

# Upper Deverills Parish Council

9 March 2009

Lord Stephen Carter CBE  
Minister for Communications, Technology and Broadcasting  
Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

Dear Minister

## **Digital Britain**

I am writing on behalf of the Upper Deverills Parish Council to respond to The Interim Report that was published in January.

The Upper Deverills Parish comprises three hamlets in south west Wiltshire. Whilst we are in an attractive rural area we are close to major towns and cities such as Bath and Salisbury and have good road and rail connections. However we suffer from a very limited (and in parts non-existent) broadband service. As a result the Parish Council has established a Working Group to collate information about the scale of the problem and to lobby for an early solution.

The Parish is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the topography and understandable restrictions on a proliferation of masts means that current mobile telephone coverage is patchy and certainly not of 3G standard. In addition the distance from the telephone exchanges together with the poor quality of the copper wire circuits means that Broadband speeds are low (typically less than 0.5 Mbs) where the service is delivered at all. There has been little investment in local wiring and cabinets so the distance to the remote exchange is a crucial issue. There are examples of people in our villages whom BT refuse to connect to broadband because of the inadequacy of their service; and households where the service can be lost for weeks at a time and where BT now often suggest that it is impossible to reinstate the service that has previously been enjoyed.

Of course this is unsatisfactory for all residents; but especially for those who run businesses from their homes within the Upper Deverills. We believe that the Government would wish to pursue the more environmentally suitable approach of encouraging people to work from home where it is practical but the apparent lack of interest from BT in making the necessary improvements to the circuits from the exchanges works against this.

We therefore welcome your Report and wish to particularly comment on some key issues. We especially agree that broadband is becoming an "essential commodity" (paragraph 4.1) but it is a commodity in short and irregular supply in areas like ours! As you note the Ministerial Conference in Vienna concluded that Member States should enable "citizens to access and exploit ICT irrespective of location ... in particular ..... in remote and rural areas ...". We wholeheartedly support this commitment and find it

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Clerk: Mrs Jacqueline Smith Shotts Cottage Duck Street Sutton Veny Wiltshire BA12 7AL

ironic that in a part of the country so close to towns and cities we struggle to secure a basic reasonable service.

In your Foreword you suggest that most of the necessary changes “must be driven by the market”, but our concern would be that this would continue to permit BT to focus on urban areas and larger villages, providing Next Generation broadband with faster speeds and greater availability of service there, whilst settlements such as ours will continue to be left with a reducing quality and 1990’s service.

Action 17 refers to the digital Universal Service Commitment for up to 2 Mbs to be effective by 2012. We believe that, particularly with the challenges of the present economic situation, we cannot wait for almost four years to see a reasonable service provided. Given the limited service that areas like ours have at present (and that the report suggests that there are only 370,000 households receiving 0.5 Mbs or less currently), we believe that more rapid progress could and should be made towards universal connectivity. As with other infrastructure projects, surely this is the time for a combination of public and private investment to produce an adequate basic network?

In addition we believe that “options up to 2 Mbs” is too timid an objective. Surely 2 Mbs should be the absolute minimum requirement given the expectations about the use of this technology for communications in the future.

We support the proposals in Actions 19 and 20 to encourage the take-up of universally available broadband. However, stating the obvious, such a policy will inevitably be constrained unless a more determined approach is taken to universal connectivity. Indeed unless universal connectivity is given priority it is likely that levels of frustration with the existing service will increase and rebound on the government.

We do believe that, as with other policies, rural areas are seriously disadvantaged in “Digital Britain”. The countryside is valued not only by those who live here but also by those who enjoy recreation and other opportunities. Surely it is right that we should give some priority to maintaining a reasonable level of basic infrastructure in areas such as this? After all, in areas like ours, we have less availability of public transport, local shops and so on; availability of broadband could assist in offsetting the lack of facilities such as these.

We would urge you to take into account the issues that we raise in this letter in proceeding to your final report.

These opinions are based upon a detailed study and survey a copy of which is enclosed.

Yours sincerely

*Felicity Wheeler*

Lady Wheeler  
Chairman

Cc Dr Andrew Murrison MP  
Cllr Jane Scott, Leader, Wiltshire Council

# UPPER DEVERILLS PARISH COUNCIL

## BROADBAND ACTION GROUP

### INTERIM REPORT MARCH 2009

#### Background

The Upper Deverills Parish Council (UDPC) received requests for help from individual residents who have been refused broadband services or found the service when provided, unreliable, slow and expensive. The UDPC therefore set up an action group to quantify problems, investigate common causes and to address them.

The Broadband Action Group (BAG) determined to identify more precisely the nature, scope and extent of these problems with a view to identifying courses of action to be pursued, by conducting a Parish-wide survey.

A questionnaire (Annex A) was developed, produced and delivered to every dwelling house in the three hamlets. Notices were also printed in the monthly Parish News which is distributed to every dwelling house. The questionnaire was also passed to OFCOM who were made aware of the UDPC concerns and actions.

Detailed analysis of the completed questionnaires (referred to as the survey) enabled the BAG to take the following actions:

- a. Make this interim report to the UDPC advising that, it and the survey, should be passed to BT plc in order to persuade it to review and improve real technical deficiencies such as speed and reliability and also, in their favour, realise the level of scope for them to advance their own commercial activities in this area. The BAG has been advised that BT plans to upgrade the exchanges serving UDPC later this later this year and early next. These will be mainly software upgrades however BT need to be aware that less costly improvements to wiring and distribution are also needed to exploit such exchange upgrades.
- b. To enlighten other mandated and influential parties who are also vested with Broadband penetration and regulation in rural areas.
- c. Provide by 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009, our interim findings as input to the Digital Britain interim report via The Department of Culture, Media and Sports and Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. Although based on a relatively small sample, the BAG feel that it is a fair representation of the dis-satisfaction of rural communities with broadband service. Further the adoption of an “up to 2mb” service as expressed in the Digital Britain report would regrettably enable the current poor situation to continue unchanged in the future for many rural communities. (The attached letter responding to this

report (Annex B)) was approved by UDPC and posted before publication of this report in order to meet a deadline for response).

## **The Findings**

Analysis revealed:

### **Extent of Survey Response:**

The overall number of occupied dwellings by village and in total are: Brixton 30, Monkton 47, Kingston 73, total 150.

The number of completed surveys were: Brixton 18, Monkton 27, Kingston 12 total 57, of which 46 are broadband users. As OFCOM considers that rural broadband penetration is 59%, BAG consider it has achieved a 52% response level.

### **Why dial up users do not upgrade to broadband**

In our small sub-sample 11 dial up users gave their reasons and perceptions for not upgrading to broadband and prominent in these are denied service (33%) and the perception that broadband speeds and reliability are poor (33%).

However several potential broadband users describe how they have been told they are too far from the exchange despite all their immediate neighbours having broadband service! Is there a broadband telephone number lottery on the same exchange akin to the postal code lottery discussed in education and health services?

### **Broadband Features**

There was clear evidence of overall dissatisfaction with broadband speeds, both down and uploads as is shown in the charts. Speeds were measured on several occasions by respondents using predominantly independent ISPs, such as Think Broadband.

Analysis by village revealed average Download speeds (kbps) in Brixton 770, Monkton 515, Kingston 661, whilst average Uploads were Brixton 307 Monkton 297, Kingston 362. Only 6 properties in the valley recorded speeds exceeding 1000 kbps the fastest being 1336.

Curiously there is wide disparity between adjacent houses. Whilst recognising that house wiring and peak times influence speeds why does one house enjoy 900kb download when one neighbour is told broadband is unavailable and another neighbour achieves 490 Kb download?

Brixton dwellings are served by the Sutton Veny exchange whilst Monkton and Kingston are served from the exchange in Maiden Bradley. Thus one can see that Kingston, being nearer to its exchange, does slightly better than Monkton. Brixton and Kingston are closely similar. However taken as a whole all speeds and the variability amongst speed are thoroughly unsatisfactory regardless of the exchange providing the service.

Evidence is produced showing 53% of users are satisfied with reliability but conversely that a clear 43% are not satisfied. This dis-satisfaction rate is far too high.

### **Improvements “Wish Lists”**

The survey also asked respondents to list as 1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> choices the improvements they seek. This is depicted in detail in the charts but can be summarised as a desire for improved speed just exceeding better reliability in both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> choices whilst lower costs rate highly as users 3<sup>rd</sup> preference. Although a 3<sup>rd</sup> choice this can be taken as evidence that given the dis-satisfaction with speed and reliability broadband is perceived as poor value for money. Many feel that they should be charged less for their inferior broadband than is paid by those receiving top quality services.

### **Internet Service Providers (ISPs)**

The identities and numbers of declared ISP's are shown in the diagrams. 10 independent ISPs were identified as being used of which BT and associates are the vast majority with 66%.

### **Telephones**

The survey also sought to establish whether or not broadband had made any difference to the normal telephone service. 18% of users declared that it had, with lower volumes being noted.

**Please help with this survey, which is supported by the Upper Deverills Parish Council, and is designed to assess the state of Broadband Services in the Upper Deverills and enable us to determine how best to improve them.**

1. Do you access the Internet and/or email from your home? If no, please go to question 2. If yes, please select how.

- a. Landline broadband Yes/No
- b. Mobile broadband Yes/No
- c. Satellite broadband Yes/No
- d. Dial Up not broadband Yes/No
- e. Other broadband Yes/No If yes please specify.....

.....

2. If you do not use any type of broadband from home please give your reason(s) below and then go directly to question 8 without answering questions 3 to 7:

- a, Do not want it. Yes/No
- b. Have applied but was denied for technical reasons Yes/No
- c. Costs too much Yes/No
- d. Have applied and am awaiting connection Yes/No
- e. Am satisfied with my current dial up connection Yes/No
- f. Other, please specify:.....

.....

3. If you use broadband, are you satisfied with its:

- a. Reliability Yes/No
- b. Speed Yes/No

4. Please check your broadband speed and give an approx. average for:

- a. Download speed in Kb.....
- b. Upload speed in Kb.....

*Please see the February Parish News for a really simple way to do speed checks.*

5. When broadband was provided on your telephone line did you notice any difference with the regular telephone service? Yes/No

If yes please specify.....

.....  
6. If improvements could be made to your broadband, please number in priority those, that you would wish for, using 1 for highest priority through to 4 for lowest.

Speed	1 2 3 4
Reliability	1 2 3 4
Reduced costs	1 2 3 4
Others, please	1 2 3 4 but please specify

.....  
7. Is there anything else that you wish to add about the broadband services that you are experiencing.....  
.....  
.....

8. So that we know we have received a response from you and in order to keep you up to date, or clarify any of your answers, please provide your name, address, phone number and especially your email address below. Please note that returns will be confidential to the UDPC Working Party and the data gathered will be summarised and individual responses will not be disclosed without permission. Thank you.

**Name**

**Address**

**Phone**

**Email**

Please return the completed form by **insert date...** to:

For Brixton Deverill - Robin Greenwood, Dredges Farmhouse ph 840743 .

For Kingston Deverill - Richard Munro, Whitepits Lodge ph 844385

For Monkton Deverill - Albert Lee, Longhedge ph 844759

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**Upper Deverills Parish Council - Wiltshire - Mar 2009**  
**Survey of Resident's Experience and Views on Broadband Services**

**Notes:**

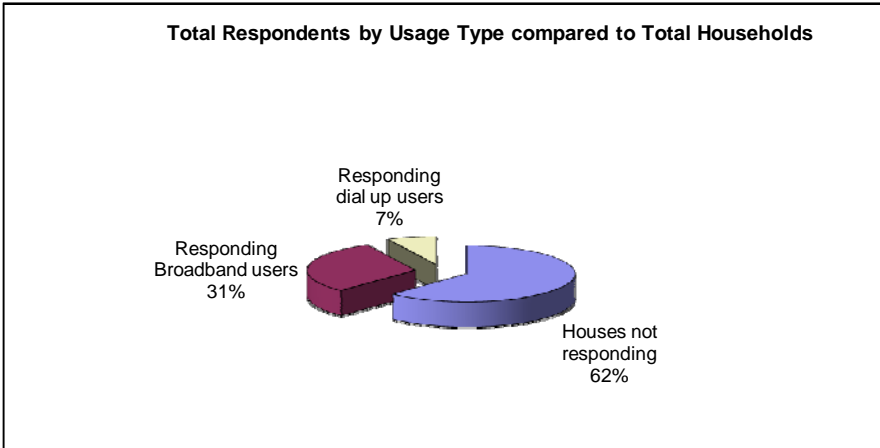
1. The Upper Deverills comprises 3 hamlets with a total of 150 houses. Brixton Deverill has 30, Kingston Deverill has 73 and Monkton Deverill 47. Mostly residential with several farms and significant numbers of residents attempting to work from home. Brixton is served by BT Sutton Veny exchange and the other two by BT Maiden Bradley exchange.
2. OFCOM state rural broadband take up is 59% of the housing total, so we have predicated that the amenable base for BB in the Upper Deverills is 89. There was a response of 46 broadband users representing 52% of amenable broadband users. In addition there were 11 non broadband dial up user responses .
3. The questionnaire was designed by the UDPC Broadband Action Group and distributed to every house in the Parish in the February edition of the Parish News.

**Key Findings.**

1. A massive 74% of users are dissatisfied with the speed. Only 24% are satisfied with this important aspect of broadband.
2. A 53% majority of respondents using broadband are satisfied with reliability but a significant 43% are dissatisfied.
3. Speed tests show the vast majority of download speeds are 0.5 mbyte or under. A minority secured 1mbyte or more with a maximum download of 1.3 mbytes. There is considerable variability in speed amongst neighbouring houses.
4. Respondents state the priority for improvements to broadband is to increase speed, with only marginally less seeking higher reliability. The next priority for improvement is cost reduction. This demonstrates that cost and potentially value for money is poorly perceived compared to areas where speed and reliability are higher.

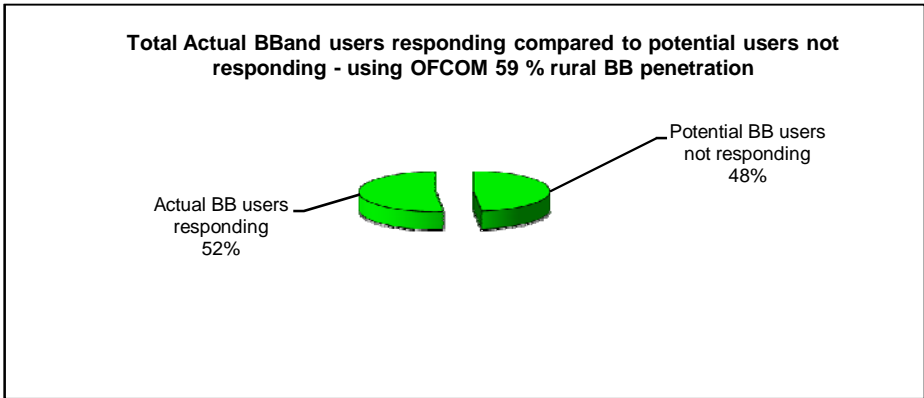
**Total response**

Houses not Responding    Responding dial up users  
93                            46                            11



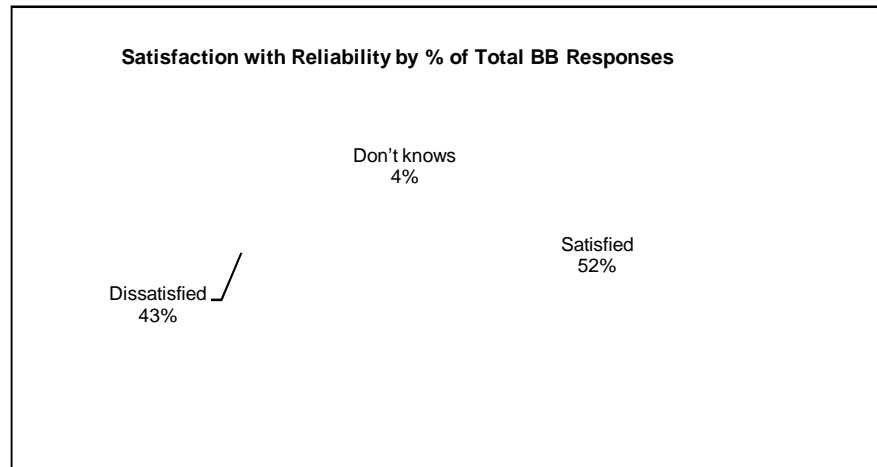
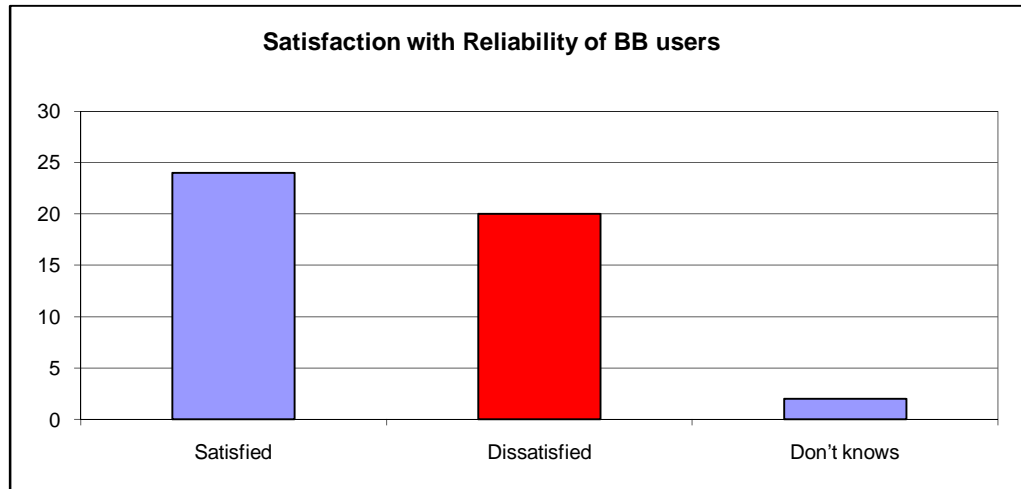
**BB Response compared to OFCOM 59% penetration**

Potential BB users    Actual BB users responding  
43                            46



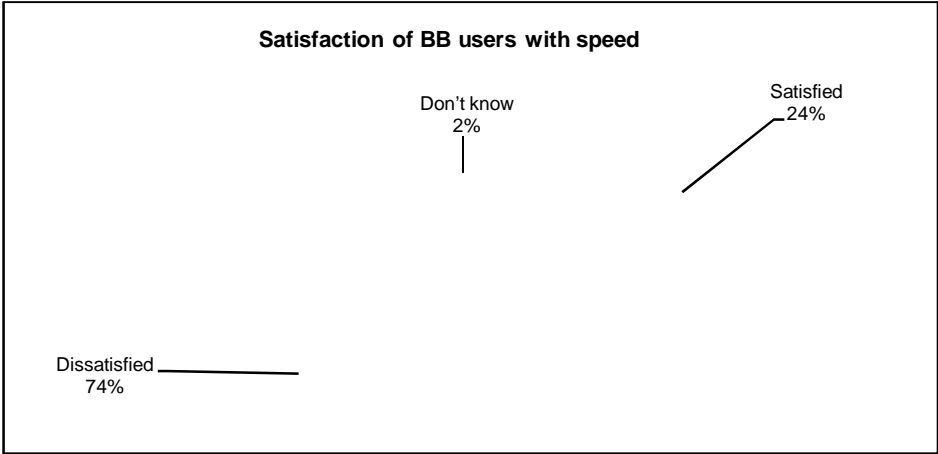
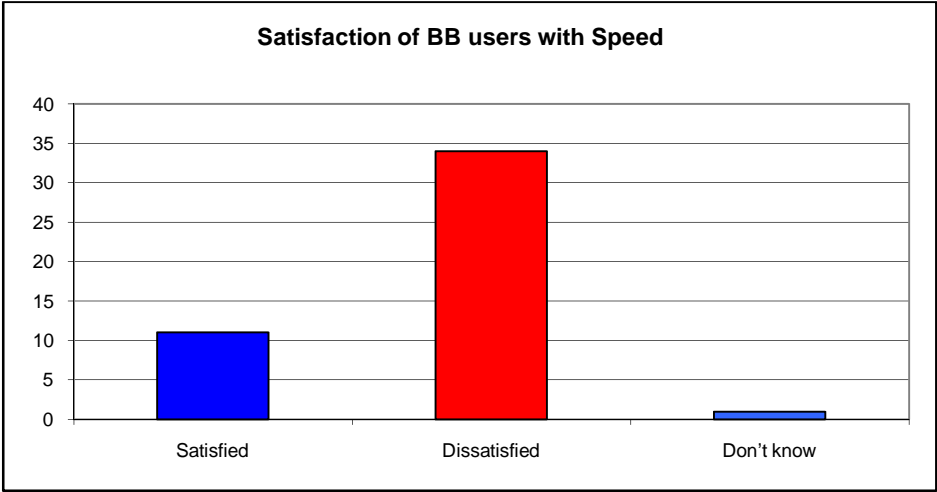
**No of BB respondents satisfied with reliability**

Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't knows
24	20	2



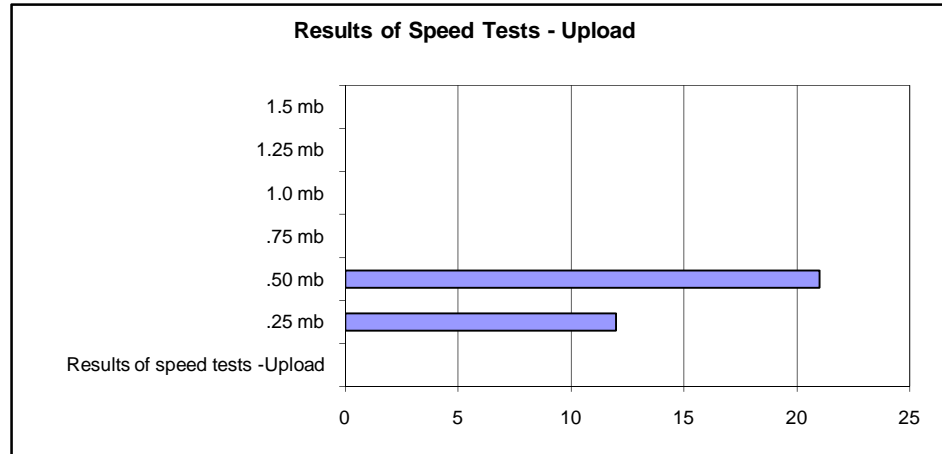
**No of BB respondents satisfied with speed**

Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
11	34	1



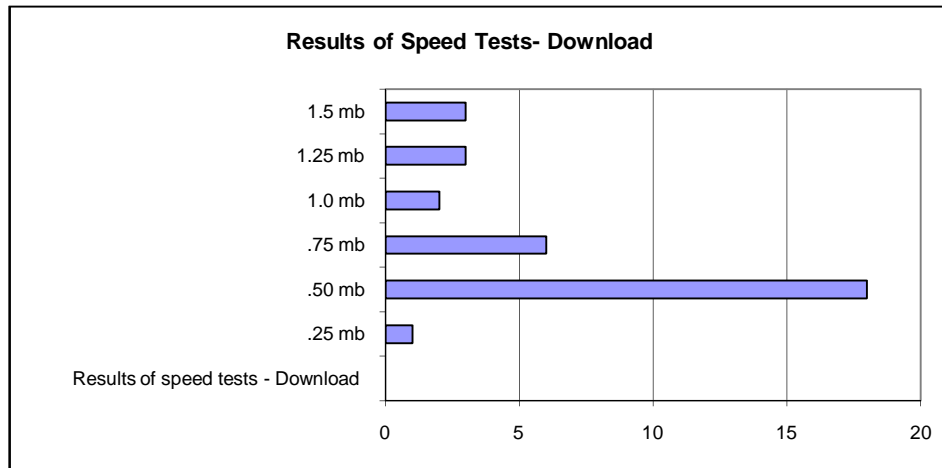
**Results of speed tests -Upload**

.25 mb	12
.50 mb	21
.75 mb	
1.0 mb	
1.25 mb	
1.5 mb	



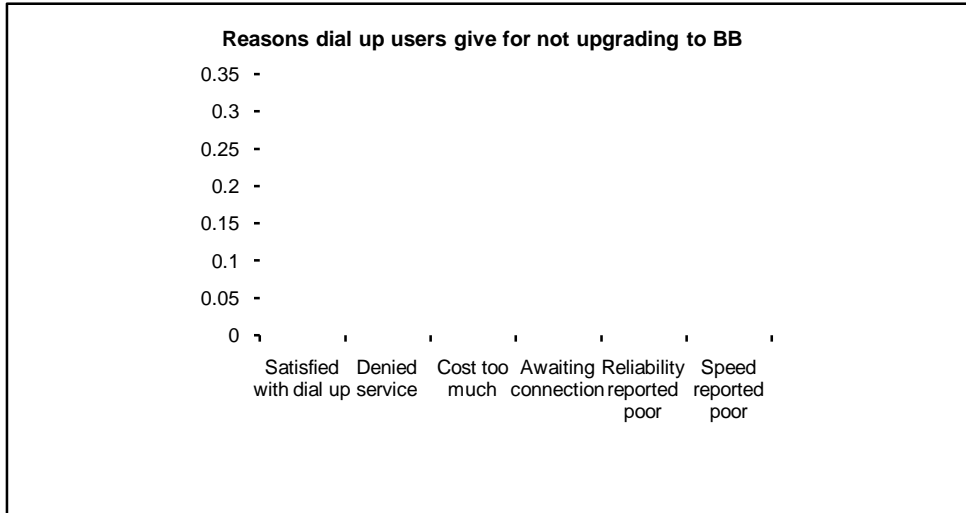
**Results of speed tests - Download**

.25 mb	1
.50 mb	18
.75 mb	6
1.0 mb	2
1.25 mb	3
1.5 mb	3



**Reasons dial up users give for not having broadband**

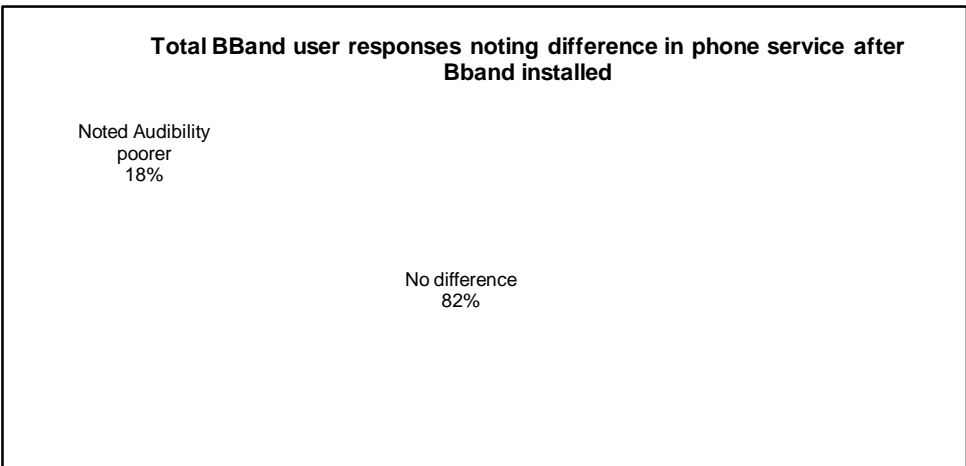
	%	
Satisfied with dial up	7%	1
Denied service	33%	5
Cost too much	7%	1
Awaiting connection	7%	1
Reliability reported poor	13%	2
Speed reported poor	33%	5



**Lower audibility noted after BB installation**

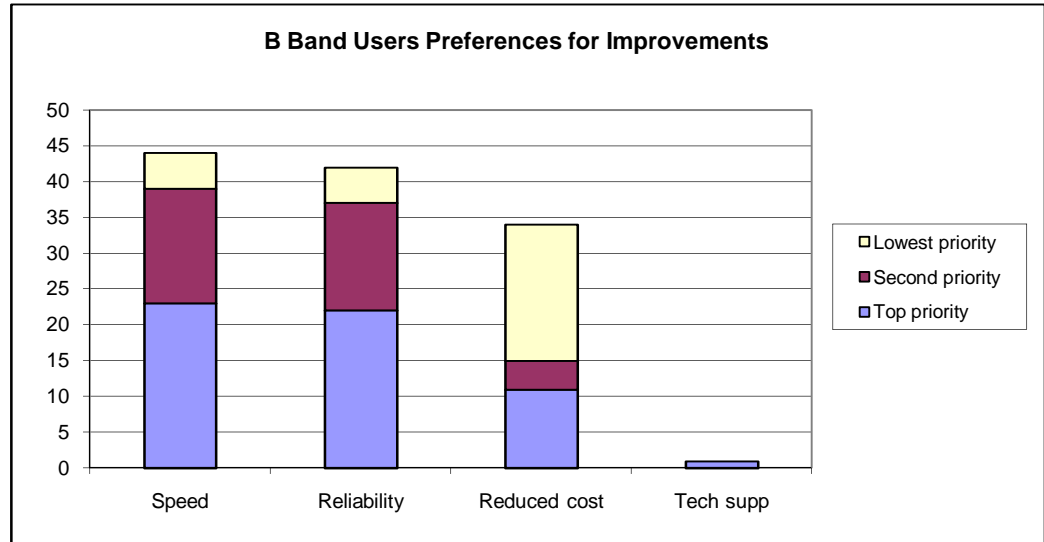
**Total BB user responses**

No difference	Noted Audibility poorer
36	8



**B Band users preference for improvements in priority**

	Top priority	Second pri	Lowest priority
Speed	23	16	5
Reliability	22	15	5
Reduced c	11	4	19
Tech supp	1	0	0



**Spread of Broadband ISP users**

Orange	1
Pipex	1
Demon	1
Freeserve	1
One2One	1
AOL	2
Talk Talk	2
Plus net	2
Tiscali	3
BT	28

