

West Chiltington – the quest for improvements to broadband connections

Mike Philips, West Chiltington Website

In 2003 West Chiltington had no broadband but through a successful website campaign achieved a speed of 512kb. Technology has moved on and the time has now come to do better and so we have another campaign to make further improvements.

The Village's telecom links are currently fed from a dusty corner of the Storrington Exchange. 4–5km of grotty copper ensures that we get at best 2–3mb speed. As a 'long thin' parish those at the top end are unable to receive any broadband. Thakeham, to the east, fed on the same network has the same problems. By contrast Pulborough, two miles to the west but fed from a different exchange, can get 6–8mb.

Having explored a number of potential solutions it was thought that replacing the 4–5km of copper wire with

fibre optics would be the answer. Discussing this with BT Openreach required the intervention of our MP Nick Herbert but disappointingly this also was not possible for technical reasons. With support from Mike Hicks at West Sussex County Council I have now submitted a bid for grant funding from SEEDA to get BT to upgrade the Worthing West Exchange to Next Generation Access. This has the advantage that it is a less parochial solution as it will assist many more local communities.

I would like to see pressure on BT to improve the broadband services to the many rural communities and let the urban areas 'coast' for a while on their already reasonable speeds.

I await the outcome of the SEEDA submission, but know that we need to keep the pressure on to improve rural broadband.

AirS Commentary

Many rural communities have poor broadband services when compared to their urban counterpart. In 2004–2005 many communities ran successful local campaigns that resulted in their local exchange being enabled for broadband. However, the advances made in bandwidth provision and speed of connectivity in the last few years have again been concentrated in the urban areas where market forces prevail and where providers can see quick returns on their investment. AirS, with other organisations and through the East Sussex and West Sussex Rural Partnerships, is campaigning for equity in broadband infrastructure provision. In the meantime, many rural communities are running their own campaigns, joining with others or finding local solutions that make local improvements. This is the case with Cocking and West Chiltington which are profiled here.



Cocking community computers

Cocking now has its own centre where residents can learn to make effective use of computers and can access the Internet. For those who have no computer of their own, or who have difficulty with broadband connections, this is already proving a great asset to the Village.

Funded through Action in rural Sussex (AirS), under the Rural Access to Services Programme the Centre has five new laptop computers, installed at Moonlight Cottage Tea Room, where a series of training sessions has begun. The instructor is Steve Redshaw, an experienced IT teacher, and his aim is to help students understand that a computer can be a helpful tool, and to remove some of the myths and fears surrounding the internet. The photograph

shows Steve with a class – up to ten students can be accommodated at a time, two to each computer. Participants can bring their own laptop if they prefer.

The training sessions are also offered to residents of neighbouring parishes, via West Lavington and Bepton Parish Councils. In addition to the classes, one computer will be available for use during the Tea Room opening hours: there is no charge for using the computer, although users will undoubtedly find it difficult to resist the refreshments available on the menu.

The facilities may be moved in due course to the new Cocking Village Hall, of which construction has just begun and which is due to be completed at the end of the summer.

For more information contact Rowena Tyler, Community Leadership Support Officer – on 01798 344612