

# DISTRICT PARISH CONFERENCE

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD ON TUESDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2015

### 4 West Berkshire Council Budget 2016/17

**Question:** Jonathon Pearson (Sulham with Tidmarsh Parish Council): stated that it was difficult to find and understand information about West Berkshire Council's budget on the website in comparison to Oxfordshire County Council. He stated that he was shocked to learn that in Oxfordshire, they were forecasting that 75% of their Council's budget was spent on social care by 2020 and asked if the same was true for West Berkshire Council.

**Answer:** Councillor Gordon Lundie replied that it was true that West Berkshire Council might be spending 75% of its budget on social care by 2020. He explained that in the context of an ageing population, people without significant financial resources would be likely to rely on the state to provide them with care in their old age. Oxfordshire County Council had made many changes to achieve savings such as closing Children's Centres, which West Berkshire Council had avoided doing.

Councillor Roger Croft added that at present, 60% of the money raised by charging Council Tax was spent on Adult and Children's Social Care services and the situation was likely to get worse.

### 5 Superfast Broadband

**Question:** Julian Baker (Farnborough Parish Council) asked how deep the fibre cables would be buried.

**Answer:** Joe Frost (Gigaclear) responded that on a public highway, the cables would be buried 30cm deep which was above other utilities but well protected from the road surface. On private land the cable would usually be run along a fence or wall or if necessary buried 15cm deep. Landowners often chose to cover the cable in plastic piping to make it easier to identify.

**Question:** Richard Smith (Sulhamstead Parish Council) asked if there was an installation fee in addition to the £100 connection fee.

**Answer:** Joe Frost (Gigaclear) confirmed that regarding installation a customer would have three options:

1. Self-installation: A customer would be provided with an installation pack containing 50m of fibre-optic cable for no additional cost, or 100m of cable for £64.
2. Gigaclear installation: A customer would be charged £95 in addition to the connection fee for professional Gigaclear installers. The cost might be slightly more if installers needed to dig up a tarmac drive.
3. Nominated installation: Gigaclear would train a nominated village 'handyperson' to install the cables who could then charge residents whatever they deemed necessary.

**Question:** Marcus Aldridge (Frilsham Parish Council) asked if residents on a private road would be able to access the service.

**Answer:** Joe Frost (Gigaclear) advised that Gigaclear would require permission from private landowners to lay the cable so if there was a dispute, they would either find an alternative route for the cable to be laid or they might need to take court action, however they had not taken any court action so far as they had been able to negotiate.

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**Question:** Ian Parsons (Basildon Parish Council) asked if there were any constraints to restrict the prices that Gigaclear could charge in two years time.

**Answer:** Joe Frost (Gigaclear) reminded the audience that Gigaclear had invested £16m into the project. The terms and conditions, which were provided to customers at the point of sale, included the pricing policy and stated that Gigaclear could increase their prices in January by the Retail Price Index plus 2%.

**Question:** Martin Crane (Hungerford Town Council) asked what remedial action would be taken if the cable was damaged, including what compensation customers might receive.

**Answer:** Joe Frost (Gigaclear) advised that preventative action was taken if a cable was lain under farmland by burying it 1m deep, rather than the normal 15cm. However in the event of a cable breaking, Gigaclear would be able to locate the point of the break within centimetres and they had a response team available 24/7 to respond.

**Question:** Nick Carter (Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council) asked whether Gigaclear had spoken to the providers of home entertainment packages to negotiate a discount for Gigaclear customers.

**Answer:** Matthew Hare (Gigaclear) advised that home entertainment packages, with the exception of BT Sport, could be provided over the Gigaclear network but Gigaclear were not able to install their network where customers were already receiving a 'superfast' service of 24mbs or better.

**Question:** Councillor Graham Pask (Ward Member for Bucklebury) asked how Gigaclear identified those who qualified for Superfast Broadband and explained that he was signed up to a package to receive superfast broadband but was receiving approximately 12Mbs whereas his neighbour was receiving 38Mbs, and would his neighbour be ignored.

**Answer:** Joe Frost (Gigaclear) replied that the Gigaclear website had a postcode checker for residents to identify if their property would be included in the roll-out. He added that they had to identify where the technology was not able to deliver superfast broadband even though residents had subscribed to that service. So on a road of ten houses where four houses were already receiving superfast broadband, the Gigaclear 'pots' would be installed but under private funding from Gigaclear rather than as part of the subsidy from West Berkshire Council.

**Question:** Councillor Alan Law enquired what the criteria was for deciding which parish areas would be included in each of the four roll-out phases.

**Answer:** Joe Frost (Gigaclear) advised that the schedule of works was determined in part by permissions from Highways regarding where they could work and when but also the availability of backhaul infrastructure from the national network carriers, Vodafone and Virgin Media.

**Supplementary:** Councillor Alan Law further asked if there were any commercial criteria.

**Answer:** Matthew Hare (Gigaclear) confirmed that they sought to roll out the phases in an order which kept costs down.

## 6 Planning Update

**Question:** Julian Baker (Farnborough Parish Council) asked whether planning decisions on the type of dwelling for a site were ever motivated by the anticipated Council Tax revenue.

**Answer:** Gary Lugg (Head of Planning and Countryside) responded that planning was entirely separate from Council Tax and decisions were never motivated by this factor.

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**Question:** Graham Rolfe (Purley on Thames Parish Council) asked whether Parish Councils were expected to have specific projects set up before they could receive Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments.

**Answer:** Gary Lugg (Head of Planning and Countryside) advised that s106 was allocated towards specific impact mitigation projects but CIL was different because parishes would receive the money regardless of whether there was a specific project in mind. However parishes would need to demonstrate what the money had been spend on with an audit trail.

**Question:** Martin Crane (Hungerford Town Council) asked a question regarding derelict employment land and whether the Development Plan Document might mean that this land could be used to erect 40 new dwellings.

**Answer:** Gary Lugg (Head of Countryside and Planning) explained that this question was related to a specific application and the Conference was not the appropriate forum to discuss it. He advised that he was sympathetic to Mr Crane's position but there was a process to follow. The evidence base suggested that the balance of employment land and residential land was correct and the new Local Plan would review that balance.

**Question:** Nick Carter (Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council) asked if Parish Councils had been lied to as he thought the Local Plan applied until 2026.

**Answer:** Gary Lugg (Head of Planning and Countryside) replied that the policy required updating and a new policy would supersede the existing policy.

Councillor Alan Law (Portfolio Holder for Planning) added that until 18 months ago, housing numbers were referred to as a 20 year supply and now the government were asking for annual figures. The new Local Plan would be adopted in 2018.

### 7 Open Forum for Questions and Answers to the Executive and Presenters

**Question:** (Unknown) asked what influence the Council had on Network Rail to avoid their activities having an adverse impact on residents.

**Answer:** Councillor Gordon Lundie responded that the Council was always happy to open up a dialogue with Network Rail and he was encouraged when he saw works being undertaken. Network Rail were joint developers of the Market Street redevelopment alongside the Council.

**Question:** Richard Smith (Sulhamstead Parish Council) asked if the Council was aware that one of the routes in the Winter Service Plan was no longer legal due to weight restrictions having been applied to the route.

**Answer:** Councillor Garth Simpson (Portfolio holder for Highways and Transport) replied that he would get more information from Mr Smith after the close of the Conference in order to respond to the specific query.

**Question:** Jonathon Pearson (Sulham with Tidmarsh Parish Council) commended Gigaclear's approachable style and asked if the Superfast Berkshire Team might be able to respond to queries from Parish Councils rather than maintaining a level of secrecy.

**Answer:** Kevin Griffin (Head of ICT & Corporate Support) explained that the Superfast Berkshire team had two employees and if there had been any secrecy it would have been during the confidential procurement process. The SFB team would not be able to share information they did not have and as an example the roll out plan had only been confirmed that day.

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**Supplementary:** Jonathon Pearson made a supplementary comment that residents in the East of the District felt forgotten about and welcomed the Council's message that more focus would be given to that area.

**Question:** (Unknown, Purley on Thames Parish Council) advised that in his area there was a section of 50-60 houses not receiving Superfast Broadband and questioned why they had not been included in the roll-out plan.

**Answer:** Kevin Griffin (Head of ICT & Corporate Support) replied that analysis was still being undertaken and those houses would be included if they were within the scope of the project.

**Question:** James Spackman (Woolhampton Parish Council) noted that originally the conference programme had included feedback from the 'Improving Communications' survey and asked why it had been removed.

**Answer:** Susan Powell (Safer Communities Partnership Manager) responded that Martin Dunscombe, Head of Communications, was new in post and had not yet completed the data analysis but would make the results known to Parish Council as soon as he was able to.