Brand New Forest Broadband Campaign Group

10 January 2012 – Appletree Court, Lyndhurst

1.0   Background

1.1   In December New Forest Business Partnership (NFBP) held a meeting to discuss the topic of Broadband. This meeting took place using the background of a local broadband survey sent out to local companies, asking for feedback on their experiences of broadband and its effect (or lack of it) on their day to day business.

1.2   The key outcome of the above meeting was to develop a Brand New Forest campaign to promote the needs of businesses and that such an approach should be delivered in partnership with community and resident interests. It was therefore agreed that the New Forest Association of Town and Parish Councils be contacted to arrange a joint meeting to examine and identify the key issues of future local broadband provision for the mutual benefit of businesses and the wider community.

2.0   Hampshire County Council Bid

2.1   The meeting commenced with an overview from Daniel Fearnley of Hampshire County Council (HCC) who has submitted a £5m bid for funding to Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) for delivery of superfast and improved broadband for communities in Hampshire. It is anticipated that an indication should be given on the outcome of this bid within the next month. Should the bid be successful a tendering process will begin with the award of a contract in late 2012. The programme will then be completed in 2015.

2.2   The principle of the submission is that market forces will provide superfast broadband to 90% of the population with the remaining 10% able to receive a minimum of 2MB. In real terms for the New Forest this means that approximately 56,000 properties will have commercially provided superfast connections, 13,500 will have grant enabled superfast connections, leaving 7500 which require alternative solutions to reach minimum speeds.

2.3   Alternative solutions include satellite and improved mobile technology but it was stated that none of these are perfect fit solutions. Trials of some of these technologies are being carried out with a view to their use once the Broadband Plan has been approved.

2.4   Any funds enabled through BDUK will need to be match funded i.e. £5m will also need to found through contributions from local authorities, private funding etc.

3.0   Open Floor Discussion with Q&A

3.1   Anthony Climpson facilitated a wide-ranging discussion on how best to create a business and community New Forest focussed broadband campaign, that would both assist HCC's submission and identify the wide range of issues and support their solution at a local level.

3.2   The question was raised whether existing public sector infrastructure (i.e. HPSN) could be used to assist the rollout of the broadband programme. Initial meetings had been held with commercial contractors which had been positive. Whilst this would be legally possible, a number of considerations would need to be made including security and physical access to the infrastructure.

3.3   It was asked whether the estimated £10m would be sufficient to deliver the project. This figure was based upon various assumptions about the cost of delivery but also the estimated take-up figure. This was shown in the bid as 25%; however should higher take-up figures be achieved e.g. 40-50% then further penetration could be made to improving the speeds of the excluded 10%.

3.4   It was agreed that all New Forest networks need to be utilised so that the broadband campaign engaged all interests across the District. Other groups than those present would need to be identified so that information and calls to action can be best cascaded throughout the forest. These networks would be utilised to encourage registers of interest on www.hants.gov.uk/broadband. This may demonstrate where demand is highest and therefore impact on any future rollout. This would require co-ordination and a joint response; it was felt that the establishment of the Brand New Forest Broadband Campaign Group would be the correct vehicle for this.

3.5   HCC proposed that they will initiate quarterly meetings for all Hampshire districts at which updates can be provided on the progression of the project. New Forest Broadband Campaign representatives will be identified to participate in these meetings. It was also agreed that the current Brand New Forest Broadband Campaign Group meetings would continue in their own right so that local levels of interest can be maximised.

3.6   An alternative broadband funding stream through the RDPE programme was identified, although it was noted that applications for this process would close at the end of the month. It was thought Round 2 of this funding scheme would be announced for the spring and that local Expressions of Interest should be prepared in advance. HCC could help with providing information to assist with this process which would require significant levels of technical detail.

4.0   Actions and Outcomes

4.1   That notes of the meeting should be circulated to all invitees and other interested parties.

4.2   That the Brand New Forest Broadband Campaign Group be formally established with representation from business, local community and voluntary sectors. This group would be responsible for engaging local sign-up.

4.3   Hampshire County Council should be responsible for engagement with and responding to queries of a more advanced/technical nature.

4.4   The Brand New Forest Broadband Focus Group would develop through e-communications and meet at least once every quarter. The group would also provide representation to the scheduled quarterly meetings to held by HCC.

5.0   Contact Information

5.1   Until further notice all Brand New Forest Broadband Campaign Group activity contact should in the first instance be to:

Matt Callaghan
Business Development Officer
New Forest District Council
Appletree Court, Lyndhurst
SO43 7PA
Tel: 023 8028 5371
Email: matt.callaghan@nfdc.gov.uk
www.brandnewforest.com