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[Herefordshire County Council sets out plans for BDUK pilot](#)

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Herefordshire County Council last week published its strategy for delivering superfast broadband across the region, following on from the announcement in October's [comprehensive spending review](#) that the county was one of four superfast broadband pilots being funded by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), alongside North Yorkshire, Cumbria and the Highlands and Islands. From the council's [press release](#):

"The aim is to have 90 per cent of homes and business in the county linked up to fast broadband by 2015, and by 2020 50 per cent of premises having the opportunity to access broadband speeds of 100Mbps."

More information about broadband developments in Herefordshire is available [here](#), which is where the new [strategy](#) can also be downloaded. Some key extracts:

"...90% of homes and all business premises having the opportunity to connect to a superfast broadband service offering at least 40Mbps download speed and better than 10Mbps upload speed, by 2015. In the short term, by the end of 2012 progress should have been made by private initiatives for all homes and premises to have access to broadband at speeds of 4Mbps. By 2020 50% of homes and businesses should have the opportunity to access 100Mbps download speed with a choice of upload speeds. Broadband services in Herefordshire must be affordable to the user and in most cases offer a choice of Internet Service Provider. How the vision should be delivered is subject to a range of technical options, but the majority of homes and premises should be served by a county wide fibre optic infrastructure. New homes and new premises on business parks should be built by their developers with fibre optic connections."

The strategy goes on to acknowledge that FTTC may be "the first stage", given the cost and length of time provisioning is likely to take, but regards FTTH as an eventual progression from any interim FTTC solution. Open access considerations are acknowledged too:

"Other parts of the country are investing in fibre networks providing open access to any Internet Service Provider (ISP) and standards to provide interoperability are being developed through the Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA)."

And on what funding is available:

"The pilot project will provide at least £5M (partly split with Gloucestershire and Wales) so an initial area can be enabled and the problems, benefits, take-up and usage can be more accurately assessed...To maximise the use of the BDUK funds the focus will be on extending a fibre network infrastructure as far as possible into rural areas, and where the final "mile" service is not easily achievable by the provider (e.g. where the distances involved prevent use of existing copper circuits) to allow local communities or other providers to deliver the fast services to more remote homes and businesses."

The important role of local communities and the [JFDI ethic](#) is recognised too:

"This may require a separate funding stream to match fund a community's own investment in this local loop unbundling, and a community may partner with an alternative provider to deliver the service. The success of this approach would depend on the involvement of communities, possibly through Parish Councils and the parish plan process. In some rural areas the communities have worked together with local landowners and farmers to lay ducting through fields, rather than roads, and have been able to lay fibre at less than 20%

of normal costs. A rule of thumb for cost of delivering a fibre optic connection in this situation is between £1,000 and £2,500 per premises/home, but other technologies can provide a fast service at a lower initial cost. There is also scope through the planning system for ensuring that any major development in a rural area, including wind turbines or anaerobic digesters, include the provision of a fibre connection for the local community."

Other technologies mentioned include [Allpay's](#) and [Airband's](#) wireless broadband services. Allpay's service was recently featured on the BBC's [Midlands Today](#) programme; I wonder if the [LLU analysis](#) of Herefordshire I undertook last year might be of some interest or relevance? Thoughts on costs and financing, via a partnership approach, include the following:

"The different technologies that can be used to deliver broadband services each have their own implementation and operational costs, and one that is cheap to implement may be much more expensive to operate over a long period of 25 years. The pilot scheme will be used see what the different telecoms providers can deliver to enable the maximum number of homes with a fast broadband service at minimum cost. Whatever the cost may be, the investment required for a county wide fast broadband service would deter the private sector from investing on its own. However, a 40% take up of the faster service from all homes would generate additional income, and a connection charge could be used to contribute to initial costs. In addition to this, higher levels of rental income would be obtained from larger businesses and Herefordshire Public Services, and some of the savings made from maximising technology to deliver services (e.g. tele-healthcare) could also be used to fund the programme. When considered over the long term, such as 25 years, the costs do become more manageable. By tackling work in stages (e.g. by simply taking fibre to a community in the first instance) there may be scope for spreading costs while delivering early benefits for people who are keen to take the service or who need it."

The importance of community involvement is stressed again here, this time in the context of community investment (at a fixed cost over a fixed period) potentially being used to leverage loan funding. All in all, an interesting read - and far more informative than the "blank sheet of paper" referred to at the [NextGen10 conference](#). The next step for Herefordshire is the completion of the tender for the pilot, to secure a commercial partner (or partners?) via a competitive exercise. This is currently still in development, but the intention that delivery of the pilot infrastructure improvements should commence in Autumn 2011, so they'll need to go to market very soon to meet this deadline?

It'll be interesting to see what strategies are developed by the other three pilot areas. Barry Forde's trilogy of posts on the [Broadband Cumbria](#) website (on the importance and practicalities of [FTTP vs FTTC](#), followed by a [design methodology](#) for the Eden Valley and finally a possible [funding and service model](#)) is also well worth reading. I attended Herefordshire's second [Broadband Summit](#) last week, so more to follow in another post, once I've managed to decipher my notes.