

Notes of a Public Meeting 13.10.2022 with Voneus broadband

In attendance: S Martin (Chair GPC), Jon Chantal (Voneus – Head of Fibre Build UK), Sean Kelly (Voneus Regional Delivery Manager), S Kindersley (Cambridgeshire County Councillor), Clerk L Bacon and 7 members of the public.

SM made introductions and invited JC to outline what Voneus have been doing in Gamlingay and why.

JC – Voneus have been building the fibre network in Gamlingay and elsewhere on a strategy of being in and out as quickly as possible. He understands they have invaded your area and understands and listens to complaints. All are taken on board and acted upon. Without goodwill Voneus don't have customers but their product is lifechanging. Voneus want this community to have the experience of connectivity that all our lives now demand. JC took the decision to accelerate the programme in Gamlingay, hence more noise/disruption and number of on site operatives but the intention was always to minimise the overall impact and it is substantially complete. Now in remedial and engineering commissioning phase – men in boxes linking things up/ jet washing pavements/assessing need for reseeding etc. JC gives genuine wholehearted apologies for any problems caused. S Kelly – came on board to reduce need for additional poles, down to just 7. Voneus attempt to utilize existing BT infrastructure to minimise dig, for aesthetic and cost reasons but there has been more digging than hoped due to problems with Openreach infrastructure below ground – CCC Highways have overseen work at every stage.

Q and A session

Q – is it co-incidence that some residents have had outages with their current providers recently? JC – don't know but Voneus have not used existing BT cables (other providers piggy back off these), although they will have been in BT ducting.

Q – will Voneus genuinely be able to offer better speeds than current? JC – absolutely. Voneus will be totally fibre to each property, no “coppersaurus” connection – speeds can be 900/900mb/sec up and down with lowest of 250 (current best 65mb/sec). Major cabinet is on Manor Rd. Voneus will be an entirely new fibre network.

Q – How do Voneus ensure quality of work and standards? Contractors have cut through BT cables and been verbally abusive to residents. JC – cognisant of what has happened. Some individuals have been removed from workforce. Higher level of supervision was demanded (one per 4 gangs of workers - usual is one per 8).

Q – Voneus contractors do not know how to interact with the community. Blocked walkway with van and forced pedestrians with pram/toddlers to walk in road (scaffolding on opposite footpath). Laughed at MOP when he asked them to move van and used foul language. Provided numberplate/time/date of incident to S Kelly.

Q – Will Voneus rectify wonky new telegraph pole and drain blocked by left over mud/debris? JC – issues will be addressed.

Q – SK asked JC to explain reasons for inappropriate night working which caused many complaints on social media. JC – took decision to maximise productivity in daylight hours before shorter days set in but came across nearly 200 “blockages” in BT infrastructure which meant clearing out ducts etc. which made a big impact on progress. JC acknowledged that work went on very late, he apologised

for the disruption and did intervene after which complaints died down. JC was always on site until end of working day – sometimes 01.30. The disruption won't reoccur.

Q – Will Voneus learn from this? Because Voneus were causing problems, other issues annoying the community were attributed to them too – e.g. traffic lights in village/portaloos being put on private property/scaffolding going missing (nothing to do with Voneus). JC – There was a categoric failure in communications, he is ashamed of it and will take this back to the organisation and ensure there are no further incidents of it.

Q – what is the best mechanism for feedback/remedial work? JC – contact S Kelly – can be here within 12 minutes.

Q – when will Voneus network be live? JC – active marketing starts next week, plan is to be available 2nd Monday in November.

Q – how will Voneus broadband be delivered to each property i.e overhead line or underground cable? S Kelly – will depend on property. Will use an existing entry hole into property if one exists but may need to dig. Voneus map of Gamlingay is not suitable for publication as it is multi layered and will not be viewable, but S Kelly can advise individuals about how their individual supply will be delivered.

Q – What can Voneus do to make up for the bad feeling the installation has generated? JC – Voneus can possibly make a significant contribution to a community-based project and this will be an ongoing discussion with the Parish Council to find out what is important to this community/what the priorities are. Voneus recognise the value of supporting the community and in other areas have been involved in supporting annual community events 3 or 4 years after installation. JC will ask Zoe – head of community engagement at Voneus – to get in touch with GPC.

Q – is there any mileage in a letter of apology to residents from Voneus? JC acknowledged that the contractors had failed.

Q – Would Voneus be the only providers able to offer these high speeds? JC – Voneus don't have to share their ducting with any other providers. BT have to provide high speed by Sept 2028, but won't be in Gamlingay for some time.

General comments:

MOP – Information letters from Voneus about proposed works arrived three weeks after work had commenced in some areas of village.

SK – first we knew was when notices went up on lampposts about planning application. Head of community consultation attended a planning meeting but no prior public meeting/approach to the Parish Council was arranged or requested. By the time the poles applications were subsequently withdrawn, local residents were already very unhappy with Voneus. JC responded – the notification process is a series of letters to residents starting 3 weeks prior to works commencement and knocking on doors to check of any special access requirements etc. Voneus paid contractors to do this but it was not done properly. This is something we have fed back into the planning department to make sure this is improved for future builds.

JC – no value to fibre – not targeted by thieves so advantage of no outages due to theft as there is with copper.

Meeting closed at 20.55