

North Skye Broadband Q&A's

Phase 1 Community Engagement

Will our areas have a choice over broadband providers?

Yes, our project does not limit the ability for others to provide broadband. Our network will also be open access allowing other providers to use our infrastructure.

Will they be stuck on lower connections?

We can't comment on what other providers will offer but it is unlikely to be faster than they currently provide.

How will we deliver our service?

The public tendering process means we have to be technology neutral in tendering. This means we will not know what technology will be used to provide the service until we have selected the successful tender(s).

Implications for phone lines, will I still need line rental?

Our service will not require a line rental and you will be able to get a phone service over the reliable internet we provide. You will still be able to maintain a line with BT if you wish.

Will we create direct employment on the island?

We aim to employ locals in as many of the jobs created by the project as we can. We also aim to run 100% of the service in the future but understand this is not possible from the beginning.

Roughly how much will it cost?

Due to state aid rules we are prohibited from undercutting competitor's prices and aim to be comparable. This aim is currently coming out around £30 per month.

Can I still get Sky/BT Sport?

Our service will be able to handle the Sky and BT Sport streaming channels. Please note that subscriptions that require you to have an internet package with the provider will not be available ie SkyQ.

What about 1Gbps?

That is the aim in the medium term as part of making the network future proof. This is the speed we expect people to need in the next 5-7 years.

How will we raise the extra capital needed?

We are currently exploring all the possible avenues available to us but it is likely to be raised by a mixture of connection fees, share capital, loans and grants

Will there be a data cap?

As we have not got a provider yet we cannot rule this out yet but we would like to have truly unlimited tariffs without caps especially as with higher speeds much more data is used, for example when watching/streaming a film.

Will there be business packages?

Yes. we aim to have comparable business packages and would be willing to work with businesses to create solutions to meet your needs.

Can I keep my current broadband?

Yes. You may keep your current broadband but you should be aware that the speed is unlikely to be increased by any other providers in this area and you will likely need much higher speeds in the future just to look at modern web sites let alone anything else.

Will we create direct employment on the island?

We aim to employ locals in as many of the jobs created by the project as we can. We also aim to run 100% of the service in the future but understand this is not possible from the beginning. One of the drivers in this project is the additional social and economic impact it can bring to the island beyond broadband services.

Do you know where BT are covering?

We currently know what exchanges will be getting upgrades but do not know the exact details of where the cabinets are going or who will be covered by them.

I am in a BT area, can I still get your service?

Once we have delivered services the initial core areas of Waternish, Glendale and Struan we can commercially expand and cover other areas regardless of the BT roll out.

How long is Phase 1?

It is currently unknown in length but if you register on the website we will let you know any news as we find out.

What will the minimum contract length be?

Due to the subsidising of high cost of establishing a service to any property we will most likely require a 12 month contract to start.

Would this count to a fibre escape clause with my satellite provider?

You will have to look at your own contract with them but as it will be a superfast service we would hope it would.

How will it compare to satellite?

It will be more robust in terms of latency and contention. We are aware that satellite is an excellent stop gap for those not benefiting from broadband services but it tends to be an expensive solution especially with regards to data allowances. Latency can also affect applications such as video and gaming or any other highly interactive application.

How much will 1Gbps Cost?

As yet we have no idea how much that level of service would cost. It is our aspiration to “design” the system to be capable of upgrading to that level of speeds as we see this as being future proof. Only when the design of the network has been considered will we have an idea of realistic costs, but it will be governed to some extent by offerings from other Service Providers in that we are constrained to charging at least comparable rates to other providers.

How many properties are in our phase 1 area?

Currently there are just over 700 this is subject to change and we will communicate changes as they are incorporated in our plans.

Is there a minimum number needed to sign up?

We need to demonstrate that at least 10% of the area is interested in taking the services however for our own modelling we would expect this number to be considerably higher.

Will the EU referendum have any effect on the project?

Not to our knowledge, the funding for BDUK and CBS is approved so should not be affected.

Will the take up effect funding?

Yes and no. It will not affect the level of capital funding we receive from CBS, but to get any funding from CBS we will need to demonstrate in our business plan that we have sufficient planned income to sustain operation of the service(s). Obviously, expected take-up is the primary indicator of the income we will receive.

Will we cut out any competition?

No, it should be noted that through our state aid consultation process we have already identified that no provider is planning on putting superfast services into the areas we have identified for at least the next 3 years. Our network is however due to public funding regulations under obligation to provide “open access” therefore allowing other providers to use it to provide services.

What technology do you think it will be?

We do not know until we have the tender responses in. It is not up to us to speculate as we cannot dictate what technology is to be used nor can we influence the market as we go through a very detailed and tightly regulated procurement process.

Will there be a location restriction on membership?

We are still working through the membership rules of the community benefit society. Once this has become clear we will publish the information.

Will we always be comparable to BT?

We aim to be different from BT in many ways!

What upload speed will there be?

A minimum of 15Mbps and we are asking for a design that would allow the network to be capable of providing up and download speeds in the 1Gbps area.

Could BT tender for the project?

Possibly there is nothing stopping them as it is open tender.

Will anyone want to tender?

We expect so, there were 13 tenders for the GigaArgyll project so the market seems keen to bid on projects such as these.

Will you still need to use BT for backhaul?

Most likely yes however we are looking into all possible options including the West Highland Access Network which is part of an Edinburgh University research project to provide backhaul.

Do BT have the capacity?

We do not know but we have submitted a FOI request to see if we can find out what BT have done in terms of capacity with public funds.

How are we gauging demand?

We will gauge demand through the work already carried out and our ongoing community engagement process. We aim to have more and more information regarding the services and costs as the project progresses.

Is BTs solution scalable?

It is not up to us to comment on other providers commercial operations, We are focused on our own project which will be scalable and extensible in design.

Won't running everything in-house increase costs?

It may do however it will also ensure that any revenues made are held locally benefiting the local economy.

Will superfast bring in mobile provision?

With an increase in capacity across the island this will hopefully facilitate enhancement of mobile services.

Will wireless be affected by the weather?

Modern wireless technology and mast sites are actually very reliable if maintained properly. Scoval Mast for example has been using wireless reliably for many years to provide broadband services.

Have any other communities done this?

Yes many communities across the whole of the UK. The fastest and most reliable services in the UK are actually provided by a community organisation called B4RN in Lancashire they are deliver 1000Mbps Upload and Download via fibre through a project which has received no public funding to date. It absolutely can be done by communities and its success, and how good it can become, will be down to the those in the community who want to actively support the project.

When will it be here(Braes)?

We are not sure yet but will let you know as soon as we can. We are only being held up by the current changes in the EC regulation regarding the procurement rules and the detailed definition of where BT will and will not be going..

Is BT open access?

Yes, however this is under BT rules, so for example we are not allowed to simply dig up parts of BTs cable. We have to access at agreed points of presence and through commercial arrangements with BT Wholesale.

Will I need a phone service?

You may not require your landline as reliable broadband will allow you to access Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) services such as Skype without the need for a traditional phone line.

What price points will there be?

We are not sure yet.

Can I suspend services ie over winter in a holiday let?

This has come up several times and is up for consideration. In the early stages however in terms of modelling the finances of the project an annual subscription model would no doubt be the best.

Will it be unlimited?

It is likely that the services will be unlimited, with access to superfast broadband watching data heavy streams of video becomes the norm and bandwidth allocation can be used up very very quickly. It also adds layers of administration and costs to manage data caps

Can we still choose you (BT area)?

In the future yes. There will be nothing to stop North Skye Broadband moving into areas where any other providers exist if we are wanted. As we will not be using public funds to deliver in those areas so we will be operating under no restrictions.

Will we be hit by diminimus aid?

Not sure will need to check (NO)

Will there be clipping of the service?

No

Is there the backhaul capacity needed?

We are unsure yet this will become clear as the HIE and BT project provides more details.

Is the CBS funding based on property count?

We are not sure of the exact formula used by CBS for the funding provision all we know is that they can fund up to 89% of the capital infrastructure costs.

What resilience will you have, backhaul and core network?

We aim to have a highly resilient and robust network, thanks to the experience in our core team we are lucky to have highly specialist experience in this field so we will pride ourselves on our resilience and robustness.

Are we prepared for the small clusters of properties at large distances from each other?

Yes, we aiming to include 100% of premises in our project footprint. As this is a community project we will most likely require the community to get behind and support this initiative not just by taking services but also by helping to facilitate delivering services to those harder to reach properties in our community areas. This can be through free wayleave agreements or repeater stations for wireless mast sites etc.

Is it worth me going for satellite for a few years?

Possibly if you are in a very hard to reach location and/or out with the current roll out plans and our project area. We aim to be delivering services in our project footprint a year from now.

So even though we are miles away from the rest of your network we will still be included?

Yes if you are included in our phase 1 project footprint we aim to deliver to 100% of the premises.

Are all Steering Group Members of NSB?

Yes

Why not set up the fully constituted community organisation in the beginning?

At the meeting in the Skeabost hotel last year it was agreed with HIE and the members of the public that came along, that the best and most efficient way of progressing the project was for a separate organisation to be formed which would have representation from all the areas in the then extended project. The Glendale Trust (GT) was keen to undertake the work but was limited by its constitution to only benefit the area of Glendale (not to mention other communities not so content to be part of a Glendale led imitative), and it was felt that changing the GT constitution would not be in the interest of the community of Glendale and could lead to unnecessary delay and administration issues.

The NSB project needed to access funds for a variety of reasons quickly, items such as a website, meeting room hire, branding and many other costs are needed to be paid in order to progress such a significant project. An organisation needed to be in place

which could also formally access support from CBS and HIE in terms of legal advice which would be particularly important in ensuring the appropriate organisation was formally constituted. That is why North Skye Broadband (2015) Ltd was formed. This allowed all the work including detailed legal advice to be undertaken prior to applying for the significant funds from Community Broadband Scotland for delivering the actual live Broadband project/network. It also allowed the volunteers to access paid for project management support in order to allow the project to be managed to through the initial phases estimated to be around 9 months.

With regard to setting up the chosen organisation which will be a Community Benefit Society (CombenSoc), this is a relatively complex process which needed support and advice from the Plunkett Foundation (again this support needed to be provided to a constituted organisation to begin with). The process to formally constitute a ComBenSoc requires time as the FCA has to approve and register (minimum 6 week approval process) the organisation and its constitution. This can only be registered once the final constitution has been agreed and understood and this is scheduled to take place in the summer all being well.

The reason a CombenSoc has been selected is because it legally contains an asset lock which is the minimum requirement for CBS funding. The network which they will contribute to funding will not be sold for private gain and remain within community use if it is defined as the locked asset. A CombenSoc also allows the organisation to use a variety of fund raising process such as accessing grants and issuing social investment shares.

Will BTs continually up speeds like you?

The market would suggest that the demand for greater allocations of data and bandwidth are increasing rapidly. BT will no doubt have to try and increase speeds however there will be limitations if they continue to use the existing (copper) cables to the premise especially in rural areas where long exchange only lines are common. These lines can significantly limit the speeds available to those properties.