

PIPE DREAM DISCUSSED IN VILLAGE LOCAL LEADS TO FAST BROADBAND IN RURAL ABERDEENSHIRE

COMMUNITY NEED FOR BROADBAND

Residents in Marykirk were chatting over a drink one night in their local and the conversation turned to the slow broadband speed they had to put up with and how frustrating it was. Either as a business owner or somebody just wanting to do a bit of online shopping that was so simple for millions of other people in the country, people were pretty fed up with the poor service they received. "You work in IT, can't you fix the internet Bill?" said one local to Bill Buchan. So began the remarkable story of Marykirk.com.

With a typical broadband speed of less than 2Mbps and an upgrade through the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) project unlikely, residents in the Howe of the Mearns in rural Aberdeenshire worked together to bring about their own solution.

HOW THE COMMUNITY GOT BROADBAND

Bill Buchan took up the challenge and with fellow volunteers experimented with a few houses in Marykirk and the neighbouring town of Montrose and even a cattle shed to bounce a signal! The experiment was successful and the group then approached Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) for support and advice.

As well as providing advice and guidance to the community, CBS awarded funding of £24,000 which allowed additional resilience to be built into the network. The system is robust and future proof, with the potential to further extend capacity. CBS also assisted with the establishment of a Community Interest Company, and drafting of a sustainable three-year business plan.

FINDING THE BEST TECHNICAL SOLUTION FOR THE COMMUNITY

With help from CBS, the group built the capacity required to manage and operate the network, and sourced access to a resilient backhaul provision. Three sites were linked to a hilltop location which has clear line of sight to both a fast internet site in Montrose and the Mearns area. One is linked with three 80Mbps connections, and another two with single 80Mbps links, offering both speed and resilience.

Customers have their own small receiver mounted externally on their premises, with line of sight to the repeater station, allowing access to internet services at speeds of up to 20Mbps.

At the same time, a training plan was designed for the group and a local installer to undergo a series of approved industrial standard training courses so that the service delivered to the community was of the highest possible standard.



IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

More than 130 users benefit from Marykirk.com which provides continuous access to fast broadband that people expect. Marykirk.com now employs three members of staff to help meet demand for the service.

Fast broadband has brought huge benefits to the whole community from businesses to younger and older generations using the internet for leisure.

Local engineering businesses, farms, restaurants and photo studios are now reaping the benefits of fast broadband connections. Local residents are able to work from home, reducing their carbon footprint and stimulating the local community through an increase in local spending.

Perhaps the biggest benefit to the community is the way the project is transforming the way that people now live in the area, which is best summed up by the project leader Bill Buchan. He said: "The great part of this job is the look on people's faces when internet services, which many people in other places take for granted, work for the first time. Young people are no longer going elsewhere for fast broadband so online gamers can enjoy this hobby at home. Whilst others can watch their favourite programmes easily on BBC iPlayer, connect with friends and family on Skype and indulge in some online shopping."