



Superfast Broadband Supports Diversification at Troutbeck Camping Pods



After making the decision to diversify into luxury camping pods at Poole Bank Farm, whatever they did, Pip Simpson and his partner Hannah Towers knew that the broadband service they had would struggle to meet the connectivity requirements which have become an expectation in today's world.

At the time of making the decision, their agricultural business at Poole Bank Farm, situated in the centre of the Lake District National Park, was considered to be in one of the 'hard to reach' areas of Cumbria, and one of the hardest to reach areas in the UK, in terms of connectivity to superfast broadband.

Hannah told us "we had been talking to other property owners in the area who were experiencing the same issues with regard to their broadband service and with no known plans for any improvements, as a collective group, we decided to take the bull by the horns and approach the commercial market in seek of an alternative delivery of a network to provide an improved service. Our search led us to Kencomp who became the chosen supplier for our community scheme".

Hannah took on the role of project lead on behalf of the community and as discussions continued with the community's chosen provider, she was made aware of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and Digital Borderlands Top Up Voucher which work together to provide support for community schemes of up to £3,000 for residential and £7,000 for business premises. A quote for delivery was provided for the provision of a gigabit capable service to their community; this quote, taking in to account the voucher value available, was deemed by their provider as being within scope of being financially viable for delivery. The community were delighted. Hannah noted "without the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and the Borderlands Top Up Voucher, our scheme would not have been possible. This additional pot of funding really made the difference in terms of our scheme being within reach of delivery'.

Hannah told us "Our provider was great and the service they provided was hugely professional. Our contact guided us through the process and managed the voucher application on behalf of our community. I wouldn't say that the process was

particularly fast, there are a number of steps which have to be taken before you reach the point of delivery, but our supplier definitely supported us in achieving the service we so desperately needed”.

‘Our community worked well together and as an improved service was our collective goal from the off, the community element was smooth and didn’t cause us any glitches. I think our community working so closely at a time when Covid-19 had the world in disarray really brought us together’.

The camping pod site at Poole Bank

Farm boasts three camping pods.

Situated behind the main farm steading in a quiet setting away from the road and next to a small beck, the family are more than happy to show visitors around the working farm by arrangement.



Hannah said “I think many businesses like ours, particularly in the tourism industry, will agree that the provision of wifi services to customers has become an expectation; before our community scheme such provisions were not possible to offer but now we are stood in good stead alongside those who are also able to offer wifi services to customers. The recent national lockdowns have, I believe, further emphasised the need for a strong and stable broadband service be it for working away from the office or maintaining online communication – people want to be able to do the same as they can do from home from their holiday destination”.

“With our improved service we have been able to create and manage our website which offers prospective holiday makers the opportunity to check availability, prices and book their stay with us. We also receive a lot of enquiries via telephone, email and Facebook. We have recently added the WhatsApp business function button to our Facebook page which has proven to be an extremely popular way for prospective customers to contact us with questions or queries. Tourism, like many other business sectors, has to be open and available around the clock and accessible in the many different ways in which users wish to make contact; having the gigabit broadband service means we can be exactly that and manage the incoming contact on the laptop when we are at home or on our handheld devices when on the farm or offsite”.

In terms of publicity for the new camping pods, Hannah told us that having a social media presence is essential in working hand in hand with their website and word of mouth. Hannah went on “social media is such a powerful tool in terms of selling the service we provide, we can showcase our pods on here and hopefully as time goes by, our following will increase which will lead to more and more prospective customers hearing about us and seeing what we have to offer. The gigabit broadband connection enables us to keep our social media page updated and current and allows us to react to any comments and enquiries made on our page in real time and at the touch of a button”.

"The improved service has also brought benefits to our farming business; we can now work BACs with confidence and security and can notify BCMS (British Cattle Movement Service) of cattle movements and register new stock using an online cattle passport system. This has really helped us as previously our only option would have been to do such movements over the phone or travel to our nearest BCMS office which is quite some distance away. There are also a host of other administrative functions now available to us which just help make life a little easier. We can even keep up to date with the local auction happenings via the livestream of sales, something which really came in to its own during lock down".

Hannah went on "we have 2 children at home, the new and improved broadband service has been greatly welcomed by each of them. They use it for a range of activities including online learning, gaming and entertainment. Our youngsters now need to have access to decent broadband provisions, without it, I believe, they are at a disadvantage to others".

Hannah would encourage other businesses and residents with poor broadband to look at their options and consider a community broadband scheme. Hannah said, "the process may feel daunting at the beginning but once you begin you will find the providers to be extremely helpful, knowledgeable and very able to support you in reaching an improved broadband service. The benefits are huge; we certainly have no regrets in starting this process and are now able to run our businesses, fulfil online educational requirements for our children and access online entertainments from our own home. It has made such a difference to our lives".

If you are interested in pursuing an improved broadband service via a community scheme; in the first instance you should visit [Gigabit Vouchers \(culture.gov.uk\)](https://www.culture.gov.uk/gigabit-vouchers) to find out if you are eligible for a rural voucher and to access a list of providers who are active in your area.