



Connecting Shropshire update, August 2021

Project Gigabit

Project Gigabit is a £5bn government infrastructure project to deliver fast, reliable digital connectivity for the UK. The prime objective of the programme is to deliver gigabit broadband to those areas of the country that aren't commercially viable for broadband infrastructure suppliers to build to without public funding.

Project Gigabit is a follow-up programme to the Superfast Broadband Programme. Unlike previous broadband infrastructure procurements that were undertaken by Shropshire Council, for Project Gigabit, Building Digital UK (BDUK) will be the responsible body for procurements, specifications, contracts and supplier management. Shropshire Council will remain integral to the process but will no longer manage the relationship with the broadband infrastructure suppliers and will have no funding role.



Since 2013, Shropshire Council's [Connecting Shropshire broadband programme](#) has worked alongside BDUK to provide improved broadband connectivity across the Shropshire Council area. Through three separate procurements and contracts, superfast broadband has been made available to over 68,000 premises to date. The final contract with Airband is due to complete in 2022. Since 2014, coverage of superfast broadband has increased from 24% to 98% across the Shropshire Council area.

BDUK have now mobilised Project Gigabit which follows on from the work that has been achieved through the Superfast Programme.

The county of Shropshire has been identified in an early phase of Project Gigabit. Both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council areas are defined as Lot 25, which falls within Phase 1b of the national gigabit programme. The objective of the national programme is to deliver gigabit broadband to 85% of the UK by 2025, and as much as possible by 2033.

Before BDUK can undertake a procurement process, they need to review the current marketplace for broadband infrastructure. This is a key condition for spending public funding, which can only be directed to premises where there is clear market failure.

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Open Market Review (OMR)

In March/April 2021 BDUK undertook an Open Market Review of broadband coverage in Shropshire. The process involved inviting broadband infrastructure suppliers to provide commercial information about their current/planned coverage across the Lot 25 area for the next three years. This information was reviewed and assessed by BDUK to produce a proposed mapped eligible area for intervention and procurement.

Public Review

The next stage is publishing the mapped eligible area. BDUK want to hear from all relevant stakeholders, including the public, businesses, internet service providers and broadband infrastructure suppliers, in relation to the proposed mapped eligible areas.

This Public Review opens on 19 August 2021 and closes on 20 September 2021. To respond to the Public Review, and for more information, please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/uk-gigabit-programme-shropshire-public-review>

Project Gigabit - key dates

22 April 2021	Open Market Review completed
19 August 2021	Public Review starts (one month)
September 2021 to January 2022	BDUK to assess intervention and produce procurement strategy
February 2022	Procurement process launched (subject to change)
Early 2023	Contract Award (subject to change)
Summer 2023	Build commences (subject to change)

Project Gigabit - FAQs

- *What is Project Gigabit?*
It's a £5 billion government infrastructure project that aims to enable and deliver fast and reliable digital connectivity for the UK. For more detail, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-new-5bn-project-gigabit>
- *What is a gigabit-capable broadband network?*
A broadband network that has the capability to provide download speeds of at least 1 gigabit per second (1 Gbps or 1,000 megabits per second). Superfast broadband provides download speeds of 30 megabits per second.
- *What's the government's target for the project?*
The target is for at least 85% of UK premises to have access to gigabit-broadband by 2025, of which 80% is expected to be delivered by commercial broadband infrastructure suppliers.
- *How much funding has the government committed to Project Gigabit?*
£5bn in public funding has been pledged to deliver gigabit-capable broadband to properties not reached by the commercial market (around 20% of the UK). These properties are mostly in rural areas.
- *How much funding does Shropshire Council need to commit to Project Gigabit?*
Project Gigabit is being funded by BDUK. There is no expectation for Local Authorities to contribute funding to the committed £5 billion. Shropshire Council has already added £1m of its own funds to a 'top up' scheme for Gigabit vouchers. This will continue to be available on a first come, first served basis up to any procurement commencing.
- *Is the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme still available?*
Yes, Project Gigabit is funding up to £210m for vouchers to April 2024, worth up to £1,500 for residents and up to £3,500 for businesses in rural areas.
- *Is the Shropshire Council top-up to the Voucher Scheme still available?*
Yes, the £1m top-up is still available (on a first come, first served basis) and is worth up to £4,500 for residents and up to £7,000 for businesses in rural areas, see: <http://connectingshropshire.co.uk/gigabit-broadband-voucher-scheme/>
- *Will the Voucher Scheme be available during the procurement process?*
No. Broadband infrastructure suppliers won't be able to apply for vouchers during the procurement and up to six weeks before the process formally starts. For Shropshire, this means that the Voucher Scheme is likely to be closed to new applications during most of 2022.

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