

StantOnline

An article written by a parishioner who has made the leap.....

Broadband News for Stanton on the Wolds

Over the last few months a new superfast broadband has been installed in and around the village. You may have had a letter through the door from Nottinghamshire County Council listing some of the companies you can buy that from.

Now, if you're already enjoying super speeds, no need to read on unless you'd like to. For those of who've yet to jump ship, or who may be unsure what the system can do for you, please read on.

What can it do for me?

Because of the distance from our properties to the old BT cabinets, the best most of us could hope for were speeds of around 1Mbps to 4Mbps. What do I mean by that jargon? Well, it's often shortened to 'meg', and for sake of simplicity, we'll use it as a unit of speed. If that definition isn't quite sciency enough for you, Google is your friend :-)

To answer the question, super-fast broadband comes in a variety of speeds. These are usually 34, 78, 200, and 300Mbps. Now, there's four people in our family, and previously we had about 3Mbps.

How does 3Mbps play out? Once both kids started watching YouTube (online video), that meant my wife and I went without, because the video would just take up all our speed. Likewise, the family could watch Netflix or iPlayer, but if they did, no one was up to much else.

For those of you with teenagers and their gaming consoles, laptops, phones, etc; well, all those devices need an update from time to time. Modern computer games often need large updates, and my son would be waiting two to five days running the update day and night.

Now having set the scene, I think we get the picture that in a modern household, the old broadband was really struggling. To the question 'what can it do for me?', the answer is free you up to make more use of the Internet in your household, and certainly have to wait less time for downloads. IPlayer, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and NowTV all work much better on a faster connection.

What's all this jargon mean?

Okay, so we talked about 'Mbps' being to do with speed. Here's a few other terms which you may see when you look to upgrade.

- Bandwidth: Another way to say speed. The bigger the number, in general, the more you can do at the same time on your connection.
- Email: Some of us may have Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo email addresses, and these won't change when you change your broadband. However, let's say you'd signed up with Sky or PlusNet; then chances are you'll have an address like fred.bloggs@sky.com or sarah.jones@plus.net.

When you change your broadband provider, or ISP (see below), then you may not be able to keep those @sky or @plus.net addresses, unless you stay with the same provider.

Now, it's not impossible to move your email from one provider to another, but it's certainly out of the scope for this article. Have a look on Google, or a similar search engine, to see what you can do. If it's any help, my Dad has moved between broadband companies, and he got around the @btinternet.com issue by changing all his online shopping accounts and telling his friends.

- Fibre: No, not the stuff that's good for your gut, but fibre optic cable. The new super-fast broadband doesn't use electricity and copper, which slow down over long distances. Fibre, FTTP (see below), or fibre optic, all pretty much the same way to describe the way the connection comes into your house.
- FTTP: To give it its Sunday name, Fibre to the Premise. This is true super-fast broadband. You might hear 'FTTC' or fibre-to-the-cabinet, which is not the same thing. Remember I said that broadband slows down over long distances? Well, unless you happen to have a property close to a cabinet - which none of us do in Stanton - then FTTC is, frankly, going to be too slow to be considered super-fast. In short, avoid FTTC and aim for FTTP instead.
- ISP: Companies love an acronym. This just means 'internet service provider'. They are the company you buy your broadband from. BT, Sky, PlusNet, TalkTalk, etc.
- OpenReach: Until a few years ago, BT owned the telephone exchange, cables, telephone poles, and broadband systems. To keep a long story short, they're now effectively two companies: OpenReach and BT. BT concentrate on selling things to you and me, whereas OpenReach are the company who provides the physical wires to our property. It's worth noting because companies like TalkTalk, Sky, PlusNet, and even Virgin, will all use OpenReach to set up super-fast connections.

Think of OpenReach putting a fast road directly to your house, and the ISP offering you different vehicles to drive on it. Different speed, different gadgets, and different prices.

- Hosting: So earlier I said that when you change your ISP - say from BT to Sky - you'd have to change your email address? Well, with hosting, you can buy a domain name to keep and this is independent of your ISP. So, you could buy @bloggs-family.co.uk, and this would be yours no matter which ISP you moved to. However, that flexibility comes at the price of you having to shell out more money to a hosting company. Or remember you could use an internet email account - Gmail or Hotmail which is independent of your ISP provider.
- Router: This is the box of tricks that lets your computers, smartphones, iPads, and tablets connect to the Internet. While you can buy your own, chances are your ISP provided one when you signed up.

With the older broadband, you'd plug your router into the telephone line. With super-fast broadband, OpenReach install a special box that connects to the fibre network, and then a new router connects to that.

Unless you like tinkering with technology, it may be worth asking your future ISP if they include a router, and helping you set it up. Not that the latter is too hard, but sometimes having something less to worry about is a good thing.

- Streaming: In the early days of the Internet, if you wanted to listen to a song, or watch a film, you had to download the whole thing. That's assuming you were allowed to download it legally.

Now, services like YouTube, Amazon Prime, Netflix, BBC iPlayer, all offer video on demand services. YouTube is free, whereas Amazon and Netflix are both paid for. BBC, ITV, C4, and Channel 5 all offer 'catch up' services, which you can use on your computer, tablet, or smartTV to watch TV shows at your leisure.

Likewise Amazon Music, Spotify, Apple Music, etc; let you listen to music when you want. It's a bit like the radio, only you call the shots on what you want to hear. Oh, and all for a monthly fee of course. :-)

How do I know I can have it?

The ISP you're with now may have a checker to see if you can have it. Alternatively, <https://gosuperfastchecker.culture.gov.uk> can help you look it up too.

That's not the only checking site out there, so if you don't get an answer, do shop around.

Where can I buy it?

Going back to the jargon in the earlier section, you want an internet service provider who can offer fibre-to-the-premise. According to the leaflet Nottinghamshire County Council sent around, that includes: Andrews & Arnold Ltd, BT, Fleur Telecom Ltd, IDNet, PlusNet, and Zen Internet. From a quick look online, you can add Sky and Virgin to the list.

As to which one to go for, a lot of it comes down to personal preference and budget. There's also the question of which company you're with now.

Sky, TalkTalk, and Virgin will all use OpenReach's cables to connect your internet. They offer 35 to 78Mbps contracts. The price variations are to do with any extras - like SkyTV - or savings based on how they run their company (TalkTalk).

PlusNet are offering super-fast on a trial, so there's a few hoops to go through. Their prices are very reasonable, and, in my experience, their customer service is excellent. I can't comment on their super-fast broadband, as I didn't sign up with them.

BT is the most expensive of the bunch, but they offer the fastest speeds. At the time of writing, they were the only company to offer 200Mbps and 300Mbps contracts.

What package should I buy?

Here's where a good cup of tea, a couple of hours, and a pen and paper come in handy. I would suggest you have a look at what the ISP is selling, and play the 'plus and minus' game.

So for us, I looked at BT because of the fastest speeds (big plus) and they would give me a router (plus). Downsides, it's more costly (than PlusNet), and I'd have to change my email addresses. Alternatively, Sky was cheaper (plus), but slow (minus).

The truth of it is that there's no right answer; only what's right for you. If you prefer to have Sky, Virgin, or TalkTalk, and have been happy with the service, then that's cool. Likewise, if you'd like to try IDNet or Fleur; that's okay too.

Things to watch out for are if you get a free router, do you get help having it installed, are there any 'caps' (or limits on how much you can download), and how long will the contract be for?

What do I need to think about before installation?

Let's assume that you've picked an ISP and they've given you an installation date. Now, my ISP was BT and OpenReach did the installation. If you go with another company, your experience may be different.

First off, you'll need to be in for most of the day, because a fibre installation takes most of the morning or afternoon.

How close your property is to one of the new improved telephone poles, will affect where the engineer can put the fibre box. Not the router, but the box that converts the fibre (FTTP) connection to a regular router.

For us, the nearest enable telephone pole was opposite Foxcote Farm, and as the fibre cable to the house can't be above a certain length, we had to have the fibre box put at the front of the house. This box is inside the house and requires a power socket.

Having it upstairs and away from the living room meant the Wi-Fi signal wasn't great at the back of the house. This was fixed by running a rather long common-or-garden network lead down to the hall, and then plugging the BT router into that.

The engineer did say that another option would be to use a 'PowerLAN' adapter, which lets you run a network connection using the power lines in your house. This is easier to do, but costs you a little speed.

Again, choices, choices! A long network cable can be bought from Amazon or Maplin. Likewise, PowerLAN adapters are available online. You will want a set that is as fast as your broadband; otherwise, the slower PowerLAN link will be a bottleneck and give you slow speeds.

Will I need a new router or other gadgets?

We've spoken about routers and fibre boxes in earlier paragraphs. We've also mentioned network cables and PowerLAN adapters.

Depending on which ISP you go with, you may be provided with a new router. If that's the case, no worries. If they don't, your existing router may work. You can check this by looking at the router, and seeing if it has a one of the sockets marked as 'WAN'. Regular sockets are LAN, or 'local area network'. If you're not 100% sure, find the router's model name and use Google to see what features it has. If you're still not sure, you could ask your existing ISP if it would be suitable.

The other gadgets we spoke about were PowerLAN adapters. These are bought in pairs and you plug them into the mains. When they're set up, they 'bond' so that they can send network traffic between them. They can be very useful to extend a WiFi signal into an area of the house, where that room is too far from the existing router. Again, a look on Google for reviews will let your find out more on how they work, and which ones you want.

In the unlikely event that the fibre box has to be in a part of the house that's not ideal, and therefore your router does too. You can move the router and connect it to the fibre box using either a PowerLAN adapter or a long network cable. If you've ever run a telephone extension cable, then you should be fine running a network cable.

I should stress that you want to avoid serious adjustments to the fibre box, as fibre optics aren't the most robust things.

Last Thing

Good luck with finding a new ISP and we hope that you're soon making the most of super-fast broadband.

If you get stuck, ask friends, neighbours, or maybe get in touch with the community via the NextDoor website (<https://nextdoor.co.uk>) & app.

Useful internet links are:

<https://www.digitalchampionsnetwork.com>

<https://www.gcflearnfree.org/internetbasics/>