

24th April 2020

BROADBAND PROJECT TO PLAY VITAL ROLE IN CORONAVIRUS RECOVERY

Confirmation has been received of UK Government funding towards a major Pembrokeshire broadband project that will play a vital role in post-coronavirus recovery.

On 11th March Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced successful bids under the Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) Challenge Fund.

Pembrokeshire County Council was among the local authorities to claim a share of the money.

Earlier this month the signed agreement was received at County Hall from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Plans being developed include connecting a large number of public sector buildings in Pembrokeshire – such as libraries, and leisure centres - to giga-capable broadband.

That will create a base from which suppliers will make giga-capable connections available to the homes and businesses nearby.

Paul Miller, Pembrokeshire County Council Cabinet Member for Economy, said the impact of the coronavirus outbreak had underlined how important broadband was to people's lives.

Quality broadband will also play an important role in recovery after the pandemic.

Cllr Miller added: "The award of this funding is the culmination of 18 months of work.

"We recognised, long before the coronavirus, the need for first class digital infrastructure and since taking responsibility for Economic Development in 2017 I've been clear that digital connectivity is a priority for us.

"We have already established a dedicated team to drive fibre broadband out to our rural communities. We've committed £2m of PCC capital to support fibre broadband delivery, in addition to this central government funding.

"We're developing a digital infrastructure strategy to ensure Pembrokeshire is attractive as anywhere for digital infrastructure investment.

"This announcement provides the cash for a programme of work that starts immediately, coronavirus or not.

“Openreach will be delivering the first stage – connecting public sector sites across Pembrokeshire so they can act as hubs for fast fibre in our communities.

“Over the course of the next 12 month we’ll be laying miles of fibre optic cables across the County, creating base, a spider’s web of fast connections, from which it our ambition to connect the whole of Pembrokeshire to a gigabit capable service by 2025.

“The next step is area connectivity projects. That might well be a £50m investment and that starts in 2020 too.

“We will get through Covid. We know it's going to be tough but we're determined to lay the foundations for a successful, innovative, vibrant Pembrokeshire economy.”

Minister for Digital Infrastructure Matt Warman said: "We are investing £850,000 to give hospitals, libraries and other public services in Pembrokeshire gigabit-speed broadband and bring better connectivity to the region through collective buying power.

"We want everyone in Wales and the rest of the UK to feel the economic and social benefits of faster internet speeds and have also pledged a further £5 billion to connect hard-to-reach areas."