

Light Blue Fibre Annual Progress Report

To:	Assets and Procurement Committee
Meeting Date:	15 October 2024
From:	Executive Director for Place and Sustainability
Electoral division(s):	All
Key decision:	No
Forward Plan ref:	N/A
Executive Summary:	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress of the Light Blue Fibre Joint Venture Company between Cambridgeshire County Council and the University of Cambridge.
Recommendation:	The Committee is asked to note the progress of the Light Blue Fibre over the last year.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

- 1.1 Ambition 1: Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

The installation of empty fibre ducts in new transport schemes and then making them available to telecom providers allows operators to avoid costly retrofitting. This minimises disruption to highways users and reduces carbon emissions (approximately 20 tonnes co2 to date).

2. Background

- 2.1 In 2019, the Council's Commercial and Investment (C&I) Committee approved the creation of a joint venture company with the University of Cambridge, named Light Blue Fibre. The purpose of Light Blue Fibre is to commercially market the fibre assets of both the University and the Council.
- 2.2 As part of the governance arrangements, the C&I Committee transferred oversight of Light Blue Fibre's operations to the Environment and Green Investment (E&GI) Committee, which established an annual reporting cycle. This report marks the third annual progress update for Light Blue Fibre. The first [report](#), presented to the E&GI Committee in January 2022, provided an overview of the company's structure and operations. The [second report](#), delivered in July 2023, offered a brief overview of Light Blue Fibre's annual progress.
- 2.3 This report provides an overview of Light Blue Fibre's progress within the last 12 months, along with a confidential appendix detailing the company's operational and financial status.

3. Main Issues

Strategic Context

- 3.1 In 2021, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board approved a Digital Connectivity Strategy for 2021-2025 and allocated funding to expand the Connecting Cambridgeshire Programme. This initiative aims to enhance digital connectivity across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. As part of the strategy, the innovative 'Dig Once' policy was included, to incorporate fibre ducting into new transport infrastructure projects, yielding significant economic, community, and environmental benefits.
- 3.2 Fibre ducting is essential for carrying fibre optic cables, which form the backbone of high-speed broadband. This infrastructure supports all types of digital connectivity, including fixed services (such as home broadband and business connections) and mobile services (like 4G and 5G).
- 3.3 The true benefits of the Dig Once policy is exemplified by the early success of the proactive Light Blue Fibre joint venture. This policy has led to the installation of empty fibre ducts in new transport schemes, making them available to telecom providers. This allows telecom operators to avoid costly retrofitting, encouraging them to expand gigabit-capable broadband networks to businesses and communities that might otherwise lack access.

- 3.4 Additionally, avoiding retrofitting minimises disruption to highways users and reduces carbon emissions (approximately 20 tonnes co2 to date). Dig Once schemes in Whittlesey and Linton have already been leased via the company to local fibre providers, together with ducting developed with the Milton Road (Cambridge) scheme already leased to a telecoms operator before it is complete.
- 3.5 This approach not only provides a modest financial return to the Council but also helps improve digital connectivity for Cambridgeshire.

Light Blue Fibre Progress

- 3.6 Since its formal establishment in late 2019 to help the Council expand the county's fibre network, Light Blue Fibre has now completed its fourth year of trading. The company is performing both operationally and commercially ahead of its original business plan. As outlined in the updated business plan, Light Blue Fibre is also progressing in forming a strategic partnership with a major global cloud services provider. This partnership aims to extend the reach of its infrastructure and maximise financial returns. Light Blue Fibre benefits from strong collaboration and a positive working relationship between the University and the Council, with a joint management team overseeing daily operations and project delivery. The commercially sensitive financial details of Light Blue Fibre's operations are available in Appendix 1.

4. Source Documents

- 4.1 Source documents:

[Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2025](#)

[Light Blue Fibre Annual Progress Report July 2023](#)