

Statement to Cabinet, 8 May

**Matthew McCabe, on behalf of Chew Valley and Wansdyke Broadband Groups and as a Director of the Community Interest Company, Wansdyke Telecom CIC.**

“For some time now, Chew Valley and Wansdyke Broadband Groups have been campaigning for better rural broadband for the residents and businesses of N E Somerset. Given the refusal of Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) to reveal any information about their planned roll out, and given their (frankly) puny targets, and reliance on the existing copper infrastructure, we have now formed a Community Interest Company, with a view to offering fibre to every home or business in NE Somerset.

We are a group of local residents with industry knowledge and expertise, and we believe that we can deliver a gigabit service. A service that is on a par with our urban centres. We have seen what others have done, for instance B4RN (Broadband for the Rural North) using only local volunteers. So we know we can do the same, as volunteers, for our communities here.

However, one of the first obstacles we’ve hit, is that we can’t apply for the relevant government funding, because criteria for applying requires us to show that we’re in an area where BT is NOT planning to offer a highspeed service. But, as I’ve already mentioned, CDS is saying nothing! I quote from CEO Sheila Wheeler: “SCC (and thus CDS) is forbidden by the contract (the one they’ve signed with BT) to release detailed information about the places that will see CDS-funded improvements to their broadband services, the improved broadband speeds and the timing of that deployment... A secondary reason is that the timing and location of improved broadband as currently planned will inevitably change between now and the end of the programme.”

So, we’re not going to tell you now, and we’re not going to tell you for the next seven years! A deliberate and unashamed obstruction to any competition for the available government money.

However, at this point I would like to make an apology. I am genuinely sorry that we did not form our CIC last year, when you were debating how to spend tax payers’ money on our rural broadband. And I realise that you really had no choice, other than to go in with CDS.

So, here we are. A lot of disappointed or angry rural residents, who don’t want to end up living in a technological backwater, getting together to create a community interest company, to deliver ultrafast rural broadband: provided by the community, for the community. And not fibre to a cabinet and copper to the home, the ‘up to 24mb/s’ that BT is offering (to those who live right next to the cabinet), but Fibre direct to the home: 1000mb/s - a genuinely high speed, future proof service.

So, my question is this. Given that BaNES is signed up to this secretive and seemingly anti-competitive contract between CDS and BT, can you now look at the nature of your relationship to CDS to see if the wording of the contract even allows you to support another delivery option, either as a council or as councillors? And if so, what support does it allow you to offer? Because we are all local volunteers working to get the best for our communities, what can you do for us?

**Written Question:** Given that BaNES is signed up to this secretive and seemingly anti-competitive contract between CDS and BT, can you now look at the nature of your relationship with CDS to see if the wording of the contract even allows to support another delivery option, either as a council or as councillors? And if so, what support are you allowed to offer?