

Digital Connectivity Summary



It was agreed that there it is important to understand, define and to separate:

1. Fixed Installation Broadband
2. Mobile phone reception/roaming WIFI

Issues

General

- Sporadic nature of mobile phone signal in the FoD
- Building structures can affect receipt of
- Fibre availability – even where available is not fast enough
- While Fastershire has made some progress, it is felt that Cheltenham and Gloucestershire have been prioritised
- Service providers such as Open reach are reluctant to talk to end users and are hard to contact

Business reputation

- A lot of the businesses in the Forest of dean are sole traders/micro businesses who need to work mobile
- Faster fibre is essential for the Forest of Dean to compete as a location for business and family life combined
- Lack of mobile signal hinders the reputation of small businesses trying to contact/communicate with customers while travelling around the FoD

Tourism

- Forest of Dean is known as a mobile blackspot, but this is not true for the whole of the Forest of Dean
- Lack of coverage tends to fall where known attractions are – Beechenhurst for example who have WIFI but rarely working – so tourists are unable to 'check-in' reducing opportunities for promotion

Technical Innovation

- The FoD is behind the game already in relation to technical innovation – magic mirrors, holographic sales people etc.
- This prevents us from being able to compete with competitors and other destinations

Location, location, location

- Lack of decent speed broadband is putting off inward investment and businesses relocating to the Forest of Dean – one business built a new office in the FoD and didn't have access to broadband for 18 months
- House buying decisions are being made based on the availability of Fibre

Young people

- Younger generations want to be connected at all times – not encouraging them to stay in/visit the area
- Attending college/university with students from outside the FoD who are 'comparing notes' – Bristol, Cheltenham etc – more appealing to our young people
- If attracting and encouraging young people becomes a key priority of the FEP then putting investment into communications is the way forward

Education

- Education facilities are leaning more and more towards online learning packages and support for teaching – students are expected to complete parts of their courses/qualification/submitted coursework and exams etc.
- Extreme weather – no provision for students to pick up work at home if not in areas
- There is a need for more education for local people/businesses/towns on using technology/social media to promote towns and businesses

Vulnerable people/Emergency Services

- Ambulance crews increasingly more dependent on digital data entry that needs to be uploaded/emailed to hospitals ahead of patient arrival
- Mobile/lone workers are unable to make contact in an emergency situation
- Vulnerable individuals are living in areas where the connectivity required to keep them safe is not available

Actions/Evidence

- Marketing consideration – the whole of the Forest of Dean as a mobile blackspot with slow broadband – how do we correct this perception?
- A need to understand exactly where the 'blackspots' are before addressing the above – can anything be done
- Who are the mobile service providers who are failing in the FoD – some providers are better than others
- A need to understand what the long term plans of network providers/BT are so we are not duplicating effort or lobbying for something that is already planned
- A need to understand the technology of the future – 5 & 6G – we don't want our efforts to be obsolete

Thinking Big

- Reference was made to a project in Hull City. The City was failing until large financial investment into communications was made. It was acknowledged that Hull City owns a telecoms company that made this investment work harder.
- By 2050 our networks will need to support over 50million devices all needing to speak to one another – how will we support this?

- The FoD as a 5G WIFI test Zone? We need to think bigger than that... we need to be at the forefront of technological advances
- The Forest of Dean has the lowest social media take up in the County – why? Is this a direct result of connection issues or due to lack of education and understanding