



**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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**From the Office of the Deputy  
Leader**

County Hall  
Oxford, OX1 1ND

Tel: 01865 816037  
Fax: 01865 815390

To all Town and Parish Councils and Parish  
Meetings in Oxfordshire

**Cllr David Robertson**

Deputy Leader of the Council

Direct line: 01865 815284

E-mail: [david.robertson@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:david.robertson@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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Dear Colleague,

**Broadband For All**

Access to fast, reliable broadband is more than a luxury. Successive governments have said they consider it a right, and we at Oxfordshire County Council agree.

In today's world the ability to interact socially or commercially online means ready access to services, information, friends and family or clients.

In being chosen by Ministers to be a Local Enterprise Partnership, or LEP, within our own county boundaries Oxfordshire made a strong case to be an economic area in its own right, and to grow as the place where business, science and academia meets.

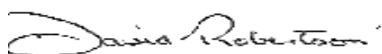
But if we are to realise the potential this brings, we need to ensure the whole county is connected. This brings benefits in a multitude of areas, from allowing small businesses to start up in rural areas, to reducing residents' carbon emissions by allowing them to work more at home, reducing commuting and building stronger, closer and more stable communities.

It is a grand ambition, but I believe it is achievable, realistic and vital. It's not a political matter, but something on which I hope representatives of all parties (and none) can come together for the common good.

This briefing note will help you understand how Oxfordshire County Council is leading work to make our ambitions and, I'm sure, your own, a reality. It will also tell you how you can support us in achieving them.

This is a real priority for us, and for the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership and the LEP. We look forward to working with you – our partners at district, town and parish level – to reach our goal: fast, reliable broadband for all Oxfordshire businesses and residents.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr David Robertson  
Deputy Leader, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Broadband Champion

### **What we will achieve?**

The Government wants to see fast, reliable broadband available to everyone by 2015. That is the timeline that we are working to as well.

Working in partnership with providers and public sector partners, we want to see every resident have access to broadband of at least 2mbs. We hope this basic level of service will be available to everyone. There will be some, especially in the most isolated areas, who will not be able to access broadband through conventional means (such as the telephone line to their houses, or cables laid underground). In these cases we will work with our partners to seek alternatives such as wireless broadband.

The majority of residents will receive far faster broadband by 2015, but we are committed to ensuring that everyone has access to a useable service of *at least* 2mbs.

### **Why is it so important?**

Even in major metropolitan centres it's no longer possible to grow a business without access to high-speed broadband. In a rural county like ours, this is even more important.

If we are to attract the kind of inward investment we need and make it easy for residents themselves to set up micro and small businesses, we need effective networks.

Equally, in future companies' business models will rely increasingly on staff working at home or even from hubs near where they live. An effective network here will be essential if we are to exploit our intellectual, academic and technological advantages as a county and turn them into successful businesses.

Of course broadband is also important personally, as well as commercially and in terms of access to public services. The ability to stay connected to friends and loved ones, build social networks in the place you live and enjoy "virtual" communities in village, town, church or sports club matters to people, and increasingly affects their choice of where they live.

Finally, we see this as right.

### **How will we achieve it?**

Oxfordshire is the most rural county in the South east. Initially this may make people think we are at a disadvantage when it comes to spreading broadband access to all residents.

However, we have an ace up our sleeve in the Oxfordshire Community Network, the OCN. This is a huge network of cabling laid underground here, set up by the county council.

Thanks to the OCN, we are able to seek partnerships with commercial broadband suppliers who are keen to build upon and develop the OCN. That means they can provide service to areas where, were they to have to dig new cabling themselves, it would not be cost effective.

Of course whoever we partner with will also need to dig in new cabling. We'll also want to see the use of ultra-high-speed fibre optic cabling and other cutting edge technologies wherever possible.

The other great advantage of this for Oxfordshire is that we can move faster than most other counties in achieving our goals. We've set a completion target of 2015, but we hope many areas of the county will see significant improvements within 12 months – depending on negotiations in the coming weeks.

### **What can you do?**

OCC is proud to be leading our efforts – it's also our job as the strategic body for this county – but we'll need help and support from both public and private sectors to succeed.

The most immediate need we have is to show private broadband providers how strong the appetite for their services is in our county. We want them to come here first, not last.

There are lots of ways to do this but we have an opportunity to send a message to BT this very month. The company is running a campaign called "Race To Infinity", which you and your residents may have seen advertised on the television. This is BT's way of judging interest in expanded broadband in given areas.

No doubt other providers will do similar things, but whilst the BT campaign is running it's vital that as many Oxfordshire residents as possible vote. We need you to get the word to those in your district, town or village, please – people can vote using this web link: <http://www.racetoinfinity.bt.com/>

It's important to note that we're not favouring BT above any other provider, but the company is asking people to let them know if they want faster broadband, it's vital we play our part.

We also want to see a network of "Broadband Champions" across the county; a member of each council, at whatever level, to be its representative in discussions on this issue. Together we'd have a hugely powerful voice.

In the coming weeks we'll be in touch again to ask you for your views, details of the needs of your community and to ask for your help again.

In the meantime, if you have any further questions or ideas, please contact Dawn Pettis, Programme Manager for Oxfordshire Connect and our representative for OxOnline. Dawn can be found at:

[dawn.pettis@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:dawn.pettis@oxfordshire.gov.uk) or on 01865 816082