

## Community Broadband Upgrade – Gigabit Voucher Scheme

“Rural premises with broadband speeds of less than 100Mbps can apply for vouchers worth **£1,500** per home and up to **£3,500** for each small to medium-sized business (SME) to support the cost of installing new fast and reliable connections.”

<https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>

We have recently become aware of this UK Government Initiative to improve broadband speeds for rural areas. When part of a group scheme homes and businesses in rural areas of the UK may be eligible for funding towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband.

Would you be interested in this offer? As a good broadband connection becomes ever more vital for access for education, home working, banking, business services, media and music streaming, and many other services, we depend a lot on having a reliable fast connection.

We live in Pokeriage Gardens and currently only have access to the old FTTC (Fibre to the Cabinet) type of connection. The cabinet is half a mile away, sited more or less opposite the Caravan Site down near the A14. The connection, managed by Openreach, is often unreliable and at best only gives us a top speed of around 34Mb, much slower than the now common standard of 100Mbs and often insufficient to cope with our needs, especially at peak times.

Openreach’s website confirms that there are no active plans to upgrade and improve our service, notwithstanding that the new housing developments under construction close by will automatically benefit from much faster connections than ours.

We have checked our postcode on the website which confirms that we are eligible to apply for vouchers to upgrade our connection. There are several suppliers locally who are involved in the scheme. Most of these work with businesses only but two companies offer to supply schemes for homes and businesses. These are Openreach (above mentioned) and FactCo. More details of their offering can be seen by clicking through from the links on the Voucher Scheme website, see link above.

We are very keen to apply for this scheme but cannot do it alone. There is a minimum requirement for two households. It seems likely that the cost for each household can be reduced if we combine forces with as large a number of local properties as possible – see the case study overleaf.

Would you be interested in a joint approach. If so, or if you know already of another group of residents who are applying for the voucher scheme, please could you let me or Gordon know by phoning or emailing by Sunday 13 September – see contact details below.

We have contacted both companies and so far OpenReach have responded with some additional information which we attach for your information.

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## **Case Study from the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme Website**

### **East Hagbourne Community Fibre Partnership**

A community in Oxfordshire has signed up for the fastest broadband speeds available and it isn't costing them anything thanks to the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and special funding for schools through Openreach.

Ninety-two properties in East Hagbourne near Didcot are looking forward to receiving gigabit capable (where one gigabit is equal to 1,000 megabits) broadband speeds through a full fibre connection installed through Openreach's Community Fibre Partnership Scheme.

Inspired by some information sent from Oxfordshire County Council, Parish councilor Cordelia Gover enquired about a small scheme to install fibre to one end of East Hagbourne through Openreach.

In surveying the project the Openreach team realised that fibre cabling would be laid past the village school, Hagbourne CE Primary School which meant that Openreach could draw on its own community grant scheme available to educational establishments\*. Openreach would pay 75% of the installation cost of new fibre infrastructure, capped to a maximum of £30,000. It also meant passing a further eighty-seven properties on the way to Cordelia's project.

The whole scheme was calculated with a final cost to the community of £6,000. However, with two businesses forming part of the ninety-two premises, they were able to apply for two Gigabit Vouchers to cover the remaining cost.

Happily, this meant that the whole scheme for ninety-two properties would be completed at no cost to any of East Hagbourne's residents.

Cordelia said: "At the start of this project I didn't think it was fair that we should be penalised for living at the furthest end of a copper wire connection and that's what spurred me on. After making contact with Oxfordshire County Council they told me about the community schemes and the government-backed Gigabit Voucher Scheme."

"I cannot thank our Openreach community liaison manager enough for her efficiency in pulling this huge project together and we are all now very excited about receiving our dramatic improvement in connection speeds!"