Coleorton Broadband Update August 2016

Sandra Dillon
webmaster@coleorton.org.uk

(The content of this update reflects my understanding of the current situation and my opinions which are not necessarily those of Coleorton Parish Council)

Current Situation

During 2014 and 2015 BT upgraded the BT cabinets that serve premises within Coleorton parish. This was done under the first phase of the Superfast Leicestershire programme contracted out to BT / Openreach, part of Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) project, funded locally by Leicestershire County Council, NW Leicestershire District Council, various EU and government funding programmes. Depending on location these cabinets are connected to one of 3 exchanges:
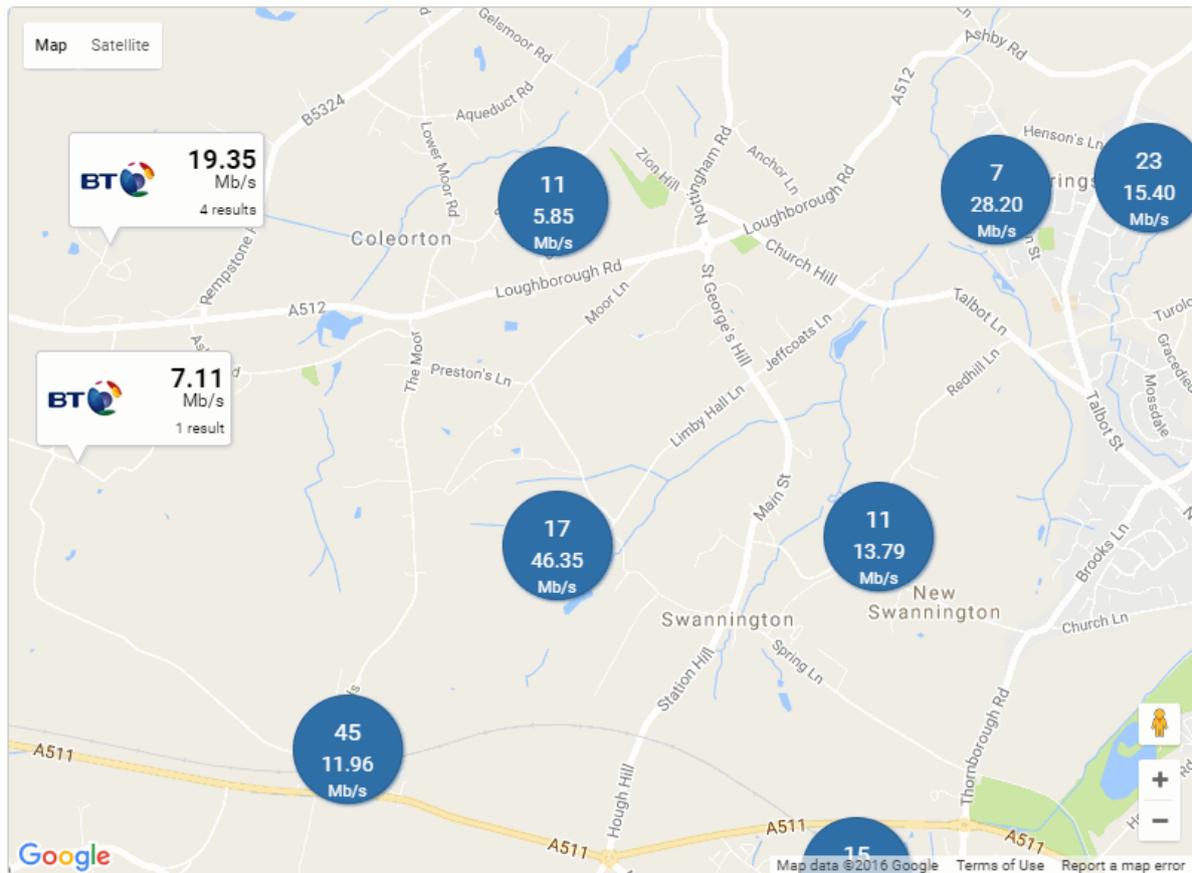
- Ashby
- Coalville
- Osgathorpe

The upgrade consisted of adding new cabinets to house the upgraded circuitry and installing new fibre cable between the exchanges and new cabinets. The cables connecting the cabinets to individual premises are unchanged – i.e. still copper. This is termed FTTC – Fibre to the Cabinet.

Read more about the existing Contracts and proposals from Superfast Leicestershire in this presentation given to Stakeholder Forum which I attended last month.
http://www.coleorton.org.uk/Superfast Leicestershire Stakeholder Presentation 20160720.pdf

All premises within Coleorton parish should now be able to be upgraded to receive faster broadband via the new fibre-linked cabinets. You need to contact your current service provider or another, e.g. BT, ENTAnet, TalkTalk, and sign up for the new fibre service.

The speed you will get depends on the distance from your house to the cabinet. There is a cabinet outside the Kings Arms, so if you are located near there - The Moor or Forester Close, say - you'll be able to get 20-30Mbps, maybe more. People on Zion Hill in Peggs Green are connected via a cabinet on Rempstone Road/Top Road junction and will only be able to get 8-10Mbps – not really Superfast but better than before. But just to remind you, you must sign up for a new contract, and have a new router/hub to benefit from the fibre.

Results based on tests in last 6 months

This map is taken from
www.broadbandspeedchecker.co.uk/broadband_speed_in_my_area_v2.aspx

You can go on-line and check in more detail what speeds your neighbours are getting and what ISPs they are using (e.g. BT, TalkTalk).

The speeds are collected from people doing a speed check on the Broadband Speedchecker site – so isn't necessarily representative. It maybe shows just people who are interested in technology or those who have problems. It does show – as expected - that speeds achieved are related to proximity to cabinets. For example, around the Moorlands, close to the cabinet by the Kings Arms, speeds are higher than Zion Hill which is connected to a cabinet on Rempstone Road/Top Road junction quite a distance away.

The definition of Superfast is vague. Naturally our expectations are increasing as time goes by and we start to use the internet for more applications – streaming TV, radio, video, phones etc as well as email and web browsing. The Government's BDUK website quotes 2Mbps as Basic broadband and 24Mbps as Superfast. Clearly quite a number of houses within Coleorton are not going to achieve superfast even with the fibre-enabled cabinets.

If you want to see the spread of download speeds across the nation, by technology and service providers take a look at the ThinkBroadband's Speed Test Results for June 2016: http://www.thinkbroadband.com/news/7463-broadband-speed-test-results-for-june-2016.html

The Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme

Coleorton parish was included in Contract 1 of the Superfast Leicestershire programme which aimed to get everyone on at least 2Mbps. Subsequently further areas were highlighted and are currently being connected in Contract 2. After this phase LCC expects that there will be less than 4% of premises unable to get Superfast Broadband – at least 2Mbps. LCC are working with a number of companies and service providers to offer broadband via alternative technologies – e.g. wireless, satellite.

There is a voucher scheme to install alternative broadband technology if the current suppliers can't deliver. Alternative technology includes wireless and satellite. More details from:

http://www.superfastleicestershire.org.uk/register-for-notifications/the-final-4/better-broadband-subsidy-scheme/

This phase will be aimed at premises not covered by Contracts 1 and 2 so is probably irrelevant to Coleorton parish. However, there may be premises in the parish unable to get decent broadband via BT (or Virgin cable).

If you still can't get 2Mbps and you have contacted suppliers (BT, Virgin) and have been told you can't get 2Mbps even with a fibre enabled package, then give it a go. The website above tells you how to go about claiming your voucher. Please also let the Parish Council know so they can monitor broadband coverage of the parish and maybe add some weight to the voucher applications if there are several people in this situation.

There is definitely a lack of interest in the issues of distance from cabinets. At the Stakeholders Forum meeting the representative from Openreach was enthusiastic about the amount of investment and research his company (part of BT) is putting into improved fibre technology. However, when I suggested that the need was really in getting faster speeds over existing copper or cheaper fibre to the premises I got a stony response (and at this point the meeting dissolved into chaos with many of the attendees representing rural parishes giving the Openreach guy a really hard time over delays in implementation of Contract 2 and problems with poor cabling).

The Future

The upgrades we have received so far are part of the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) project initiated in 2013. Read it here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/broadband-delivery-uk

It's worth noting these main aims of the project to which the government is committed:

"The Government's aim is to provide superfast broadband (speeds of 24Mbps or more) for at least 95% of UK premises and universal access to basic broadband (speeds of at least 2Mbps). "

and

- "provide superfast broadband coverage to 90% of the UK by early 2016 and 95% by December 2017
- provide access to basic broadband (2Mbps) for all from December 2015"

So "Superfast" is considered to be 24Mbps. Quite a few of us are a long way from that and with no plans in place from suppliers or the government to improve things.

The Local Government Association, many of whose members have contributed to the "Superfast" schemes, says in a press release last month *"The Government needs to re-affirm its commitment to a national minimum broadband speed across the country to stop hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses falling into a digital twilight zone"*.

Read the press release here:
http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7909406/NEWS

and comments here:
http://www.thinkbroadband.com/news/7477-local-council-body-wants-government-to-reassert-commitment-to-uso.html

On 5 July the government announced The Digital Economy Bill. Read the Bill here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/digital-economy-bill-2016

The Bill covers many aspects of communications including privacy, pornography and security. Part 1 of the Digital Economy Bill concerns access to digital services, including a broadband Universal Service Obligation. The first paragraph of which states it will *"create a new broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) which will set out how government and industry will deliver broadband connectivity. This will ensure everyone has the legal right to request connection to 10Mbps broadband."* The 10Mbps is considered to be a safety net with the assumption that by the end of 2017 95% of premises with be able to get 24Mbps.

How the 10Mbps will be achieved if the infrastructure is not already in place is not clear. It's also a bit concerning that this and other government proposals measure access in terms of homes connected. Small businesses and single professionals in rural and semi-rural areas need superfast broadband too.

The position of Openreach who currently own, install and manage the network infrastructure mostly used by providers of broadband – is a bit unclear at present after Ofcom's recent report. Openreach are part of BT but are legally required to offer services to other providers e.g. TalkTalk. Ofcom want to reduce the ties with BT to open up the market more.