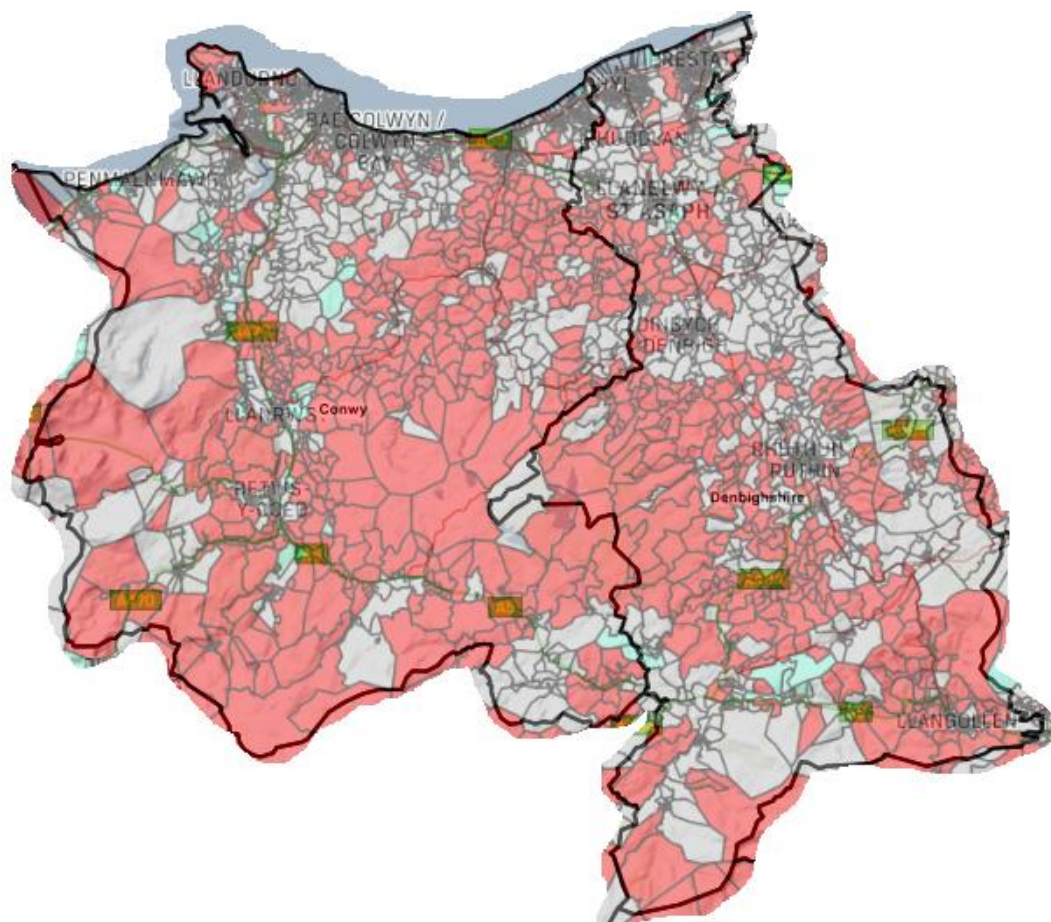


# Appendix 1 – Digital Connectivity in Conwy & Denbighshire

## Section 1 – The Picture

1.1 As an area with a lot of rurality, Conwy & Denbighshire counties have a lot of ‘white’ premises. “White” premises are properties that officially receive less than 30Mbps, in truth nearly all of them have less than 5Mbps, some less than 0.5Mbps. The majority of “white” premises are in what we would identify as rural areas (i.e. non urban areas). There are a number of these “white” premises in Conwy and Denbighshire. Please see the below map.



- 1.2 BT OpenReach have a plan for rolling out full fibre connections across some parts of Conwy and Denbighshire. We don't know when the next phase of the rollout plan will start, but it's scheduled to be complete by June 2022, though some slippage should be expected. This rollout scheme will still leave many properties without access to fibre broadband. Those properties covered by the planned rollout scheme are not entitled to apply for Rural Gigabit Vouchers.
- 1.3 For properties not on the rollout scheme, funding is available via the Rural Gigabit Voucher scheme. This is a UK scheme (with a generous top up from the Welsh Government for our residents) that's worth £3000 for a residential premise and £7000 for a business premise (including sole traders). The

vouchers can be pooled by communities to commission Open Reach to lay full fibre broadband to a community. This pooled budget approach is necessary as the cost of commissioning OpenReach is typically a six-figure sum (they've recently quoted a Denbighshire community a cost of £1.2million). This voucher scheme expires 2021, though it might be anticipated that it would be extended.

- 1.4 Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) is another Government scheme designed to roll out full fibre broadband connections to public buildings like schools and libraries. The idea is that by taking full fibre out to public buildings, Openreach will then connect homes and businesses along the fibre route and in the vicinity of the newly-connected public buildings. There is a workplan to March 2021, although Covid-19 has pushed the time scale back. The LFFN programme installs will not deliver full fibre to all of the areas.
- 1.5 Even after LFFN and Openreach's planned rollouts, many rural areas of Conwy & Denbighshire will have poor connectivity.
- 1.6 In Denbighshire, enabling everyone to have access to good broadband is a corporate priority, so they have invested in a Digital Officer post (from February 2020 to March 2021 at present). This officer advises individuals, businesses and communities on how to improve their current connectivity and on how they can use schemes such as the Gigabite Voucher Scheme to secure improvements to community infrastructure. The latter is a long process, so individuals are also supported by Community Development officers to mobilise their neighbours, etc.
- 1.7 Conwy have been looking to appoint a Digital Officer as part of their rural development team but this has been delayed due to Covid-19. It is hoped that Conwy will have recruited an officer in place from January 2021 to December 2021. Their approach is slightly different to Denbighshire's as they are looking to directly intervene via four Rural Community Development Fund Capital (RCDF) projects. This will provide Wi-Fi infrastructure for the following areas:
  - Project Area 1 - Llanfair TH to Llanefydd to Llansannan (inc part of Betws yn Rhos)
  - Project Area 2 - Llanrwst to Llangernyw to Llanfair TH (inc part of Eglwysbach)
  - Project Area 3 - Nebo/Capel Garmon and A5 valley from Pentre Isaf/Padog to the county boundary
  - Project Area 4 – Extend the reach of the above and fill in any gaps.The projects will concentrate on using existing buildings and placing relays on them.
- 1.8 The North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) has digital infrastructure as a priority. Denbighshire's Leader and Officers take an active role in this.

## **Infrastructure**

### **2. Strengths**

- 2.1 Both Conwy & Denbighshire have a clear picture of the white spots in their counties, and a plan in place to address them.
- 2.2 Denbighshire's Digital Officer is in place and is working actively with six communities to support them to secure vouchers and enter into a contract with Openreach. This enabling approach means any community is supported to organise itself to explore the Gigabite Voucher Scheme (as long as it's not already part of the Openreach planned rollout up until June 2022). This approach is in-keeping with the preference of Government to focus on pure Fibre networks where there is a complete fibre "path" from service provider to subscriber. This is due to the sustainability of the solution.
- 2.3 Conwy's approach offers direct intervention from secured project funding that places equipment on existing buildings to enhance digital connectivity to surrounding properties. It's a cheaper option.

### **3. Limitations**

- 3.1 Conwy's appointment of a Digital Officer has been delayed due to Covid-19. It is hoped they will have an officer in place from January 2021 to December 2021.
- 3.2 DCC digital officer only has funding until March 2021. The post started in February 2020, after which lockdown began so a few months of momentum have been lost as a consequence.
- 3.3 For both counties, the posts are temporary and are not of sufficient term to have resolved the white spot issues in the counties.
- 3.4 LLFN rollout focuses on enhancing digital connectivity in rural areas. In Denbighshire, this has included Rhyl, Prestatyn and Denbigh, which may not be consistent with PSB's perception of rural communities. BT's rationale is that our urban areas are rural when compared with, for example, Manchester.

### **4. Opportunities**

- 4.1 In addition to the Gigabite Voucher Scheme, Conwy & Denbighshire communities are in a unique position whereby they also have monies available from the Clocaenog windfarm into which they can bid. This has the potential to help overcome bridge funding barriers.
- 4.2 PSB could assist with lobbying WG to agree a definition of rural with BT, so that we ensure communities that are most lacking in connectivity are prioritised for upgrades.

- 4.3 Longer-term funding for the Digital Officer posts would increase the chances of addressing a higher proportion of white spots in the counties, which would benefit our residents, and also support our own rural-based staff to work from home.
- 4.4 There are a number of “white” premises on the border of Conwy and Denbighshire which could benefit from a joint working approach between the two counties (see map in paragraph 1.1).

## **5. Threats**

- 5.1 Although Conwy’s approach is a cheaper solution, it does rely on the cooperation of property owners to allow equipment to be installed on their premises.
- 5.2 Denbighshire’s approach requires a level of community leadership and mobilisation in order to secure the funding required.
- 5.3 There are a number of “white” premises (red in colour on the map above) on the border of Conwy and Denbighshire where cross-county collaboration could deliver for the residents.