

## MUSIC TO OUR EARS

### RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTH WEST HIGHLANDS BENEFIT FROM FAST BROADBAND.

#### COMMUNITY NEED FOR BROADBAND

Radio is all about EMFs these days. That's Electronic Music Files to the uninitiated, which have replaced records and CDs. The DJs at Nevis Radio were often prevented from playing the latest music to listeners due to unreliable internet and broadband speeds. Combine this with other businesses like the well-established Glenfinnan House Hotel where guests got snap happy on their stay but could not upload their photos to Facebook or residents simply looking to use broadband to shop online and it is clear that communities on the shores of Locheil, Loch Linnhe and Loch Lochy were missing out.

#### HOW THE COMMUNITY GOT BROADBAND

Established in October 2012, Locheilnet is a not-for-profit community interest company formed by residents and local businesses. With support from Community Broadband Scotland (CBS), the team at Locheilnet found a way to bring 21st Century connectivity to hundreds of people and businesses on the remote banks of the three lochs.

CBS awarded £91,500 of funding to Locheilnet, enabling the company to complete the network and connect customers quickly by hiring local tradesmen to help. It also allowed them to build significant additional resilience into the network ensuring the best possible service for their growing subscribers and businesses.

#### FINDING THE BEST TECHNICAL SOLUTION FOR THE COMMUNITY

It was no easy task, but wireless technology provided a way through the mountainous terrain. The wireless network plugs into the backbone of the internet (or 'backhaul') at the Marine Harvest Offices in Caol. This is relayed to the shoulder of Ben Nevis, which sends it out to a number of minor relays in Ardgour, Glenfinnan and Gairloch.

Using this system, Locheilnet is able to access superfast or next generation broadband (NGB) thanks to the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme (DSSB) at Fort William. Locheilnet has worked in partnership with big businesses and significant private investors to deliver something truly transformational to the communities covered.



#### IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Initially aiming to connect 50 properties that were previously without broadband altogether, the high quality of its service meant many in the area who were struggling for service signed up. It proved so popular that Locheilnet had to add a second cable connection to the backhaul. Its fixed wireless point-to-point network has now been operational for more than two years and has around 250 subscribers, transforming economic and social opportunities in the remote communities it serves. Many public services can be delivered quickly and efficiently online, it has opened up online learning opportunities, supports remote and home working possibilities and allows people to download music or catch up on missed TV programmes – just like the rest of the world.

As one local family put it: "We have been without an internet connection for ten years. Everything has changed. The children can go online for homework. We live remotely and can now keep in touch easily with friends and family. It's wonderful. I feel as though we are now back in the real world."

Customers include key local businesses in Lochaber - from biomass specialists to fish farms to music studios - demonstrating the economic opportunities and benefits that access to good broadband provision can bring

Another customer said: "It has made working from home possible as I need to carry out daily video conferences and connect to my office network. Most important for me is reliability and speed, both of which I get from Locheilnet."

Locheilnet is indeed music to the ears of the community with one musician choosing to build her house and recording studio in the area as a direct result of hearing about the reliability of Locheilnet.