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Superfast broadband on the way

SUPERFAST broadband coverage could be available in all Surrey homes and businesses by 2013.

Surrey County Council's cabinet has given the go-ahead for private sector companies to submit tenders to ensure superfast broadband across the county.

The successful bidder will target up to 20 per cent of Surrey premises – particularly in rural areas – that it is estimated will not be included in BT's UK roll-out of superfast fibre optic broadband within the next two-and-a-half years.

Benefits of superfast broadband, which is usually defined by download speeds over 20Mbps, include users being able to send and receive large amounts of data much more quickly. It allows a music album to be downloaded within 30 seconds and a feature length movie in about five minutes.

"Fast and reliable internet access is vital for business and is central to our daily lives," said the leader of Surrey County Council, Dr Andrew Povey.

"Everyone should have access to this essential tool and we are committed to making sure that those in rural areas and other parts of Surrey where service is patchy are not left behind.

"Poor broadband coverage and slow speeds hold back local businesses and put rural communities at a

disadvantage. Unless we step in, up to 20 per cent of Surrey won't feel the huge benefits of high-speed broadband in the near future."

As one of Surrey's more rural boroughs, large parts of Waverley were likely to miss out on superfast broadband prior to the council's announcement.

David Munro, county councillor for South Farnham and also Surrey's councillor responsible for economic development and community, said: "Business has always been a priority for Waverley and the introduction of superfast broadband to all businesses and residents is crucial in today's world.

"We will do all we can as a council to ensure that Surrey's ambitious plans have the most impact for businesses and residents across the borough to support our local economy and stimulate future growth."

Surrey County Council has already earmarked capital funding to improve connection speeds in Surrey and is drawing up a bid for a share of the £530 million the Government has pledged nationally.

It comes after Farnham MP Jeremy Hunt, who is also the Government cabinet member responsible for improving internet access in the UK, pledged last month to deliver superfast broad-

band for 90 per cent of Britain by 2015.

Speaking at a conference in London, he said: "If we press ahead with expansion of superfast capabilities, then we can put the UK in the global fastlane.

"We have set aside the money and the expertise to make this happen. Now local authorities need to step up to the plate by bringing forward their own plans and setting out how they will deliver this level of ambition."

Surrey business leaders have also welcomed the council's announcement, saying superfast broadband could even reduce traffic and rail congestion as more people work from home.

David Seall, Farnham-based chairman of the Surrey Institute of Directors, the second largest IoD branch in the country, said: "I think the benefits will be that many small businesses will be able to properly trade and do business via the web.

"Additionally faster broadband will support businesses offering flexible working and enable staff to work productively off site. This could help reduce congestion on our overloaded infrastructure.

"If the broadband reaches out into rural communities it will help start ups and facilitate growth in rural businesses."