

THE ARRIVAL OF ULTRAFAST FIBRE OPTIC BROADBAND TO OAKRIDGE

Since the advent of the Internet age Oakridge residents had had to put up with very slow speed connections either via their old fashioned phone lines or by using a “dongle” and renting a specific data limit monthly. Big companies like Virginmedia were not interested in connecting remote communities, only large areas of population. The BT Open Reach system for rural communities was way behind schedule and could not offer any date for villages around here. Speeds could be as slow as 0.5 Mbps, which meant downloading movies or TV programmes was a very time consuming process, and often came with fixed data limits as little as 5GB per month unless a premium price was paid on excess use.

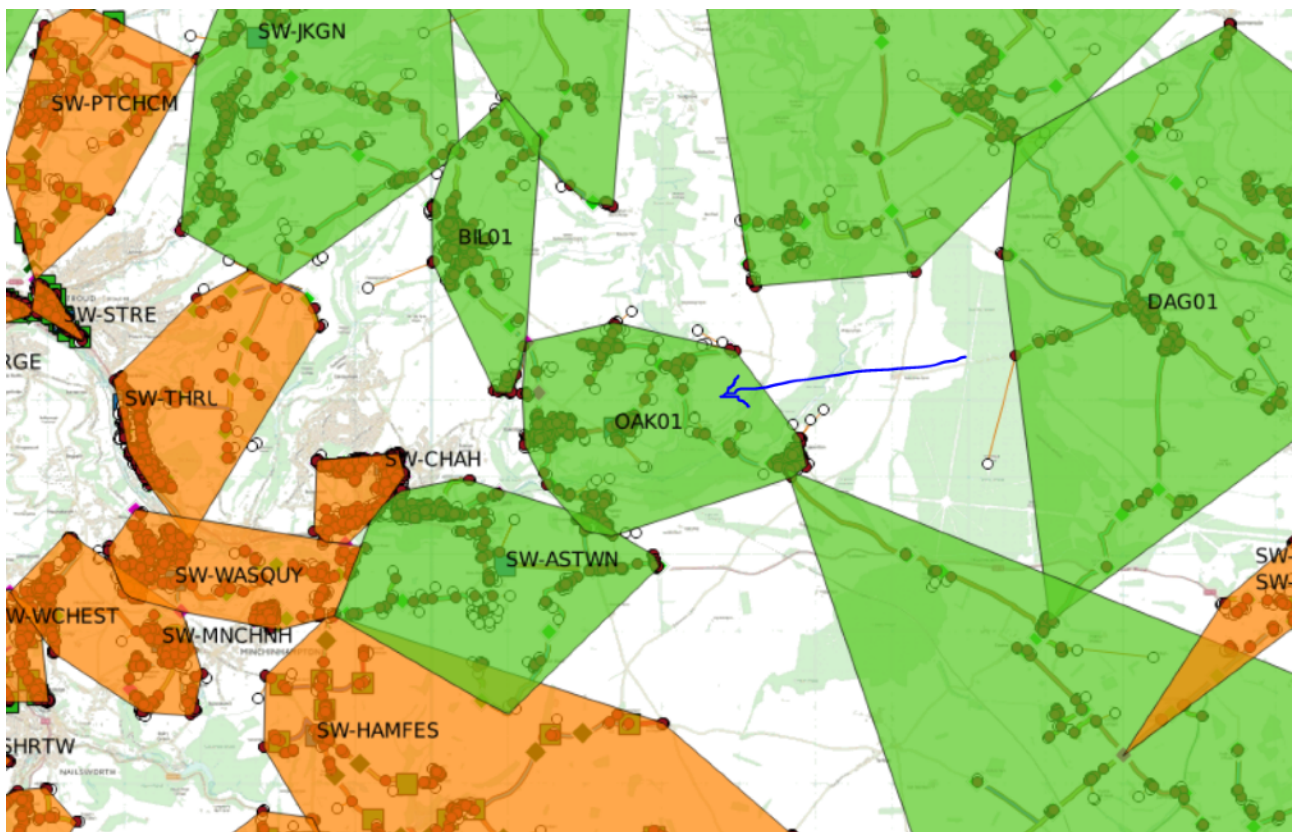
In 2016 it emerged that Gigaclear.com based in Abingdon , Oxfordshire, was potentially arriving to fill this gap with “ultrafast” fibre optic broadband via underground cables and monthly rental fees for unlimited usage. Gigaclear started canvassing for customers from Summer 2016 and they needed more than a certain minimum number of subscribers per area (?150) to make it economically viable. Consequently a number of keen residents started a leaflet and poster campaign to get their neighbours to sign up. Many did not take much persuasion as the available services were so poor and the magic number of sign-ups was reached fairly quickly.

Gigaclear’s advertising pointed out that their fibre optic technology would give unlimited access to entertainment, gaming, communications, employment and learning related applications available on the Internet. This would also make watching TV on the Internet, using, for example BBC iPlayer or Amazon Prime, a viable proposition at last.

The deals they were offering depended on speed required to cover intended usage, either up to, 50, 100, 200 Mb or 1Gb per second. It was considered that 50 was adequate for normal modest domestic usage with the higher speeds desirable for businesses or households with more users. Gigaclear pointed out that these optimum speeds needed up to date computer equipment to get the best service as they adapted to the speed of the slowest item connected.

Gigaclear also offered a telephone service via the broadband line and they recommended a company called vonage.co.uk, although customers could still continue to use their old BT phone lines. It was necessary for a number of village residents to change their email service providers too as some companies would not support the change to Gigaclear lines. Gmail got a lot of new subscribers as a result due to its worldwide reach!

Cable laying, by digging a channel along all the arterial roads, commenced south from Bisley in the third quarter of 2016 and lasted about 12 months to connect the whole community. It eventually connected 441 households. Gigaclear subcontracted this cable laying and used an experienced utility installation company called Complete Utilities. In fact, as the map shows, our network is controlled from a cabinet at Far Oakridge but does not include part of Bournes Green which is controlled from Bisley, but does include Sapperton and Frampton Mansell.



The system involved digging a narrow channel along every road which could give access as close as possible to properties. Every property, whether they had signed up or not, was future-proofed by installation of access at the roadside boundary. This was called a “Fibre Optic Network Connection Point” or “pot”. From there it was the responsibility of the householder to arrange connection. This could be done via Gigaclear with their contractor for a fee, which depended to some extent on distance and the nature of the surface to be dug up. Alternatively the householder could get a DIY kit from Gigaclear for self installation. The company said about 30% of customers opted for DIY installation.

The result has been largely as promised with much improved speeds, very few outages and mostly comfortable video/TV watching via the Internet. A huge step forward to give us proper 21st Century technology at a reasonable price.



