

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 01 DECEMBER 2023

Statement from: Councillor Richard Davies - Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and IT

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Budget

Inflation within the construction sector continues to cause challenges for the Highway service, as it does for the wider cost of living challenge experienced by the residents of Lincolnshire. Whilst the dramatic rises witnessed in 2021 and 2022 have subsided, increases of 2% in the last five months have been experienced in road surfacing related activities. These increases will not commercially impact the Highway Service until April 2024, but it does indicate a potential future budget pressure, unless it is matched by additional funding or further service efficiencies.

The additional Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) highway funding announced in the 2023 budget has ensured that the existing service levels can be maintained for the current financial year. The LCC funding was also increased by the Additional Pothole Funding announced by the Department for Transport (DfT). The one-year funding of £6.8 million will help improve the Highway service, however, the funding level falls short of the inflation pressure on the Highways Maintenance Block allocation that has and is due to remain static between April 2022 and 31 March 2025 under a three-year settlement. LCC Highways continues to lobby the DfT via regional bodies in relation to this ongoing pressure and are awaiting the outcome of the Autumn Statement to see if highways maintenance funding has improved. Similarly, there is an indication that further highways maintenance funding will be made available through Network North.

Carriageway Condition

The results for the Principal, Non-Principal and Unclassified roads all exceed the minimum agreed target levels in terms of the percentage of the network where maintenance should be considered.

PI 84 Condition of Principal Roads

Actual: 2%

Target: 3%

PI 85 Condition of Non-Principal Roads

Actual: 6%

Target: 7%

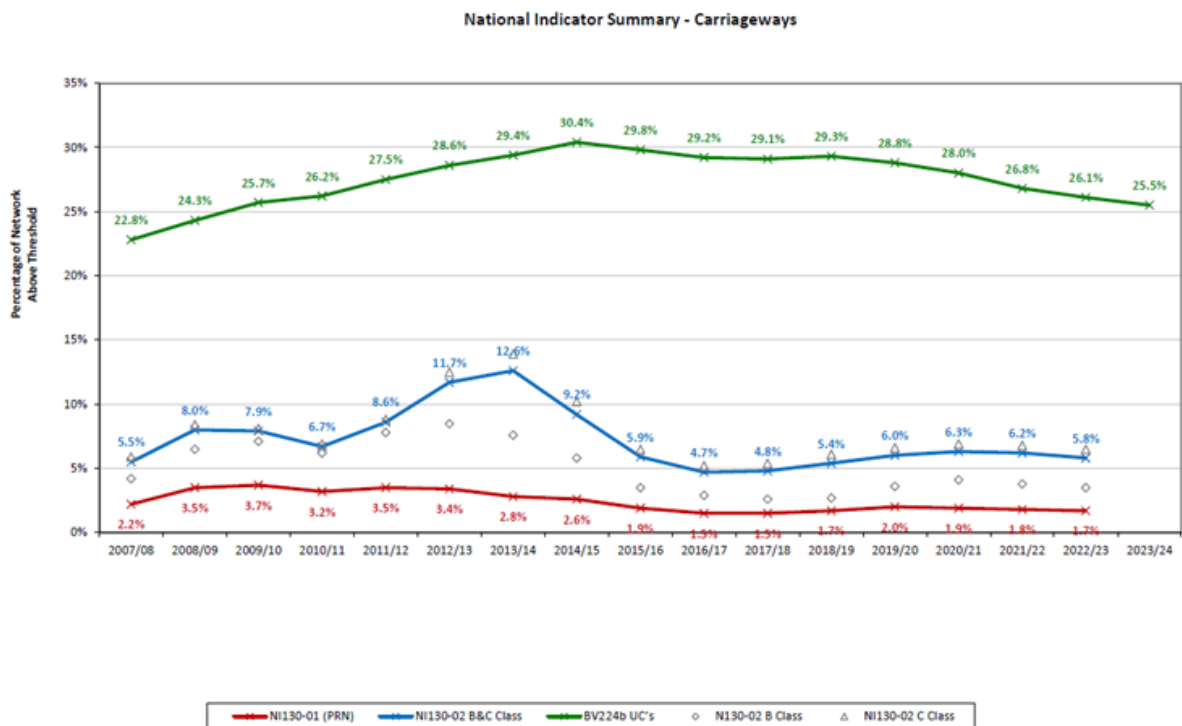
PI 86 Condition of Unclassified Roads

Actual: 26%

Target: 27%

Comparisons to other authorities demonstrate that the Principal road network in Lincolnshire is in a better state than the average rural authority, whereas the Non-Principal and Unclassified road networks are in a worse state than the average rural authority. The LCC Highways team continue to target improvement in these areas and to maximise the service efficiency, so that the condition of the assets is maintained and, where possible, improved.

The current strategy of an accelerated improvement on the Unclassified network remains on track.



Contract Refresh

The Contract Refresh procedure has been completed for the Highway Works/Professional Services and Traffic Signal contracts. The process required the Client and the Contractor/Consultant to review service delivery and identify contract improvements should an offer of extension be made and accepted by the parties.

The outcome of the contract refresh procedure was resolved at the Executive meeting held on the 7 November 2023 where the following recommendations were agreed:

- The Highway Works contract provider (Balfour Beatty Living Places) is offered a six-year extension from 31 March 2026 to the maximum permitted extension (as advertised in the original procurement documentation), taking service delivery to the 31 March 2032 on revised terms.
- The Professional Services Contract provider (WSP) is offered a two-year extension from 31 March 2026, taking service delivery to the 31 March 2028. This would leave four years available of the maximum permitted extension.

- The Traffic Signals Provider (Colas) is not extended, and a new re-procurement process has commenced.

Highways Works (Balfour Beatty)

The Highway service continues to focus on the reactive service delivery. The scale of demand, resource requirements and commercial pressure within the contract are challenging, but all parties involved (including the supply chain) are making the required improvements. A series of “Day in the Life” sessions have been held with the operational reactive gangs to help identify and implement further service improvements. These improvements will be implemented jointly between LCC and Balfour Beatty over the coming months. Combined with this improvement activity, the construction of a new Operational Control Hub within the LCC Highways office has been completed. The control hub monitors live data of gang performance, feedback on operational issues and is responsible for identifying service improvements. The control hub is the focal point for any Highway incidents when wider team input and management decisions on the network are required.

Councillor nominated Community Volunteering Days

As part of the original bid commitments from the Highway Works, Professional Services and Traffic Signal delivery partners, there have been 35 schemes completed to date, and guidance, designs and costs have been issued for another seven that are due to commence in 2023/2024 to assist Parish Councils and Community Groups.

Schemes this year have included various types of works, including the clearing of a memorial garden, painting a village hall, painting play parks, and providing an accessible path at a school for wheelchair users to access their nature area. The schemes carried out have all been extremely well received and many compliments have been received from the applicants, as well as from members of the community.

The 3 main contractors (Balfour Beatty, Colas and WSP) have been involved in the schemes and we also have had additional volunteering from some of our sub-contractors and major scheme delivery providers.

Grantham Southern Relief Road

Phase 1 from the B1174 running towards the A1 was completed in 2016.

Phase 2, which is the new graded separated junction onto the A1, was completed in 2022.

Phase 3 is the final phase of the project and is the largest and most complex to deliver. It consists of a five span viaduct carrying the road over the East Coast Mainline railway and the River Witham. Works commenced in April 2021, and much of the project has progressed well with sections already open. There have, however, been issues with the viaduct design with regards to piling and embankment stability. As a result, the bridge has been lengthened approximately 70 metres towards the East to avoid the area where the poor ground is situated. This has resulted in project delays, pushing the completion date to 2025. The project will also incur significant cost increases, which are being developed in conjunction with the design solution. A full investigation is underway to understand how this has occurred and where the liability rests. Notwithstanding, the bridge has progressed with the pier

foundations completed and the piers themselves installed. Piling works for the extended bridge has also now commenced. Works are now progressing towards the next milestone which will be the installation of the beams commencing towards the end of 2023 through to Summer/Autumn 2024.

North Hykeham Relief Road

When complete, this new road will link the A15 Lincoln Eastern Bypass with the A46 Western Bypass at Pennells Roundabout to create a full ring road around Lincoln. The project also aims to:

- Assist the sustainable economic growth of Lincoln and Lincolnshire.
- Maximise accessibility to Lincoln.
- Improve journey times and road safety in Lincoln.

In December, LCC was informed that the project had achieved programme entry approval from the DfT, which also secured £110m towards the project. A key decision to appoint Balfour Beatty as the Design and Build contractor was approved on the 5 April 2022, who in turn appointed a design consultant, Ramboll. The project has developed well in completing data acquisition, ecological surveys and preliminary design. Public engagement events were carried out through this period; these were positive events, and the output has been fed into the scheme design. The planning application has been developed and was recently submitted. It is expected that this will be brought to the Planning Committee for determination in Spring 2024. During this period, the project team will commence the development of the legal orders documentation for submission, should the project receive planning permission.

Spalding Western Relief Road (SWRR)

Section 5 (Northern Connection) – In February 2018, South Holland District Council (SHDC), in collaboration with LCC, were successful in securing £12m from the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) for delivering this section of the SWRR. Since then, a further £8.13m has been sourced from the HCA.

Works commenced in January 2022 with the construction of the two piling platforms to allow the c1600 number piles to be installed to support the bridge over the rail line. These piles are now complete, and so are the pile caps. In addition, the new roundabout on Spalding Road is complete and open to traffic. The abutments and piers have been constructed and the bridge beams were successfully installed over the rail line on the 21 and 22 October 2023. During this period the installation of the vertical light weight fill embankment has also commenced. Works are programmed to be completed in Summer 2024.

Lincolnshire Coastal Highway

LCC investigated potential improvements to the A158 across the county from the A1 to the North Sea coast, known as the 'Lincolnshire Coastal Highway'. This looked at the options for intervention along the route. In identifying improvements to the Highway, consideration was given to being future-ready, building in capacity to support growth, investigating options across a range of modes, building in resilience, and lower longer-term costs for infrastructure management.

A Horncastle bypass concept paper was completed, which identified expected costs and benefits. Due to the DfT scoring mechanism, the benefits are very low in comparison to the cost and therefore, would not attract any central government funding. This project is therefore currently not being progressed but is included in the Council's pipeline of projects to consider in the future.

A Skegness Relief Road concept paper has also been completed, which indicates a route that attracts a poor/very poor 'Benefit to Cost Ratio' score, meaning that it is unlikely to attract third party funding should a funding opportunity be presented.

A feasibility of an Orby bypass has been completed, indicating a very poor 'Benefit to Cost Ratio' score, meaning that it is unlikely to attract third party funding should a funding opportunity be presented.

Levelling Up Fund Projects (LUF)

LCC submitted a bid to central government under the LUF initiative, this consisted of the following projects:

- A16/A151 Springfield roundabout capacity improvement.
- A16 Greencell roundabout (Spalding Power Station) capacity improvement.
- A16 Marsh Lane Roundabout.
- Boston Active travel scheme.
- Spalding Active travel scheme.

In October 2021, it was announced that the bid had been successful. Since the announcement, the projects have progressed through detailed design with some on-site or nearing that stage.

Marsh Lane Roundabout and Boston Active Travel projects are progressing well. Most of the works are complete with the final roundabout works and carriageway reconstruction remaining. The works remain on target for completion at the end of 2023.

Works at Springfield Roundabout have commenced with the initial phase being to remove the roundabout splitter islands, which are being done at night. Following this, the contractor will focus predominantly on the southwest quadrant, with the vast majority of works being completed with just lane reductions and not using temporary traffic lights. Works are expected to be completed in Autumn 2024.

Greencell Roundabout continues through detailed designs as per the programme, which aligns with a July 2024 start date.

Phase 1 for the Spalding Active Travel scheme on the A151 is complete. Detailed design progress for phase 2, requires approvals from the Environment Agency. These works are planned for Summer 2024.

Grantham Future High Street Fund

South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) were successful with their Future High Street fund bid, which included two projects which impact the highway. These include Station Approach five-arm junction and the Market Place. The Station Approach project entails improving the pedestrian facilities to make the flow of pedestrian movements coming from the station into Grantham town centre a more pleasing experience. At the moment it is very industrial; therefore, the project will remove barriers, improve the form of the pedestrian islands, and install conservation street furniture amongst some more general maintenance elements. The Market Place project will lift the existing carriageway stone setts, so they are the same level as the existing footway stone setts. This, combined with the removal of street furniture, will allow for more events to be held in the marketplace while not impacting the stability of the carriageway.

Due to cost inflation, the SKDC have been considering the affordability of the projects. As such, the Market Place is going through detailed design as originally planned, however, the Station Approach project is currently being priced as a reduced scope project. Should these be affordable to the District Council and an acceptance of risk ownership be in place, then the project will likely progress to Scrutiny Committee in March 2024, before an Executive key decision in April 2024, to allow a construction start date in June 2024.

It should be stressed that these are not county-led projects, and therefore, the risk of delivery remains with the District Council.

Sincil Bank

The City of Lincoln Council (CoLC) were successful with their Towns Fund Bid, which included, amongst other things, the Sincil Bank regeneration scheme. This project includes embedding a one-way system and residents' parking facilities that will complement the potential residents parking Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). The project also entails a significant sum of public realm improvement to enhance the townscape.

Due to increased construction costs, the original intention of the project has been reduced in scope. This new outline was completed in July 2023 and provided to CoCL for consideration with the Town Fund Board. The proposals have been reviewed by the Town Fund Board in September 2023, who were supportive of the project. Detailed design continues for the project in addition to public engagement later this year and next. Works are planned to commence in Spring 2024.

Dolphin Lane

This a joint funded project between LCC and Boston Borough Council (BBC) which originated from the District's Heritage Lottery Fund. The project is a public realm scheme that will improve the pavement with new stone setts that are in keeping with the surrounding environment. This will connect directly to the Market Place, which has the same type of stone setts.

The works are now complete and have been well received by the public.

Transport Services

At this time of year, activity moves away from arranging new educational travel provision for the academic year starting in September; this peak of activity tends to last until October half term and the focus then becomes targeting cost savings, especially the removal of short-term contracts.

The Callconnect app rollout is a key focus for the service, alongside planning the use of public transport related funding – more information is provided below.

Newly recruited staff have started in the following roles, which are all aligned to the approved new staff structure for the service:

- Travel Projects Officer & one out of two Projects Officers, funded through BSIP capacity funding for two years.
- Senior Officer Data, Systems and Performance.
- Business Change Manager to drive change projects and initiatives across the service.

The remaining ten permanent vacancies in the operations team are now going to be targeted for recruitment again.

The passenger transport industry continues to face numerous pressures, for both bus and taxi suppliers. The Council is finding that taxi contract prices continue to remain relatively stable, but they remain high compared to previous years. Driver shortages have also stabilised, so there is greater resilience in the industry.

The Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership provided grant funding from the Labour Market Support Fund towards a Professional Driver Development Programme. It initially focused on HGV drivers, but since March 2023, has extended to include PSV drivers to support local bus operators.

The Council's passenger transport supplier market continues to grow, albeit slowly and only with new taxi operators choosing to work with the Council, as opposed to bus operators. We now have more than 400 operators with whom we contract with, through our dynamic purchasing system; the majority of these are taxi operators.

Public Transport

The government has recently announced new funding for Local Transport Authorities, diverting money that would have been spent on HS2 projects, into the new transport strategy called Network North. Lincolnshire has been awarded £4.37m for 2024/2025 of Network North's funding, which is to be used in line with our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) aspirations to improve bus services in the county. This funding is in addition to the £2.1m granted to Lincolnshire through BSIP+ funding and will provide a real boost to supporting bus services in the county.

Alongside the Network North Funding, DfT has announced that the £2 fare cap will remain at £2 and not rise to £2.50 as originally planned. The announcement also sees the cap extended until December 2024, rather than ending in October 2024.

The nature of the BSIP process requires us to update our plan annually, with the latest iteration of the document having been submitted to the DfT on 31 October 2023. The updated plan responds to feedback given by the DfT on our original unsuccessful plan, focusing on smaller schemes, generating passenger growth through meaningful bus priority measures, improvements in bus infrastructure, and bus service enhancements.

The overall picture of public transport is much healthier than it has been over the past 12-18 months. Services are now very stable, and reliability has improved considerably, with driver shortages no longer impacting on delivery across the county.

Bus Passenger Travel

The government's £2 fare cap initiative is providing bus services with greater levels of patronage and encouraging growth in many areas of the county with some corridors seeing healthy growth in the last nine months.

Lincolnshire's Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service, Callconnect, continues to see excellent levels of passengers utilizing the service. On average, weekly patronage levels are at 98-99% of pre-COVID levels, showing passengers have high levels of confidence in the service.

The rollout of the app-based booking system is continuing across the county; 17 of the 34 services have been transitioned to the Callconnect app. Of these 17, areas that have had the app for over six months are seeing up to 60% of all bookings made through the app. This demonstrates the desire amongst passengers to self-serve where possible. The remaining areas of the county are on schedule to be completed by the end of March 2024.

Educational Travel

As with all local authorities in England, we continue to focus on managing the cost pressures in educational travel provision, arranging travel provision for 19,000+ pupils per day. Whilst we are seeing contract prices stabilise, they will not reduce, creating a new baseline in the industry and for the Council's budgets. From November 2023, we have been able to understand the educational travel budget position more clearly for 2023/2024.

The cost pressures are not solely related to contract prices, however. We continue to experience high expectations of parents/carers and the complex needs of passengers, alongside more parents/carers applying for travel provision due to the cost implications for their households. Working closely with Children's Services, we are also experiencing school placement sufficiency issues, which has an impact on the number of pupils eligible for travel provision.

Mechanisms to avoid increased costs and make savings are being delivered as part of the three-year transformation programme and focus on the following:

- Implementation of a new Travel Options function, enabling and empowering pupils to use alternative travel modes to taxis, from travel training Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils to maximising opportunities for sustainable travel. A development plan is being established now that all vacant posts in this team have been recruited. This includes collaborative work with Adult Care and Community Wellbeing to support adults with independent travel training, and with Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership (LRSP) to deliver joint lessons for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) pupils. Since August, we have successfully travel trained six pupils; a further 11 pupils are currently in training, and 57 are on the waiting list. Planning work is underway to promote travel training more widely to increase uptake.
- Re-procurement of all contracts during the three years (2021-2024) in geographical areas using reverse e-auctions. This includes the contracting of provision requirements to replace short-term contracts that have been put in place from July to October due to the start of the academic year – this is an annual cycle.
- Route optimisation activity as part of preparing for the re-tendering of all contracts, ensuring all possible efficiencies are maximised.

In order to manage and monitor key measures in educational travel, a management information dashboard is being created, with significant support from corporate teams in data services and performance. The initial data from the dashboard was presented at the October meeting of Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee.

IT SERVICES

LCC's IT team continue to deliver substantial volumes of change in support of Council priorities. This currently includes the removal of OpenText (IMP) the document storage system, which will save circa. £2.6m over five years, and extensive work to replace the critical 999 response systems for Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue.

The IT strategy has recently been rewritten and the proposals for the re-procurement of the core IT contracts will shortly be making their way through our governance processes. Whilst the contracts are not due to be replaced until March 2026, work has commenced due to the significant scale of the task. Supplier engagement meetings were held in October 2023.

Approximately 5,000 PCs/laptops will be replaced over the forthcoming 18 months to ensure colleagues have equipment that is effective and supports them in their roles. LCC has received good value from the existing equipment, however, it no longer adequately supports all of our colleagues.

The team continue the work to improve our cyber security against a background of ever-increasing worldwide threats. The Council's first permanent Head of Cyber security is currently being recruited and will spearhead this work in the near future.

One department, Legal Services, is yet to migrate to Office 365 in the cloud, but this will be completed by the end of December 2023. This will mean that all LCC staff have constantly up-to-date and improving office software.

The Council will implement its first Artificial Intelligence (AI) system in Quarter 4 of 2023, which will automate the answering of common reasons for calling the council, often at peak times e.g. School Admissions. The same technology will also improve the LCC website. General AI is becoming available to all staff on the Internet and a policy is being put in place to ensure it is used safely, ethically, and responsibly. This presents the opportunity for staff to save time by using AI “prompts” (instructions to an artificial intelligence engine) to write documents, generate images etc. and IT will provide training for colleagues to leverage these capabilities.

LINCOLNSHIRE BROADBAND UPDATE

The following report details the latest position regarding the various elements of the Lincolnshire Broadband Programme. Please note that any figures quoted in this report are accurate at the time of writing but are subject to change as projects progress.

Contract 3 – BDUK/Quickline/LCC

The original contract was to provide Ultrafast Broadband (defined as download speeds >100Mb/s) via Fixed Wireless Access technology to 8K premises across rural areas, prefixed by postcodes LN and DN. At this point in time, a total of 7191 premises have been upgraded with the remainder due to be completed in this calendar year.

As this contract has progressed, significant advances have been made in Fixed Wireless Access Broadband (FWA). The potential range and download speeds have increased during the contract life span and we are now deploying 5G based FWA. We have recently witnessed field tests where download speeds of 400Mb/s were achieved at a distance of 17.9km from the transmitting mast. Higher speeds have also been achieved at a distance of 20km in other trials carried out by Quickline.

This greater improved capability does open up huge opportunities to allow us to provide very fast broadband to more remote areas, and ongoing trials and developments are looking to achieve close to gigabit download speeds across the same distances. This 5G technology lends itself to a wide range of additional opportunities across the county, and discussions are ongoing with Quickline and BDUK in an effort to progress the deployment of this technology to the very hard to reach areas.

Despite the original contract requiring coverage to be provided to 8K premises, the reality is that we can now reach several times more than that figure with very high-speed connectivity.

Project Gigabit

Project Gigabit is the government’s Building Digital UK (BDUK) project to deliver gigabit-capable broadband to rural areas deemed non-commercially viable to existing providers.

Where Lincolnshire is concerned, the county has been broken down into two 'Lots', Lots 10 & 23.

Lot 10 went to Tender in June 2023 and is now closed and being evaluated (Lot 10 includes rural areas around Lincoln, moving south and west into Nottinghamshire). There are circa 10.5K eligible premises in this county within this Lot.

Lot 23 (the remainder of Lincolnshire, moving north, as far as East Riding). The eligible premises count for Lincolnshire Lot 23 is 75.3K and went to Tender in mid-October, with the contract being awarded in April 2024.

It is worth noting that whilst Project Gigabit does include all rural premises not covered or planned to be covered by commercial investment within the next three years as being eligible, the BDUK aspiration is that approximately 85%-90% are likely to be upgraded by the successful providers in both Lots 10 & 23. The remainder are highly likely to be deemed too expensive to reach with full fibre connectivity. Clearly, this leaves a gap, and the Broadband Team is engaged with BDUK and providers in an effort to persuade BDUK to accept other technologies such as 5G FWA as described above, as an alternative to leaving these premises without any high-speed connectivity. Currently, Project Gigabit funding will only allow for gigabit-capable connectivity and the only technology accepted by BDUK as being capable of meeting this condition is full fibre. It is our view and with the support of colleagues in other areas that 400Mb/s to 500Mb/s download speeds are infinitely better than existing speeds and leaving these areas without this opportunity makes no sense, particularly as the capability of these alternatives are improving rapidly. The Broadband Team have mapping and analysis that is being utilised to try to understand those premises that are most likely not to be included, and when the actual deployment plans for each Lot are visible to us, it is intended to start addressing the remaining premises in tandem with Project Gigabit.

Commercial Deployment of Full Fibre

Commercial investment is moving rapidly across the county and well above what we would have envisaged two years ago. Market forces will determine the commercial operators' level of activity in any location.

Coverage levels are currently - Ultrafast (>100Mb/s) = 64.5%, Gigabit-capable = 63.5%.

We expect in excess of 250K premises to be upgraded by commercial investment by the end of 2025 and at the time of writing, we have no less than ten commercial providers deploying full fibre in the vast majority of our urban clusters. Those urban areas not currently undergoing fibre deployment will be in the future plans of at least one of these providers and in many cases, more than one provider will be available to end users, thus providing a competitive environment that offers both choice and affordable packages to those taking up the services.

However, we are already seeing consolidation across the industry. Virgin Media's recent acquisition of UPP, an organisation who are very active in the county, is an example of this and moving into the future, it is a reasonable assumption that we can expect to see more of this.

The Broadband Team meet regularly with all providers to understand their plans, their build progress and more importantly to assist in removing/reducing barriers to successful deployments.

This level of build, whilst very welcome, does bring with it a degree of disruption to our streets and highways, and the LCC Highways Team meet regularly with providers to address issues and minimise levels of disruption.

Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme

Despite the scheme now being on hold temporarily in terms of new communities applying, there are a significant number of ongoing schemes that BDUK has allowed to progress or are in deployment/completed. The scheme is on hold to allow BDUK to finalise the 'eligible' premises data for Project Gigabit, but it is hoped that the scheme will be resurrected as a part of being able to upgrade the very remote areas described previously.

We continue to work with communities to encourage their involvement in this scheme and it is pleasing to note that a number of communities have successfully been upgraded already with several thousand more premises in the planning/build phases.

However, perhaps a little more difficult to understand is that a number of areas, whilst showing initial interest, have subsequently failed to follow through and sign up for the scheme. This is despite considerable effort from providers, supported by the Broadband Team. One of the major advantages of this scheme is the service level agreement that exists where the provider has to complete within 12 months of a community agreement.

4G/5G Technology

Firstly 4G, coverage in urban areas continues to improve as the four main mobile network operators (MNOs) expand their network to deal with capacity. As a part of this growth in coverage, the Broadband Team, working with LCC Highways has facilitated the improvement of 4G coverage across the main tourist areas of Skegness, via Small Cell technology deployed via our street lighting. This relationship will see similar activities carried out across a number of other urban areas over the next 12 months or so.

Additionally, the four MNOs have formed a fifth organisation where they collaborate and allow the use of each other's infrastructure to improve rural connectivity. This scenario is further improved by their involvement in BDUK's 'Shared Rural Network' project where additional infrastructure is publicly funded in rural areas that experience poor or non-existent coverage. This project will run across the next two to three years and will certainly enhance rural connectivity.

Secondly, 5G, we are currently seeing significant expansion of 5G infrastructure across our larger rural clusters and 5G mobile is now widely available in some of our larger towns. 5G technology, whilst offering faster speeds, is more about its greater data handling capacity in built-up areas. This allows for additional services and applications via the Internet of Things (IoT).

We are aware that the presence of 5G masts does cause some concern to residents, but it should be noted that the frequencies being used by 5G, fall well within what is known as non-ionising radiation and therefore, is not deemed a risk to anyone living in the vicinity. This is backed up by Ofcom and industry safety experts.

Aside from the obvious potential of 5G mobile, the LCC Broadband Team has been actively engaged with industry experts and providers to understand the possibilities this technology can offer in the agri-tech, offshore energy, and supply chain sectors. We are aware of significant innovation that is ongoing in these various sectors, but to date, commercial infrastructure does not really exist in this county in these sectors. The Broadband Team, working with 5G experts at Quickline Communications, have established that we are able to deploy private 5G networks to these business sectors that will allow innovation to work and deliver huge benefits in a real-world scenario. Whilst this is something that we can collaborate with Quickline to facilitate, it should be emphasised that commercial viability would need to exist. For example, we are able to provide a private 5G network in the Food Enterprise Zones and indeed the farms and food processing areas in the south of the county, but a real business-led demand and commitment would need to exist.

Beyond this, we are leading a bid with colleagues in North East Lincolnshire Council, Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Hull and East Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Hull City Council for potential funding under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS) 5G Innovation Trial. A submission has been sent in and we await further news.

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