

**CULGAITH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
MINUTES OF THE MEETING
Held on April 11th 2011 at Kirkland and Blencarn Recreation Rooms**

Present: Councillors M. Helm, C, Richardson, J. Slann, P. Toppin, L. Wilson (Chairman)

In Attendance: 12 members of the public.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors J. Hay, J. Hindson, K. Philipson.

2. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting including Craig Brass of NextGenUs.

3. MINUTES OF THE 2010 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Resolved that the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on April 26th 2010 be signed by the Chairman as a true record.

4. RURAL BROADBAND

NextGenUs presentation

Craig Brass of NextGenUs gave a presentation on the community projects being undertaken by NextGenUs. NextGenUs is a CIC (Community Interest Company), where 65% of the profits are re-invested in the community once the project becomes profitable – this generally takes 5 to 7 years. All assets of a CIC can only be transferred to other CICs. This stops the assets being sold to the highest bidder a few years after the network is built.

The main projects it is involved with use fibre optic cables to provide the broadband, although in some outlying areas they use point to point wireless technology. NextGenUs' solution is to bring fibre optic cabling directly to each property from a central point (Digital Village Pump) in the village.

Subscriptions prices for an individual household start at £150 set up fee plus £30 per month subscription. For businesses the start up price is £250 plus £40 per month. The prices are based on a two year contract and assume the subscriber digs the trench on his/her property.

There are a number of advantages to fibre optic technology including no signal degradation and it is very reliable (with copper connections one can get water ingress). A lot of new services need fast downloading and uploading. These include video conferencing, new ways of watching television (YouView), Skype, and online backups to the Internet. By providing a faster broadband students can interact with school systems and local businesses are encouraged to move into rural communities.

As to the way forward the options are to a) wait for BT, but at present it is only committed to upgrading services to Penrith, or b) set up own Community Interest Company as they have done at Great Asby, or c) establish a demand for NextGenUs Broadband. More information is available at <http://www.nextgenus.net/> or d) await for Accessible Cumbria (superfast broadband) project in Cumbria, being developed by Broadband Development UK (BDUK) for Cumbria County Council.

Question and answer session

A number of issues were raised in the discussion that followed the presentation.

- Telephone calls can be made over the internet rather than using a land line. NextGenUs work with a company called Vonage. Vonage allows you to make VoIP (Voice over the Internet) phone calls by connecting your existing high-speed Internet connection and home

phone with a Vonage phone adapter. The cost is about £6 per month with unlimited UK calls. There are other packages available which include overseas calls. More information is available at <http://www.vonage.co.uk/>

- NextGenUs is working with T-mobile and Orange to improve mobile connections.
- The installation of the fibre optic technology does need the co-operation of local landowners to bury the duct.
- About 60% of households in a community need to sign up before the project can start. If a household is already signed up to another provider, it can sign up and start when the old contract is finished. Concern was expressed that in small communities such as Blencarn the demand would not be there. [Number of households in Culgaith=207, Skirwith=88, Blencarn=63, Kirkland=14 data taken from the address list used for the Housing Survey in 2010]
- NextGenUs understands that there is no money available from the County Council for local projects. Information on the County Council's approach can be found at <http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/broadband/update.asp>
- Satellite technology is an alternative, but they can be a delay in the signal and speeds tend to be 8 meg download and 2 meg upload.
- Point to Point wireless needs line of sight to the mast up to 25 kms away.

It was agreed that the Parish Council would discuss the issues at its next meeting on May 16th and continue to act as the focal point for broadband within the parish.

5. DATE OF NEXT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The next Annual Parish Meeting is provisionally set for April 23rd 2012 at the Culgaith Victoria Institute.