Killearn Broadband Open Day Report

Killearn Broadband Open Day was held on Saturday 24th Oct. with an opening address by Gerard O'Sullivan, Director, Corporate Operations, Stirling Council and attended by Bruce Crawford MSP, Steven Paterson MP and local councillors. The event, organised by the Killearn Broadband Group (a sub group of Killearn Community Council), focused on when and where Next Generation Broadband (NGB) will arrive in Killearn and the other Western rural villages.

Exhibitors were: Killearn CC, Ofcom, Digital Scotland, Community Broadband Scotland, STEP and LocustWorld. KCC and KBG had Helpdesks and both Ofcom and LocustWorld gave presentations.

About 200 attended on the day; of these nearly 50 used the KBG Technical Helpdesk to clarify their own issues and expectations. Visitors were mostly Killearn residents but others came from other Community Council areas prompted by invitations to other Community Councils eg Balfron, Boquhan, Buchanan, Buchlyvie, Croftamie, Gartmore, Kinlochard, and Strathblane/Blanefield.

50% of the queries at the Helpdesk were concerned about availability – would they get the NGB service – and were also complaining about their current speeds and querying whether the new service would be any better. 10% were from people who already knew that they were on long lines and wondering what would happen for them. Other issues were: When 20%, Benefits 16%, Cost 6%, Faults 5%. Finally, people generally had complaints about the lack of information from the roll-out programme and commented that our efforts to remedy that were greatly appreciated.

Many of the speed concerns arise not just because rural premises are generally on long lines but because they are on Exchange Only (EO) connections. Half the village is connected in this way, the other half through the E1 & E3 cabinets. Generally, when people were told that they were on an EO connection they were unsure about the significance of that, and therefore concerned whether they would get NGB at all. About 73% of premises are close enough to get NGB speeds eventually.

Only a few were aware of www.digitalscotland.org/whereandwhen that allows you to check your own connection. It will tell you whether Fibre is available to your area and how you are connected to the exchange (directly or via a cabinet) but not how far away you are which is the really critical information. Other sites such as www.freemaptools.com/distance-between-uk-postcodes.htm will let you enter your postcode and that of the exchange (G63 9RN) to get a distance, though note the difference between line-of-sight (as the crow flies) and the 'by land' which is more likely to be the actual route your landline follows. Further, you will know that a postcode covers several properties, so is approximate. A more accurate estimate can be obtained by looking at data within your router. Links are on the KCC website.

This leads to the main question – whether you are within the 'magic' 1.2km of a Fibre cabinet, or the exchange. If you are further than this, and maybe it will be reduced to1km, then the NGB service will not be offered. The reason is that beyond this distance, the fibre technology (VSDL2) is no better than the ADSL2+ technology newly installed in Killearn. This may become the "poor man's NGB" as it has the same reach as before but doubles the speeds, both up and down, that you will have seen before August. If you are on a really long line though, doubling a very poor speed will not make much difference – and it is still far, far less than the 80Mbps that the advertising keeps talking about!

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Everyone wanted to know how the roll-out would work and we provided maps, pictures and a BT training video to explain this. Also to help explain the potential benefits to business several case studies were provided, including some local ones. Links are on the KCC website.

Solutions for people with long lines were a main topic of interest. This affected 45% of the callers at the helpdesk and we had prepared a list of possible solutions that KBG plan to explore. One, of several companies invited, exhibited their technology: LocustWorld, a provider of a community-led wireless solution. Drymen Broadband users will be familiar with this company.

So what next?
KBG are investigating what solution(s) offer the best long-term answer to the problem of premises on long lines. Included in this will be, perhaps interim, alternative solutions such as that offered by LocustWorld. These are almost all collaborative so need community-wide cooperation. Further, we are concerned that the EO roll-out may not be as complete as we envisaged and so this is another aspect that will be getting significant attention.

In conclusion: a very successful day, but a lot of work still to do.

All of this information, useful links and more about the work of Killearn Community Council is on the KCC website www.killearncc.org.uk and we will keep you up to date via this and the monthly KCC meetings.

We are very grateful to the following for their generous support: Killearn Village Hall, Stirling Council Connect Fund, iLomond, and Three Sisters Bake.

Doug Ashworth
Chair, Killearn Broadband Group
28 Oct 2015