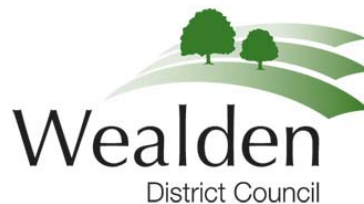


**Wealden Local Strategic Partnership  
and  
Wealden District Council**

**Wealden's rural broadband projects:  
a case study to inform project start-ups**



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## Summary

This case study is for Town or Parish Councils or other community groups planning to organise a broadband infrastructure delivery project in their area. It sets out experience gained in Wealden District Council and Wealden Local Strategic Partnership's work towards publicly-funded broadband delivery projects in three rural locations in the District.

It highlights a range of sources that can be useful in understanding and promoting the development of next generation/high speed broadband and in writing funding applications. This includes running demand registration surveys.

It outlines the current funding landscape, examples of projects that have used different funding mechanisms and the relationship between the large county/national government next generation rollouts and the Rural Community Broadband Fund launched to enable some of the hardest to reach communities in rural areas to upgrade high speed internet access in the next two or three years. The case study describes the interests of each of the key players in this field.

Delivering a broadband infrastructure delivery project will be highly rewarding, but is a very challenging process. This case study points to a number of key requirements of such a project:

- Understanding what your community needs/wants
- Getting the specification right
- Project management
- Bringing adjacent communities on board at an early stage
- Working out potential pitfalls in advance
- The importance of good communications

To find out more, please visit Wealden Local Strategic Partnership's [Better Broadband webpage](#).

## List of Acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| BDUK  | Broadband Delivery United Kingdom                  |
| CLG   | Department for Communities and Local Government    |
| DCMS  | Department for Culture, Media and Sport            |
| Defra | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| ESCC  | East Sussex County Council                         |
| EU    | European Union                                     |
| FTTC  | Fibre to the Cabinet                               |
| ITT   | Invitation to Tender                               |
| LSOA  | Lower Layer Super Output Area                      |
| LSP   | Local Strategic Partnership                        |
| Mbps  | Megabits per second                                |
| NG    | Next Generation                                    |
| RBP   | Rural Broadband Partnership                        |
| RCBF  | Rural Community Broadband Fund                     |
| RDPE  | Rural Development Fund for England                 |
| SEEDA | South East England Development Agency              |
| T/PC  | Town and/or Parish Council                         |
| WDC   | Wealden District Council                           |

## Background

The Wealden Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Wealden District Council (WDC) recognised the importance of improving broadband in the District, and been lobbying for action for several years. It was identified as a key priority of the Wealden Sustainable Community Strategy since 2007 given its potential to support economic activity and overall quality of life. Both the WDC Corporate Plan and Local Development Core Strategy documents highlight the need for expansion of high speed broadband networks. In March 2010, the LSP responded to the Government's Next Generation Fund consultation detailing the District's needs and concerns.

The LSP Chair and WDC officers were advised of local interest in applying for South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) Rural Development Fund for England (RDPE)-funded broadband projects in Spring 2010. Isfield Parish Council had submitted an application and Upper Dicker residents were discussing the possibility (both located in Wealden district). This led to the rapid development of a Wealden LSP expression of interest in funding for broadband infrastructure federating the emerging projects in those two areas plus the villages to the west of Heathfield. SEEDA approved the application and awarded the Council £140,000 funding in January 2011 which was most enthusiastically welcomed.

However, the three broadband projects facilitated by Wealden's LSP and District Council for the three local communities consumed very large, and in the main, unforeseen amounts of officer and councillor time and energy. This case study report aims to articulate the Wealden experience and identify further issues applicants could usefully consider. Our aim is to offer constructive information to potential future applicants for funding or project delivery teams to help them take positive steps towards the goals, avoid pitfalls and get through the necessary work efficiently. We suggest options for improving funding applications/plans/tender documentation etc. Overall, we hope that it outlines a route to achieving successful delivery of improved broadband where it is needed.

Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and BDUK (Broadband Delivery UK) have since announced a £20m fund to support the delivery of broadband projects in 'the last 10%' - i.e. the areas of the country where providing broadband is least economically viable. Details of this fund are available from <http://rdpenetwork.defra.gov.uk/funding-sources/rural-community-broadband-fund>, and that page also provides links to guides on rural community broadband from Defra and BDUK. These are referred to in this document as the *RCBF Applicants' Handbook* and *RCBF Guidance and notes*. Expressions of Interest for the first round of funding must be submitted by 31 January 2012, but a further round is provisionally expected in April/May 2012.

## Broadband Technology

It is important to understand there is a twin-track approach to broadband:

- Basic broadband, mainly delivered through copper phone lines using ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) technology
- 'Next Generation' or 'Superfast' broadband

There is no strict definition of which is which, and it is also likely to change as technology advances. However for Defra and BDUK's Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF), Next Generation has been defined as speeds of 24 Megabits per second (Mbps) or greater (these are currently available to around 58% of UK premises).

Basic broadband is available across East Sussex, except to properties connected to the telephone exchange serving Isfield and most of Little Horsted, who can only get internet through their phone line using dial-up. However, basic broadband services suffer from degradation of the signal speed as the line distance from the exchange increases. Although line distance is not the only factor, it is the main issue causing received broadband download speeds to decline quite sharply between two and three kilometres from the exchange (in terms of length of copper line). Slow speeds are

achievable at line distances greater than 3 km, but the most remote properties are unable to get a signal at all (as was the case for a major tourist attraction in Wealden, Michelham Priory in Upper Dicker).

The geography of broadband does not match administrative geography; any one parish may be served by more than one cabinet, and in many cases, more than one exchange. Likewise, a given cabinet may serve people from more than one parish. In a different way, the same applies to other broadband technologies. Samknows.com is a very informative website, with details of services offered through each exchange and a facility to roughly map the coverage of each exchange: [www.samknows.com/broadband/exchange\\_mapping](http://www.samknows.com/broadband/exchange_mapping). In rural areas, after entering address details, you may need to zoom out until the 'house icons' appear on the map, and click on these to give the option to 'show exchange coverage'.

For some time, business customers have been able to order a dedicated ethernet line to achieve high download and upload speeds. Clearly this comes at a high cost, which is worth paying for certain types or larger sizes of business.

A range of technologies are used by smaller numbers of customers to receive broadband. These include mobile, wireless and satellite, offering basic and/or next generation broadband. Technological improvements in these fields are yielding higher speeds, higher quality and falling prices.

A major issue for the majority of technologies is the cost of 'backhaul', i.e. getting the high speed broadband into your community from the points where there is a connection to 'the internet', as these are widely-spaced in rural areas. In Wealden, it may be that the work funded by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and BDUK will help to bring the backhaul costs down for a wider rural area than just that fully connected to high speed/Next Generation (NG) broadband.

There are pros and cons to all the different technologies and it is important to understand how they tally with your objectives.

- Do you want all premises in the area to access the service?
- Speed, stability and monthly download limits are among the key attributes of the actual broadband signal – which are most important?
- How much will the solution cost to install?
- What subscription costs are end users willing and/or able to pay?
- Is a cheap and cheerful basic service essential?

These questions will be key in determining which technology is most appropriate. It is perfectly reasonable to adjust the scoring of your procurement exercise to reward those companies that offer the attributes your community values most highly. However, you will need to ensure that the scoring system does not exclude particular technologies.

Useful explanations of these concepts are available on Wikipedia, and in the Government's original Next Generation Broadband consultation document at:

[www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/proposals-for-a-next-generation-fund?cat=open](http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/proposals-for-a-next-generation-fund?cat=open) and  
[www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/migrated-consultations/consultation%20on%20proposals%20for%20a%20next%20generation%20fund.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/migrated-consultations/consultation%20on%20proposals%20for%20a%20next%20generation%20fund.pdf)

Ofcom, the industry regulator, also produces useful reports that will help with understanding of the impact of technology, geographic location/rurality, time of day, etc. on UK fixed-line broadband performance and speed:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/telecoms-research/broadband-speeds/?a=0>

## Sources of Supporting Evidence

There is a clear market failure with regard to delivery of broadband to a level of 2 Mb/s in many parts of rural Wealden. The aims of projects to bring decent broadband to 'not spots' and 'nearly not spots' in rural areas are valid and well-supported.

High speed broadband is already considered a daily essential for many people. As internet content becomes increasingly 'bandwidth hungry', the lack of access to Next Generation broadband will become an increasing and more debilitating disadvantage.

The first page of the RCBF 'Applicants Handbook' sets out on the first page the kinds of internet functions that currently require NG broadband speeds. Wealden LSP is particularly concerned about young people, businesses and health. We are also concerned that existing infrastructure weaknesses that can be partially addressed through internet and communications technology, will instead be compounded without NG access. We expect high speed broadband to provide new channels for people with disabilities to access services. There are also important implications for Wealden's Local Development Framework. It is essential to the prosperity and development of the area that Next Generation broadband becomes universally available.

### ***Demand registration, aggregation and stimulation***

This is the most important thing that communities can do, regardless of whether they plan to apply for funding for broadband or not. The East Sussex countywide broadband plan will benefit greatly from demand data being collected as would a commercial or publicly-funded project. ESCC is developing a demand registration webpage for individuals and businesses, which will be published very soon and will be accessible from: [www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/broadband/default.htm](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/broadband/default.htm). They have invited local communities to take advantage of the tools and experience of the '[Rural Broadband Partnership](#)' (RBP) in order to show support for their work and to raise awareness of the project. Local communities are encouraged to check what others are doing in their area or propose a new project through: [www.ruralbroadband.com/for-communities](http://www.ruralbroadband.com/for-communities).

For communities planning a bid to the RCBF, this website is another source of advice on putting a project together, the RBP website includes two examples of a broadband survey and tips for designing your own. Applicants for funding will need to conduct and analyse their own questionnaires. The Wealden LSP ran an online NG broadband demand survey during 2011, the text of which can be shared locally. The survey has now been closed in order to contribute to the countywide approach by directing local communities to the RBP/ESCC websites.

Demand stimulation is not just about generating an indication of demand, but informing, ideally training, people in how to take advantage of high speed services once they have them.

The greatest levels of interest may well be from those who experience the poorest current broadband service.

### ***Speed and service data and maps***

You can back up your application by reference to the following data on broadband provision: SEEDA's 2008 survey of broadband speeds presents maps under Report files/Broadband Speed Survey Main Report on the following webpage.

[www.seeda.org.uk/Global\\_Competitiveness/Business/Broadband/Next%20Generation\\_Broadband/](http://www.seeda.org.uk/Global_Competitiveness/Business/Broadband/Next%20Generation_Broadband/)

The report does not seem to include a key to the colour-coding on the maps, which can be found separately at the bottom of the page linked to above.

As described in the RCBF [Guidance and notes](#), detailed information on the prospects for gaining Next Generation Broadband in each Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) throughout the country can be found in the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG)/Analysys Mason report [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/assessmentngafinalreport](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/assessmentngafinalreport). This resource provides detailed data tables, and a useful report on Next Generation Access which maps the

national picture. Wealden District Council has mapped this information across the District and can be contacted for a copy, but you may benefit from accessing the original full data series and accompanying explanations. As noted, the assessments use census geography, LSOAs, a map of which is available on the ESCC data observatory East Sussex in Figures (ESiF): [www.eastsussexinfigures.org.uk/nesstar/temp/EGMS20080314125306351/Boundary+map+of+Wealden+soa.pdf](http://www.eastsussexinfigures.org.uk/nesstar/temp/EGMS20080314125306351/Boundary+map+of+Wealden+soa.pdf).

If you are unsure of the boundaries of these LSOAs, they are individually overlaid with Ordnance Survey maps at: [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/) (although not available for download).

British Telecom Openreach, to date the only NG provider with widespread domestic fibre plans in the Wealden area, periodically publishes its rollout plans at:

[www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/](http://www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/).

It is important to note, however, that these maps and spreadsheets only give information to 'Exchange' level. Each exchange serves up to a few dozen cabinets, but only some of these cabinets will be upgraded to NG, Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC), capabilities. In other words, you can only tell whether your local telephone cabinets are *definitely not* planned to be included within the short-term rollout programme. If your exchange is listed on the 'Coming Soon' or 'Future exchanges' spreadsheets, you still cannot be sure whether or not your individual cabinet(s) will be included in the rollouts. Many such cabinets will be connected; it depends on distance from the exchange and projected demand. Furthermore, connecting remaining cabinets to an exchange already providing fibre broadband would usually have a lower unit cost than upgrading an exchange and all its cabinets. Therefore, it is anticipated that these cabinets will be included in the BDUK/ESCC-funded rollout, rather than needing other funding sources like the RCBF.

With British Telecom, TalkTalk are planning to expand their high speed product into parts of the Wealden area. However, Wealden District Council is not currently aware of plans to expand any other fibre network in the District.

As noted above, Samknows.com gives details of services offered through each exchange at [www.samknows.com/broadband/exchange\\_search](http://www.samknows.com/broadband/exchange_search) and a facility to roughly map the coverage of each exchange. You can also enter a specific phone number or post code on the 'broadband checker' part of the website and on the results page, click the 'BT 21CN' tab to the left of the information box for details of when up to 24 Mb basic broadband may be made available through your exchange. Speeds on these services are still greatly influenced by copper line distance from the exchange.

## **Funding Sources and Relationships between them**

### ***Government funding***

BDUK is working with East Sussex and other County Councils to deliver NG broadband. £10.64 million has been provisionally allocated to the county from the Government's £530 million national pot. In East Sussex, this will be match-funded, subject to Cabinet approval, by ESCC, and then again by the industry (commercial partners must provide at least £21.28 million). In order to draw down the BDUK allocation, the county council is writing a Local Broadband Plan, which BDUK must approve. This plan will set out the areas of the county where the BDUK money will be invested. This must reach at least 90% of premises.

As noted in the Rural Community Broadband Fund '*Applicants' Handbook*', the RDPE funding through the RCBF cannot be used in areas where BDUK/ESCC's Local Broadband Plan will be investing. Consequently, a key first step will be to contact the county broadband lead. In East Sussex, email [broadband@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:broadband@eastsussex.gov.uk). At the time of writing, the East Sussex Broadband Plan is not yet finalised, so it may be difficult to be sure whether your community would be covered by the plan by the initial January 2012 deadline, although the County Council does have an outline indication of where it expects these areas might be. It should be noted that these can be different depending on which telecommunications supplier is being engaged in discussion.

The RCBF is the main source of funding for areas not covered by their Local Broadband Plan, possibly the only national fund. LEADER funding will not be available for broadband infrastructure development.

In preparing any funding application, it is obviously important to consider the aims of the fund from which money will be drawn down. For example, the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) "aims to improve competitiveness in the agriculture and forestry sector; safeguard and enhance the rural environment; foster competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities." As noted in the 'How do I complete the EoI form? Section of the *RCBF Applicants' Handbook*, it will be important to demonstrate business and social (including domestic) benefits to your project. These points will be strengthened by cross-referencing with the internet functions known to require NG broadband, such as those given in the first section of the *Handbook*. At the same time, if there is a business park or cluster of business units in your area that would be attractive to 'high demand' sectors which are currently absent, were it not for the existing broadband speeds, the owner of such sites may be able to demonstrate that there has been initial interest from companies that have asked for details of broadband speeds. Equally, there may be people working locally who currently have to go elsewhere to perform the 'upload/download heavy' parts of their job.

### ***Other external sources of funding***

The Rural Broadband Partnership website includes a page on potential funding sources: [www.ruralbroadband.com/for-communities/finance-funding/funding-sources](http://www.ruralbroadband.com/for-communities/finance-funding/funding-sources), although caution has been expressed about the applicability of some of the suggestions (notably the National Lottery). The RCBF will contribute up to 50% of the total cost of your broadband project, and applicants will need to raise the rest from private sources. The named funds currently listed on the webpage above cannot be used as match funding for an RCBF application, because public money (including parish precepts) cannot be used for this purpose. However, they could be approached independently as stand-alone sources of public funding and some of the fundraising ideas at the top of the page would be valid, e.g. village fete, sponsorship. This is covered in the *RCBF Applicants' Handbook*.

### ***Other business models/self-supporting communities***

The RCBF *Guidance and notes* start with an explanation of the business models that can be used. These illustrate ways of improving your community's broadband infrastructure that do not involve public money. The 'build and benefit' model essentially involves the community doing the non-technological legwork (digging trenches, arranging wayleaves) to reduce the cost to the supplier, an approach taken by Alston Moor in Cumbria and Ashby de la Launde in Lincolnshire. One community that moved early to grasp the NG nettle itself was Lyddington in Rutland, where a small number of local people clubbed together to pay the £37,000 needed to deliver FTTC to the village: [www.onlincolnshire.org/case-studies?case=28](http://www.onlincolnshire.org/case-studies?case=28).

## **Legal and Procurement Issues**

Defra's handbook indicates that they will assist applicants with State Aid and procurement issues during the 'full application' stage. It will be very important that organisations proceeding to the full application stage seek this advice as soon as possible. It is hoped that a facility for entering into a procurement partnership will be put in place in 2012. There is specific European Community guidance that applies to broadband projects and national legislation on the use of public funds. In addition, many organisations that might bid for funding, such as parish councils, will have their own procurement rules with which they have to comply. Failure to follow all three sets of legislation and/or rules carries significant financial risk and the possibility that the project could be stopped even after the infrastructure has been delivered.

## **State Aid**

State Aid rules are designed to prevent public money distorting the market by backing particular companies rather than their competitors. The normal business model would be for a company to invest in the infrastructure and sell a service to residents / users. In the 'partnership' and 'concession' models (see BDUK guidance) the community is using public money to pay some or all of the infrastructure investment costs but the supplier still owns the infrastructure. We found it hard explain to the community why this was problematic. Those members of the community that run businesses may well be able to imagine how they would react if a competitor were to be awarded public money in this way. For others, a way to explain it needs to be found. For example, imagine the village has only one shop, which sells sweets, bread and milk. Several companies are interested in opening a completely new shop in their village to sell a range of quality meat, vegetables and groceries, but have all concluded that the cost of converting a suitable building into a shop would be prohibitive. If the village then applied for a Government grant to convert and fit out the building and awarded that to one of the companies, you can see why competitors might complain, even if they accepted that the means of choosing between the different companies was fair. This would be especially true if it also enabled the company in question to gain a competitive advantage over a wider area than just the village in question. This is not directly analogous, it just gives a flavour of the explanation for State Aid rules. It is also an oversimplification of a very complex area of law – for the Government's beginners' guide, view:

[www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/consumer-issues/docs/10-951-state-aid-beginners-guide](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/consumer-issues/docs/10-951-state-aid-beginners-guide).

## **Procurement**

The procurement of goods and services as technically complex as broadband is something of a legal minefield. The possibility of a partnership arrangement for the procurement exercises that relate to the RCBF is being investigated. Such an approach would be highly recommendable if it proves possible. Defra and the ESCC Broadband Lead should be contacted early in your consideration of the procurement element of the project. In the absence of a partnership procurement facility, it may well be advisable to plan to contract a procurement consultancy, but you should not leave everything to them.

In any case, you should establish the priorities for your community, e.g. speed, percentage coverage, end-user subscription rate, monthly download limits/excess penalties, attractive business packages. If running your own procurement exercise, you would set the scoring to reward companies that best meet those priorities. However, you will need to ensure that the scoring system does not exclude particular technologies. Considerable focus is needed to produce a scoring mechanism that fairly compares different methods of delivering the desired result (high speed broadband). To construct a reasonable specification, you need to understand what is available at present and what it is practical to expect the industry to deliver within your budget.

Where State Aid rules are applicable, the European Commission has a 'Broadband Guidelines' document available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:235:0007:0025:EN:PDF>. This sets out the tests it would make to determine whether State Aid payments made to a contractor are legal. The document is set to be updated in 2012, and will need to be used in the drafting of any Invitation to Tender (ITT).

If you are procuring independently, once you have decided on your specification and evaluation mechanism, you have to stick to it. Companies may respond with suggestions of how they can deliver a solution to meet your needs but would require flexibility in the conditions you have published. This is not allowed – companies need to adjust their bids to fit your criteria.

The ITT should also set out all contract conditions and the means by which you will tie the contractor to the specification they submit. You may ask bidders to provide reliable evidence in support of their proposal, and where necessary challenge them with reliable but conflicting published evidence. Ofcom, the industry regulator, publishes reports on UK broadband speeds, at:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/telecoms-research/broadband-speeds/?a=0>.

These contain useful evidence for your procurement, notably the sections on variation in speeds

with geographic location and with technology. At the time of writing, the [July 2011 report](#) is the most up-to-date. However, it is hard to find reliable sources of evidence that cover every possible technology, especially as the technologies are progressing so rapidly.

There is a fine balance between an ITT that, on the one hand, addresses your needs, requires companies to provide evidence to support their offer and effectively commits the winning bidder to delivery, and on the other, is not so arduous to complete or so restrictive or punitive that few companies tender. The partnership approach to procurement will hopefully provide a suitable means of striking the right balance.

Procurement rules mean that residents will find out very little about the tenders companies make. In particular, there will be an information 'black hole' during the period over which the evaluation is made when it will not be possible to release any news beyond the confines of the panel chosen to assess bids. Evaluating these bids may take a few weeks, so this can be a frustrating time for residents. You will be able to discuss the process publicly – dates, the nature/stages of the assessment, etc., but not the content. All bids will be commercially confidential – even the names of the bidders must be kept confidential – and this applies permanently to all but the successful bidder (which will still have to be the source of most information that is publicised). Consequently, it will be important to try to ensure that local expectations are not raised beyond this level.

The public procurement process itself, particularly around such a technically complicated product, will be difficult and complex. The great risks that flow from making a mistake will mean that outsourcing the procurement, if possible, to a local partnership, will be the preferred option for the majority of public-funded projects. Whether or not this approach is taken Defra and ESCC's advice will be critical, and RCBF applicants will need to follow the rules diligently and ensure they obtain independent legal advice.

## **Project Management**

These broadband projects need a competent project manager from the application stage, through procurement, into contract delivery and service maintenance.

There are a great many elements in each of these stages of the project. Some of these will require physical presence on site (e.g. signing off contract delivery milestones), some may be achievable remotely. It is possible that different individuals could project manage different stages of the project, but a coherent hand-over would be essential.

The role of project manager requires a specific skills set and the funding bodies are likely to require confirmation that the person involved has these.

The project manager will need to be backed by a team of people able to cover each individual element of the project. The project will require a lot of time, energy and money even before a funding offer is made – all of which would be ineligible for RCBF funding. As different organisations may be involved, the relationships and responsibilities of each will need to be clearly agreed in advance. This may take the form of a Project Initiation Document (PID) and will need to cover finance, legal responsibility (a single accountable body will probably be necessary) and workstreams.

You may find that there is limited interest in the early stages, but understandably, success in gaining funding brings many more interested parties out of the woodwork. Involving new people at that stage may well be beneficial, especially if they bring new skills to the table or if your project includes a 'build and benefit' element. Equally, you may find it helpful to have a public document that explains the understanding that you have gathered and decisions you have made, as a transparent 'audit trail' of the process.

## **Interested Parties**

One of the things any broadband project will quickly find out is the number and range of parties interested in their project. There will be widely differing levels of technical expertise and / or understanding, not just in respect of broadband and communications technology, but also in other aspects such as procurement and project management. The trick is to try to harness them constructively at a very early stage. While almost all will agree on the need and urgency for NG access, there will be competing interests in terms of how it is delivered. Managing those competing interests will be an important role of the project sponsors. This may best be agreed early on by a well-informed and representative audience. Ultimately though, it may come down to community leaders exercising and justifying their judgement on what is best for the area.

One of the interested parties in the Wealden projects refers to the 'jam tomorrow syndrome'. Your project does not exist in isolation, and local people will be aware of developments in broadband solutions nearby and nationally. His point is that it is all too easy to lose focus on a solution that is achievable in a relatively short space of time in the face of promises of something better in the future. All improved broadband technologies need significant investment in rural areas. If you get what looks like a reasonable chance of winning funding for a project that meets your needs, find out as much as possible about other options, but don't assume that they will be delivered if they lack detail like locations and timing. On the other hand, beneficiaries of public funding for projects agreed in 2012 will be ineligible for further public funding for some time (including the ESCC/BDUK funding). Consequently, the long-term potential of a separate project should be carefully considered. It will also be important to try to manage the expectations that are likely to be generated by publicity around broadband rollout programmes. Anticipation is key, so a communications plan is also a vital tool in the armoury. This is addressed in a later section.

### ***The industry***

The objective of achieving universal broadband coverage and NG access for at least 90% of the population takes the public sector into a sphere normally occupied only by telecommunications companies. Each company has its own commercial plans for maintenance and expansion of its network. The decisions you make might negatively affect them, so you need to have reasonable evidence to show that your decision-making has been lawful and fair.

Clearly, each company will be convinced of the benefits of the technology/service they offer. You will need them to provide reliable evidence of their case, and where necessary challenge them with reliable but conflicting published evidence. As well as testing claims about the advantages of their product, you must satisfy yourself that companies are financially sound and have the technical capability to deliver the project.

### ***European Union law and European Union funding bodies***

European Union (EU) law, in which the UK Government has been an influential party, needs to be followed. This particularly applies to State Aid regulations and the European Commission Broadband Guidelines, on which advice will be available during the application period for the RCBF.

The RDPE is an EU programme and is part of the Common Agricultural Policy. It is financed jointly by the EU and national government and is the source of the RCBF.

### ***UK Government departments/agencies***

BDUK is an arms-length body linked to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Defra now manage the Rural Development Programme for England.

Both organisations are working together to deliver the Government's aim that:

- by 2015, virtually all communities able to have access to a quality home working experience i.e. to get at least 2 Mbps with the majority able to access more
- by 2020, everyone able to access 30 Mbps capabilities. 50% to access 100 Mbps capability

DCMS and BDUK have been setting the framework through which NG access and the universal service will be achieved and are working with county councils to deliver broadband plans. BDUK provide 25% of the cost of rollout, amounting to over £500 million nationally.

Defra's contribution seeks to use the RDPE funding to bring forward the date on which beneficiary communities achieve NG access, so they can compete with urban areas as locations for high bandwidth businesses rather than being left behind again as the latest wave of broadband technology rolls out.

If you are awarded funding, maintain a dialogue with your contacts in the funding organisation and be open with them (not least because they can stop funding or require funds to be repaid if you do not keep to your contractual agreements and declarations). Funding bodies are an excellent source of advice and may have experience in overcoming problems your project may encounter – they are on your side.

### ***Politicians***

Elected representatives at different tiers of government will be well aware of the demand for broadband in inadequately served parts of the area they represent. They can be a good advocate for your project and may be able to offer new and useful perspectives on issues that arise. The majority of politicians have a feel for the public mood, which can feed in to your work, and they can also advise on, and get involved with the communications element.

Harness the support that local politicians will offer. If broadband is not their speciality, they are likely to know someone locally who can help. If you are not getting the support you need, try another council tier. The most effective support occurs when the tiers work together in a co-ordinated way.

### ***LSP/public bodies/District Council/County Council***

As noted above, the broadband lead at the county council, will be an important person to contact early on as it is vital that locally-led projects dovetail with the county broadband plan.

Capacity for assisting broadband projects will be an issue for all public bodies and overstretched staff resources present a real risk. It is vitally important to be realistic about the volume and level of work involved. This is part of the reason why the Wealden Local Strategic Partnership and the District Council have prepared this case study. For projects in Wealden, WDC can share research already carried out for the three local projects. If needed, we may also be able to give basic assistance to communities to help with the funding application process. Within the Wealden area, it would be helpful to inform us if you are planning a project so that any advice or information provided can be shared with others in the District. The District Council is also supporting ESCC where appropriate in the delivery of the county-wide plan.

### ***Town and Parish authorities***

The impetus for a local broadband project may come from the Town or Parish Council (T/PC), local businesses or from engaged local residents. The project team may work best if each party is represented, especially as there are likely to be relevant skills that can be harnessed within the target community. This will also have the benefit of bringing new faces into contact with community planning processes and opportunities for sharing the additional administrative load.

The T/PC will have existing relationships and channels of communication with residents, which will play an important part throughout the process. Given that, as mentioned above, communications

networks do not match administrative geography, it may well be necessary and beneficial to work with one or more neighbouring T/PCs, possibly even across district or county borders. As noted above, a formal agreement on legal, financial and operational responsibilities will be needed, whoever is involved in the project.

Town Councils should be aware that the need to improve broadband is not an exclusively rural issue. Copper phone lines may be threaded a long way up and down through residential areas before reaching their furthest points. In addition, poorer areas and those with high proportions of elderly people usually have lower demand. Consequently, providers may not invest because the relatively low revenue means long pay-back times while, as in rural areas, the capital costs can still be high. Among Wealden's market towns, extensive parts of Crowborough and two outer LSOAs in both Hailsham and Uckfield appear to be in the 'last 10%', according to the CLG/Analysys Mason report (available from [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/assessmentngafinalreport](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/assessmentngafinalreport)). This despite the fact that Uckfield was the first place in East Sussex, outside Brighton, to get FTTC.

### ***Local residents and businesses***

It may be that local people or businesses lead the community broadband project – this applied in two of the three Wealden broadband projects. If this is the case, the points made in the Town and Parish Councils section will also apply. In any case, local residents and businesses may include people with genuine expertise in telecommunications technology, funding applications, project management or procurement.

One of the first steps in a broadband project will be to involve local residents and businesses in the demand registration element of your project. You are unlikely to get a competitively-priced service installed unless you can demonstrate demand. Furthermore, once a solution has been delivered, the more it is actually used, and the more likely it is that competitive pressure will bring price control and service improvements. This can be boosted by organising training or skills sharing workshops.

In many areas, there are premises where broadband is frustratingly slow even for general use. This does not necessarily mean they need NG broadband or would pay for it if it were installed. There is a need to focus on demand for internet services that require high speed connections, as outlined in the RCBF 'Applicants' Handbook'. Business premises are more likely to require NG access because of the greater use of uploading.

You may find that the greatest interest in the project will be from those with the worst broadband currently. It will be important to take account of this when deciding on priorities and the corresponding technologies to reward through tender evaluation. Some forms of NG broadband provision will still not deliver NG speeds to relatively remote properties, even though speeds should still be greatly increased. It will be important to judge carefully how to balance the often disproportionate cost of reaching every property with the need to avoid perpetuating digital exclusion.

Clearly, communicating with local people is important. An issue with the demand registration/aggregation exercise is that you may raise expectations which are a long way off being met – possibly several years if your funding application is unsuccessful. Even successful funding applications will take a significant period of time to deliver a product which people need now. Good communications and management of expectation are fundamentally important.

### ***Neighbours (at any geographical level)***

Be prepared for interest from neighbouring areas. They may wish to join in with your project or potentially be disappointed that you have a project and they don't (especially if you are successful in raising funds). These aspects may be mitigated to some extent if you take the trouble to communicate openly with neighbouring councils/authorities/villages in advance. There may be unexpected synergies to be gained from working together.

## ***The media***

Elements of your community are likely to have an existing relationship with the media, which should be built on. The media are likely to be interested in success stories and can be a useful additional means of reaching out to parts of your community as well as promoting the project generally. Equally, it is likely that there will be problems from time to time, and it will be important to have an agreed communications protocol among the interested parties in order to minimise if not entirely avoid unhelpful publicity.

It is generally wise to get key players from the business and residential community, including local councillors, on board before approaching the media. Ideally, get suitable quotes together and contact details so that journalists can add a personal angle to a story, rather than find they have contacted their own local network possibly including people who are not directly involved with the project and who may provide inaccurate or out of date information.

Funding bodies will have expectations about the way they are recognised in media releases and published materials you generate, so anticipate this and discuss your media plans with them.

## **Communications and Managing Expectation**

As indicated above, communications with all interested parties will be a key element of your project. At the same time, you may find yourselves limited in what you can say, either by the rules of public procurement and commercial confidentiality, or because there will be sensitive negotiations at various stages of the project. Equally, you may come up against unforeseen difficulties along the way, and it may be unhelpful to publicise them until they are resolved.

A communications plan and protocol should be agreed, both for dealing with the media and publicity aimed at the interested parties. This will probably involve agreeing joint communications if there are a range of organisations on the project team. Equally, it will be beneficial to have a means for people to find the latest information even in periods where there is 'no news' for a while, e.g. a page on the T/PC website(s).

Your communications need to make it clear that:

- there are no guarantees of success
- even successful projects will take at least a year or two from inception to going live
- different people within the community will have different, and possibly conflicting, needs; as a result the project team will have to make decisions that do not please everybody
- the goal is to improve broadband in the community and local people should try to share in that positive vision even if the outcome is not exactly as they would have chosen
- communications should be clear and simple - this may require considerable effort given the technical nature of the project. It may help to identify 'translators' – people who can communicate with the technical experts and interpret the complex information for more general consumption.

## **Disclaimer**

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