

It has been suggested by SEEDA that I send the note below via yourself FAO Lord Stephen Carter in response to the interim report linking it to the USC statements.

Background

I have been involved in the issues and technology related to Rural Broadband over the last 4-5 years. I have had close involvement with SEEDA, BT and our local MP Paul Goodman. Hambleden is in the heart of the Thames Valley and has no landline broadband. We also have limited mobile reception. We went out to tender with SEEDA's and Bucks CC help to try and get a third party provider into the valley. After a tender process BT eventually agreed that they would look at providing a FTTP or FTTC service and use Hambleden as a trial pilot for other rural areas. Under a non disclosure agreement a comprehensive survey was undertaken, partly subsidised by SEEDA. The topology was such that FTTP would cost about £1.5M to provide a service to about 300 houses. ADSL was not an option to provide a service to the whole area. After a lot of work the project died after BT announced their fibre strategy and the excessive cost involved. We were dealing with BT at the highest management levels while the investigations were being undertaken. BT did say that if fibre was implemented in the Henley on Thames exchange that they would be able, with some £300K expenditure on equipment installation, be able to extend a service to Hambleden. This would be a FTTC service.

Wireless is not an option in the valley due to the number of trees in the area.

My main reason for writing to you is the comment in the report relating to the range of methods of providing broadband services in rural areas. We have experience of satellite in the valley and I would like to make the following comments based on 4 years experience:

Satellite performance, regardless of quoted bandwidth, is poor and there is little that can be done to avoid the latency problem. Our experience indicates it falls down in several areas:

1. Service and support is limited and there are very few suppliers.
2. The browsing performance is very poor, such that time outs occur on many web pages particularly at certain times of the day. Latency is always going to be an issue however clever the software is.
3. You cannot reliably play uTube clips. iPlayer, etc are out of the question. Forget Skype and interactive games.
4. The cost of the service is expensive for poor performance.
5. If there is rain about a reliable service is not possible.
6. It still disenfranchises many people who cannot get on to the wireless network because of the trees in the area. In any event only a small proportion of the valley could take advantage of a satellite service.
7. All the items above lead to a low productivity system which is very frustrating to homeowners and SME's.

I have enclosed a parochial synopsis on the history of trying to get broadband into the valley. We have a great deal of further information should it be helpful.

The key point of the message below is that in Hambleden any broadband USC would have to be met by a fibre deployment as other means have been demonstrated to not work.