

# Chapter 14

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The Wray and Lowgill towel volunteers blowing the fibre over Littledale.



Tea break at the top of Littledale.



Chris Hall and Bruce assisting and Alistair running the blower.



Brookhouse towel helpers.

## Brookhouse and Caton

This is a project in two halves. The first part came to pass when the main core was going through Littledale from Quernmore to Wray in 2013. A new branch grew down through part of Littledale to reach the Brookhouse side of Caton village. Bob Hutchinson and local farmers dug a lot of it, and the fibre blew well. None of this land was moled, it was all dug. There were no vouchers for this first route, it was all self-funded by Wray residents and Littledale farmers and businesses (see Chapter 1).

From the main core route, spurs were dug down to the different farms, and one of them came as far as Brookhouse.

The Brookhouse volunteers turned out to help Bruce Alexander with the blows. Bruce fitted up house kits and blew the house fibres on the route. Rob Staveley was volunteering with Bruce at this time, and learned how to blow the 2f into the houses. Rob ended up becoming one of the key members of the fusing team by the end of this story.

A cabinet was installed at Artle Beck so the people on that line were fed from it right away, and others could join on if they wished to.

Then fusing began. It was a mammoth job at the time of the core dig, as there were no staff employed yet.

There were lots of joins to do, and so some volunteers including Bruce, Alistair and Iain agreed to work for shares. At this stage the focus was on getting to Wray, to build up our customer base.

All the farms and properties between Quernmore and Caton joined on to this route, including the Forge Mill complex, who were very grateful to get a good connection at last.



## Blowing and fusing the fibre



Alistair from Abbeystead and Iain from Thrushgill, volunteer fusers.



Spectators.



Iain Robertson fusing a bullet join.



Fiona getting in the groove laying conduit.



Iain prepping a bullet with core fibre.



Alistair fusing the house connection.



Bruce shows Rob, a new volunteer from Wray, how to blow house fibre.



Paul Parsons, a new volunteer, helping to blow the fibre to the cabinet.





The final blow down into the cabinet, through the garlic wood.



The Caton Green spade.



The Brookhouse fibre arrives, with Paul Parsons on the reeler.



The Brookhouse cabinet fibre blow with Bruce, and Sandra helping..

BT Openreach had just put FTTC cabinets in Brookhouse, and Caton had its own telephone exchange.

A lot of people were satisfied with the connection they had at the time. Most of them had been told it was 'fibre broadband' and the signs on the roadside cabinets proclaimed it was, but the service came through their phone lines and so it was not all fibre. Try telling them that when they are told constantly by BT marketing that it is. Anyway, quite a few were savvy enough to know the difference, and in Brookhouse a group got together and started laying the duct through fields and gardens to reach the houses they could get to.

The branch from Caton Green was supposed to carry on down into Brookhouse, but because of landowner issues it did not. Therefore the best chance they had was from the Artle Beck cabinet at the bottom end of the village off the Littleedale branch route. Quite a few houses that were relatively easy to reach got on to that straight away, with help from Bruce.

Caton at this point did not get a group going, but Brookhouse had a church and a school they wanted connecting, and they decided to make it happen.

Then they came up against the problem of roads and pavements and great expenses, and the second half of this project finally woke up about the same time that Caton did which was quite a few years later.



The Brookhouse spade.





The Brookhouse meeting, with John Hamlett, Martyn Dews and Barry Forde from the B4RN management team.

## Brookhouse

By Steve Smithson

Looking at my diary, it looks like I got involved with B4RN 4 Brookhouse before I'd even moved there! I was aware of the B4RN project from the get-go and didn't hesitate to offer a wayleave through our land and to help in our local area as and when the time came. At that time, we were living at Caton Green.

On Monday 18th May 2015 there was a public meeting at St Paul's Church Hall in Brookhouse. The hall was beyond full with people standing at the back and even out into the foyer. Barry Forde, Martyn Dews and John Hamlett from Gressingham presented the B4RN project with the aim of generating interest in Caton & Brookhouse. A cabinet had already been sited near Artle Beck bridge.

Over the next few months, under the guidance of Peter Hearne, residents at Caton Green dug in their ducts. We were living in a converted farm complex, and those residents that could, did the digging to get the ducts to every resident in the complex. I recall spending about three evenings getting passage under a drystone wall for the ducts to enter the complex. Turns out a one metre drill bit comes in very useful in this situation!

We'd been looking to move down the hill and eventually settled on a house near St Paul's church in Brookhouse with a completion date of 30th October 2015. Needless to say, B4RN went live at our old house after we'd moved!

However, prior to moving there hadn't been much movement since that public meeting back in May. Towards the end of September 2015 I struck up an email dialogue with my future next door neighbour and by the 8th October we had a team prepared to get B4RN into the north side of Brookhouse.

Selfishly, we were just focusing on the area around us and started by seeing if we could get fibre from Caton Green. This would be far easier than coming from the cabinet at Artle Beck. In fairness, Barry had drawn up a network plan but it involved a lot of wayleave negotiations and plenty of ifs and buts. Hence the selfishness. If our little group could get fed from Caton Green, we'd be alright, Jack!



That wasn't to be. There wasn't enough fibre and that plan also involved wayleave negotiations. We therefore went with Barry's plan to come from the cabinet at Artle Beck. We were still being selfish though, and were concentrating on Brookhouse North.

We'd moved house and by April 2016 a team had formed to move things along in Brookhouse South. In many ways they had a head start on us as B4RN had already laid an interconnect to the east and even laid 7mm ducts to the back of every property backing on to the fields.

We then worked together, working on wayleaves, communicating with the community and generating interest. In December 2016, Barry Forde gave us the go ahead to start work in Brookhouse North and South.

On 27th January 2017 a public launch meeting took place for all Brookhouse residents. We were off!

In 2016 Jorj Haston, myself and others had set up and manned a B4RN promotion stand at Caton Gala. In 2017 we decided to do it again. I believe it was there that we persuaded, cajoled and possibly strong-armed Phil Hughes to get something going in Caton. It's possible Phil saw it as gentle persuasion but I'm not sure. Anyway, my diary notes that a public meeting was held in Caton on the 6th July but that will be Phil's story to tell.

Our Brookhouse projects were difficult. Many of the B4RN projects were generally run and manned by retirees with a fondness for tea and cake. Virtually all of us running this project were in full time jobs. I was renovating our new house as well. A most memorable dig weekend was held on 13/14 January 2018 and concluded with the diggers standing around our shovels on a cold dark evening celebrating our achievements by sipping Hugh Stewart's whisky!

Getting B4RN to everyone in Brookhouse was always going to be a tall order using the traditional 'fields and gardens' method. In May 2018 the government voucher scheme ultimately opened up the 'hard dig' method. This enabled B4RN to employ contractors to trench the pavements, leaving a Toby Box in the pavement outside every property that wasn't covered by the soft dig. The annoying point for us in Brookhouse is that Caton got a head start by being fully completed via the hard dig process before us. Hey, we started first!

After Caton was completed, Brookhouse became a hybrid project completed using a mix of hard and soft dig.

Good things come to he who waits. I went live during the third week of June 2021. It only took 5½ years! I now have a rock solid connection that has only suffered 20 minutes of unplanned downtime since then. Was it worth it? Yes, I've met people I might not have otherwise met, we've future-proofed our village as far as internet connectivity goes, and our community has benefitted from free service in our schools, churches and village halls.

If we can do it, so can you.





Chris, Paul, Phil, Ralph and Mel aka the Local Heroes.



Homeowners were really pleased with the re-instatement after trenching.



After the dig, grass healed well.



The team in action.

## Soft dig in Brookhouse.

The core to Brookhouse had been planned originally to come in from Claughton, but landowner issues stopped that route at Caton Green. So we brought a core down to the other end of Brookhouse at Artle Beck from the long dig between Quernmore and Wray. Once the cabinet was put there, some of the villagers decided to get their houses connected, and take the core up to the Church at the top of the village.

Fantastic volunteers have driven this project for everyone in Caton and Brookhouse. They also wanted to connect their school. Miles Rutledge at Old Hall was a massive supporter and encouraged them. Richard Mews, Steve Smithson, Jorj Haston and Geoff Metcalfe were brilliant at getting things moving. Most of their meetings were in the pub, and more people started to take notice.

Steve and Jorj prepared a wonderful Powerpoint presentation for a village meeting at the Methodist Hall, but when they started it they found it would not run on the old PC, so they did it on the fly. They explained how the village could be separated into zones, with each one having a block champion. They set the hall tables out into zones and got all the people there to sit in the right zone. People who had lived there for years finally met neighbours and it started the community build.

They put information in newsletters, both digital and printed, and started their own Facebook page where they kept everyone updated.

They met up with Barry, made a plan, and got digging. By this time B4RN had new premises at Melling and staff, but most of the work was still done in the communities by the volunteers.

A lot of people commented that their gardens and





Old Hall Farm dig.

patios were much better after the dig had been done than they were before, and that encouraged others to join in.

Jorj remembers going to B4RN in her car, only to realise the reel of 7mm multicore was bigger than the car itself. Frank Brown was there at the time, and he jumped in to help her with his pickup and the reeler trailer. She says without Frank's help they could never have done what they did. They dug every house connection in from the field behind the houses, but then trouble set in when they had not enough money for the pavement and road crossings needed to connect the rest of the houses.

There were no vouchers in those early days.

They were out every weekend digging, and the best bits were when a lovely elderly lady who could not dig turned up every day with tea, and a lady brought them biscuits every day. She says that working like that was a great leveller, and it was amazing getting to know everyone and what their jobs had been. A lot were retired and she witnessed many getting a new lease of life.

It was also great when youngsters came, and the older guys taught them how to flip a boulder out with a crowbar. There was also a person who took on the job of cleaning all the tools until next weekend so they did not rust. They put big signs outside Jorj's house which was close to the Methodist chapel so all would see them, and it was updated regularly with the number of houses connected.

For 5 years running they had a stand at the Caton Gala, where people could come and ask questions. They also had a booth outside the local Coop and Londis stores to raise awareness and shares.

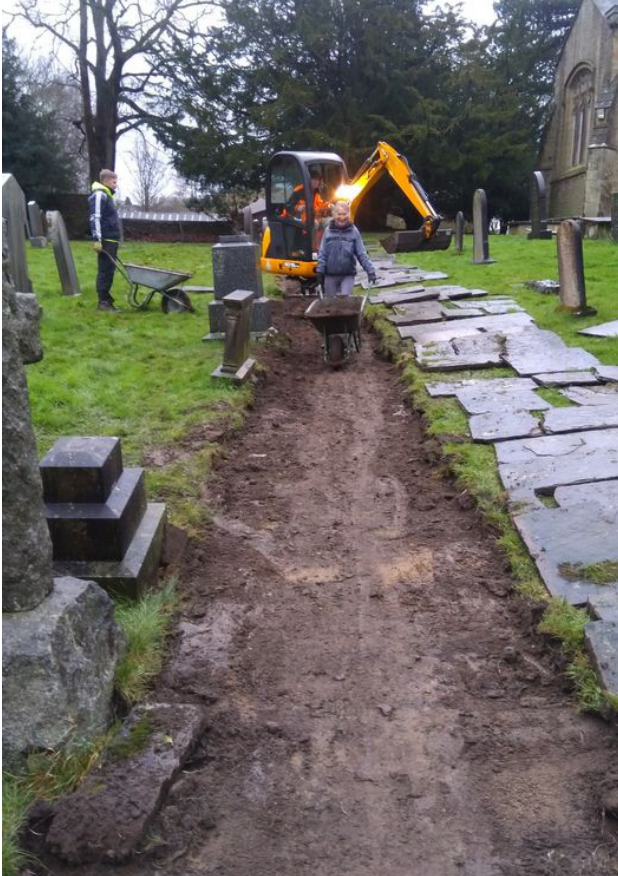
They organised work parties to stone pick on the core digs in the fields once the ground had settled as well.



The village school.



## FTTC B4RNland style, Fibre To The Church



Flags lifted.



Church work party.



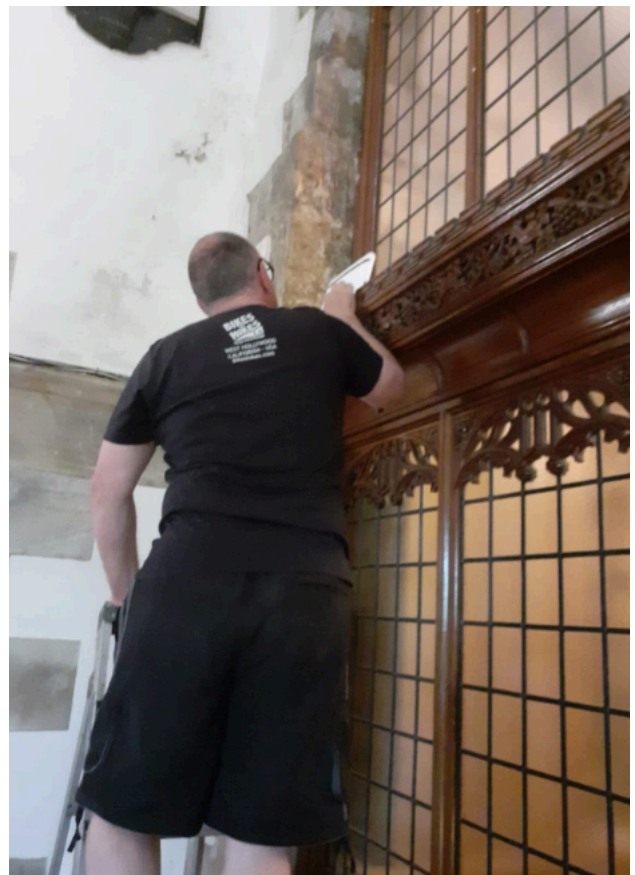
Many hands make it work.



Subduct being used under the flagstones.



Steve fixing up the church router.



Putting it out of harm's way.



## Get me to the church on time...

The church notice at the time stated ‘St Paul’s Caton with Littledale–B4RN is coming through to Caton Green Road–working together with the path being upgraded. The work is being carried out sensitively due to the location and the grass will recover. Many thanks to the volunteers’.



Steve from the Cycle Mechanic.



Richard at Plan and Design.

‘9 December 2020 ‘ST PAUL’S CHURCH - Our work here is done! 2 x 16mm ducts for our core route are now through the churchyard and across Caton Green Road awaiting the sinking of a ground chamber.

‘This milestone achievement opens up the north east side of Brookhouse to the B4RN service - from Sycamore right up Caton Green Road.

‘Thanks to all the volunteers that helped and to the church contractors who were a dream to work with. The contractors still have about 10 days work ahead of them in relaying the paving’.

The volunteers fitted the router in the church, and it enables the church to go digital and use card machines for donations.

Steve from the Cycle Mechanic in the photo on the left splicing his own connection and getting ready to connect up to his home network. ‘When I redesigned the house I put ethernet to every room. I’ve put additional external and internal wifi points so I can access the internet on my devices.’

Richard at Plan and Design has been involved from the start of bring B4RN to Brookhouse. Finally he is now connected on a true Fibre To The Property FTTP connection. With his own WiFi mesh attached he has extended the wifi around his home. ‘It’s just brilliant! Thanks to everyone who has helped’.





Phil joining up a Toby Box.



Phil fusing a house connection.



The Caton Sp(l)ice Boys!



Paul remembers his splice protector.



Chris waiting for his turn with the fuser.

## The Caton hard dig

There had been a lot of interest in Caton since the cabinet for Brookhouse had arrived from Littledale. However, it was on the wrong side of Artle Beck to serve the Caton end of the parish, and the early volunteers got disillusioned when it seemed impossible to make a plan to connect the village.

They walked routes and came across many obstacles, including wayleave blockers, so they knew it was not going to be possible to do the dig through gardens without radically changing the early plan. This very nearly spelled the end of the project.

The first voucher scheme came in, but unlike the rural areas—where one business voucher could support 10 residential properties—there were not enough businesses in the village at the time.

There was nobody to lead the project, but a core of people did not give up. They had meetings at the Victoria Institute, which were very well attended, and carried on raising awareness of B4RN being a possibility for the village.

Eventually Phil Hughes stepped up to take the lead; this was the start of a journey for Phil, and the village B4RN team are very appreciative of his tenacity as village champion to see the project through to completion.

The team had been trying for a long time to get Lancashire County Council permission for a cabinet on the school playing field, and after about 14 months this was finally agreed. A duct came in from the Quernmore end, after a wayleave was agreed with a local farmer, and Caton Primary School and one property were connected and went live—the first in Caton.

However, the soft dig method was still proving difficult for Caton and so the cabinet plan for the school field was put on hold. There was considerable



Paul fusing a property.



Chris gets his turn fusing a property.



A Toby Box.



The Victoria cabinet.

frustration, and at one point Phil Hughes had the email ready to send to B4RN to resign as champion for Caton, when B4RN got in touch to say there was some good news.

It was summer, 2020, and the country was in the grip of the Covid pandemic, so an inside meeting was not possible. Elaine Elrick from B4RN organised a socially distanced meeting with the remaining volunteers on the football field. Elaine explained about B4RN's new method of urban dig, which was being successfully tried out in Halton. She explained about the new gigabit vouchers that were available for their postcode. This was a turning point in the project, and the volunteer group immediately knew this was be the answer to their problem. They just needed to get the required level of interest and vouchers with the support of their community.

A core team of about 8 people was formed and they set forth to develop the plans. There was a lot of street walking, door knocking, and discussions with residents to explain how the voucher system worked, and to get enough people to sign up. This was supplemented with encouraging people to invest.

Eventually, sufficient numbers had registered for vouchers, and combined with the allocation from investments, the money was there, and the project started.

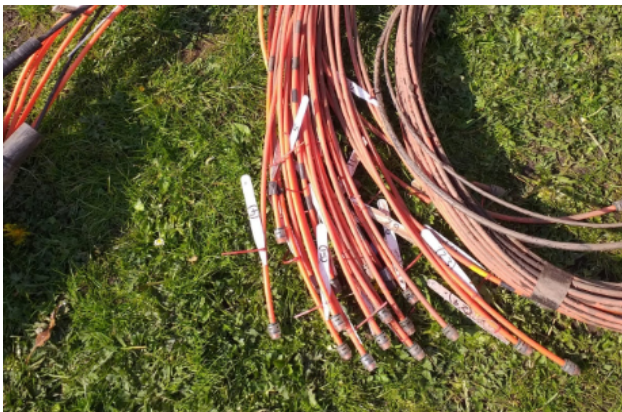
B4RN by this time had a dedicated civils team and code powers, and qualified people to work on roads and pavements, which meant the volunteers were free to concentrate on connecting the houses from Toby Boxes outside their boundary. Every single property was provided with one of these boxes ready to connect to the house duct. The method had proved to be successful in Halton, and Caton had enough interest at last to raise the finance to top up the vouchers.

This means effectively that government money goes twice as far and connects more people.





Phil, Sandra, Mel and Julian.



Multiple ducts in the chambers.



Oops.



Digging to meet the Toby Box.



The route into the village was changed to come from Quernmore, which gave additional added resilience, and because it was now an urban dig, the cabinet could go in the centre of the village. The Victoria Institute was an obvious choice of location and agreed to host the cabinet. This was already a focus for the community, with a computing room for villagers, so a really good internet connection was an added incentive. The Victoria Institute belongs to the village so it was fitting to have the cabinet here.

The team was formed, trained and roles were quickly assigned. The volunteers discussed best routes from Toby Boxes to properties with residents and got on with the digging and installing. The volunteers learned how to lay duct, blow fibre, and then to fuse fibre. Phil was a star turn.

There are more ducts going into an urban chamber than a more rural one, and all must be labelled and end-capped like these, or this happens - see photo!

The straightforward turf lawns were the easy bits but the team came up with challenges such as paved drives, slabs to be lifted etc. They always came up with a solution, making good after the trenches were completed and cable laid. Paul Austin was their manic digger, and often put in long days to complete garden connections; he was extremely fast with each house so the rest of the team had to work hard to keep up with installing house kits. Mel Wilkinson managed all the supplies of equipment and ducting, which soon took over his garage and garden; Sandra, his wife, did lots of digging and was skilled at keeping things moving and encouraging the rest of the team to complete tasks on time.

An unincorporated association was set up with Miles Rucklidge as chair, Steve Smithson as treasurer, Kath Fanning as secretary, and members Phil Hughes, Maria Coward, Jorj Haston and Chris Benson, giving Caton and Brookhouse a forum to manage the money and monitor progress of the project. When Miles turned 90 and retired as chair,





The Pizza Spade.



The urban dig to the school.



B4RN's new civils team in action.



Brew time.

Julian South was elected as Chair to continue to distribute funds to good causes within the village.

As the project got going, Julian set up multiple WhatsApp groups to run the project without bombarding people with calls and emails. The team got accustomed to their phones pinging when there was a call for action. Maria completed CRM training at B4RN, along with Kath, so they could maintain the central database of every property updated with the progress they made. They also kept a spreadsheet for the workers for reference, so they knew what needed doing and where, Maria being the main contributor to keeping this all bang up-to-date. Chris Benson did masses of work of all types, and Ralph Thackray who had said, 'It'll never bloody happen,' dived in labouring and became the House Kit King.

The team did most of the house kit fitting and garden digs, with the dig grants going into their community pot for their tools and equipment.

The Halton project also donated their tools to the Caton group when they finished their digs. Of special note should be the Pizza Spade, which was invaluable when installing ducting in manicured lawns. The team did most of the house kit fitting and garden digs, with the dig grants going into their community pot for their tools and equipment.

Each evening Julian walked the streets and inspected the progress, uploading photos to the village Facebook group. Occasional complaints from residents were dealt with via Facebook discussions. An example was the chalking of pavements which was described as 'urban graffiti' for which B4RN should be held responsible and wash away promptly. Once explained that this was specialist chalk that quickly disappeared the complaints went away. The Facebook group was a great way to keep the community updated and also helped explain the benefits of B4RN and gain extra sign-ups.

Residents near to where the civils team was working



## The Caton urban dig



Pavement trench.



Pavement digs.



A road crossing.



Traffic controls in action.

on any given day would bring out mugs of tea and biscuits, as they worked hard through many exceptionally hot days. The dig on the road to the school was planned for the school holidays, as it is quite narrow and around one hundred cars go up it twice a day in term time with parents taking children to school.

During the project, each property had a Toby Box from the main core through the pavements. This allowed easy connection for those who did not want B4RN at this time but might choose to do so in the future. Indeed, there have been sign-ups since the project finished and as people come out of existing contracts, move into the village, or just realise what a great internet provider B4RN is, they want to switch. The team says that once the hard dig got underway it all went pretty fast.

The civils team was very popular in the village as they all worked very cleanly and efficiently and the roads were closed for very short periods. They said it was



Pavement ducts.



A chamber with ducts and fibre.





Frank Brown, Will Dehany and Barry Cheeseman—the blowers.

real teamwork, with all the guys working in unison to keep it running smoothly.

Once all the ducting was into the Toby Boxes and the volunteers had fitted the house boxes, it was time for the blowers. Frank blew the fibre through these ducts to the house entry point ready for fusing. The white duct inside the box goes directly to a pre-terminated box in the house that the router is clipped to with a patch lead.



Opening the Toby Box.



Frank blowing house fibre.



Fitting an internal house kit.



Fitting an external house kit.



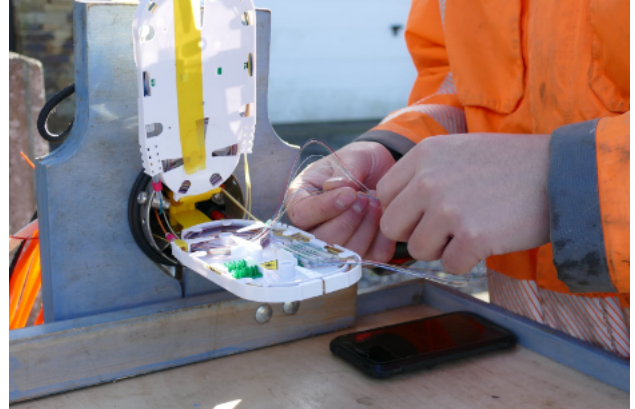
House fibre blown into the outside box ready to fuse.



## Photos taken from the community Facebook page



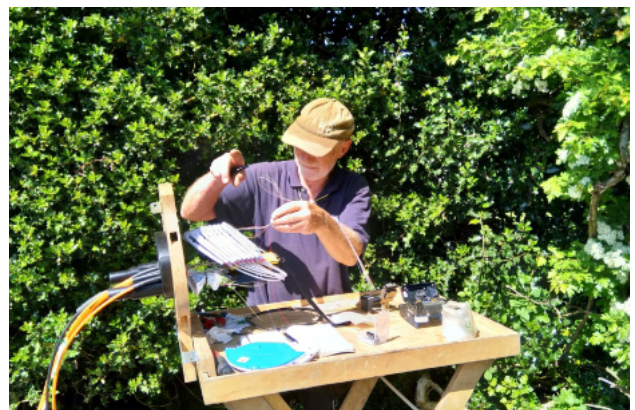
Ronan Halstead and Bruce fusing.



Wrapping the fused fibres into the bullet enclosure.



Kit Mackereth and Bruce.



Bruce wrapping the fibres into a large bullet.



Alex Colton and Bradley Jackson.



Joe working on a large bullet.



Fusing in the van.



Rob Staveley and Lucy Hawkins working on a large bullet on Caton Road.





Tom Rigg the CEO of B4RN, shows the local MP the cabinet.



Patching in the customers to bring them live.



The volunteers and the B4RN team on connection day.



The Caton Tea Party where volunteers paused for a well-earned break.

Once the blowing was done, the fusers moved in. By now B4RN had a core team of fusers, led by Alistair Adams-Huset. They had lots of bullets to do but the weather was grand and they got on with it.

Volunteers and staff had already fitted the house kits, and as the volunteer team were already trained up to fuse the house connections, the customers came live very quickly.

The volunteers and staff from the connections team at B4RN connected 40 customers to start off the exodus to the hyperfast fibre network as it neared completion. The local newspaper carried this [report](#).

The benefits of the community project were, and continue to be, immeasurable. New friendships were forged, new skills were learned, and the village has benefited from the accessibility of the best broadband technology available. It now has the ability to move away from corporate contracts to excellent value, and the assurance of locally-based technical support.

They had a community pot for the dig grants, and they used it for all their tools, with over £12,000 being donated to worthy causes when the project was finished. They installed a really good mesh wifi system in St Paul's church hall and the Victoria Institute, and continue to support many other village activities.

In the meantime the funds raised by the volunteers have enabled the benefits to spill over into other projects of benefit to the community, including amongst others, essential training for scout leaders, new kit for the local junior football team, contributions to Grow Caton for the planting of food-bearing trees in the community – the list goes on.

The team had a celebratory evening in the Victoria Institute at which B4RN Spades were awarded .



## The MBE spade awards



Ralph and Chris Benson.

Volunteers were awarded spades by Jorj for their sterling work bringing the future to Caton. At the end of the project the Facebook page offered this comment;

‘We all continue to benefit from our superfast fibre to the property broadband, thanks to the tenacity and hard work of the village residents who kept the project alive, especially lead Caton volunteer Phil Hughes’.



Jorj and Phil.



Jorj and Julian South.



Steve Smithson and Joyce Prichard, block champion and leaflet deliverer.



Mel and Julian.



Julian South, Maria Coward, Phil Bargh.,



Chris Benson and Phil.





Phil and the router fitting team.



The special JFDI beer and spade.



Not the normal brew...

After people went live, the main issue faced was educating users to the dark art of wifi. They have lent out kit and advised on running ethernet into offices and TVs, and shown people how to use meshes.

They still assist the B4RN connections team when properties need a connection, and they still run the [B4RN for Caton facebook page](#) and advise people when they have issues.

To celebrate the end of the project, Julian, a keen home brewer, made a special beer.

Later, a further celebration was held and a beer was commissioned from Kirkby Lonsdale Brewery and labelled with labels depicting the project team in action.

22 kilometres was dug in the Brookhouse project with the core feed coming from Quernmore via Littledale and Artle Beck.

13 kilometres of trench was dug in the Caton Village project, with the core feed coming from Quernmore via Escowbeck.





Bay Health &  
Care Partners  
delivering



ldcvs

volunteer awards



**Volunteer Achievement  
Awards 2021**

**Certificate of Recognition**

**Awarded to**

**Caton and Brookhouse  
B4RN Volunteers**

For your contribution and commitment as  
volunteers with Broadband for the Rural  
North

presented by the Mayor of Lancaster

on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2021

