10 December 2017

BROADBAND UPDATE from Jim Pollard, for Deerhurst Parish Council

Part 1. There is much to report.

Last Wednesday, representatives from Fastershire, Gigaclear and Complete Utilities visited Apperley to give councillors a progress report. The main news is that the build of the new broadband network in Apperley will start immediately, almost six months earlier than the last start date we were given. This is simply because the design of the network for Apperley has been approved by Gigaclear earlier than anticipated.

Also last Wednesday, the concrete base for the main cabinet was cast next to the phone box in Apperley. You may have noticed blue dots and numbers at the edge of many properties. Each is the location for a "pot", from which each property is connected to the network. Other markings are for "blow" points (BP) and cabinet locations (CDC).

As they lay the underground cables around Apperley and Lower Apperley, Complete Utilities will also place several smaller cabinets around the neighbourhood. They hope to complete the network around Apperley in about two months.

Anticipating the connection to their home, some owners have asked the survey team to place their pot in a more convenient location. The build team can adjust these pot locations, if it is practical to do so.

Having just received the proposed network design from Gigaclear, the survey team was due to be working in Deerhurst Walton (the broadband area) last Friday, marking more pot and cabinet locations. Once the survey has been done and the design approved, Complete Utilities will be able to start building that part of the network. They appear very keen to start.

If both areas take two months each, the broadband network within our Parish may be completed by April but, as yet, we can only guess the completion date.

On your behalf, I visited Complete Utilities on Friday, to see the design for both the Apperley and the Deerhurst Walton networks. This was an opportunity to correct any errors; particularly properties without a pot. I have since discussed a few problems with the homeowners affected.

In September, I also submitted a report to Fastershire about the different status reports given on the Fastershire and Gigaclear websites, including a list of missing addresses. This report has since been shared with both Gigaclear and Complete Utilities.

While the network is being built, Gigaclear will be writing to landowners with whom wayleave agreements are needed to allow access to properties across their land. Given the speed at which the network is likely to be built, it is urgent to have these agreements in place to avoid delays. In some cases, landowners may be giving permission to have themselves connected, so please respond as quickly as possible.

The Gigaclear network is coming towards us from Coombe Hill. The main cabinet for Deerhurst Walton is planned to be by Highfield Business Park. The Apperley network will be connected via the Deerhurst Walton network. Contrary to previous advice that properties will be activated progressively, this means that everyone in the Apperley area may be activated all at once.

The retail arm of Gigaclear should be advising us when the network of cabinets, cables and pots is near completion. We are hoping they will be organsing launch events at Apperley Village Hall, in cooperation with the Parish Council. These could either be presentations in the main hall or drop-in sessions. Based on the popularity of our event with Fastershire last October, we may have to arrange two or three presentations. Once the Village Hall itself has been connected, it will be possible for Gigaclear to demonstrate their new network.

Part 2. The following notes are for anyone wishing to do some further research themselves online before the new network is activated.

I have added below various links to parts of the Gigaclear website. While Gigaclear is responsible for the new ultrafast broadband network, they are also one of a small number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

Gigaclear Broadband Packages

While I cannot (and must not) recommend Gigaclear, the obvious first step is to look at their costs and the process of connecting your home to the pot on the edge of your property, as well as their four broadband packages (giving different download speeds).

See https://www.gigaclear.com/our-broadband-products/for-home/home-broadband-packages/

Internet Service Providers

Only when the Gigaclear network has grown sufficiently will more familiar ISPs be attracted to offer their broadband services, giving everyone a much broader choice. The current list of eleven providers is next to the postcode checker or at: https://www.gigaclear.com/retailserviceproviders/

Please note that some of these companies offer services only to businesses and schools, so the choice for home users is less than it seems.

Price Comparisons

If you look at websites like https://www.broadbandchoices.co.uk/broadband/fibre-optic, please note that none of these companies currently offers a broadband service via the Gigaclear network.

Connecting Yourself

Some owners are intending to make the connection themselves, for which a kit and instructions are provided. It is everyone's choice where the connection is made to their home, including where the indoor wall-mounted unit is mounted. Various useful documents are available to download.

See https://www.gigaclear.com/about/help-and-support/ (documentation download tab)

Registering with Gigaclear

About 20% of households have already registered with Gigaclear, after using the postcode checker at: https://www.gigaclear.com/postcode-checker

The status report has been updated recently but, unfortunately, the list of addresses has not, despite assurances and several reminders. By registering with Gigaclear, you are making no commitment to use either the new network or their Internet service but registering might encourage them to start arranging the launch events.

Phone Services over the Internet (VOIP)

Some households no longer use landline phones, preferring their mobile phone, satellite or their existing broadband service. While looking at the Gigaclear website, you may find their partner VOIP services at: https://www.gigaclear.com/our-broadband-products/for-home/voip/.

I look forward to hearing Gigaclear being asked some searching questions at the Village Hall, hopefully in around four or five months (fingers crossed).