

Latest report on broadband from EDDC/DCC Cllr Jess Bailey - February 2022

Report from Cllr Jess Bailey, Otter Valley (Devon County Council) and West Hill and Aylesbeare (East Devon District Council)

February 2022

I am frequently contacted by residents with concerns about poor broadband speeds and the unreliable service in West Hill. Broadband is an essential service and residents quite reasonably expect to be able to work and study from home relying on their broadband to do so. Although West Hill has fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) I know that some people suffer from poor speeds and intermittency due to factors such as distance from the cabinet. I am also concerned that given global internet traffic which is growing by approximately 40% each year we need to ensure that the system in West Hill is 'future proofed'.

I have become aware that some parts of West Hill have been upgraded by Openreach to ultrafast broadband, whilst others have not, which is creating two tiers of service within our village. It seems that some upgraded locations are often located in close proximity to those which have not been. It was my understanding that Jurassic Fibre were previously intending to roll out to West Hill but advised that they changed their mind due to the arrival of Openreach. I recently organised a meeting with Clive Selley CBE the chief executive of Openreach to discuss broadband issues in our area. I raised concerns with him about West Hill as well as across the wider Otter Valley ward. In the Otter Valley there are a number of rural communities and properties that do not even have FTTC and are still reliant on the extremely slow copper network. I will be having a further meeting in February with Clive Selley as well as Simon Jupp MP where I continue to highlight concerns in West Hill and elsewhere. Much as I would like to insist that there is an upgrade in West Hill as well as across the wider Otter Valley, the Government's mode of delivery is heavily dependent on commercial operators who are of course free to upgrade wherever and whenever they wish.

Another potential option aside from looking to commercial operators, is the gigabit rural voucher scheme where residents can pool vouchers, although I am not aware of any such schemes in our immediate locality who have previously done this <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk>.

It is worth noting that the issue of delivery of improved broadband is not just an issue in our community. The Public Accounts Committee published a report on 8th January criticising the government's undue emphasis on delivery by commercial operators and the problems that this creates in providing broadband to the hardest to reach (often the most rural) areas. I have written to Dame Meg Hillier MP chair of the Public Accounts Committee endorsing the findings of her committee's report.

Cllr Jess Bailey, February 2022