



## **Kirkoswald Parish given superfast boost with delivery of successful community broadband scheme**

Anthony Steven runs his technical writing and online training businesses from his home near Croglin, part of Kirkoswald Parish. His company and family now connect to the Internet over a dedicated gigabit capable fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) broadband connection, thanks to a community scheme delivered by B4RN and supported by the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and Digital Borderlands Voucher Top-Up Scheme.

We talked to Anthony about this upgrade and how much of a difference it has made to his home and work life.

“Before getting the B4RN FTTP service, I had been with the same service provider for 20 years,” said Anthony. “Living over a mile outside the village, they could only provide us with a basic broadband service, which came over a copper wire from the Croglin exchange more than three miles away. Our best speed was under three megabits per second (Mbps) download and less than 1 Mbps upload, with regular drop-outs. I was desperate for a faster and more reliable Internet connection.”

“Because I work extensively with virtual machines and cloud-based systems, I often need to upload Gigabyte-sized images, which could take a day to transmit. I also run online training sessions for clients around the world and interview international customers over Microsoft Teams,” he continued, “so network reliability is essential. I remember on one occasion being about to deliver a live global training event and my connection completely dropped out. I had to get in my car, drive to a place with a good mobile connection and park up in a layby. I then had to deliver the session from my laptop and wearing headphones while sitting in the passenger seat; importantly, it worked and I didn’t let my client down. However, the local farmer was giving me some funny looks!”

“I follow the Kirkoswald Village Facebook page, where I heard about this new scheme to bring gigabit fibre connections to isolated communities like ours. Initially, it sounded too good to be true. However, volunteers were asking residents to register their interest, so of course I did that right away. The volunteers were passionate about this project and I am sure their enthusiasm was an important driver to the success of the scheme in our area.”

“After we registered our interest in the gigabit service, we started to receive direct communications from the network provider. They guided us through the process from start to finish and managed the grant application for us.” Anthony enthused, “The volunteers made us aware of the government grants to support installations like ours. At the time, the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and Digital Borderlands Top-Up provided financial support for community schemes of up to £3,000 for residential homes and £7,000 for businesses, including small home-based enterprises like

mine. My company's installation grant paid for most of the work of bringing the cables across the moorland and enabled all the houses in our hamlet to get online as well. It felt good to be helping bring broadband to our neighbours at the same time."

"We did experience a slight hiccup with the planned cable route to the boundary of our property, but the B4RN team worked with us to resolve this situation. They were excellent in terms of communication and were happy to meet us on-site. Some of our neighbours dug trenches to connect their houses to the cable termination points but because our house borders the road, we didn't need to do that. Overall, it took about two years from first hearing about the scheme to getting online," Anthony confirmed.

"With this upgrade in place, I can upload very large virtual machine images in minutes rather than days, stream multiple video feeds simultaneously and download apps instantly. The low latency makes video and audio conferencing a breeze and as a bonus, online games also run much quicker. We all like having a more dependable service and I can honestly say that it has been a game-changer for my business and family."

Anthony was keen to explain how FTTP broadband offers far more than just faster connection speeds. "We are now using this improved service to enhance both the house and the company. Winters here can be a bit chilly, so we're looking to install remote monitoring and control of energy usage within the house. This feature means that we can switch on the heating before getting home and monitor the house even if we're on holiday abroad."

"I've put in an upgraded Wi-Fi network that uses the existing power connections to connect throughout the house. With a traditionally built Cumbrian longhouse, the thick damp walls often block Wi-Fi signals, but this repeater system means that everyone gets a signal, no matter which room they're in. We've also recently invested in two electric vehicles, which we can also control remotely through the Internet. On cold days, we precondition the cars before getting in and driving away in a nice warm vehicle. It's a lot easier than scraping ice off the windscreen or worse, running the engine for ten minutes to warm the car up."

The permanent fibre connection provides other options for saving money. Said Anthony, "The reliability of the B4RN link means that we got rid of our old landline completely. We're also looking at other connected home equipment, such as real-time energy controllers that divert spare power from our solar panels to charge the electric cars and make more efficient use of the biomass boiler through hot water storage. Next, we want our solar panels to charge a house battery that would then provide electricity for the whole house during the evening peak hours. A permanent, high-bandwidth Internet connection is the essential glue that sticks all these technologies together."

Anthony urges all businesses and residents in areas of poor Internet connectivity to consider a community broadband scheme. "Should this opportunity present itself, grab it; the results are life-changing in so many ways. You won't regret it."

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.