



With the excitement of the public launch of the North Skye Broadband Project there is inevitably a lot of interest, enthusiasm and expectation generated. There is also the risk that there will be false expectations of time scale for implementation and detail about solutions, so we thought it worth producing a short note to provide a little of the background of what has to happen from here on in, to get to the point where we can appoint contractors to build and operate the network we are looking to provide. Hopefully this will set your expectations realistically!

We are seeking to obtain public funding and as such are constrained to operating a procurement process in accordance with the requirements of Community Broadband Scotland in order to be eligible for any such funds. We are required to be technology agnostic in our requirement, so no matter how knowledgeable we may be about the technologies available we cannot demand a specific technology. So it is all about how we specify our requirement. The first step of the procurement process is to issue a Public Consultation document which allows any suppliers to register that they have committed plans to offer comparable service to those we propose in the next three years. This process alone takes at least a month and was started in late December. To date there have been no registration of interests forthcoming from this, so we now know that nobody has any plans to offer anything in the Next Generation Broadband (NGB) category to the areas we have declared as being in our project. The next step is to issue a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire.

This allows suppliers to register a desire to bid for the project and supply us with sufficient information for us to assess the suppliers for suitability legally, technically, financially as well as in other areas. This will take circa 6 weeks to complete. Following the selection of suitable suppliers a full Invitation to tender (ITT) is produced and sent to the supplier for their detailed response. Through a process of evaluation and further dialogue with bidders we will arrive at final tenders from the bidders which will then be evaluated and a preferred supplier will be selected. This element takes up to 16 weeks to complete. At this point we will know who we want to do the work and what the likely solution will be.

There is then perhaps the most critical part of the procurement phase in that we have to raise funding and negotiate the final detail of the contract with the supplier before awarding the contract (probably another three months). So it is reasonable to expect that we are at least some 8+ months away from starting to do work on the ground and probably 5 months away from details of the solution that will be deployed being known, and that is assuming no changes in legislation or emerging external factors that are completely unforeseeable and may affect our planned progress.

Alongside the procurement process North Skye Broadband is launching a second Community Engagement Program to better understand the level of interest there is in taking the services we plan to offer, and the level of assistance we can get from within our communities. All of which will inform the final solution and help build the business justification that is required to secure the funding we need to deliver. We will also be looking at how we would physically get our service to various points and premises in the project area. Be this by wireless, fibre or some other technology.

All in all a huge amount of work to do for a committed team of volunteers and one Project Manager! North Skye Broadband volunteers have already contributed thousands of hours of time, with meetings every two weeks and significant amounts of complex work undertaken to ensure a professional, transparent and ethical approach to the task in hand. We have also identified a significant level of volunteer input in man hours still to come to get to the build stage of the project. This has been and continues to be a huge effort by dedicated team of volunteers working on behalf of their communities.

Hopefully this explains at a high level the way we will be moving forward. There are no quick solutions to getting to NGB for large swathes of the Island, and as we already know nothing is going to happen from any other commercial initiative for at least the next three years so the more the communities of North Skye can get behind this initiative and the more positive support and assistance we receive from individuals, the quicker we can deliver world class broadband services.

Geoff Semler - Chair, North Skye Broadband (2015) Ltd.