charged with, amongst the portfolio, looking at broadband delivery. He had been kept fully briefed and would be taking up the issues faced by the locality.

In summary Cllr Powell stated that he understood that the Allpay provision was not commercially viable, it would be stopping and 30 days notice would be given. Ward Cllr Powell and Ward Cllr Johnson would speak to the Allpay Chief Executive, Tony Killeen, or his representative and enquire as to whether the Allpay service provision could be maintained until another solution can be found.

Ward Cllr Powell also knew a local telecom entrepreneur (no personal interest was made clear) and he would approach him to see if he would come and discuss options regarding provision of a service in the area by possibly adopting the local system and keeping it running. He may be able to provide a demonstration and Cllr Powell would try to arrange this. There was also the possibility of receiving a service by satellite). A local Allpay technician, who had left the company, had said to a resident that the kit held at the site in Kingstone was being sold off.

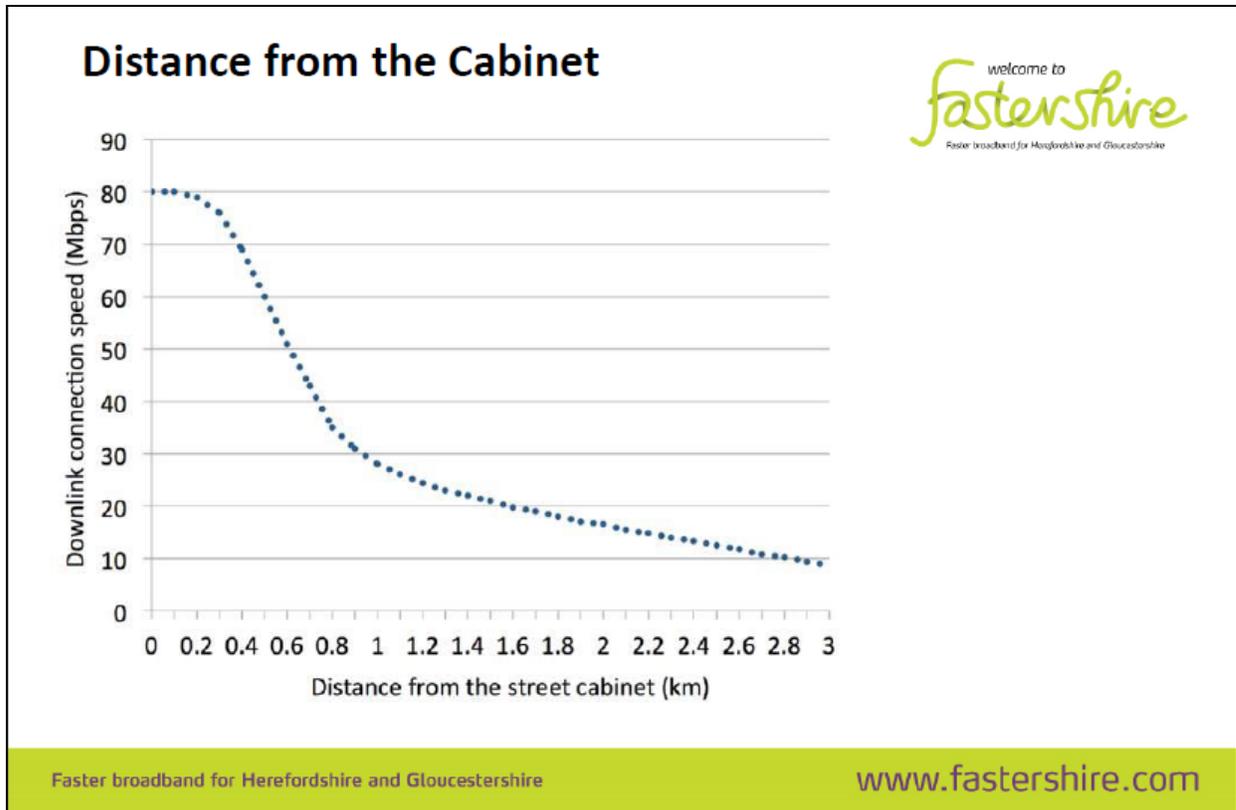
Cllr Cramp had done some research into likely costs of satellite provision and contracts from £25 per month upwards plus £200 - £300 upfront costs are available with amounts of £50/60/70 per month likely for higher data output demands.

Slide 2



There was further discussion regarding the “adopt a kiosk” scheme and Matt would ascertain which parish the kiosk was in so that the relevant persons could be contacted to discuss possible adoption.

Denim Nation transmitter was likely to be decommissioned first and this would affect Church Road and Green Farm. Allpay had not yet given an indication of likely switch off dates.



**5. To confirm or not, whether some households in Allensmore are too far from the exchange and/or the nearest cabinet to receive broadband at all from the Hereford exchange - with the planned deployment.**

This was confirmed during the discussion and details are under item 4.

**6. If the scenario in item 5 is confirmed, to explore alternative solutions.**

Alternatives covered in item 8.

**7. Questions:** covered during presentation.

**8. To consider the way forward and confirm any recommendations or requests**

Following on from information presented and discussion and questions the following four points were agreed as actions going forward:

- 1) Ward Cllrs Johnson and Powell to meet with Allpay Chief Executive to discuss options
- 2) The "pillar" in Allensmore to be investigated as a potential site for an upgrade in conjunction with a possible community package initiative
- 3) Cllr Powell would follow up possible demonstration of satellite solutions and liaise with Clerk to arrange date etc.
- 4) Kiosk adoption options at Belmont to be looked in to as a possibility to provide power source for cabinet 73

There was further comment regarding availability locally of phone signals and 4G. A Question from the floor challenged BT for "cherry picking" the best areas for profit and ignoring less profitable or non-profitable ones. Was there an obligation on BT moral or otherwise to assist the unsupported areas? Cllr Powell asked that this question be directed to Jesse Norman MP and OfCom.

Matt from BT responded to the cherry picking comment by saying that BT is a commercial company and cannot be criticised for making commercial decisions. 19 million homes have been served by BT investment into open access network and there are 120 providers on the service selling band width so the competition element is there. Competition has driven down the cost also. The commenter said that he was not criticising BT for making commercial decisions but maybe a moral stance could be taken to safeguard the corporate reputation. Could some of the profits from Fastershire be used to help fund the cabinet for the unserved areas possibly? The Parish Council are asking the question of BT regarding a possible contribution from the "BT Reputational Protection Fund". Matt answered that monies are reinvested back into bringing things along and investing in future development.

Following this exchange the Chair thanked everyone for their time and attendance at the Meeting.

**9. Date of next Ordinary Meeting is confirmed as 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

The Meeting closed at 1.43pm

Allensmore Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting

21<sup>st</sup> August 2015

Signed .....as a true record by Councillor

Chairman)

Dated: - 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015

For information about what's going on, local groups and businesses, the Church, some local history and the Parish Council, including minutes of past meetings and dates for future meetings, visit the Allensmore website.

[www.allensmore.org.uk](http://www.allensmore.org.uk)