



EAFRD-funded projects

# Broadband 4 Our Community

Building a community-owned and future-proofed digital infrastructure.

On learning that their villages were outside the National Broadband Plan funding area, the community of Piltown/Fiddown built their own community-owned and future proofed 'fibre to the premises' (FTTP) network.

Using analysis & development and training support from the LEADER programme, they developed a FTTP network installation project plan.

The community formed a separate social enterprise company, Broadband for Our Community (B4OC), to run the project. B4OC got support from residents, both young and old, and businesses, which facilitated community volunteers to installing the infrastructure necessary to create the network. Physically, this included installing a total of 480 metres of buried ducting and overhead fibre serving the community, and the building of supporting infrastructure.



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## Location

Piltown & Fiddown, County  
Kilkenny (Ireland)

## Programming period

2014 - 2020

## Priority

P6 - Social inclusion and  
economic development

## Measure

M19 - LEADER/CLLD

## Funding (EUR)

Total budget 156 010  
EAFRD 22 614  
National/Regional 13 396  
Private 70 000  
Other 50 000

## Project duration

2019 - 2022

## Project promoter

N/A

## Contact

[jimobrien@mailbox.org](mailto:jimobrien@mailbox.org)

## Website

[betterbroadbandforpiltown.com](http://betterbroadbandforpiltown.com)

## Results

Thanks to the project, the 750 homes and businesses in Piltown/Fiddown can now enjoy future-proofed broadband. This area is one of those communities that were unlikely to attract interest from a commercial operator to develop such a network.

The project achieved a model of social and financial innovation and was able to attract co-funding from local businesses.

B4OC's exceptional achievement was recognised by Ireland's 2022 'Digital Town' awards in both the business and overall categories. The project is expected to be replicated in up to five of the potential 25 towns and villages in a similar situation as Piltown/Fiddown in the Kilkenny LEADER Partnership (KLP) area.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- Technical support is essential – B4OC are now able to share their knowledge with other communities.
- Promotion of the cost saving benefit for the service users is essential – the relative cost of the service is considerably less expensive than the equivalent commercial rates in similar sized communities. Real savings in the services user's pockets fuels the desire to investigate and drive additional community development projects in their locality.
- Capital Investment is pivotal and should be secured at the earliest possible stage of the project

### ENRD Contact Point

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## Context

The Irish government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) is based on a so-called 'gap funding' model: NBP supports the installation of high-speed broadband only in areas of the state where existing provision falls below 'Next Generation Access' (NGA) standard provision of 30 megabytes per second (mbps) download/10 mbps upload (a 2011 EU standard).

Kilkenny LEADER Partnership (KLP) identified potential flaws in this model. Firstly, NGA is inadequate to today's needs. Secondly, rural areas that meet NGA standards - and therefore cannot benefit from gap funding from the NBP to improve their connectivity - will struggle to attract broadband investment if they are isolated and scarcely populated. Over 25 villages and towns in Kilkenny are in such a situation and risk to remain 'digital white-spots.'

KLP identified the need to address the issue and identified 'fibre to the premises' (FTTP) as the only appropriate solution. It recognised that community ownership of a local FTTP network is important not only in terms of the provision of future-proofed speed of the service, but also in terms of minimising operational costs. In addition, if a social enterprise model is adopted, profits can be shared with the community.

KLP invited Kilkenny communities to express interest in the development of technical and business plans to develop FTTP networks for their community. Such an ambitious community initiative had not been accomplished in Ireland.

Piltown/Fiddown has 750 homes and businesses in a 3.4 km<sup>2</sup> area and is one of those communities outside the NBP area who were unlikely to attract interest from a commercial operator to develop future-proofed broadband. With speeds from 1 to 6 MB, families and businesses in Piltown/Fiddown struggled to work remotely, study at home and stream television. Thus, the community indicated its interest in KLP's proposal.

## Objectives

Piltown/Fiddown sought to develop a plan for the installation and operation of a FTTP network in their community. This would provide the community with a future-proofed broadband network that it would not otherwise achieve. Piltown/Fiddown set up a social enterprise company, Broadband 4 Our Community (B4OC), to pursue its objective.

This unique community initiative has the potential to not only

provide the community with an income from the operation, but also to stimulate generational renewal in the locality by making it an attractive place to live and work.

## Activities

At a 2019 series of 'roadshows' on broadband in rural towns outside the NBP area, Piltown/Fiddown's community, initially through Piltown Community Enterprise, engaged with a mentor-trainer funded by LEADER called John Graves, ex Director of NTL Telecoms United Kingdom, to plan their FTTP network design.

In 2020, the community formed a separate social enterprise company, Broadband for Our Community (B4OC) and designed a financial and implementation plan for the network's monthly installation fees to fund further Fiber Node stages (i.e. remote point(s) in the Cable System connecting fibre-optic cable to the Trunk and Distribution System).

Broadband 4 Our Community (B4OC) recognised an FTTP network could both address the lack of quality broadband, and potentially be used to fund other community projects.

The project was based on completing the FTTP through a number of stages: initial development and establishment of seven-eight Fiber Nodes, subsequent utilisation of income from connection costs to fund running/maintenance costs, resultant expansion of the scheme and reinvestment in other community projects.

In 2020, B4OC employed a Project Manager to drive the research and installation work needed.

Despite the restrictions of Covid-19 crisis during 2020 and early 2021, B4OC consulted with the residents and businesses of the community on the FTTP Plan and secured expressions of interest from most of the community in its uptake.

The project leveraged private funds as a result of LEADER funding.

In late 2021, B4OC secured the support of Iverk Produce, a major local business to fund part of the initial costs of installation. This allowed KLP to part-fund the installation of the network with an equivalent level of funding from an eligible funding partner in its overall broadband initiative: Tomar Trust.

In spring 2021 work began on the installation of Node 1, led by the Project Manager, with support of resident and business volunteers. Simultaneously, B4OC entered negotiations with Irish Rail and the BT Group plc on the purchase of broadband backhaul capacity on the fibre optic cable.



By early 2022, Node 1 of around 50 premises was connected to the BT backhaul and the system went 'live'. The broadband connection was as quick and stable as wished for design. Based on the success of Node 1, work continued on further Fiber Nodes connecting fibre optic cable to cover the entire non-NBP area of Piltown/Fiddown. For this, KLP secured additional support from Tomar Trust.

B4OC propose to complete the installation of the full FTTP systems (all Fiber Nodes), with all initial subscribers connected.

In the autumn of 2022, KLP and B4OC propose to run a workshop/seminar as the culmination of a promotion and training process for other towns and villages in Kilkenny bypassed by the NBP.

KLP hope to support up to five of the potential 25 towns and villages to emulate Piltown/Fiddown in the development of their own FTTP network.

Other types of centres could benefit from smart technology in the future, such as churches, old castles and palaces.

## Main results

The project provided the crucial infrastructure of future proofed high-speed broadband to a community that would not otherwise have gained it.

The relative cost of the service is significantly less expensive than the equivalent commercial rates in similar towns and villages.

The community's business plan predicts significant profits, which it intends to allocate towards the expansion of the service and notably other non-broadband community projects.

In May 2022, B4OC was awarded both the best «businesses» and «overall» categories in Ireland's «IE Digital Towns» awards, gaining € 19,000.00 towards further investment.

The project is squarely in accordance with the EU Digital Strategy and contributes to several other EU policies and initiatives, including Smart Villages, of which digital connection is key.

The food sector has been involved through Iverk Produce Ltd, B4OC's key business partner in, in the digitisation of their operations where the provision of high-speed broadband has been a key element.

Local people have been very active in the project resulting in a genuine feeling of inclusiveness and opening of potential about the project across the generations.

Key networking elements of the project were the gathering of a group of people of varying backgrounds to form a new structure and such a gathering cohering as a special purpose company focused on community benefit.

The project is innovative, in technological terms, through social innovation and funding innovation. These latter two elements of innovation are potentially transferable and scalable and of particular importance in facilitating project progress.

The Manager and Chairperson of the project are young people. The project will deliver significant benefits to the local school and through the collective activities in the community centre, and family pastimes and pursuits, in homes, to all younger residents.

## Key lessons

Community-led volunteerism is a significant contributor to the success of the B4OC project and would be an integral part of progression of similar initiatives in other rural communities.

Constant community engagement is crucial to promote the benefits of a future-proofed fibre broadband solution and the long-term advantages of having their own fibre network.

Financial support is necessary and securing capital investment not just from the community but also from a branded stakeholder is key.

Whilst B4OC now possesses a wealth of knowledge, the group were novices at the beginning of the process. Without the key technical support received from the LEADER Programme, the community would struggle to make significant progress on a complex project within such a short time frame.

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### Additional sources of information

[Broadband 4 Our Community \(B4OC\) Facebook Page](#)

[KCLR96FM Podcast](#)

\* This project has been categorised under 'Digital futures' by the nominating National Rural Network