

Dear xxxx,

The SCC / BT launch event was informative, but apart from redefining “superfast” did not address the questions that I raised with your Project Director on the 31st January in the e-mail below. Since they in the main only require a simple yes or no response I am disappointed to have had no reply to date and hope that I may get something, even if it is just an acknowledgement of my e-mail.

There are a significant number of lines already having fibre-based access in Ewhurst that do not support even 15Mbps. These telephone numbers will be forwarded to Bill Murphy in due course as he requested at the launch event.

In other parts of the country where county council / BT projects that have been underway for a considerable time, similar issues have been raised regarding the ability of the proposed technology to reach rural areas, the easy areas having been picked off first. Like Surrey, there have been no real answers as to how rural areas will be provided with superfast broadband and the continual delays with various trials and pilot schemes suggest that BT have no answers either.

I would be pleased to have some reassurance that in Surrey this will not be the case.

Kind Regards

David Cooper

Dear *Project Director*,

First, I should introduce myself. My name is David Cooper; I am a Chartered Engineer with a 40 year plus background and qualifications in communication engineering. I worked for six years with SEEDA, other RDAs and the devolved administrations managing projects for the public funding of broadband in rural areas of the South East. As you can imagine, as well as understanding the technologies this required knowledge of the national policy, regional strategy and local issues. I project managed and assessed the bids for the European funding of community broadband projects, one of the successful bids being Ewhurst. They proposed to use Vtesse as their infrastructure provider, who promised a far better fibre infrastructure and support than that which BT has delivered. As you no doubt are aware, the Vtesse project was derailed by BT announcing that they were after all going to provide their superfast solution to Ewhurst. This announcement was made under an NDA to selected public officials after the SEEDA award to Ewhurst. In my experience, this way of operating by BT is not unique with previous examples in the South East and across the country.

With this background you can understand my interest in the Surrey Advertiser story in the Friday 11th January edition about the problems with BT’s superfast broadband deployment in Ewhurst and in the same newspaper in another story, the declaration by SCC’s deputy leader Peter Martin that they plan to ensure that virtually all premises will be able to connect to the

internet at superfast speeds by 2014. You are probably aware, but if not, both of these stories are attached.

I understand that SCC have defined “virtually” as 99.7% of Surrey premises and “superfast” as a download speed of greater than 24Mbits/sec, although the EU would have us all able to connect at greater than 30Mbits/sec. The SCC definition does not include the upload speed, a very important parameter given the two-way nature of many internet applications, especially for businesses. The contract that SCC has with BT was signed on the 12th September 2012 and this commits £21.3m of public money to provide the improvements, mainly in rural areas.

I have serious doubts about the likely success of this project, my main concerns being:

1. BT’s Fibre to the Cabinet technology will not meet the SCC targets of superfast to virtually every home and business. The SCC estimate of the number of premises that will be able to connect at superfast speeds is very optimistic.
2. Fibre to the Cabinet technology limits broadband speeds such that in a very short time the technology will be obsolete and require replacing.
3. SCC use the BT promise that consumers will be able to pay for even higher speeds by “demanding” a Fibre to the Premises connection once their particular street cabinet has its own fibre connection. Based on the Ewhurst deployment and information in response to my questions at a recent [IET talk](#) given by a very senior BT Openreach engineer, the affordability of this for small businesses is not clear and the concept seems to be wishful thinking rather than practical reality. Another BT promise of Fibre to the Pole was said to be still under development and an impression given that it was in difficulties.
4. At the same IET meeting the BT Openreach engineer said that superfast deployment has been built mainly to accommodate their communication provider customers (Sky, Talk Talk and BT retail etc) whose priority is to deliver video (TV); there was no emphasis during the talk on upload speeds or business requirements. This emphasis is supported by the BT Vision ambitions that have seen them spend vast sums on content so they may compete with Virgin Media. At the meeting the deployment of Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) and Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) was said to have pushed ahead of completed trials, using unproven equipment and processes, the urgency coming from the commercial requirement driven by the BT Board and CExec.

5. BT Openreach are already stretched with their own commercial deployment of fibre and therefore will find it difficult to resource the SCC contract, especially as they have secured many other similar contracts in other parts of the country. The apparent lack of trained resource and equipment has led to the installation problems in Ewhurst. The local population in Ewhurst is well organised and have independent technical support to spot poor superfast installations. Other locations could well have similar problems, but they may never know given the lack of diagnostic facilities available to the end user, not helped by the cumbersome and unhelpful BT Openreach processes that are in place to resolve such problems.

My fear is that public money has been contracted based on optimistic predictions from BT marketing professionals with the engineering of solutions still being under development, with as yet no announced technical / commercial solution that will meet the SCC objectives. Also, the emphasis by BT on residential services does not square with the SCC justification for the new broadband infrastructure, which is to help businesses to generate £28million for the local economy.

The questions that I would like to see answered are:

- a) Will SCC follow their advice to the BIS consultation on NGA funding in 2010? In their submission, SCC said that the emphasis should be on areas with either no or poor quality access and that these should benefit first from the roll-out of NGA.
- b) Will the SCC contract cover premises in areas that have already been covered with superfast broadband by commercial providers (mainly BT) but have little or no improvement and still cannot access superfast speeds?
- c) Will the SCC contract cover premises where the exchange area has been "done", but some cabinets left out?
- d) Will SCC make business parks a priority? In many cases these are on the outskirts of towns / exchange areas and have been left out – for example Slyfield Green and Loseley in Guildford.
- e) SCC talks about “access” to superfast broadband. BT talk about premises passed. What is defined in the contract for access? The BT definition does not necessarily mean premises have access as once the initial capacity is allocated it will need to be increased by the installation of more street cables and possibly more than one street cabinet per existing PCP cabinet? This has already been necessary in Chilworth. Are the costs to increase capacity in this way included in the contract? If not how can the SCC contract provide “virtually” 100% access by 2014?
- f) SCC says the FTTC solution is future-proof by virtue of the undefined “Fibre on Demand” and “Fibre to the Pole products”. How confident is SCC that BT will provide such solutions at an affordable price and does the contract have a deadline before which these products shall be available?

These observations are made in the absence of any detailed information from SCC or BT relating to the Surrey contract. I assume, given the bold claims by SCC, that the contract will be closely monitored to ensure that the targets are met. Given the significant public money being spent I hope that you can provide some confidence that the project with BT will meet its targets and not become a county wide “Ewhurst”.

Kind Regards

David Cooper