WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM TONY HAWKINS

We write to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee on behalf of the community of North Kincardine and with the support of North Kincardine and Rural Community Council to present our views on key issues relating to broadband in Scotland.

Through the Community Council Newsletter we have sought information and views from local people on their experience of broadband coverage in this area. With their help we have compiled data on broadband speeds in this area. We present the latter in the form of an attached spreadsheet.

The main points we wish to make are as follows:

1. There are 900 household and business premises in the North Kincardine Rural Community Council area. We are wedged between Peterculter, Bieldside, Aberdeen City, Portlethen, Newtonhill and Stonehaven. We are served by the exchanges of Cultur, Bieldside, Cults, Kincorth, Newtonhill and Stonehaven. Most of the households and business premises are at the end of the poorly maintained and archaic cabling to these exchanges.

2. This area, although it is rural, contains a disproportionately large number of small high-tech commercial companies, many of them engaged in science and engineering or associated with the oil industry in Aberdeen. Many individuals located in the area work for companies based in Aberdeen, or for international organisations. The uptake of broadband is above the national average and there is strong demand for high connection speeds.

3. Connection speeds, shown in the attached spreadsheet, are low by current standards. Most of us experience speeds below 1Mbps and many have speeds below 0.5 Mbps. Even the best speeds in the area fall short of 5 Mbps. Yet many of us are engaged in high-tech activities and need very high connection speeds.

4. Although BT has aspirations to reach 20 Mbps for 90% of the population by Spring 2013, and two thirds up to 40Mbps by 2015, we would be grateful if we could obtain 6-8 MBps. It is not the next generation of broadband we aspire to – it is the level already available to people in cities and urban centres.

5. We wish to make the point that many of the businesses important to Scotland are located in rural areas – especially those on the periphery of Aberdeen. It is important that these businesses, and the people who live and work in this area, are provided with adequate broadband services. Currently those services fall far short of what is required.

6. Examples of the problems we are currently encountering include:
   
   - Very sluggish connections, an inability to log on to the server at busy times and connection falling away without warning
   - An inability to send even attachments of moderate size and a lack of ability to stream video material. Poor Skype connections. All of these are vital to individuals and businesses with international links.
   - The state of the cabling in the area is poor, with water ingress during rain and afterwards - a problem that has been acknowledged by Open Reach crews.
   - Inexplicable differences in broadband speed between neighbouring houses.

7. We believe there is an immediate need for local exchanges like Bieldside, Culter and Newtonhill to be upgraded.
8. No one, including ACSEF and other lobby groups, is adequately representing the views of small and medium size enterprises in this area, despite the importance of those businesses to the national economy.

9. We understand that there are new techniques for installing fibre optic cabling and superfast cabinets which will make it easier to provide higher broadband speeds to rural areas and would urge the Scottish Government to implement these techniques in those rural areas which have a large proportion of business users.