

## Kirkoswald based artist Irene Sanderson reaps the benefit of a gigabit capable broadband service



Kirkoswald based artist Irene Sanderson's home and business are now connected to the Internet through gigabit capable full fibre broadband, following the successful completion of a community scheme delivered by B4RN and supported by the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme (GBVS) and Digital Borderlands Voucher Top-Up Scheme.

We talked to Irene about this upgrade and how much of a difference it has made to her home and working life.

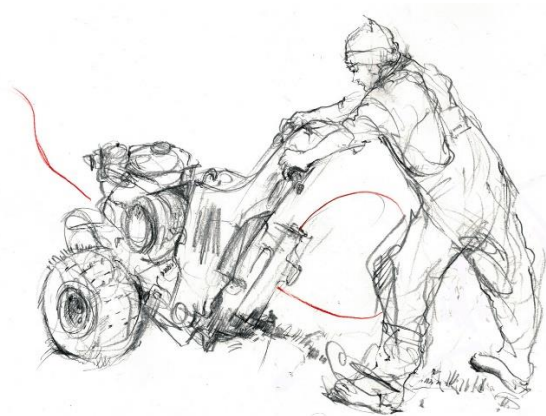
“Before our community scheme, I had a constant fight with my broadband connection with regular outages and an extremely slow performing service. Being a graphic artist, not having the means to send files over 2 Mb in size was far from ideal. Our Wi-Fi service left a lot to be desired and I have at times had to drive in search of a mobile signal just to make a call let alone make a connection to webmail.

“Our Parish Council had been monitoring the possibility of improved internet provision within the area for a number of years, getting local dignitaries involved, pushing for action, seeking reasonable pricing for connections, but their efforts were to no avail until their determined volunteers were able to work with B4RN to access GBVS and Top-Up funding.

“Working with B4RN the group of community volunteers undertook ‘awareness raising’ activities to push our broadband community scheme forward. Volunteers worked via word of mouth, the parish magazine, setting up a community Facebook page, collecting email addresses, posters, leaflets. You name it, they did it and I honestly think it made all the difference to the scheme getting off the ground. I signed up to say I was interested and B4RN then began communication directly with myself which led to me formalising my interest in a better broadband service and them making a voucher application on my behalf; which I understand is how the process worked for everyone within the community who wished to be part of the community scheme. At the time, the GBVS and Digital Borderlands Top-Up provided financial support for community schemes of up to £3,000 for residential homes and £7,000 for businesses, providing a huge catalyst to the viability of the scheme.

“Confirmation of the vouchers was received in October 2021 and B4RN fed back to inform us that the build would be complete, and services would be available by September 2022. True to their word, I was able to use my new service in September 2022.

“I followed the programme of work closely and, with the approval of the engineers, became the ‘artist in residence’ creating sketches from the first dig through to the house fittings and router connection. As a supplier, B4RN were extremely professional and maintained a good, helpful and positive attitude throughout their time working in our area.”



Irene is currently finalising her studies and is looking to set up an exhibition this year of the sketches which follow the installation of the broadband community scheme.

Irene went on, “Since the completion of works in our area, B4RN continue their support of our community which includes their ‘Computer Club Online’ every Friday giving everyone an opportunity to join in and get the advice they need with regard to technology and connectivity. I have sat in on a few of these sessions myself and have found them to be really rewarding and I could even say fun”.

“B4RN also circulate a monthly newsletter and encourage discussion via the community Facebook page which again adds an extra layer to their accessibility and the customer support which they provide.

“The scheme has created a real community buzz and has definitely brought people who live and work in this area closer together”.

“In terms of the benefits from my new service, these are immense. My life is no longer plagued by a snail speed service which falters if the wind blows or the rain falls. I have high speed broadband free from buffering that I can trust and can rely on. It really is amazing to have fibre that is running under the ground and right into my home!”

Irene would encourage other communities who are struggling with their service to look at the possibility of improving this via a community broadband scheme. “The success of our scheme shows what is possible when communities work together. The process may not provide you with a ‘quick fix’, but as long as you have the drive and determination then it works and can bring real benefits to everyone”.

If you are interested in pursuing an improved broadband service through a community scheme, then go to the Government’s Gigabit Voucher Scheme website, at <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>. There, you can discover if you are eligible for a rural voucher and access a list of active providers for your area.

Find out more about Irene Sanderson at <https://irenesanderson.co.uk/> and contact 01768897071 / 07720842529 to arrange to visit her studio at Brookside, High Bank Hill, Kirkoswald, Penrith, CA10 1EZ.

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