



Businesses and Residents in Kirkoswald are given Superfast Boost



Mr and Mrs Bottom live on a small holding in the Kirkoswald area where they also run their holiday cottage business.

Following years of struggling along with a poor broadband speed of between 0.2-0.5 Mbps accompanied by regular drop out of service and minimal mobile signal at their property, they had to find some way of improving things.

We talked to Sue Bottom about how they made this happen and how it now supports their agricultural and holiday cottage businesses.

Sue told us "prior to the go live of our improved broadband service, we were really struggling. General farm paperwork requirements such as notifying the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) as to cattle movements were not possible online and we had to either take hard copies to our nearest BCMS office which is a 1 hour car journey away, or use the telephone support line. There is a definite encouragement from BCMS to get their customers using the online movement facility but obviously to support this you need to have a reliable broadband service".

"I genuinely believe that the fact we could not offer complementary fast Wi-Fi services to our holiday cottage customers put some off staying with us. This, hand in hand with the unavailability of a mobile service at our premise, meant we definitely lost potential bookings and guests have been known to comment on their frustrations regarding connectivity during their stay. I am sure some of these customers will have chosen not to return because of this. People take for granted that such services are available wherever they go, and unfortunately this just was not the case".

"Emails would be extremely time consuming to download and open, that's if they arrived at all. In the past I have had to travel to Penrith, a 20 minute drive, to find a stable 4G mobile signal in order for me to be able to open emails as this was more successful than using my home service. Sending and receiving large attachments or pictures was just impossible".

"At home we were unable to download or stream tv, online browsing was extremely frustrating and for example, downloading an electronic version of the daily telegraph would take in excess of 25 minutes, even in a low resolution copy".

“There were a lot of other residents and businesses within our community who were experiencing the same problems and hence the decision for us to work together to better this”.

Sue told us “a core group came together to drive this on behalf of the community. They assessed the options available in terms of companies who may be able to help us and after much discussion and deliberation it was deemed that B4RN was the most appropriate to progress with”.

Sue said “I supported this core group in carrying out a door-to-door exercise where we spoke to all residents about the scheme and the advantages it would bring. This exercise was to ensure the take up would be there in order for the scheme to be viable. At the time we carried out our scheme, we were 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. Delivery of our scheme was very much dependant on this funding and in order to secure it there had to be agreement from each premise for which an application was made that they would take out the new service for a 12 month period once it went live. I cannot emphasise enough how grateful we are for the offering of this funding to support the scheme, without it our scheme would not have gone ahead”.

“In terms of community engagement, face to face was I would say the most effective method and probably the biggest catalyst to the success of the scheme. Our community did set up a Facebook page which to be honest was slow going in terms of attracting followers and encouraging conversation. There is also the drawback that not everyone is a Facebook user. We also placed information on our parish council website but again, not everyone looked at this”.

Sue went on “Our provider was great. They led our community through the process from initial contact, to voucher application, and through delivery to the go live. The process can at times feel prolonged but I guess if you take a step back and look at it as a whole you can see why. Our installation was perhaps a slightly unusual case in terms of delivery as we are up a long lane which was obviously more difficult to reach than those closer to the roadside. Our provider however visited us onsite and discussed every stage of the delivery process. I would absolutely recommend our supplier to other communities embarking on this journey”.

Sue said “it has become increasingly important for those involved in the agricultural and tourism business sectors to be online. There are more and more agricultural online requirements, which I am sure will continue to grow and with regards to tourism, the provision of Wi-Fi services to customers has become an expectation; people want to be able to access the services they can at home from their holiday destination. Those with services are so used to having it at their fingertips they don't want to be without it.

“With our new gigabit broadband service we are able to offer Wi-Fi services to guests staying in our holiday cottages, we can open and send emails regarding bookings with ease, we can check our online banking for payments and we are now considering developing a website to showcase our holiday cottages making them more accessible to potential customers”

“In terms of our agricultural business, we have been able to set up an online account with BCMS and can notify them of any births, deaths or movements on or off our holding with ease using their cattle passport system. We are able to receive and open invoices via email and are able to work BACS safely and securely. There are a raft of other administrative tasks which can be carried out online also such as road taxing vehicles, completing animal inventories, even checking the upcoming weather reports. All these things which we were unable to do previously”.

Sue went on “the home benefits mirror those which apply to our businesses, we are now able to stream TV and music, browse online, enable Wi-Fi calling on our mobiles and keep in touch with family and friends, all at the touch of a button”.

Sue would encourage other businesses and residents with poor broadband to look at their options for a community broadband scheme. “There is a lot of work involved but I can assure you that it is all worth it. Our community are proof that this process can work. Reaching out to our supplier was honestly the best thing we could have done. It has made such a difference to both our home and working lives”.

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

Find out more about Crossfield Holiday Cottages at <http://www.crossfieldcottages.co.uk/> and contact them at info@crossfieldcottages.co.uk