



Header: Reviewing Land Allocations

Stand first: Wayne Reynolds, Director of Atriarc Planning offers an overview of infrastructure upgrades to rural broadband network.

Rural broadband services often fall short of comparable services found in urban areas. To promote Welsh business and enhance internet access for rural communities; the Welsh Government has committed to improving rural connections through the Superfast Cymru programme. The programme was designed to upgrade the necessary infrastructure by 2016 however it is widely acknowledged some areas will take longer to connect. Notwithstanding this, a target has been set to improve internet connections to 96% of homes and businesses in the next twelve months.

The type of service upgrade is largely dependent on location. For example, in most instances the infrastructure upgrades are largely focussed on installing new fibre optic cabling to telephone exchanges in villages and then relying on the existing copper telephone wires to provide a higher download speed. In areas where existing exchanges are limited or where the cost of laying new fibre optic cabling is high (in proportion to the number of properties served); other options are being promoted. For example, digital masts similar to those found for mobile networks can provide download speeds of up to 30mbps. Alternatively satellite downloads are possible but the costs associated with a satellite connection are generally found to be higher in the long term.

Details on the role out of the Superfast program can be found at <http://www.superfast-cymru.com/>. The website also retains up to date news items and a list of frequently asked questions on how the infrastructure upgrades are being developed.

In areas with very poor connections (generally less than 2mbps), the Welsh Government also offers a funded grant to install receivers and associated IT technology up to the value of 90% of the installation cost (with a maximum grant of £900 per property). This grant is delivered through Access Broadband Cymru and is available to both home-owners and rural businesses.

The role out of broadband services is particularly beneficial for farms and rural businesses. The introduction of this technology enables faster methods of working and allows businesses to operate more efficiently. After a new connection has been established, many landowners are now setting up their own Wi-Fi networks to connect other buildings. For example, it is becoming increasingly common for the main farm house to run a Wi-Fi network, connecting out buildings such as holiday lets or office units to enhance the offer for occupiers.

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