

So what's all this I hear about super-fast broadband?

Within the country there are various schemes and funding streams available to bring the average broadband speed up to at least 24Mbps, which is the speed regarded as super-fast.

Northamptonshire County Council has been the facilitator in this county, gathering a range of funding. This has been earmarked for various schemes in the county where there is little or no commercial broadband development. There are however, large geographic areas that are not getting funding via this method, and we are in one of them. Nevertheless, there is an option available to our local communities via a commercial company, www.gigaclear.com

What are they proposing?

The scheme is planned to bring fibre optic broadband to the premises of Ravensthorpe, West Haddon and Guilsborough. There are roughly 1200 properties within the three villages and approximately 1/3rd have to take the service to make it commercially viable. (We are one of 4 schemes in the county, totalling 5000 properties.) The basic broadband speed is 50Mbps, with options up to 1Gbps and will be available to both business and private users. As this is an all optical system, there will be no speed degradation related to distance from the core network.

If people are able to sign up in April, the infrastructure could be in by October of this year.

What will it cost?

The question most people ask next is regarding the costs. For each premises there will be a £100 connection fee (£200 for businesses) which will bring the optical fibre to a point on the roadside just outside of your premises, and will include a fibre modem (with wireless-n and gigabit wired connections) and an optical cable to connect to the point outside the premises (up to 50M in length – longer cables are available at extra cost).

Mounting the modem, digging the hole from the roadside, making the connection and configuring a single computer to use the new Internet connections can be done either, by the premises owner, or will cost from £95 for expert fitting (see the company website for exactly what is covered by that expert fee and what else you may be required to pay for).

The monthly cost for the 50Mbps service is £37 for homes and £59 for businesses.

The minimum contract is 12 months, with 3 months' notice (so 15 months in total)

Can I completely get rid of my BT line?

Yes, if you do not want to use their telephone service, with its associated line rental and call costs. You will, however require some alternative method to make and receive calls. If you have a good mobile phone signal, you may already be using this instead of the land-line for your voice calls. If you do not have a good mobile signal, or require a land-line, you may stay with your telephone provider for this, or for a fee of £6/month you may use your existing handsets with an Internet phone provider (e.g. www.vonage.co.uk/gigaclear whose adaptor plugs into the modem).

Note that it's not clear on the Vonage website, but you can keep your existing number on the £6 package.

Also, as your optical router and telephone adaptor will require powering from mains sockets, these will not be available in a power cut unless you use an Uninterruptable Power Supply. (Your current BT master socket is powered from the exchange and will work in a power cut, but usually not any connected cordless phones or other forms of extensions.)

So, it will cost more than my existing home system?

They say you get what you pay for, and 50Mbps is a much faster service than people are currently receiving. For instance, many Ravensthorpe properties, due to line quality or distance from the exchange (or both) are receiving a service of less than 1Mbps and the average for the village as a whole is just under 2Mbps.

Item	Wired BT monthly cost range	Gigaclear home fibre costs
Speed	Up to 16Mb download	50Mb symmetrical
Broadband	£10 – £21	£37
Line Rental	£15.99	£0.00
Call Plan	£7.00	£6
Typical Monthly Cost	£32.99 – £43.99	£43

BT prices taken from http://www.productsandservices.bt.com/products/broadband/packages/?s_cid=con_FURL_packages on 26/03/2014 13:00 and include integrated features not offered by Gigaclear. Cheaper broadband and phone deals may be obtained from other suppliers

What is contention ratio?

Contention ratio is the sharing of capacity, and Gigaclear's domestic contention ratio at 25:1 is much better than the industry standard of 50:1 and for businesses it is low or even uncontended. As the core network becomes proportionally faster, contention is becoming much less of an issue and Gigaclear are going to connect to the core network using a 10Gbps link.

My current provider has email, antivirus and net-nanny included – does this?

This connection is directly into the core optical network and does not offer these 'sweeteners' used by other Internet Service Providers.

For an impartial review of the free email providers see:

<http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/features/internet/3448241/whats-the-best-free-email-service>

For an impartial review of free antivirus providers see:

<http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/shopping/free-anti-virus-software>

There is a dual stack IPv4/IPv6 firewall built into the router, and most modern operating systems on your computers will also have one, if you have it enabled.

Currently, the author does not know of a good free net-nanny. (One of the larger ISP's is now advertising this as a "shield".) The ISP does provide access to a parental controls scheme based on the blocking of adult content via a globally controlled classification.

Personally, and even though my current ISP does provide some of the above services, the author takes control of this and uses Norton Internet Security to provide all of these services at home, but it does have a yearly fee of under £1/week for up to three PC's. (Many other paid for, and free solutions are available, and they may be more suitable for you.)

I've heard that the Internet will be changing to something called IPv6 soon?

The people and organisations that control the Internet have been wanting to move across to using IPv6 for over a decade, but there has been incredible inertia from manufacturers and suppliers to this. The Internet currently uses IPv4 which has a relatively limited number of addresses that can be used to talk directly to computers. Most people reading this will have at least two layers of Network Address Translation (NAT) occurring on their Internet use, a technique which is allowing many peoples PC's to share one address at the ISP. Moving across to IPv6 will increase the number of addresses hugely and allow everyone to have an individual address.

All modern computer operating systems and the Gigaclear router will operate with both IPv4 and IPv6.

What if I don't want the service now, but might in the future?

Once there are sufficient people signed up to take the service, the infrastructure will be installed to the roadside of all premises covered by the scheme, whether they are currently signed up or not. Connection at a later date may incur higher fees for expert installation than those taking it immediately, and if too many people wait we may never reach our deployment threshold. To help with this people can sign up now and get their installation, but only start using the service when their current subscription expires.

I live in an isolated property, will I get included?

Inclusion of properties is a simple function of return on investment. It is going to cost more to provide the service to somewhere isolated, and it will only be included if that cost will be recouped. For instance, an indication of the costs of including Winwick in the scheme have already been supplied.

I might be moving from the village in a year or so. Is it worth me signing up?

Most certainly, if you are going to use the service while you are still here. Also, this article

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/broadband/10671273/Slow-broadband-wipes-20-off-house-prices.html> suggests that the connection cost will easily be recouped in an increased value of the property.

I am a landlord can I have the service installed but not pay a subscription?

Landlords can have the installation and connection only, and then let the tenant take up the subscription (3 month minimum contract + 3 months' notice). The advantage for landlords is that with ultra-fast broadband available they can attract more professional tenants.

What do I do now?

Be patient, and we'll let you know how as soon as you can sign up.