

12. Connectivity – Telecommunications, Broadband and Mobile Internet

Relevant Evidence Base

- BDUK Broadband Delivery Project - Local Broadband Plan: Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire Superfast Broadband (2011-2015)
- Coventry Broadband Coverage Map
- West Midlands Strategic Infrastructure Advice Paper (PBA) 2015

Introduction

The Government is committed to securing a world-class communication system. The importance of facilitating this through the Local Plans is identified within the NPPF (para 43) as well as the Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy and the Digital Agenda for Europe. Currently, one of the main barriers to this is the availability of super-fast and ultrafast broadband¹, especially in more rural areas and within new developments, in particular those on previously undeveloped land. The NPPF recognises the role of advanced, high quality communications infrastructure in creating sustainable economic growth. The development of high-speed broadband technology and other communications networks will also play a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services.

Communication infrastructure includes telephone systems (both wired and mobile) and broadband. The benefits of having a modern and accessible system of telecommunications, wireless and electronic methods of communication across Coventry and its surrounding area will be significant both in terms of economic growth, inward investment and sustainable living environments. As such, the city aspires to be a superfast broadband city and wherever possible will look to invest directly in projects to help deliver this aspiration. This is also recognised within the Council's IDP and forms the basis for policy C1.

Broadband Connectivity

A digitally accessible city will allow people enhanced freedom of choice about where and how they work, how they interact with services and facilities and how they promote and operate their businesses. It will also support the city centre and its role within Coventry's electric city initiatives and its position as a Gigabyte City. A connected community is a more sustainable one, as it represents the opportunity for a reduction in car-based commuting and a commensurate reduction in carbon outputs and traffic congestion. It also promotes Coventry as a suitable place for high technology activities and employment to take place, especially in accordance with the growth and continued success of the city's two universities.

At this time however, there is no legal requirement to provide such facilities as standard, although recent proposed changes to Building Regulations could change this position. Despite the nationwide installation programmes of major suppliers there is a genuine risk that gaps will continue to remain within the market, especially within new developments that grow and expand the existing urban area. Indeed, the Council is aware of recent

developments across Coventry where superfast broadband has not been installed from the outset and as a result is incurring greater cost and disruption to introduce retrospectively compared to inclusion alongside wider utilities provision or highway construction at the outset of development. In 2015, Peter Brett Associates undertook an overview of Strategic Infrastructure on behalf of the Metropolitan Authorities. This included a section on telecommunications infrastructure and highlighted the importance of incorporating such provisions at the initial development stage. It also highlighted that within predominantly urban areas where existing networks can be connected and enhanced the cost of delivering such provisions is highly unlikely to have an impact on development viability when delivered from the outset in partnership with a specific provider.

To support the delivery of superfast broadband across Coventry, the Council has a strong track record in procuring and implementing advanced wide area network services, working closely with both JANET(UK) and the Cabinet Office in relation to the Public Services Network (PSN) programme.

The Council is also a member of the CSW Broadband Project, which has been supporting the delivery of broadband upgrades across Coventry and Warwickshire since 2011 and which aims to upgrade existing infrastructure to deliver the government and European connectivity targets. The project is supported by the Coventry & Warwickshire and Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEPs.

The project mapping developed by the CSW Broadband Project highlights a range of areas that continue to lack super-fast broadband connections across the city. These locations are predominantly situated around the edges of the city, including the largely undeveloped or low developed areas to the North West corner of the city. There are other notable locations though, especially around the current regeneration areas in Lower Stoke and Canley as well as parts of the city centre. This highlights the importance of continuing to promote the benefits of super-fast broadband and the principles of the CSW project throughout the plan period as part of new developments as and when they happen. This will not only support the viability of such infrastructure but will also support urban regeneration and sustainable development principles.

In addition to Broadband connectivity, the provisions of mobile internet services are becoming increasingly important. The CSW Broadband Project identified that Coventry has 100% coverage of 3G capabilities; however, there is an on-going roll-out of 4G technologies, which will seek to maximise provisions and access across the city.

Policy C1: Broadband and Mobile Internet

1. Developers of new developments (residential, employment and commercial) will be expected to facilitate and contribute towards the provision of broadband infrastructure suitable to enable the delivery of broadband services across Coventry to ensure that the appropriate service is available to those who need it.

2. Developers must make sure that broadband services that meet the ambitions of the Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy and the European Digital Agenda are available, wherever practicable, to all residents of the development at market prices and with a full choice of all UK service providers.
3. Developers are required to work with a recognised network carrier to design a bespoke duct network, for the development.
4. Other forms of infrastructure, such as facilities supporting mobile broadband and Wi-Fi, should be included, wherever possible and viable and should be designed in a sympathetic and appropriate way in order to reflect the character of the surrounding area.

Key to this plan is ensuring that new developments deliver broadband services that meet the ambition of the governments Digital Communication Strategy and the European Digital agenda. Notable targets of these strategies are:

The digital communications infrastructure strategy:

- By 2017, superfast coverage will have reached 95% of premises, and we expect mobile operators to have achieved 4G coverage to 98%.
- The ambition that ultrafast broadband of at least 100Mbps should become available to nearly all UK premises.

Digital Agenda for Europe:

- Download rates of 30 Mbps for all of its citizens and at least 50% of European households subscribing to internet connections above 100 Mbps by 2020.

Through this Local Plan the Council will adopt these targets for Coventry. In relation to the ambition for ultra-fast broadband, the Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy did not set a timeframe for achieving this target. In adopting this for Coventry, the Council will therefore aim to support the delivery of ultrafast broadband to 95% of all homes across the city by 2021 and 100% by the end of this plan period. Any opportunity to accelerate or increase connectivity across Coventry however will be supported.

In relation to point 4 of Policy C1, specific regard should be given to the delivery of new infrastructure to support mobile internet within Conservation Areas or on/adjacent to heritage assets. Such infrastructure should not be intrusive and should not have a negative impact on the character, integrity or setting of such assets and/or areas.

In terms of actual connections and intended providers, applicants should engage with network providers from the outset to ensure the needs of the service (including new ducting) can be introduced alongside other on-site infrastructure works as part of new

developments to ensure the most efficient and viable approach is taken to securing connectivity.

This approach should be clearly identified within the Planning Statement that supports a relevant planning application and should outline who the intended network provider(s) will be and how the connection will be secured to each property. Every opportunity to future proof broadband provision and infrastructure should also be taken. This should ensure that ducting can be utilised to support ever increasing broadband speeds and cabling with minimum disruption to the highway network.

¹ Superfast broadband is defined as delivering speeds of 25mbps+, whilst ultrafast broadband is