



# Broadband Blueprint for Rotherhithe

Superfast Broadband for All

# Introduction

During the period when Rotherhithe was dominated by warehouses holding goods from abroad for onward shipment, the telephone lines installed in 1940s and 1950s avoided placing green connection boxes on the streets, as it there were few residential lines and most phones was for businesses and warehousing. As a result, the area was wired to receive telephone signals direct from the nearest exchange which is still located in Lynton Road, Bermondsey. With the rebuilding of the area in the 1980s and 1990s, this deficiency was never addressed; no new exchange was built. In order to upgrade to faster broadband, BT requires existing green street-side cabinets which most of Rotherhithe still doesn't have. The rise of the internet and especially super-fast fixed broadband and growing use of high definition internet TV, the service to significant parts of Rotherhithe has lagged far behind that available to neighbouring areas. It is common for some people to receive less than 2.0Mbps and many below 3.5Mbps.

Rotherhithe's broadband infrastructure is currently provided by two companies: BT and to a lesser extent Virgin. BT infrastructure is used by many ISPs, such as SKY and TalkTalk. These ISPs can only provide broadband at speeds BT can supply.

## Recent Developments

There were over 12,000 properties in the Rotherhithe and Surrey Docks wards on the 2011 Census data, with 8000+ properties on the peninsula itself. Since that date over 600 properties have been built around the Canada Water dock and station. In addition, planning permission has been given for around 1000 new properties on two sites. Work is under way in building 366 properties in Quebec Way and 600 student units for Kings College on the former Mulberry Business Park along with over 200 being built in the Downtown area closer to the river. Other proposed developments add around another 500 properties in Rotherhithe. The closure of Harmsworth Quays Printing works has potential for a campus for Kings College along with around 1,000 properties. Another 1000 properties are a possibility on the Mast Leisure Park site.

In all we estimate that the area will grow to around 15,000 properties within the next decade along with an unknown number of new businesses in addition to the c200 already located in the area.

During the last decade or so, a number of new residential developments have been built in Rotherhithe. Some of these have been able to benefit from the provision BT's 'Infinity' broadband. Other providers have also been able to provide fibre-optic connections to a number of large residential developments around Rotherhithe, but due to installation costs have yet been unable to extend their services to beyond this.

BT claim that it is uneconomic, without support, to upgrade the service to the area due to the cost and they do not have plans to undertake the upgrade of the service to Rotherhithe.

The current Connection Voucher Scheme, managed by the Major of London, is welcomed. This is a scheme to help fund businesses to connect their premises to faster broadband. Unfortunately for Rotherhithe, the scheme only allows funding for connections and not for infrastructure upgrades.

The local community has established a project group to coordinate action and press for the upgrade of the local broadband service which could affect the viability and growth of the area and the areas local economy as many residents have home offices.

The lack of faster broadband will affect the growth potential of an area within sight of Tower Bridge and impact on the future developments in this Greater London Authority Opportunity Area.

# What We Have Done

Having identified the key issues relating to the broadband we have had meetings or talked with all the relevant broadband suppliers: BT, BT Openreach (the infrastructure suppliers), Virgin Media and Hyperoptic.

We have looked at current broadband speeds, talked to developers and set up a website and mailing list. We have investigated the types of technology that could be used to improve broadband speeds.

As part of a feasibility study we have also visited and spoken to other communities who are looking to resolve their broadband issues, alongside meetings with contractors and other broadband suppliers.

We believe the problem inherently lies with the providers of infrastructure rather than the ISPs. BT as main provider needs to urgently upgrade their provision to Rotherhithe. However our work over the last few months has lead us to the conclusion that a community-owned and managed broadband infrastructure could deliver a better solution faster and cheaper. Such a solution would future-proof the infrastructure by providing superfast fibre to the home rather than relying on the existing copper wire system or ad-hoc wireless solutions.

## Who we are

### The Rotherhithe Broadband Group

The Rotherhithe Broadband Group was established by the Canada Water Consultative Forum in response to a request from Val Shawcross the Labour Greater London Assembly Member for Southwark and Lambeth following a vast number of complaints about broadband speeds in Rotherhithe and Surrey Docks wards. It has also been supported by Simon Hughes MP and Cllr David Hubber. The Group is made up of local residents who contribute their skills and knowledge in various fields.

The Canada Water Consultative Forum was established in 2002 to provide a voice for local peoples input into the developments in the area.

# The Community Solution

The proposal is to establish community owned and managed business based on the innovative practice of other community broadband projects from around the country. We would install and run an all-fibre network across Rotherhithe to provide broadband and other services to the community. This network will be available to 100% of households and businesses. We would be delivering a future proof solution using the latest available technology and deployment. We would be providing next-generation broadband access and would meet the requirements of residents and businesses for the foreseeable future.

Our detailed proposals are included in the Feasibility Study available in the near future.

We believe the benefits of a community solution would be:

- a service that is available to all residents at an affordable cost,
- a long term future-proofed broadband service for both residents and businesses,
- a better service at lower cost,
- a community interest company that would be more responsive to local residents and business needs,
- to provide training, employment and apprenticeship opportunities for local residents.