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## Broadband Provision Case Study: Rural Parish Community Project One Year On from Installation

Report compiled from extracts written by Steve Bolter  
Parish Councillor with responsibility for the project



# Case Study – Gestingthorpe Village



Gestingthorpe is less than 80 km (50 miles) from the centre of London, less than 25km from Colchester and about 7km from the towns of Halstead and Sudbury. It is a parish of adult population 350, forming about 190 households, most of which are in the main village. As well as farming there are a number of small businesses, many of which are run from homes.

Broadband was completely unobtainable for many of Gestingthorpe's households. Those households that were able to connect to broadband had a service much slower than the Government's recommended minimum of 2Mb/s. With the assistance of a grant from Braintree District Council's Rural Community Development Fund, the Parish Council commissioned County Broadband to provide a wireless service for the parish.

This has provided broadband superior to the telephone line broadband available in many towns, at a price which villagers can afford. After a year of service, satisfaction is high. Wireless Community Broadband provides a highly cost effective way of bringing broadband at rates well in excess of the recommended 2Mb/s, to rural communities.

In the winter of 2007/8 County Broadband Ltd visited the Parish and estimated that most households could be reached if a backhaul link into the village and three distribution points were installed. We proposed a flexible system, allowing users to separately select burst rates for downloading and uploading data, with their monthly tariffs dependent on the service options chosen (£10.99 – 29.99).

Our estimates showed functional data rates could be provided at prices families could afford. The local parish council organised for a survey to be delivered to every household in the Parish, plus a few households just outside the Parish but likely to be within range. The responses indicated sufficient interest for the Parish Council to apply for a grant from Braintree District Council Rural Development Fund.

In July 2008, 20 of the 30 families who had expressed a strong interest having signed up for the service, the community infrastructure was provided and individual connections were commenced. The £99 installation charge included fitting a rooftop client radio, the power supply and a lead to the home's main computer. Many households paid an additional £50 to have an internal wireless network installed at the same time.

The success of this project was in no small part due to the high degree of community involvement in research, recruitment and in providing local knowledge.

The number of users has increased over the first year of operation. Some who were able to have a limited "broadband" service via their land-line have transferred to Gestingthorpe Community Broadband, as soon as their contracts with other providers allowed. There are six new affordable homes in the village. An open day showed that the availability of wireless broadband was a significant factor for prospective tenants and part purchasers.

Customer satisfaction is very high. After one year with the service, many in the village have become very dependent on it for business, educational and other uses. The system installed is to a modern standard. Fixed wireless Community Broadband services such as ours afford a cost-effective way or bringing real broadband to "the last 1%"; taking them directly from no broadband availability, to having a service superior to many towns and cities.