

Digital County Vision for Herefordshire

Herefordshire Council is working with a range of partners, organisations and businesses to improve broadband in the county. Through working collaboratively the aim is to support everyone in Herefordshire to be able to access broadband and use it to create advantage and opportunity whatever age, ability or background.

Overview

Herefordshire has a great deal to offer through a strong work-life balance combining a stunning natural environment, a diverse business base, high standards of education complemented by a rich range of culture and leisure opportunities.

The technology revolution has created an opportunity for Herefordshire to retain its key qualities while simultaneously meeting the requirements of modern-day living and working. Technology can become a tool for creating social and economic benefit, with businesses able to increase their competitiveness and residents being able to access services and goods. This is particularly important in rural areas where people can miss out on information, employment, access to key services and risk becoming isolated just because of where they live.

Therefore a key component of Herefordshire's long term prosperity and quality of life is to embrace opportunities digital access can provide. This document outlines how that is going to be achieved within business, community and public services.

Objectives

The network - To improve the broadband infrastructure throughout Herefordshire and advocate for greater mobile phone coverage to aid residents and businesses

Internet use - For more people to exploit the internet creating opportunities and advantages in work, educational settings, home and communities

Education and training - To increase the use of the internet as a tool to support education and training including engaging students in high-tech careers

Business - Create competitive advantage through business engaging in today's online world

Rural isolation and digital divide - To address issues of rural isolation and exclusion through the use of technologies

Health and wellbeing - Transform public sector services to create added benefit for residents in using advances in technology and broadband to support people to live as independently as possible.

Vision

In 2020 Herefordshire will be one of the most digitally connected counties in the UK.

From the position of a quarter of households having no Broadband access and the average speeds in Hereford City slower than any other comparable town or city in the UK, by 2020 we will have transformed the quality of the broadband network to meet the requirements of modern day-living and working.

New enterprises and established businesses will have benefited as a result of access to faster broadband. An influx of technology and knowledge companies will view Herefordshire as an ideal location to do business, offering a good quality of life, yet ensuring there are no barriers to accessing the global marketplace. The county will have a highly skilled workforce who are applying their knowledge to different types of enterprise.

The countywide education network, will have a well developed technology curriculum covering computer programming and sophisticated exploitation of applications. Pupils will leave education with a high degree of technology skills to be used in different forms of work and life.

Family and adult learning courses in technology use will be common-place with a network of online forums and a spread of internet clubs operating virtually and within communities. There will be an army of volunteers to help people use technology to suit their lifestyle.

All public access and community venues will have access to the internet as a given, and Herefordshire will have mobile coverage that enables people to exploit technology irrespective of their location and without ties to specific places.

Hereford City and the market towns will be vibrant places to meet, to shop and for entertainment, with the retail offer boosted rather than undermined by internet competition. Through online sales and greater access to the global market place local retailers will enjoy greater opportunities for growth and diversification.

Residents who need care and support will benefit from advances in health technology, with online consultations the norm along with at home monitoring and self medication. Better care will be delivered at lower cost enabling people to have improved quality of life.

Herefordshire Council will have developed a number of smartphone applications that enable communication and consultation with residents on a whole range of topics. Residents will feel better informed and engaged through innovative use of technology.

Herefordshire will be well known as a county which retains its key characteristics whilst embracing modern day living and working through its ambition of being a digital county.

Themes

The Network

The current broadband infrastructure in Herefordshire is one of the slowest networks in the country. Without action the current situation will only become worse as more and more people use the internet therefore creating added pressure on the existing network. There are also households in the county that do not have access to a broadband service at all, and these are the priority.

As a rural area, with a low population density, Herefordshire has not been commercially viable for telecommunication companies to invest in the broadband infrastructure as they would be unlikely to receive the financial returns to recoup that investment. Therefore, funds from national Government matched by Herefordshire Council are providing a financial contribution to make private sector investment viable. The network supplier will use a combination of their own resources and that of the public sector to ensure the infrastructure is expanded to enable everyone to gain access to broadband speeds of 2Mbps, with many areas receiving speeds in excess of 30Mbps.

The network is being improved through the Borders Broadband project, a partnership between Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, working in collaboration to meet the challenge of broadband provision in the two counties.

Mobile phone coverage enables internet access through existing 3G and future 4G developments. At present Herefordshire has very patchy mobile coverage - 69% 2G geographic coverage, and 3% 3G coverage from all operators

(<http://maps.ofcom.org.uk/mobile/index.html>) which hinders communication for residents and businesses at a time when the increasing priority is to access the internet while on the move.

Internet use

Studies show typical savings of £560 per annum can be made in household finances by making the most of internet use (ref: www.sqw.co.uk/file_download/138). Plus by switching to online accounts (i.e. e-billing) additional savings can be made, in the region of £239 per annum to the average family (www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11787658).

There are also strong social benefits with internet access becoming an essential part of communication and interaction.

A key task is for more people and businesses to be aware of the benefits of the internet and specifically the use of broadband. To many this is obvious, but for others it is a big step with barriers to overcome, including the cost of equipment, skills and knowledge. Experience has shown that with a little support these barriers can be overcome leading to new horizons opening up through the use of the internet.

Education and training

The technology skills young people learn at school today will be essential in their future careers and the future economic vitality of the county and the country. As businesses diversify, technology skills will become even more important as many schools and colleges are tackling this issue with advances in computer programming as part of their studies.

However, the issue of training goes far beyond the classroom. Sometimes training is also about building awareness and confidence among the general public in using technology.

The internet is also a great way of accessing education and training, in supporting studies, providing online courses as well as assisting with homework and research. This is very important in rural areas where the access to courses and resources is not readily available.

Rural Isolation

There are considerable benefits to older people living longer in their own home rather than residential care for both their own well being and the public purse. Though there is a concern that people will become more isolated with limited interaction with the outside world as we become older and less mobile. However, isolation does not just affect older people, but also a consequence of poverty, disability or access to transport. This isolation can be compounded in rural areas.

Use of the internet has the ability to address isolation through interaction with friends and family, and for practical applications such as communicating with public and health services.

As more services and goods will be designed solely for the internet the danger is that some people will be left behind, creating a digital divide. There is a role for the public and voluntary sectors to support more people to get online and take advantage of what the internet can offer.

Business

The improved broadband in Herefordshire is a key component of the county's Economic Development Strategy and combined with other initiatives it will transform the prospects of industry in the county. It is estimated that the improved broadband network will have significant impact on the county's Gross Value Added (GVA) - potentially boosted by £120m over the next ten years. The improved broadband will enable companies to compete on a level playing field with more urban based companies who already have the broadband speeds. The county has a high proportion of small and medium sized businesses (86% of businesses having 1-10 employees) many of which operate from home. These businesses are

important to the sustainability of rural communities in providing employment and support to local amenities, enabling public services like schools to continue and adding vibrancy to communities. The investment in the broadband network will help keep these companies in rural areas, as well as attracting new businesses which would have been otherwise deterred by poor broadband and mobile phone coverage. As well as creating market opportunities, greater use of the internet by businesses can create savings that can be reinvested in the company or used to employ more people. It also reduces the need to travel, with additional benefits to the environment.





Members of Burghill Community Access Point



Colin communicating to family in America



Learning together



Broadband champion Toby Murcott

Themes

Health and Wellbeing

Pilot schemes and research have shown that there are key benefits to increasing people's health and wellbeing through use of digital services, specifically in preventing preventing the need for invasive treatment which in the long run costs the tax payer less and is better for all.

Remote diagnostic and monitoring services, commonly referred to as telehealth, can assist the vulnerable and long-term sick allowing them to remain in their own homes and avoid the need for hospital or care worker visits. Patient experience of remote monitoring has indicated that people can feel empowered and more secure knowing their health is being observed.

www.hometelehealthltd.co.uk

This way of working is not a simple task - it requires initial investment and a change of approach for patients and health professionals. However, maximising the use of suitable technologies could help to address the growing challenge in Herefordshire and the rest of the country of the social care needs of vulnerable people.

Though living in a rural environment has many positive effects on wellbeing, travel and accessing services can be a challenge. By using email and web services people can interact with friends and family irrespective of geographical constraints. For older people Skype and email are increasingly popular applications enabling communications and interact with family across the world.

Activity

Some of the key programmes taking place in Herefordshire include:

- **Network:** One of four national pilots to improve broadband infrastructure in rural areas, creating better coverage and access to faster speeds. Private sector providers also independently addressing the lack of broadband in some rural areas through wifi services.
- **Mobile coverage:** Potential pilot area for improved mobile phone coverage
- **Champions:** Establishment of broadband champions across the county to support the communication, awareness and involvement in the Borders Broadband project.
- **Business:** Local programme of business support to generate private sector growth and sustainability by maximising the benefits of faster broadband speeds.
- **Awareness:** Communicating the benefits of broadband access, including questionnaires to every household and businesses to assess demand and need.
- **Training:** A network of training courses to help people develop their skills and confidence in using the internet.
- **Community Access:** Financial support for community venues to purchase equipment enabling residents to access technology and the internet.
- **Public Service:** Use of digital technologies as part of Herefordshire Public Services' main transformation programme.
- **Go-on Line:** Planned programme of activity by a range of groups and organisations linked to the national programme to get every connected to the internet by 2020
www.go-on.co.uk

If you require this document in an alternative format or language please contact 01432 260609 or email bordersbroadband@herefordshire.gov.uk