

Case Study: Fibre to the Premises

Canary Wharf residents lead Poplar uprising in campaign for fibre broadband

A combination of people power and Openreach know-how is helping to bring fibre broadband to Canary Wharf residents, as part of an innovative pilot project that could be the blueprint for apartment buildings up and down the country.

The iconic glass and steel buildings of Canary Wharf give it a futuristic feel. So it may come as a surprise that broadband speeds for many residents in these highly desirable waterside apartments are on a par with isolated crofts in the Scottish Highlands.

Of course, when the area was being regenerated, fibre-based broadband on a mass scale was unheard of. But times have changed – quickly – and with 100MBit/s download speeds being trumpeted up and down the country, Canary Wharf residents want in on the action.

But that's easier said than done.

The existing connections from some of the area's high profile residential buildings run directly to the local exchange (Poplar) rather than via a green cabinet in the street.

So although the exchange is ready for fibre, the direct connection rules out the more common fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) solution, where fibre runs from the exchange to the street cabinet – with the existing copper wires carrying the signal the rest of the way.

This leaves just one option without having to install new street furniture at high cost: a pure fibre connection running all the way from the exchange to each apartment. But that's also a massive commitment and investment, so we needed to be sure that enough residents in the area really wanted fibre broadband before we ploughed ahead. We also needed to secure the approval of the business to progress this proposal.

Bill Keddie, Openreach project director for fibre delivery to apartments, ensured that we could target this area as part of a pilot project already underway in established fibre to the premises (FTTP) areas. Funding was secured through this project and a superb Openreach team effort ensured that the plans and costs were identified and authorised. Then it was all systems go.

"It's all about demand," explains Openreach sales lead Martin Rankin. "We need to know that the work we do bringing fibre to an area is economically viable – and that our communications provider customers will be able to sell services once the new infrastructure is in place."

And that's where local resident Jane Hewland stepped in. Jane had already been in touch with us to let us know how slow her broadband speed was. She met with Martin to discuss the options and between them they came up with a hitlist of 30 local buildings in the same situation.

Openreach marketing manager Jo Bunbury takes up the tale: "We worked with Jane to target the big buildings in the area and help drum up support to create a business case for fibre."

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Openreach sales lead

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Martin Rankin, Openreach sales lead

Residents in Jane's building were keen to understand if there was a cost effective solution available to them. Residents wanted to work with Openreach for a number of reasons including the fact that we wouldn't charge for upgrading the connection to the building.

“We didn’t want to find ourselves tied into just one communications supplier,” says Jane. “After all the hard work to get a decent connection, we’d be back to square one if anything happened.”

Jane campaigned locally and on social networking sites to raise awareness and drum up support for fibre from Openreach. At the same time, we printed and helped distribute leaflets in the area highlighting the benefits of fibre and the fact that buildings could be connected for free – if there was enough interest among residents and, crucially, that the landlord agreed.

“Landlords hold the key,” says Martin, “as we can’t install our fibre cables without their permission. But when they realise the benefits they’re keen to engage.”

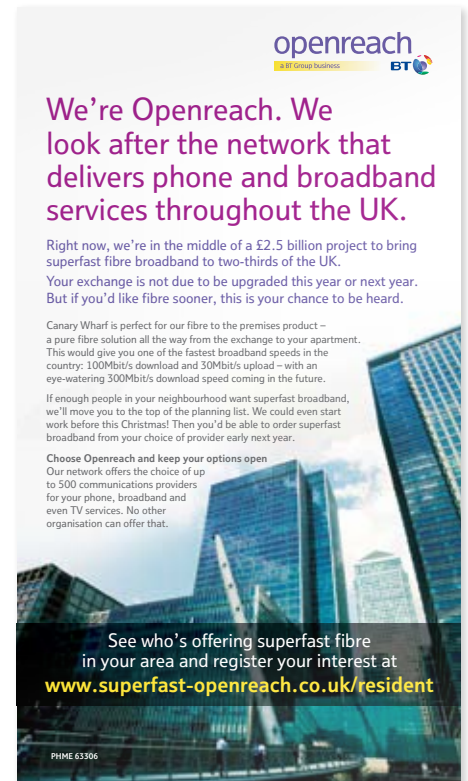
One person with a foot in both camps is Darrel Samson. His company, Premview Properties Ltd, represents the landlord of Block A in the iconic Port East Apartments at West India Quay, which houses 31 apartments in a Grade 1 listed building.

“Right away we could see the benefits of having fibre broadband available for residents,” says Darrel. “And what swung things in favour of Openreach was the fact that we wouldn’t be tying residents to just one supplier – the flexibility of the Openreach approach gives people a range of options and prices.”

And the upgrade work itself has gone well, as Darrel explains: “It could have been a real headache, as Port East Apartments is a Grade 1 listed building. But the work has been completed quickly, professionally and without any problems.”

Openreach engineers built the infrastructure in the exchange and streets in preparation for work in the buildings – and the first connection went live in April 2012.

And as our fibre roll-out continues to pick up speed, the work done in Canary Wharf will be the blueprint for similar high-rise, high density areas up and down the country.



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We're Openreach. We look after the network that delivers phone and broadband services throughout the UK.

Right now, we're in the middle of a £2.5 billion project to bring superfast fibre broadband to two-thirds of the UK. Your exchange is not due to be upgraded this year or next year. But if you'd like fibre sooner, this is your chance to be heard.

Canary Wharf is perfect for our fibre to the premises product – a pure fibre solution all the way from the exchange to your apartment. This would give you one of the fastest broadband speeds in the country: 100Mbit/s download and 30Mbit/s upload – with an eye-watering 300Mbit/s download speed coming in the future.

If enough people in your neighbourhood want superfast broadband, we'll move you to the top of the planning list. We could even start work before this Christmas! Then you'd be able to order superfast broadband from your choice of provider early next year.

Choose Openreach and keep your options open
Our network offers the choice of up to 500 communications providers for your phone, broadband and even TV services. No other organisation can offer that.

See who's offering superfast fibre in your area and register your interest at
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