

Advice for Brentor residents on applying for a Universal Service Obligation broadband connection - version 2, October 2020

After a long campaign by the residents of West Blackdown, BT/Openreach has finally agreed to build a new fast fibre broadband network to Brentor. Initially this was to cost residents over £42,000, but following our complaints to Ofcom and the Communications Ombudsman **the network connection will now almost certainly be provided at no cost**. We are told that it will probably be a fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) connection, potentially extremely fast and future-proof.

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) scheme provides Government funding of £3,400 per eligible household towards the cost of the network. **In order to build the network Openreach will automatically claim the funding for eligible properties whether or not you apply or take up the offer of connection, but you need to register your interest to be connected.**

To qualify for connection through the USO scheme you need to either:

- **Have no access to broadband faster than 10mbs** (*that's all of us who can't get a consistently reliable Airband or 4G mobile data signal*)
- **Be paying more than £46.10 month for your existing fast service** (*that may apply to some 4G broadband customers*)

To get connected to the new fibre network you must register your interest.

To register you should call the USO help desk on 0800 783 0223. The staff you speak to are working from home (expect to experience a short delay on the line because of this) but they have proved to be very helpful and sympathetic to everyone who has applied so far.

They will need your

- name
- postcode and address
- email address (for contact purposes)
- telephone number
- your date of birth
- a security word such as your mother's maiden name

They will talk to you about your current broadband and phone line supplier and why it is that you can't get access to Airband or 4G. If your Airband signal is unreliable in poor weather or when the leaves are on the trees you may also be able to register. It may take a day or two for the help desk to determine if you are definitely eligible for the USO scheme. Be aware that Airband's website says that lots of properties can get an Airband signal when in fact they can't!

Now that the cost of providing the network has been agreed as £zero with several West Blackdown residents And one property in Station View, if you are in these areas you should also be told that you will be connected to the network at no cost, providing of course you are eligible.

Many residents in the centre of Brentor village have been asked to pay £8,358 to be connected to the fibre network, and some have been quoted over £30,000. The only advice that can be given in this situation is that everyone should look at banding together and contacting our MP and Ofcom to complain, as happened in West Blackdown. It seems hard to believe that extending the overhead fibre from Station View to the village centre, only about 400m, could cost over £8,000 per property, considering that the expensive part of the network is getting a fibre from Mary Tavy exchange to West Blackdown!

It is free to apply for registration and there is no obligation to take part in the scheme until you accept their offer of connection. If you are eligible you really have nothing to lose in applying. You can see BT's USO terms and conditions at <https://www.bt.com/broadband/usoterms>.

If you need any information or help regarding the USO please contact Colin Dawes on 811079 or email brentorvillage@btinternet.com