

Garsdale Parish Council

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Notes on the B4RN Presentation Meeting held on Tuesday 1st March 2016 followed by an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council.

Barry Forde, chief executive of B4RN, explained the usage of B4RN as a tool to put in the infrastructure and outlined as to the need to set up B4RN ie. to enable rural areas to have world class broadband. Essentially a group of volunteers working as a cooperative come together to lay fibre optic cable and connect as many of the residents as possible that require broadband in the dales of Dent and Garsdale and potentially others. There were no profits to be made and any excess funds remain in the community. Each property would be connected for a fee of £150 with a £30 monthly subscription fee but with no increases guaranteed for 10 years. Anyone not wishing to allow cable over their land will be bypassed. Should they want to be connected later, they will have to pay for the full commercial costs, plus the extra costs of rerouting.

Funds were needed to be raised through a variety of means: grants, loans, share sales and could be matched by volunteer hours or 'sweat shares'. Any shares purchased or earned would yield a 5% interest after 4 years. It would not be possible to sell on any purchased shares, but B4RN will buy the shares back on request. B4RN is in the EIS so any shares would qualify for an immediate tax refund of 30% of the share value as bought or earned.

The cost to build was in the region of £5k to £6k per km with a 60/40 material/labour split. Digging can occur simultaneously in multiple areas with a final link up before becoming live. Most of the time allocated is taken up with planning routes which will be agreed with landowners but subject to alteration on advice from farmers etc. The present route is approaching Casterton and hope to be into Dent very soon, possibly May/June via Barbon and then extended to Garsdale via Sedbergh. Once the route has been agreed digging is usually very swift. Using local farmers and volunteers will keep the cost down to a minimum and shares are issued at fixed rates for wayleaves and digging in duct. The life of the completed system would be at least 50 years but likely much longer.

David Pilgrim, recently appointed 'Champion' for Dent outlined the funding process which would need to raise around £450,000 but that included £140,00 provision for subcontractors which could be reduced with volunteer labour. There were various grants available and a possibility of low cost loans which would be paid back over 10 years and which accounted for £20 of the monthly subscription. Once paid back, the subscription could be reduced or money used for other community projects. If all plans came to fruition, there would be a surplus. There should not be a need to put round the begging bowl until at least Dent is connected and live.

There was a need to organize volunteer groups for assorted jobs ranging from fund raising and digging to cake making, including a leader or 'Champion' to take overall charge. This would be the next stage. Anyone who is willing to come forward now or has any queries, please contact David at b4rninit@btinternet.com.

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