The story so far: how B4BIG began
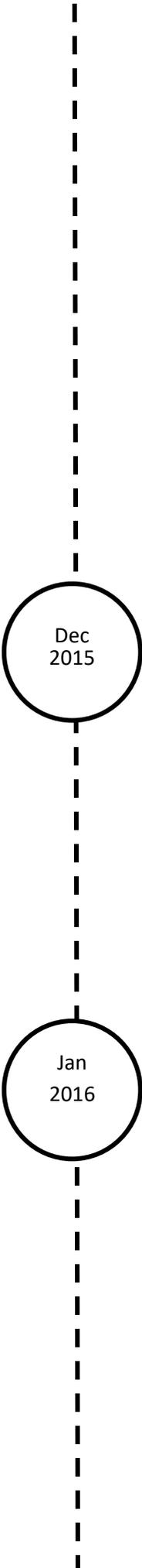
2007 to 2011

2011

June 2015

- Local entrepreneur David Ford, along with a few other local business people and residents were very dissatisfied with the existing rural broadband provision.
- BT, Superfast Lancashire and other providers were approached over several years – together with the local authorities but no prospect of any improvement to broadband access or speed was deemed likely or possible.
- David investigated several ways to improve the poor access to broadband locally, and discovered that the most future-proof method was fibre to the home or FTTH.
- B4RN were approached in 2011 to see if it would be possible to connect to them – but with their nearest connection at that point being Quernmore, at the time our area could not be considered.
- In the interim, and working with Paul Vinson of Sonning IT, an effective wireless system was used to connect local businesses and residents.
- In late 2011 it was discovered that there was the possibility to connect into the fibre optic cable on Langley Lane - which could provide ultrafast rural broadband.
- B4RN in Melling, Lancashire launch providing their rural communities with Europe's fastest broadband connected to Telecity, Manchester.
    - It was made possible by visionary community leadership, formation of a social enterprise (B4RN), through community investment in exchange for shares (and generous tax breaks for investors), supportive landowners, and community volunteers to lay the network cable, and make connections to residential and business properties.
    - It was driven by a desire to enable rural communities to complete and connect to a viable long term broadband solution.
- In early 2015, David, Paul and another individual - set up Gigabit (a non-profit Community Interest Company) as a vehicle to enter negotiations with the fibre network owner Zayo.
- During the preceding 8 year period, Gigabit and the founders had made over twenty unsuccessful grant applications to support the development of a local network - ranging from the Prince's Trust to various charities and government departments.
    - Almost all explained that our area was claimed by BT to be "Superfast Enabled" and so our broadband speed was sufficient!
- In early 2015 Gigabit requested access to the Langley Lane cable to either provide a direct connection to the internet exchange at Telecity in Manchester, or to connect with another provider – such as B4RN, Solway or Lonsdale.net.
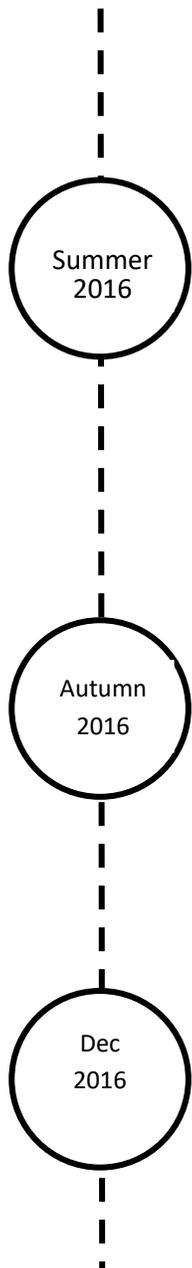
Dec 2015

Jan 2016

- Gigabit discussed collaboration with B4RN to connect this area with B4RN's network and share connections at Manchester.
- Gigabit continued to lobby Zayo to access the cable on Langley Lane and gain access to the fibre network.
- Sonning IT was successful in winning grant funding via the 'Connected Cities Voucher Scheme ' with most of the funding used to make the first connections to fibre optic network.
- Paul Vinson almost singlehandedly dug in the equivalent of 14 miles of cable - to start to build the network. David helped with mole ploughing where he could…
- In September 2105 after months of persuasion, Zayo finally agreed to grant access to the main fibre trunk but it took until late 2015 to agree affordable terms with them for a community enterprise.
- In December 2015 Gigabit approached B4RN again and this time B4RN agreed that the Gigabit enterprise could connect customers direct to B4RN from the start.
- This meant that very positively, in effect the Gigabit network became a B4RN "extension" but the balancing negative was that all future source of income for Gigabit (subscriptions) was then going to B4RN.
- The initial investment made to get the Zayo connection to our area was then at serious risk.
- The B4RN connection offers all residents in Bleasdale, Inglewhite and Goosnargh the opportunity to connect to the world's fastest rural network for a monthly fee.
- Unfortunately, Gigabit then had no customers and no revenue. The monthly connection charge of £725 was then underwritten by David to enable the project to proceed and to start to recruit customers in the community.
- Gigabit communicated the opportunity to people in Inglewhite, Whitechapel, Goosnargh and Bleasdale. People were invited to register their interest in the service and map their property.
- A local community volunteer project coordination team is formed to coordinate community volunteers and key resources to start laying more cable and getting homes connected.
- Gigabit were finally connected to B4RN via the Zayo cable on Langley Lane on the 4th January 2016.
- Several properties nearest the Langley Lane fibre point were connected.
- B4RN supports the effort by supplying conduit to Gigabit
- Community diggers dig from the Carron Lodge connections to Latus Hall Farm.
- Five more properties at Latus Hall, Inglewhite are connected.

Summer 2016

- Attempts are made to reach the Green Man but the wettest of summers delays this happening.
- Mistakes are also made near the Green Man with the installation and routing of some conduit, that results in a deep subsoiling operation ploughing up the conduit by accident. This cost, and the sudden failure to connect properties as planned damps spirits and puts the entire project at risk.
- Priority is given to dig the 2 core routes to Inglewhite, and the northern route past Kirkham's to Whitechapel and onwards to Bleasdale – in order to make a second connection to the core route - at B4RN in Quernmore.

Autumn 2016

- After months of negotiation, and because the network exists, and customers are being connected to B4RN, B4RN finally agree to formally adopt the BIG area as a B4RN parish.
- In late October 2016, all the assets of Gigabit are purchased by B4RN with the founders of Gigabit all re-investing their Gigabit stake - back into in B4RN.
- Gigabit Broadband CIC will be slowly wound up, as some contracts (Zayo etc.) come to an end.

Dec 2016

- The adoption of the BIG area by B4RN enables further investment to be raised though community shares in B4RN to release the materials required and contractor fees (as required) to build the network.
- The BIG community start to engage the community to raise investment for B4RN to release more materials, pay contractors and coordinate local volunteers to support the digging of sections of the network
- A core group of volunteers agrees to push ahead with building the BIG area network as an integral part of the B4RN project.
- Initial activities are raising investment, detailed planning of the route for cabling, obtaining landowners' permissions and encouraging everyone to in the area to join in.