

# News Release



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## **BROADBAND SPEEDS SET TO SOAR IN CAMPAIGNING CHELTENHAM COMMUNITY THANKS TO PIONEERING DEAL**

*Up Hatherley residents hail partnership approach;*

*Alex Chalk MP welcomes development;*

*Minister of State outlines benefits of Better Broadband Subsidy scheme*

A partnership between residents in the Up Hatherley area of Cheltenham and Openreach – BT's local network business – is to make high-speed fibre broadband available to around 160 more local houses.

Residents joined forces to find a way of getting the technology after learning that their community was not part of any current public or private sector superfast fibre broadband roll-out plans.

The result is an innovative co-funding agreement. It involves residents using vouchers from the Government's Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme, with additional investment from Openreach, through BT's Community Fibre Partnerships programme.

The Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme allows any households with internet speeds of less than 2Mbps (megabits per second), which are not part of any planned superfast broadband roll-out, to get funding for better broadband using any technology.

Up Hatherley residents were awarded £350 per eligible household towards the upgrade costs, with Openreach providing the additional funding required for the scheme to go ahead.

Matt Hancock, Minister of State for Digital and Culture, said: "Ninety per cent of the UK can now get superfast broadband, but we know that more needs to be done. Our Better Broadband scheme was designed to provide immediate assistance to those places in the UK with the slowest broadband speeds. Allowing neighbouring homes and businesses to pool their grants means that places like Up Hatherley can get a rapid boost in broadband speeds and start enjoying all the benefits that a fast connection offers."

Openreach engineers will install new fibre optic cabling and Fibre-to-the-Cabinet (FTTC) technology for the Up Hatherley project. Once the work is completed next year, residents opting for an upgrade will have access to download speeds of up to 80Mbps and upload speeds of up to 20Mbps\*, which they will be able to order from a wide choice of fibre broadband providers.

Alex Chalk, MP for Cheltenham, and a broadband champion, welcomed the development.

He said: "Getting to this point has taken a huge amount of effort, but I'm delighted the end is now in sight. I was not prepared to see residents forced to put their hands in their pockets to part fund this project, when the Government has set aside millions to connect up not-spots."

“So it’s great news that residents are using vouchers from the Government’s Better Broadband Subsidy scheme to work with Openreach. I won’t let up until all my constituents have been lifted out of e-poverty.”

Clark Lawson, a campaigner for better broadband in the Chargrove Lane area – through the group [www.Cheltenham151.com](http://www.Cheltenham151.com) - can’t wait for the fibre technology to go ‘live’.

As a father-of-one, who works as a data specialist in the finance sector, he fully appreciates the wide-ranging benefits that come from faster fibre broadband.

Clark said: “We were initially disappointed, frustrated and confused that we and our neighbours couldn’t order superfast broadband when we moved here three years ago.

“Given that many services are becoming digital and that having access to this technology is a factor in long-term social inclusion, this solution should open up so many different opportunities for my family and the community. For example, it will remove the barrier of a poor connection speed to allow parents to work from home for a more suitable work-life balance. It will also enable the children in the community to support their education and development – who knows what their internet needs will be when they grow older?

“This partnership deal is the culmination of months of hard work by lots of people – it’s been a real team effort and we should be proud of this milestone. It’s great to know superfast fibre broadband is now on its way, and without us having to dig into our own pockets.”

Kim Mears, Openreach’s managing director for infrastructure delivery, said: “We know the positive impact broadband has on people’s lives, and it’s great to be able to work together with communities like Up Hatherley to find a fibre broadband solution. BT’s Community Fibre Partnerships programme is enabling hundreds more places across the UK to have access to the technology, and its many benefits.”

In July, Chalford and Bussage became the first Gloucestershire communities to get high-speed fibre broadband as part of a co-funding deal through BT’s Community Fibre Partnerships programme.

Jon Reynolds, BT’s regional director for Gloucestershire and the South West, said: “No organisation is doing more than BT to make fibre broadband available to as many communities as possible, as quickly as possible.

“Around 337,000 homes and businesses across Gloucestershire – including more than 51,000 in the Cheltenham area - now have access to faster fibre broadband as a result of BT’s commercial investment and our partnerships with the public sector.”

For more information on community fibre partnerships with BT and the Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme visit: [www.communityfibre.bt.com](http://www.communityfibre.bt.com)

Eligible communities have until the end of December to apply for Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme vouchers from the Government.

#### **Notes to editors**

\*These are the top wholesale speeds available from Openreach.

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