

Kirkandrews on Esk is the most north western parish in Cumbria, extending north from the Solway, and bordering Scotland. The parish covers 10891 acres (4407 hectares), with a population of 495 living in 195 households (2011 data).

The rural parish has no village but consists of a hamlet at Kirkandrews Moat, a small industrial estate North of the Esk at Longtown bridge, a Ministry of Defence site where former military housing is now in private ownership, scattered houses, farms and small businesses.

Background

In 2011 two parish councillors, Ian Dixon and William Bundred, began to examine the extent of Broadband provision in the area. They found the coverage was very poor causing numerous challenges for residents and businesses. Sadly Ian passed away, meaning William was left to manage the project on behalf of the Parish Council.

Since then, there have been many changes, including the Connecting Cumbria programme, (delivered by Cumbria County Council and Openreach) which since 2013 has been installing the infrastructure to enable Superfast Broadband to be available to most properties across the county.

Often, the hardest properties to reach are those furthest away from existing Superfast infrastructure and at the start of the programme it looked like this included Kirkandrews-on-Esk.

However, as the countywide programme has developed it has been possible to install 3 superfast cabinets in the parish and an alternative 'fibre to the premises' solution is currently being delivered for some properties.

Whilst residents and businesses are extremely grateful for these developments, it still left many without access.



The Project

The Parish Council decided to develop a Community Fibre Partnership (CFP) - a project where the community works with Openreach (or another internet infrastructure supplier) to build a customised fibre solution, bringing broadband to homes and businesses.

Funding to deliver the scheme is met jointly by the infrastructure provider and the community, with residents and businesses able to access vouchers from the Government funded Better Broadband Scheme, to part / fully fund their contribution. Parish Councils can be the accountable body for a CFP.

In 2016 the Parish Council submitted their original application to Openreach for a CFP and requested information about how much the project would cost to deliver. The original costing for the whole area was huge so they decided to break it down into four smaller areas and submit applications for each.



Fibre connection via telegraph poles



Residents enjoy the benefits of Ultrafast Broadband on TV and mobile devices

Community engagement was a key part of the project, and this was achieved using leaflets, articles in the church magazine, word of mouth and face to face discussions.

Once they had the costings, the Parish Council decided to concentrate first on the two small areas of Scotsdyke and Glinger - a total of 23 properties.

Grant funding was available locally from both the Halburn and Beck Burn Wind Farm Community Funds meaning they didn't need to access Better Broadband Vouchers for homes and only 2 vouchers were needed for businesses in the area.

What has been achieved?

The two areas chosen were signed up as a CFP scheme and the deposit paid (half the overall cost) in October 2018. The work was due to be completed in October 2019 but was delivered in the August, ahead of schedule.

Ultrafast Broadband is now available for all 23 of properties in the area; most have been connected by fibre to the premises using telegraph poles. The final connection for each property is made when an internet service is ordered. As the infrastructure has been installed by Openreach, residents and

businesses can choose from any Internet Service Provider (ISP) operating in the area.

The Parish Council is now looking at the remaining areas in the parish with limited internet access and is investigating a further Community Fibre Partnership Scheme(s).

The Learning

Don't let your community be left behind with poor internet access, it's worth investigating whether a CFP scheme is right for your area. No specialist knowledge is required, just a lot of determination and patience!

Since the project was delivered, voucher amounts have been increased (as part of the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme), making the community contribution easier to meet. Depending on the project cost however, grant funding or financial contributions from residents and businesses may also be needed.

Contact Details

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For details about Connecting Cumbria, visit: www.connectingcumbria.org.uk

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