

Environment, Transport and Development Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Broadband and Mobile Phones – update from Member Working Group
Date of meeting:	8th July 2016
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe, Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact The provision of reliable mobile phone coverage is a key factor to economic development in Norfolk. The following report provides an update from the Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital Members Working Group on the current progress being made by operators and government to improve mobile phone coverage across the county.	

Executive summary

This report sets out an update from the Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital Members Working Group in relation to mobile phone and digital coverage in Norfolk.

Since the last update to Committee in January 2016 the Working Group continues to track progress on mobile and digital coverage across Norfolk.

Recommendations:

To consider the information provided and the progress being made.

To agree that the next update to Committee will be in November 2016.

1. Proposal

- 1.1. To review the latest information on the current progress of mobile coverage in Norfolk.

2. Evidence

- 2.1. Update on Working Group Membership

The Working Group welcomed Cllr Judy Leggett as the Conservative representative on the all-party group.

- 2.2. In March the Working group welcomed Graham Dunn, Senior Government Affairs Manager at Vodafone, and Louise Ellett, Community and Planning Specialist, Cornerstone Telecommunications Infrastructure Limited (CTIL). Graham discussed Vodafone's plans for improved coverage in Norfolk and answered confidential questions from group members. Graham and Louise also described the challenges faced by mobile operators in developing infrastructure and how a review of the Electronic Communications Code (see 5.1) could help

operators provide better coverage.

Graham subsequently provided the following non-commercially sensitive statement: *'As part of our UK investment programme Vodafone is committed to improving mobile services for people across Norfolk. The investment we are putting in will see better coverage and a major increase in the availability of mobile internet services across the county. In addition to the core network improvements several communities in Norfolk have benefitted from our Rural Open Sure Signal and community pub programmes. Our plans will see the majority of people in Norfolk having access to mobile internet across our 3G and 4G services. Rolling out the infrastructure required also needs the appropriate permissions, site agreements and connections into the rest of the network to be in place.'*

- 2.3. Louise Ellet from CTIL, who deals with infrastructure, mentioned that some Broadband delivery initiatives at other councils offer support for the principles of better roll-out/coverage within their areas and are happy that this support is referenced in planning applications to local district councils. Louise explained *'These statements are added to our planning applications to the relevant District Authorities for the mobile phone mast developments being proposed. The benefit of these statements to you is that they are quite general (and so do not promote specific developments, but just the principle of better connectivity) and also include promotion for the individual initiative (i.e. Connecting Cambridgeshire, Buckinghamshire Business First, Superfast Leicestershire, Connecting Shropshire).'*

Following agreement with the Chair of the EDT Committee and Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services, the following statement was provided to CTIL to include in planning applications:

The overall aims of enhanced 2G, 3G and new 4G mobile network coverage and capacity have been discussed with Norfolk County Council's Broadband, Mobile 'Phone & Digital Working Group. Whilst planning is dealt with by the district and borough councils the Working Group supports the principles of the project in terms of operator mast sharing and the provision of 2G, 3G and superfast 4G technology throughout the county, given the importance of ensuring people and businesses are connected to mobile broadband and telephony and are able to reap the benefits from improved social connections and economic productivity.

2.4. Mobile Infrastructure Project

The Mobile Infrastructure Project was a government initiative to eliminate all 'not spots' – where there is not even an emergency signal available. As reported previously, the two masts proposed for Horning and Sedgeford are to proceed whilst the proposed masts at Itteringham and Blakeney were 'timed out' due to funding timescales. Since the last report to Committee Cllr Strong met with Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture, Media & Sport. The Minister was very disappointed that so few MIP masts had been built across the country. However Cllr Strong was very impressed with his commitment to eradication of mobile 'phone 'not spots'. The working group will continue to monitor this situation.

2.5. DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting)

The Working Group Chair received an update on DAB in Norfolk which was subsequently circulated to all Members.

The upgrade to the local DAB network will see 6 new local DAB transmitters built (in addition to the 5 existing transmitters) at sites across the Norfolk local digital radio multiplex area: Daffy Green, Diss, Hinkling Stubb Road, Martham Collins Lane, North Walsham and Norwich central.

In addition the work includes a technical modification at one of the existing local DAB sites. The upgrade is expected to be completed this summer. As a result the local DAB upgrade is expected to provide digital radio coverage to an additional 93,353 households and 230km roads in Norfolk.

2.6. On 21st June the Working Group welcomed Paul James, Head of Public Affairs at Telefonica O2 UK, and Louise Ellett, Community and Planning Specialist, CTIL. Paul described in some detail Telefonica's plans for improved coverage in Norfolk up to the end of 2017. Paul and Louise responded to a wide range of questions from group members. Louise expressed appreciation of the Chair's statement provided for inclusion in planning applications (see 2.3). Paul and Louise will be sending through additional information once verified by Telefonica that it is not commercially sensitive and can be distributed to the Working Group and subsequently circulated to their group Members.

2.7. The Working Group received a Better Broadband for Norfolk Programme Highlight Report from the Programme Director for circulation to group members. This included an independent report on fixed line broadband in Norfolk covering all providers which can be found online at the following address:
<http://labs.thinkbroadband.com/local/index.php?area=E10000020>

3. Financial Implications

3.1. For the purposes of this report there are no financial implications.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

4.1. For the purposes of this report no issues or risks have been identified.

5. Background

5.1. The Government Response to the Review of the Electronic Communications Framework can be seen here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/response-to-review-of-the-electronic-communications-regulatory-framework>

5.2. Ofcom's detailed maps outlining the improvement to local DAB network coverage across the UK, including in Norfolk at:
<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/radio/coverage/dab-coverage-plans/>

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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