

Title of Report:	Causeway Digital Infrastructure Update
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting	15 March 2022
For Decision or For Information	For Information (including a joint presentation by DfE officials and Council officers)

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Innovation & Transformation Accelerating our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
Outcome	The Council will embrace new technologies and processes where they can bring about better experiences for citizens and visitors and work with partners to maximise investment funding opportunities from external sources. Promoting the Borough as an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit.
Lead Officer	Interim Head of Prosperity & Place

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	N/A
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	N/A

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report/ Background

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a progress update in relation to the rollout of two major digital infrastructure projects within our Borough in 2021/22 i.e. Project Stratum and Full Fibre NI (FFNI).

2.0 Project Stratum Background

Project Stratum represents the largest ever public investment in telecommunications infrastructure in Northern Ireland, with the project aiming to close a broadband connectivity gap that exists regionally compared with other parts of the UK.

Project Stratum signifies an investment of £150m by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and £15m by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The £165m broadband improvement contract was awarded to Fibus Networks Ltd in November 2020. This public investment, combined with Fibus' substantial investment in network build costs totalling £350m, will help transform the broadband connectivity landscape for many of our citizens and businesses, primarily across rural areas.

Within the initial plans for the Causeway area, a total of 6,268 premises will be improved through the delivery of Project Stratum, providing a full fibre solution capable of offering speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second to premises in the target intervention area. By the end of 2021, more than 22,000 premises across NI will have had the new infrastructure delivered.

Following a review by independent specialist telecommunications consultants, an additional 8,500 premises were brought into the scope of the project in December 2021, with additional public funding of £32m being secured. Of the £32m, contributions of £22m came from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and £4.85m each from DfE and DAERA. Fibus has also increased its investment in network build by an additional £48m.

Additional premises were considered for connection during the Project Stratum network rollout if the infrastructure was passing close by and it was considered by the contractor to be commercially viable.

The roll-out of the new full fibre network to reach all 85,000 premises, including the additional 8,500 premises being brought into scope, will continue across four extended quarters of network build, with Fibus Networks Ltd expected to complete full deployment by March 2025. Further information related to the timing of deployment across all build phases can be accessed via www.hyperfastni.com.

3.0 Project Stratum Progress/Update

Deployment by Fibus of the new infrastructure commenced in November 2020 with the Ballycastle area being one of the first locations in Northern Ireland to be upgraded. The deployment will run until March 2025; with parts of Ballymoney and the Coleraine area upgraded in 2021. An overview of Fibus' current deployment plan is available in **Annex A**.

In addition to the original 6,268 premises, DfE have identified 711 additional premises which will now be included in the Project Stratum rollout, as illustrated in **Annex B**. Table 1 below highlights the anticipated timescales of delivery for these additional premises within the Borough:

OLT Area	Anticipated Delivery Timescales	
	Original Planned Premises	Additional Premises
Portstewart	Autumn 2021	Summer 2024
Ballycastle	Autumn 2021	Summer 2024
Ballymoney	Winter 2021	Summer 2024

Castlerock	Winter 2021	Summer 2024
Garvagh	Autumn/Winter 2022	Autumn 2024
Cushendall	Winter 2022/Spring 2023	Winter 2024
Limavady	Spring/Summer 2023	Winter 2024
Cloughmills	Spring/Summer 2024	Spring 2025

Table 1: Project Stratum Anticipated Delivery Timescales

PLEASE NOTE: Dates shown reflect the current forecast for the build plan. This will be subject to change as the programme progresses.

4.0 Project Stratum Moving Forward

Fibrus are currently conducting site surveys to address 37 premises surrounded by bodies of water, this includes 28 premises on Rathlin Island.

DfE are continuing their engagement as the State Aid Under Review process for premises served by Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs) is likely to introduce more premises eligible for intervention. Table 2 below indicates the number of premises across NI currently under review with Causeway Coast & Glens Borough recording the highest number of premises currently under review i.e. 2,655. The common goal among all is to ensure that the NI broadband connectivity landscape is transformed for everyone.

Council	Premises Under Review
Antrim & Newtownabbey	256
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	57
Belfast	682
Causeway Coast & Glens	2,655
Derry City & Strabane	2,537
Fermanagh & Omagh	892
Mid & East Antrim	1,351
Mid Ulster	105
Newry, Mourne & Down	134

Table 2: Project Stratum Premises Under-Review

5.0 FFNI Project Background

The FFNI Consortium is made up of the 10 rural councils outside of Belfast and another central government public body, the Business Services Organisation. The project is hosted by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

The Consortium made a successful collective bid for £24m to support digital infrastructure development across Northern Ireland from two funding programmes managed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). FFNI secured £15m of funding in February 2019 under the Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) Challenge Fund, and in September 2019 the project made a further successful application for £9m of funding under the Rural Gigabit Capable (RGC) programme.

The LFFN and RGC projects will connect approximately 969 public sector buildings, ensuring that almost all Council, Health, Fire and Rescue sites in Northern Ireland have access to future-proofed fibre connectivity. The commercial model offers FFNI partners the opportunities for improved digital transformation, service improvements and network cost savings through its design for each partner.

Unlike Project Stratum, which is a state aid project and fixes a major rural problem using government funding directly, FFNI uses these public sector sites as hubs to further improve, accelerate and stimulate full fibre rollout by increasing the locations in scope for commercial fibre investment.

The FFNI projects (LFFN & RGC) form a key part of a larger £52m intervention that will introduce ultrafast connections to members' sites and will provide fibre connectivity to an estimated 368,594 premises across Northern Ireland.

Within Causeway Coast and Glens, the aim is to connect approximately 85 public sector buildings with ultrafast 1000Gb connections. Delivery of all sites is expected by 31st March 2022.

For the Council's geographical area, the funding is expected to deliver fibre connectivity to 51 Council owned sites, and 35 Business Services Organisation (BSO) sites. The BSO sites will use the grant funding to connect Health (Doctors' surgeries for example), Fire and Ambulance sites.

6.0 FFNI Progress/Update

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council was one of the first Councils to commence delivery of the FFNI project in December 2020. Throughout 2021, Council Officers supported Fibrus and Openreach (sub-contractor) to facilitate smooth delivery of each install.

Installs were separated into the following three categories:

1. Fibrus – required new infrastructure install;
2. Openreach FFIB – update to existing infrastructure; and
3. Openreach Commercial Rollout – infrastructure updates already within Openreach plans.

To date the following installs have been completed:

Install Type	Sites to be installed	Sites Completed
Fibrus	22	22
FFIB	14	14
Commercial Rollout	15	10

See **Annex C** for a detailed map of FFNI Council Owned Locations.

Within Causeway Coast and Glens, the following Openreach Commercial Rollout sites are scheduled to be connected before the 31st March 2022:

- Cloughmills BIO Park/Old Mill;
- Cushendall – Cottage Wood Site;
- Cushendall – Legg Green;
- Kilrea Town Hall; and
- Roe Valley Leisure Centre.

7.0 FFNI Moving Forward

The FFNI Consortium partners will begin the process of migration (moving services from pre-existing copper cables to new full fibre offering). This process must be completed by December 2022, in line with programme delivery targets. In addition, all Consortium members will undertake a benefits realisation exercise. Anticipated early benefits of the FFNI programme to date are:

- **Improved Economic Performance:** Through better and more widespread digital infrastructure provision enabling more businesses to locate and grow, increasing sustainable employment opportunities, and attracting high value jobs for individuals who in turn make financial contributions into the local economy.

Related benefit: An estimated GVA improvement of £180m in Northern Ireland's economy over the next 15 years.

- **Improved individual wellbeing & community cohesion:** by enabling better and more digitally connected individuals, communities and society at large.

Related benefit: Reduced social exclusion as more individuals and groups typically in rural areas will have ability to digitally connect with each other.

- **Improved Public Sector service efficiency and delivery:** by enabling Causeway Coast and Glens to work more efficiently and cost effectively, confident in the knowledge that Council has enough bandwidth to support delivery, and citizens have enough bandwidth to receive services.

Related benefits: Reduced operating costs by moving more Council services online. Improved quality and customer satisfaction by creating more accessible services for users, as well as improving the ways in which citizens can connect with Council. Improved delivery and quality of Council Services such as telephony, future smart technologies, CCTV which are reliant on high quality bandwidth.

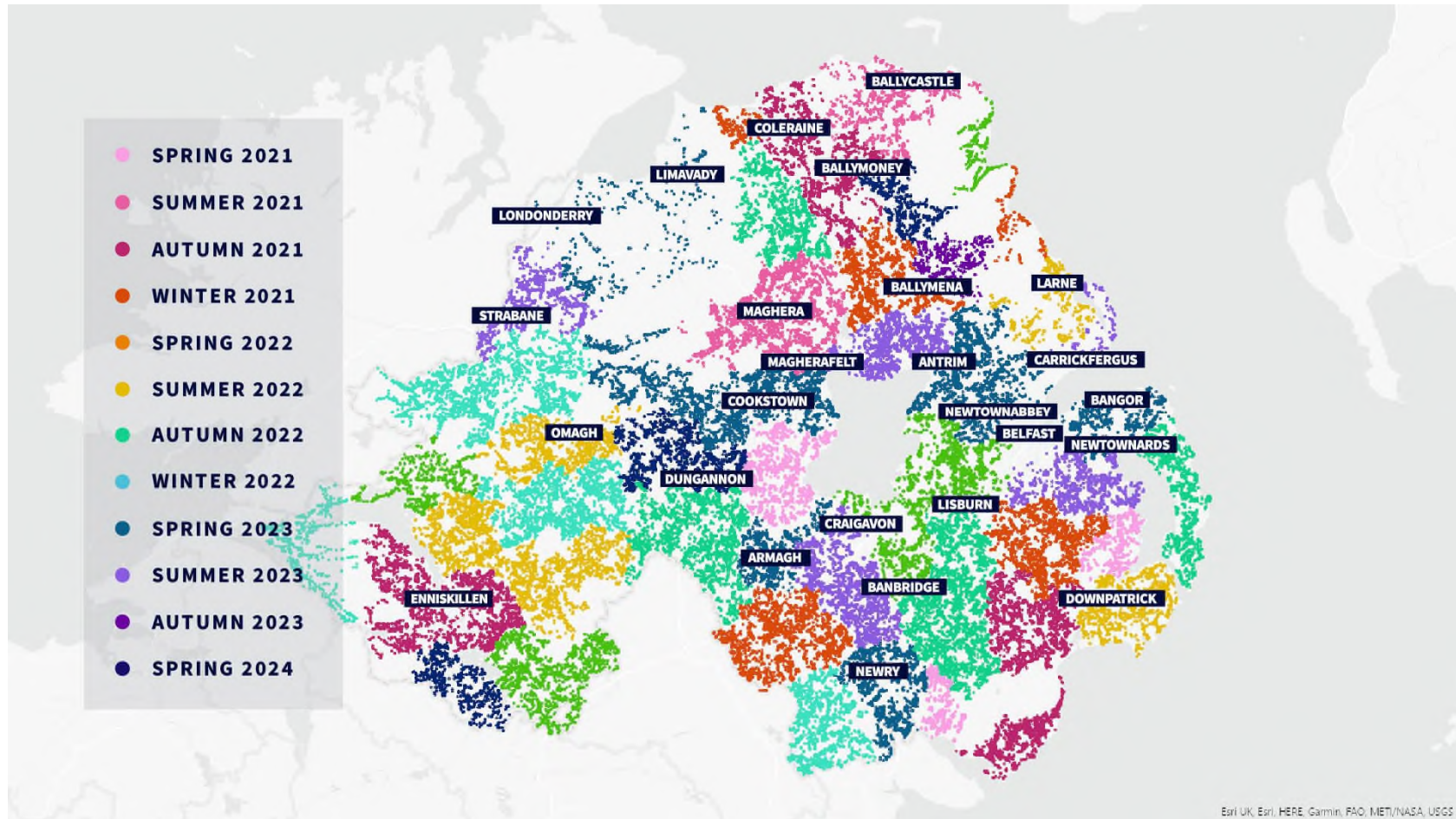
- **Greater environmental benefit:** through the reduction in the need to travel for work purposes.

Related benefit: A reduction in CO2 emissions, which has not been quantified at this time.

8.0 Next Steps

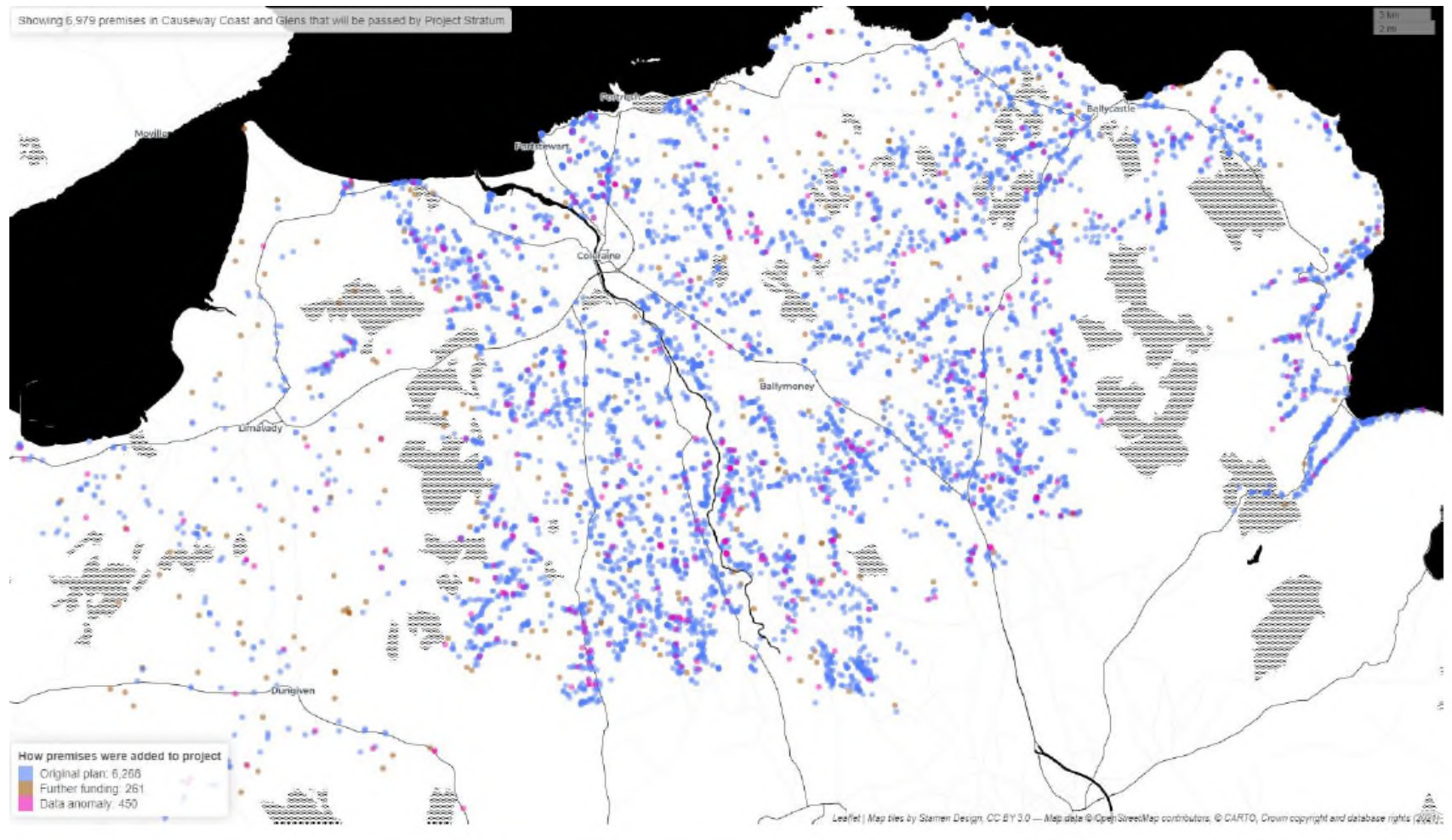
Further update reports will be brought to Leisure and Development Committee at key milestones throughout the 2022/23 financial year.

ANNEX A – Fibrus Networks Ltd Current Deployment Schedule¹



¹ Deployment Schedule as provided on <https://hyperfastni.com/> accessed 14th February 2022

ANNEX B – DfE Map Showing 6,979 Premises in Causeway Coast & Glens That Will be Passed by Project Stratum¹



ANNEX C –Map Showing Locations of the 51 FFNI Council Owned Sites

