

Minutes of the Kelston Parish Meeting held 21 July 2016

Present:

Doug Creed (chair), Stephen Constant (recorder and vote counter), David Mathews, Hugh Padfield, Edward Weston, Vera Constant, Claire & Kevin Warren, Graham & Angela Meader, Sue & Geoff Stiling, Lee Trivett, Pat & Alan Jeffries, John Dinham, David Withers, John Holden, Jackie Holden, Max Holden, Harry Holden ,Chris Payne, Kat Daweschmeisser, Mandy Weston ,Rachel & Richard Guest, Adam Burge, Murray Sayce. Cathy Creed

In attendance: , David Bland (advisor to the project), Dave Dixon (B&NES), John Quinlan (North Stoke representative)

Apologies: Alison Millar (B&NES Councillor)Vivien Waters, Vanessa Sayce, Chrissie Cullimore, Richard Tredwin, Kate Pennington, Ken & Trish Bryer

The Chair of the meeting, Doug Creed, summarised the work carried out by the Kelston broadband group so far and the decisions required of this meeting to determine our future strategy:

What's our aspiration?

- ☐ to ensure Kelston Parish no longer suffers from extremely poor broadband performance
- ☐ to ensure our residents and businesses have the internet performance they need and want
- ☐ to ensure this this can be delivered at an affordable price and that it is future-proofed

How did we get to where we are now?

- ☐ we started nearly three years ago with BT, as we are supposed to be 'commercially covered' by them
- ☐ despite many meetings with BT and B&NES, it transpires that there are no BT plans to upgrade us, and that we are excluded from the government superfast programme
- ☐ around this time last year we developed a scheme whereby the businesses in Kelston could apply for Connection Vouchers totalling £93,000 from Bristol City
- ☐ residential properties were not eligible for vouchers, but they would be able to connect to the network by paying a connection charge circa £450. A very high proportion of residents indicated their willingness to join
- ☐ this failed at the last minute in October last year when the scheme was suspended. All our applications had been made, but the necessary information Bristol required — on council tax and business rates — was not supplied by B&NES
- ☐ we looked at a variety of other ways of funding the network build. The most promising was (and is) to obtain a low-interest long-term loan from the Public Works Loan Board to cover

the capital expense of building the network

- [?] though the PWLB (part of HM Treasury) has not made loans previously for broadband infrastructure, it does make loans to parishes for a wide range of purposes such as village halls, waste treatment plants etc etc
- [?] we undertook considerable work in Westminster with HM Treasury Debt Management Office, the Department of Communities and Local Government, and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (who run the government Broadband Delivery UK programmes). All agreed that PWLB funding could be approved for parishes to build broadband infrastructure
- [?] As an indicative rate, borrowing £100,000 from PWLB for a twenty year fixed term period would cost the parish £500 per month, or the equivalent of £5 per month for each home and business
- [?] The current PWLB loan rate for this period is 1.99%, less than 20% of the cost of BT or other network operator capital
- [?] As part of the Universal Service Obligation (i.e. to provide everyone with a minimum speed of 2 Mbps by next April), new Connection Vouchers are now available. They are valued at up to £500 each, but are available to residents and businesses alike. Each premise has to make a separate application, and — if eligible — can spend their voucher with the community network or with alternative providers (such as satellite) should they wish. Note that the parts of the parish close to the Bath boundary and those at Kelston Mills may not be eligible for vouchers, as they may already be able to receive speeds above the 2Mbps minimum

What do we need to go ahead?

- [?] To finalise our business plan we need to know
 - o whether the parish wishes us to proceed
 - o what are the geographic boundaries of the network
 - o who wants to be connected

Note: being connected to the network does not imply that you will take service and incur any monthly fee. If a premise is entitled to a connection voucher, then it would make sense to use that voucher to connect to the network even if you do not make any use of a broadband service — it will make the property more sellable/rentable and more valuable and costs you nothing

- [?] Because Kelston is a Parish Meeting and does not have a Parish Council, we understand that we need B&NES approval to apply for a loan. Note: Kelston is one of only three parishes in the whole of North East Somerset that doesn't have a parish council — the others are North Stoke and St Catherine. Several smaller parishes than Kelston such as Chelwood & Newton St Loe do have parish councils
- [?] We further understand that Parish Meetings without a council cannot reclaim VAT — this means our costs would increase by 20%. We will seek further advice in this respect to see if

VAT relief can be obtained, but it is thought unlikely

- [?]** The simplest way to overcome both of the two preceding points would be to form a group parish council covering the separate parishes of Kelston and North Stoke, and to build a broadband network that covers both parishes

Resolutions

- 1. That the Kelston Parish Meeting requests that B&NES confer upon the parish meeting all powers of a parish council and the specific powers necessary to carry out borrowing as a parish council.**

FOR: 29

AGAINST: 0

- 1. That the Kelston Parish Meeting requests that its Chair, Doug Creed, liaises with his counterpart at North Stoke Parish Meeting, to ascertain the benefits of establishing a group parish council to serve the separate needs of the two parishes.**

FOR: 29

AGAINST: 0

After the carrying of the two resolutions it was agreed that villagers should be asked to make applications for vouchers from B&NES immediately. Villagers will be informed of exactly how to apply for the vouchers.