

Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Fibre Broadband for new build developments
Date of meeting:	12th September 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services, Simon George – Executive Director, Finance and Commercial Services

Strategic impact

Access to fast broadband is a vital component of infrastructure in today's world. It is key to growing a sustainable local economy, vital for education and home working and an increasingly central part of community cohesion and resilience, particularly in rural areas like Norfolk.

The availability, reliability and speed of broadband provision is now a key consideration for most house buyers as well as tourists and many view it as essential as the traditional utilities. Similarly, it is also a key concern for the business sector.

In addition, Local Authorities are increasingly reliant on digital infrastructure to provide services and interact with their customers. This is recognised across Norfolk and demonstrated through the investments in the Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) programme which is funded by the county, districts, private sector and central government.

Planning policy can play an important role in helping to achieve the transformation in broadband provision. Therefore, Norfolk County Council along with Norfolk's district councils which are the Local Planning Authorities (LPA) have a pivotal role to play in encouraging and supporting property developers to future-proof their developments and maximise their value by installing high speed broadband.

Although the County Council is not an LPA it has an important role to play as part of the officer level Norfolk Strategic Planners group, and the Norfolk Strategic Planning Member Forum.

The committee is committed to ensure that all new residential and business developments incorporate the highest speed broadband connections that are economically viable.

Executive summary

Despite the focus of Norfolk County Council and its partners on broadband provision in the county which has seen Superfast coverage reach 92% today, with firm plans to rise to over 95% by April 2020, some new developments are still being built without broadband connections.

The committee wishes to ensure that all new residential and business developments incorporate high speed broadband connections. This should be delivered via Fibre To The Premises (FTTP) wherever possible to maximise connection speeds and future proof the investment.

This paper is intended to update the committee on progress since the matter was last discussed back in January 2018.

Norfolk's planning authorities (County, Broads Authority and all Districts) have jointly developed and adopted the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework (NSPF).

Link: <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/consultation/norfolk-strategic-framework/results/20171220-norfolk-strategic-framework-final.pdf> (See section from page 53 for wider context). This document will be reviewed on a regular basis to keep it up to date.

Representatives of the Digital Committee have been working with a sub-group of the Norfolk Strategic Planning Group along with commercial input from the mobile network operator's industry body MobileUK to ensure that the next version of the NSPF (due to be published later this year) fully recognises developments in technology and national policy. This includes Fibre To The Premises (FTTP) wherever financially viable and due consideration for cellular communications, including 5G in the future.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the committee direct NCC IMT and Planning officers to continue to work with the Norfolk Strategic Planners group to ensure the updated Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework requires fast broadband connectivity for new developments using Fibre to the Premises wherever possible.**

1. The Background and Context

- 1.1. Members of the committee have been made aware of some new developments that have been built without broadband connectivity and wanted to investigate what the committee could do to stop this happening in future.

This paper has been written following an initial discussion and actions at the January committee to review progress to date and propose next steps.

In addition to the reputational and wider economic benefits of ensuring that residents can access high speed broadband when they move into new developments, there is also the issue of avoiding the costs and frustrations to occupiers of future retrofitting if the initial infrastructure is not fit for purpose.

2. Scope of the proposed Exercise

- 2.1. To improve fast broadband coverage for new developments, preferably via FTTP, NCC IMT and Planning officers should work with the Districts Planners on the Norfolk Strategic Planning group. The priority is to refresh the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework (NSPF) such that it incorporates the latest technological developments and also the government's latest updates to the National Planning Policy Framework.

The government (MHCLG) has recently closed consultation on a draft update to the National Planning Policy Framework which includes chapter 10 entitled **Supporting high quality communications** the first paragraph of which is copied below.

Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next

generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections. Policies should set out how high quality digital infrastructure, providing access to services from a range of providers, is expected to be delivered and upgraded over time; and should prioritise full fibre connections to existing and new developments (as these connections will, in almost all cases, provide the optimum solution).

Summary of Feedback to the consultation

- Respondents across all groups provided supportive comments on the policies in this chapter.
- Local authorities considered that further guidance was needed to assist proper and meaningful implementation of the policy approach in local authority plan-making and decision-making.
- Respondents stated that encouragement should be given through policy for new build development to be provided with full fibre broadband infrastructure / mobile phone coverage. For example, requiring adequate duct space for multiple network providers to operate within as part of the design and build of that new development, or that developers should be required to demonstrate the securing of full fibre connections to their development as part of gaining planning consent.
- Respondents raised concerns about a lack of proper digital connectivity in rural areas. Representations from across all the groups considered that the Framework should be enhanced to have particular regard to the expansion of broadband and mobile coverage in rural areas.

Government response

The Government welcomes the positive response to the approach to support increasing broadband and mobile connectivity, and has taken the policy forward in the final Framework. We have also made some minor amendments to the text to reflect the full range of equipment to be provided for ('electronic' rather than telecommunications). While acknowledging the concerns raised about the lack of connectivity in rural areas, the Government considers that the approach put forward to support greater mobile and broadband connectivity through planning applies to all areas, whether urban or rural.

2.2. Timing

The revised Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework document should be updated and published later this year.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. There are no financial implications for the Council at this time.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. There are no specific risks arising as a result of this item.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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