

The delivery of gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure: A guide for councillors, September 2024

This guidance gives an overview of the delivery of gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure in Shropshire and outlines how councillors can use their unique local role to support its deployment.

Introduction

There is a national aspiration to deliver fast and reliable broadband to hard-to-reach places across the UK. Currently over 84% of UK premises have access to a gigabit-capable broadband network (source: [Thinkbroadband](#), August 2024). Since April 2022, the coverage in the Shropshire Council area has tripled from 22% to 67%. Most of this improvement has come from commercial deployments, funded by the broadband infrastructure suppliers themselves.

In future, a major enabler of additional gigabit-capable broadband coverage will be the UK Government's [Project Gigabit](#) because 'harder-to-reach' areas aren't commercially viable. Project Gigabit is being delivered by Building Digital UK ([BDUK](#)), which works closely with Shropshire Council to ensure that new broadband networks meet Shropshire's needs. BDUK is an executive agency, sponsored by the UK government's Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT).

What is gigabit-capable broadband?

Gigabit-capable broadband provides a download speed of at least one gigabit per second (or 1,000 megabits per second). There are a range of different infrastructure types that can deliver broadband at this speed. These include: full-fibre and fixed wireless access broadband, with further information available in the glossary section of this BDUK [webpage](#).

What are the benefits of gigabit-capable broadband?

Gigabit-capable broadband speeds provide the capacity a household needs to connect multiple devices simultaneously, whilst supporting future advances in technology. Faster, more reliable, broadband connectivity can also help support businesses to increase their productivity.

Gigabit-capable broadband is usually delivered by fibre optic technology that is connected directly into customers' premises. Fibre optic cables have fewer faults than old copper-based networks, ensuring a better service for residents & businesses, and less time spent on infrastructure repairs that can create local disruption like street works.

Project Gigabit procurements

Most Project Gigabit broadband infrastructure improvements will be delivered through local, regional, and cross-regional contracts with broadband suppliers to deliver gigabit-capable infrastructure to an agreed set of premises. Premises included in the contract scope are those without current/planned access to gigabit-capable broadband speeds.

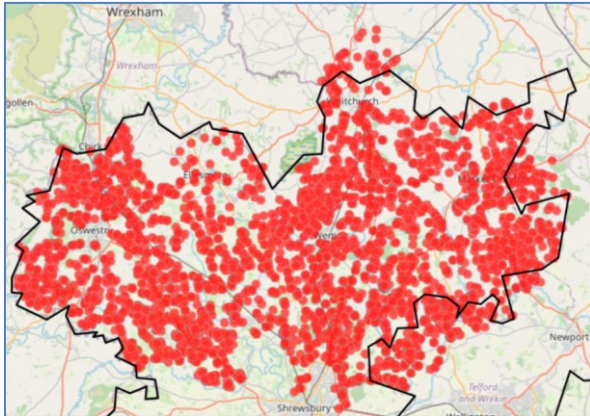
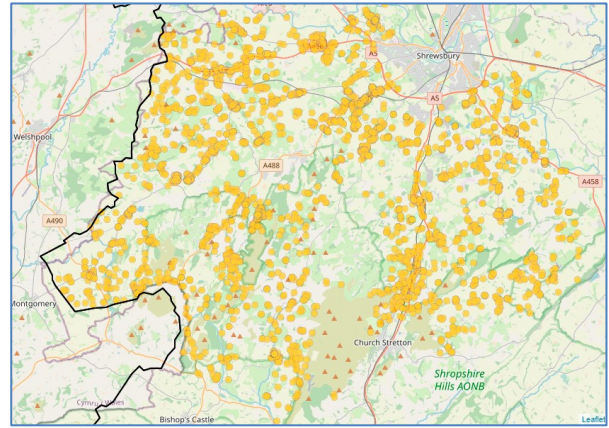
The current position in Shropshire is that BDUK has awarded two contracts, and the rest of the area is due to go out to procurement later in 2024, please see more detail on the next page.



The current position in Shropshire

Lot 25.01 Mid-West Shropshire

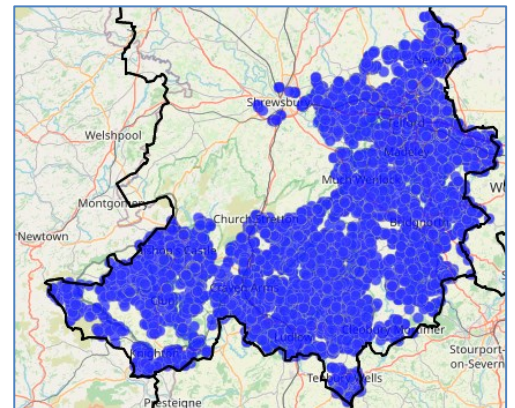
- Contract awarded to [Voneus](#) in April 2024
- 6,089 premises (all in the Shropshire Council area)
- Subsidy available £12m
- First premises to have network access expected autumn 2024.
- To contact Voneus, email: broadband@voneus.com



Lot 25.02 North Shropshire

- contract awarded to [Freedom Fibre](#) in April 2023
- 12,277 premises (10,752 in Shropshire Council area)
- Subsidy available £24m
- First premises to have network access expected autumn 2024.
- To contact Freedom Fibre, please email: careline@freedomfibre.com

The current expectation is that around 8,000 eligible premises in **south & east Shropshire** (including Telford & Wrekin) will be included in a larger cross-regional procurement (Type C) to be launched later in 2024.



What impact will installing gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure have on my area?

Like any infrastructure project, the installation of new broadband networks will cause short-term disruption for communities. This may include deployment activity such as streetworks, which the supplier will have coordinated with the Shropshire Council highways team.

Before installing new infrastructure, broadband infrastructure suppliers try to minimise disruption by using existing infrastructure such as telegraph poles and underground ducts. However, Project Gigabit contracts must operate within strict value-for-money constraints, which means it's not viable to deliver all new digital infrastructure without the installation of some new telegraph poles.

When new telegraph poles are installed by BDUK-appointed suppliers, there is an obligation that they are made available to other users, which reduces the need for more new poles in the future. Ofcom grants '[code powers](#)' to accredited telecommunication network suppliers providing them with a statutory entitlement to install, maintain, and repair apparatus on public and private land. The legislation means that providers can put in new telecommunications infrastructure, such as cabinets and telegraph poles, without the need to apply for planning permission.



Why install new fibre optic broadband network using telegraph poles?

- **Geographic reach:** Premises in rural Shropshire are spread out; using new and existing telegraph poles to deploy broadband networks makes it easier to reach every premise.
- **Cost-effective:** The cost of underground cabling can be prohibitively high, especially in rural areas where the distance between premises can be significant. Using existing/new telegraph poles can significantly reduce these costs.
- **Speed of deployment:** Installing fibre optic cables on telegraph poles is faster than underground installation. This means that residents and businesses in Shropshire can benefit from improved broadband speeds sooner.
- **Minimizing disruption:** Laying cables underground can cause significant disruption due to the need for digging and road closures. Using telegraph poles avoids this issue, minimising disruption to the local community.
It's also less disruptive to connect a premise to the fibre cable network from overhead (giving more flexibility of ingress point into the property), rather than having to dig under people's front gardens, driveways, etc.
- **Accessibility:** Once fibre optic cables have been installed on telegraph poles, they are easy to access for maintenance.
- **Environmental considerations:** Putting fibre optic cables on new telegraph poles when compared with laying cable in new underground ducts in the pavement/road can reduce carbon emissions by 50:1 (source: Freedom Fibre CEO Neil McArthur MBE, see: video on the following webpage: <https://www.freedomfibre.com/poles> from 4 minutes 13 seconds).

What happens if my area misses out due to objections to new telegraph poles?

Local opposition may result in premises being removed from the Project Gigabit funded roll-out. These premises will get left behind without access to a gigabit-capable broadband connection, which may adversely impact house prices and local economic development. Future broadband infrastructure improvements will usually still use new telegraph poles and may be dependent on a financial contribution from residents to make them commercially viable.

How can Shropshire Councillors represent their area in supporting the broadband infrastructure roll-out?

Councillors have a unique position at the heart of their local communities and can support the delivery of broadband infrastructure appropriately in their area. For example:

Reducing local barriers to deployment

- If the roll-out of broadband infrastructure is causing friction in the community, e.g., the proposed location of new poles, councillors can support discussions between infrastructure delivery teams and residents to help resolve issues and facilitate solutions.
- BDUK will collaborate with the contracted supplier, Shropshire Council, and local councillors to ensure that new broadband infrastructure is only installed where necessary, following an assessment of alternative options.
- Councillors can assist council officers and broadband infrastructure suppliers to identify landowners and help secure wayleaves for new broadband infrastructure on private land.

Championing the roll-out of improved broadband infrastructure

- Councillors can advocate for improved broadband infrastructure, helping to mitigate local concerns about deployment activity and explaining the longer-term benefit of faster, more dependable, broadband connectivity.
- More information around the leading role that Councillors can play in supporting broadband deployment can be found in the Local Government Association publication: [A councillor's guide to digital connectivity.](#)

