

Digital Connectivity Update - August 2022

Introduction

Connecting Cambridgeshire is improving Cambridgeshire & Peterborough's digital infrastructure – including broadband, mobile and public access Wifi coverage - to drive economic growth, help our businesses and communities to thrive and make it easier to access public services.

The programme, hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council, and led by Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), is working with local councils, Government bodies and external organisations, including telecoms suppliers and mobile operators. The [Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2025](#) sets out the programme's ambition and objectives to meet challenging targets and rapidly changing demands.

Broadband

Superfast and Full Fibre Broadband coverage in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough are above the national average and ahead of Government targets. Superfast (>24 Mbps) is at 98.5% (July 2022) with a target of >99% by the end of 2022. Gigabit capable broadband coverage is increasing at pace through direct intervention and commercial deployment towards the Government target of 85% by 2025. However, there is still work to do to bring future proof connectivity to harder to reach areas.

Connecting Cambridgeshire is working to achieve the highest possible broadband coverage through:

- Completion of the Superfast Broadband (SFBB) project delivery to over 99% of homes and businesses that could not get it otherwise.
- Commercial deployment – facilitated and supported through our Enabling Digital Delivery team liaising with providers and 'barrier busting' as needed.
- [Project Gigabit](#) - combining government funding with commercial investment through procurement of an intervention contract and vouchers to extend gigabit capable fibre coverage.
- Government Gigabit Vouchers and CPCA top ups to cover the cost of installing fibre broadband for eligible groups of rural premises that are not in commercial plans or covered by Project Gigabit.

View our [broadband postcode checker](#) or check [eligibility for Gigabit Broadband Vouchers](#).

Active broadband suppliers in our area

An increasing number of fibre broadband providers are actively planning and delivering gigabit capable fibre networks in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough over the next two years. These include: Openreach, Virgin Media (overlaying their existing cable network with fibre), City Fibre, County Broadband, Gigaclear, Cambridge Fibre, Netomnia, Voneus, Trooli, Lightspeed, Connect Fibre, and Upp. View our [active suppliers list](#) for links to more information.

The Connecting Cambridgeshire team is working with suppliers and Council teams to support and encourage fibre investment. However, because of the highly competitive market, commercial rollout plans are not generally announced ahead of delivery and may change at short notice.

Most suppliers actively engage with communities before build work starts, but this can sometimes raise questions from residents, especially as some fibre providers may share the same sub-contractors. We are talking regularly to providers to ensure proactive community engagement and we would encourage anyone with questions/concerns to contact us by emailing contact@connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk.

Digital Access

Work is underway to improve broadband coverage and speeds for social housing, matching the 85% target for market housing by 2025, by liaising with leading housing providers and telecoms networks.

Many people are struggling to afford broadband and mobile connectivity due to the cost-of-living crisis. Some broadband and mobile service providers are offering a range of support including reduced broadband tariffs for customers claiming certain benefits and concessions for the most vulnerable and people in financial hardship.

Find advice and useful links for keeping everyone connected on the [Help to get online](#) section of our website.

Mobile coverage

Mobile infrastructure underpins future digital connectivity, including 5G networks. Demand for mobile connectivity and data has accelerated, but coverage and capacity has not improved as rapidly in some areas.

Planning authorities have seen a marked increase in applications for new/upgraded 4G and 5G masts, which need to be taller (18-20m) to extend mobile coverage, and planning laws for permitted development have recently been reformed to make it easier for operators to upgrade and share infrastructure

The Connecting Cambridgeshire team is working with local authorities and mobile network operators (MNOs) looking to invest in 4G and 5G networks to improve coverage and capacity, which will have a long-term economic impact for the area. This includes commissioning local surveys to understand areas of poor mobile connectivity and comprehensive data analysis of planning applications.

We have produced a [Mobile Coverage Factsheet](#) explaining the benefits and challenges of expanding 4G and 5G networks to support business and communities, which is being shared with Parish Councils and elected Members to support decision making at a local level.

A dedicated digital connectivity planning officer has recently been appointed to proactively engage with Mobile Network Operators and planning teams to balance the requirements for new infrastructure with local planning sensitivities. Parish Councils with queries about planning applications for increased mobile coverage in their area are welcome to contact the Connecting Cambridgeshire team, who can provide advice and attend public meetings as required.

Free Public Access Wifi – CambWifi



Free public access Wifi services are important to help people get online wherever they are, support businesses and communities, and make it easier to access public services.

CambWifi public, managed by Cambridgeshire County Council IT service and maintained through the Eastnet contract, is available in over 400 public buildings and open spaces, including libraries, leisure centres, park & ride sites, children's centres, council offices and depots.

Access to outdoor CambWifi is being extended in market town and city centres with funding from the Combined Authority and has also been installed in 34 village halls with a government grant to support community health and wellbeing.

We are aware that some CambWifi users have had difficulty accessing the free service so we asked our IT providers to simplify the registration process. From after 7pm on Thursday 8 September CambWifi users will no longer need to enter an email address or verify an email to access the service.

The first time you use it after this date, simply connect to 'CambWifi_Public' via the device's Wifi settings, accept the Terms, click 'Log In' and start browsing. Users will then be automatically logged into free Wifi network in all CambWifi locations across the County.

For more information about CambWifi including exactly where it's available, please visit the [Connecting Cambridgeshire website's CambWifi page](#) and the [FAQ pages](#).

Find out more

An updated website is now available at www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk with postcode checkers and links to useful information.

Contact us

The Connecting Cambridgeshire team responds promptly and proactively to queries and concerns from Members, residents, businesses and stakeholders. Please email contact@connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk including details of the location and postcode to help us to investigate and respond as soon as possible. Follow us on Twitter [@ConnectingCambs](#) and [LinkedIn](#).