

**Minutes of Heatherside Ward Residents Meeting
for residents with toob
14th July 2022 - Heatherside Community Centre**

Present

Committee members - Caroline Hibberd, Katherine Sargent

Heatherside Borough Councillors - Graham Tapper,

Heatherside County Councillor - Edward Hawkins

Representatives from toob

Approximately 60 local residents

Apologies received from Kristian Wren (Heatherside Borough Councillor)

Welcome and Introductions

Caroline welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the HWRA committee members present. She then asked the representatives from toob to introduce themselves. Present from toob were:

Guilhem Poussot – Sales & Marketing Director

Maddie Minty – Senior Sales Manager

Ross Clements – Complaints Manager

James Marshall – Lead Planner - Camberley

Liz Graham – Wayleaves Manager

Guilhem began by explaining that they were coming in peace. He explained that they had a presentation which they would like to show local residents to explain more about the rollout of toob in Heatherside. He outlined the product that toob are bringing to the area and why they feel this is a superior offering to the existing broadband providers.

In summary:

- Toob are installing the first full fibre broadband supply in this area. Existing suppliers use fibre to cabinets in the road but then use copper wire from the cabinet to homes.
- The UK is behind much of Europe where this technology is concerned. Many countries already have full fibre broadband available.
- In the USA toob have 40 million customers.
- Toob have already installed their cables in the Southampton area where they have many customers and are now rolling out to towns around that area.
- Full fibre broadband is much faster than existing broadband supply at around 900mbps to the router. However where very old devices are used they may not be able to utilise this completely.

Infrastructure

Guilhem explained that in the past phone connections to many areas had been delivered to properties using telegraph poles owned by BT. More recently a lot of the cabling had been buried underground in ducts. In most modern estates the cables are underground in ducts but there are some areas in Heatherside where poles are still used or where the cables are just buried underground in pavements rather than in ducts.

Current rules mean that where there are existing poles and ducts installed by BT, other companies can ask to use them to install their own cables. This means that in most places 80-90% of the network can be installed using existing infrastructure. However in areas where this is not available new suppliers have to install their own poles or ducting. The reason why poles are normally chosen in preference to digging underground is because they are quicker and easier to install. Also because often the location of underground services are not well recorded so it is easy to cut through existing cables and pipes without meaning to. Digging up pavements is more expensive, dangerous and time consuming.

At this point in the meeting the audience became very vocal in expressing that they DO NOT want poles in areas where there are currently none. There was anger that up until this point in the meeting it had seemed as though all residents had heard was a sales pitch for tooB. The tooB representatives explained again that they had a presentation to show but the audience members were quite clear that they did not want to see it. Caroline Hibberd from HWRA suggested that it might be worth watching the presentation but the audience were not interested.

One resident explained that, because no planning permission is required for the installation of poles, they had received no notification that poles were to be erected outside their house until a small sign was put up and a cross marked on the ground for the location where the pole was to be placed. When they queried it with those putting up the signs etc. they were told that the company could “do what they liked” as they were working within the legal allowances.

At this point the representatives from tooB explained that at present all plans to install poles in the Heatherside area are on hold. While they had installed them in areas such as Southampton with no resident complaints it was clear from feedback here and in other areas in Camberley and Frimley that they were not wanted by residents.

Other pole related concerns raised by audience members included

- The requirement to ensure a certain width of pavement was left once the pole had been installed, being potentially impossible to fulfil in areas with narrow pavements.
- Concerns about possible damage to TPO trees, of which there are many in Heatherside

- Some roads have covenants prohibiting the use of fences, hedges and other obstructions to the street scene which 9m poles would likely breach.

Proposed resident consultations

Residents expressed their concerns that the only notification of poles received had been signs on lamp posts and that letters and emails to the CEO of toob had elicited no response.

The team from toob explained that very few roads had initially been earmarked for the installation of poles and that following complaints their intention had been to invite residents from each road one at a time to their office to give feedback. They explained that due to the small size of their office they would be limited to about 25 residents. However when they had tried that they found the meeting had been overrun by concerned residents from other areas. It was pointed out that bearing in mind there are over 6000 people on Heatherside alone it would take a ridiculously long time to invite everyone to give feedback! However the toob team explained they would only be talking to those from the affected roads.

Katherine Sargent from HWRA asked how residents would know whether or not their road would be affected if no communication was being sent out, except on a road by road basis to those affected. She said it was no wonder that residents were angry and concerned if they didn't know what was going on. An audience member pointed out that considering they are a communication company, their communication on this issue has been very poor! It was suggested that perhaps a letter could be sent out to all Heatherside residents explaining which roads were affected and which do not currently have underground ducting.

Meeting attendees also complained about the lack of notification about the meeting with toob. Katherine explained that notice of the meeting had been posted on the HWRA Facebook page, on local forums and to the HWRA mailing list. However, she said she had told toob that if they wanted to invite residents from specific roads then they would need to carry out a leaflet or a mail drop to those properties. Unfortunately it seemed this didn't happen. Caroline encouraged everyone at the meeting who was interested to sign up to the HWRA mailing list to ensure they received the meeting minutes and any further information. She also clarified that we don't operate solely on Facebook but also have an email mailing list and a website.

Once concerned resident mentioned a letter he had seen from toob in response to contact from our MP Michael Gove. This seemed to suggest that the rollout of poles would only be halted temporarily with the programme recommencing in mid July. However, Caroline read out a letter which superseded this and which confirmed that the rollout of poles will not recommence at this time. These letters can be seen at the end of the minutes.

-

Toob were asked whether they had links to the government and whether they had won a franchise to supply broadband in this area? They explained that there was no franchise and that there was nothing to stop other companies from coming along and offering full fibre broadband having installed their cables in the same way. These other companies might also install poles in the areas where there is no ducting or dig up the pavements to install underground cables.

Toob confirmed that they intend to go away and rethink their plans. They hope to have more information to share in late September/ early October. HWRA are happy to help share any information or invite them to another meeting.

At the end of the meeting Caroline thanked the toob employees for giving up their evening and coming to talk to us. She also reminded residents to sign up to the HWRA mailing list by contacting us at heathersidewra@gmail.com. Katherine briefly explained the other things HWRA do such as meetings with councillors, the Heatherside Christmas tree, quiz nights and so on. We are always looking for people who care passionately about Heatherside to join us and help spread the word about us.

Other audience questions

Who owns the box?

Toob explained that the installation process involves a powered box being installed on an inside wall of the house. This remains the property of toob but the router supplied becomes the property of the customer when they sign up.

Are the buried cables more susceptible to damage from vibrations etc?

Apparently the new cables are 25 times more reliable than existing cables. This is because it is a brand new network of modern cabling and because the copper wires used in traditional supplies degrade over time. So far the only issues toob have experienced have been due to rats gnawing the cables, and in Europe, forest fires burning the poles and hunters damaging them by shooting at birds sitting on poles. Water and flooding also present less of an issue to full fibre infrastructure than traditional cables.

What surveys are carried out to ensure TPO trees are protected?

Toob confirmed specialist surveyors are employed to check this.

How many poles were in the initial plan for Heatherside?

The representatives from toob were unable to answer this and said they would find out more.

-

How soon will toob be available in this area?

The rollout is underway in our area. A map was shown to the audience showing the various phases of the programme. Unfortunately this map wasn't clear on the screen in the hall and it was difficult to see specific locations. However, this map is available on the toob website.

What advantage is there to having full fibre broadband?

The new technology allows faster downloading and streaming without buffering. In some cases the service toob offer may be cheaper as it costs £25 a month. In addition the ability to use existing copper cables for landline usage is being withdrawn over the next few years so this provides the ability to move to VOIP landline calls.