

## MEDIA RELEASE

### HOMING IN ON SUPERSPEED BROADBAND

13 August 2010

What do you give the constituency that seems to have everything?

The answer from Henley's MP, John Howell, is a series of initiatives designed to improve the quality of life in key areas. The first of these is access to superfast broadband. A study by the Independent Networks Cooperative Association earlier in the summer showed that the Henley constituency was likely to be at best only partially served by Next Generation Broadband (<http://www.inca.coop/NGA-map>).

*"The broadband revolution has forgotten too many of our villages. Speeds are so slow that they are practically unusable. It's a problem for many in the constituency. Those wanting to work from home and businesses in a rural area like ours find it difficult. Those that are ill may not be able to get on-line healthcare information. Students often cannot do research for homework and it is cutting people off from the social networking broadband can bring."*

*"More and more villages in the constituency are asking – why us? Local groups of businesspeople are approaching me to point out how much more dynamic our local communities could be if the problem of superfast broadband was tackled."*

The MP has already held talks with BT to understand the work they are undertaking to ensure the constituency is covered. He has also raised with the county council the possibility of villages being able to use the broadband networks which are associated with village schools and remain unused out of school hours and for large stretches of school holidays.

Discussions with BT have focused on the cost of providing the 'extra mile' cabling between the schools and individual houses. This follows proposals around the country to open up fibre optic links used by many local authorities and services.

To take this forward, the MP has identified six steps

1. Identify the examples of how this problem has been solved in other areas (see notes to editors)
2. Keep the pressure up on BT as a key provider to tackle the problem in the constituency as quickly as possible
3. Work with other providers to facilitate solutions for the area
4. Work with local Parish Councils to identify the not-spots in the constituency and to identify the market for the use of fibre optic cables in local authority facilities such as schools
5. Work with the County Council to encourage the use of school facilities

6. Work with James Elles MEP on the associated problem of mobile broadband

The MP pointed to DEFRA information that one third of all farmers have no internet access and yet it is increasingly assumed they will file their forms for payment online. It is also a major disadvantage to those without access who cannot download information on weather, disease patterns and market prices – all essential tools of the industry.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### 1 Government strategy

The Government's strategy aims to make us the first country in Europe to extend superfast *100 Mbps* broadband across most of the population. There are four broad components of the strategy:

- to roll out a broadband service level of at least 2Megabits to those parts of the country still without basic access by 2015
- to establish three superfast broadband pilots in rural areas
- to open up and co-ordinate our existing infrastructure to bring down the costs of laying new fibre by opening up BT's ducts to competitors, easing planning rules and boosting competition to encourage a market led solution.
- where necessary, to make sure rural areas have access to this new infrastructure, it will use the element of the television licence fee used for digital switchover, stimulating investment in next generation networks.

BT is already spending £2.5bn of its own money rolling out 40-100Mbps fibre optic broadband to 66-67% of the country. Reaching the final third is the object of the Government strategy.

### 2 Examples of solutions

- Residents in some villages such as in the Hambleden valley have resorted to a local village wireless broadband service. But these are not always reliable and are very expensive.
- Business providers like Virgin Media earlier this year ran a pilot in Berkshire using telegraph poles to deliver 50Mbps broadband to an isolated village.
- A GP's surgery in Northumberland provides access to broadband for patients.
- A village in Kent has brought together the local council, local businesses and BT to get the best possible access for their community.
- Community providers like the Cybermoor Community network in Cumbria, using contributions from many sources, including subscriptions, are laying cable and bringing vital broadband access to isolated businesses and households.

### 3 Quality of life initiatives

The MP's second Quality of Life initiative will cover services for young adults with autism and will be launched in the autumn.