

Chapter 19

Staff and Directors

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Staff

We start with a volunteer's story about the time we got our first office at the Auction Mart, when we did not have any staff at all, and the whole network was being built by the communities.

Judy contributed her three ha'pence by tying patch leads for the cabinets and checking the answerphone service. Obviously, as more and more people were connected, it became necessary to have a help line to field queries and problems. I would check the messages first thing in the morning and Judy would do the afternoon round-up, which was far busier. Most of the queries had to do with payments and the setting up of standing orders, there was very little technical help needed, apart from the odd person who managed to stay connected to their old provider and couldn't understand why their service was no faster. It was with great relish that all problems, perceived or otherwise, were solved with speed and alacrity, usually by Ian Threlfall, Pat or Barry. Even serious problems, such as United Utilities just happening to sever the fibre before a B4RN Show and Tell event, were solved with speed that made the incumbent look pathetic. A couple of hours was the benchmark – none of your 'We'll be there a week next Tuesday' malarkey.

The tying of patch leads was just a little side job to be undertaken at home sitting on the settee. This was just in case Judy had any time she needed to fill to ensure that she was never idle! It is a simple job of taking small pieces of cable out of their delivery bags and cutting them to a certain length before putting them back in a single bag. This saves time when splicing. It is a great help to arrive at a cabinet with the patch leads already together rather than having to stand in the cold opening up to 288 bags with icy fingers. It's a good example of all the seemingly tiny things people can do to help, which make everything run more smoothly and swiftly.



Judy was also instrumental in the setting up of the B4RN office in the old Barclays Bank building next to Lancaster Auction Mart. Before B4RN was a viable business, all the office work was managed by volunteers, but it was essential that our admin processes were capable of coping with the expected volume of clients in the future. So, a crash course in bookkeeping and 'Learn Yerself Sage' was Judy's brief.

Other game people helped, and a good team was

born that kept things in order during the early days. Iain was once again called upon to make shelves and fittings to furnish the office and house records and kit. There were many trips back and forth to Lancaster to ensure the office space was business-like and habitable. The old Barclays Bank sign needed to be painted over, but proved to be a bit of a challenge. It was obviously made of something plastic that didn't like to be covered in paint, but after several coats only the ghostly outline of Barclays remained and a banner proclaiming B4RN was hung about the main entrance.



The Management committee.



Kristina Fournier.



Jennifer Schofield and Amy Lis.

positions.

Pat carried on being the helpdesk until we could afford more staff. Pat had been a volunteer from the early days, always bringing tea out to the diggers and helping with fleeting when the blowers came. She also learned how to fuse and helped with house installs. Her knowledge of IT came from a career managing the department for a secondary school, and dealing with customers came naturally to her. The volunteer helpdesk who triaged all the calls learned how to do the easy ones and passed the harder ones on to Pat. In those days they were escalated to Ian Threlfall if investigation was required on the network, and he liaised with The Networking People aka TNP who helped with the technical side before Tom joined us. Ian was one of the original management team and had run the WenNet wifi network.

Until 2015, B4RN was managed by Barry and a management committee formed from the WenNet group and representatives from the original Phase 1 parishes. Mary Jackson had joined as the company secretary, but as B4RN grew there was a need to formalise the organisation. Barry and Monica were appointed as directors, and Monica became Company Secretary. A new office and depot was found at Melling.

Volunteers had been helping Barry with all the accounts, Mary dealt with all the standing orders and customer records, Pat Close from Arkholme and Judy and Sheena from Lowgill had manned the phones and helpdesk. Monica worked with Barry on the organisational side of things. Now, Monica brought in more staff, often recruited from volunteers or their families, all local folk.

Kristina Fournier was taken on shortly after Alistair, to head up the administration and be general office manager. Her great expertise was honed by working within French financial systems. She dealt with the customer accounts and joined Monica in managing the share register. As B4RN grew rapidly more help was needed with accounts, phone calls and paperwork in general, so two more office staff appeared, and together they made an awesome team. Amy Lis was the first, shortly followed by Jennifer Schofield. These two were favourites of the Dent champions who sent them some chocolate lollipops. They still work at B4RN but in more senior

Pat didn't want a full time job as she was retired, but she agreed to be a contractor and often works three days a week, and covers for the helpdesk at weekends or evenings when needed.

Pat's story

I got involved with B4RN because we have a farm that was never going to get a normal commercial broadband connection, and the start of the B4RN project coincided with my retirement as the network manager in a large secondary school. I wasn't in quite at the start but soon got involved,

The call came from Chris one morning; 'Pat' she said 'I've got a digger available if you can find him somewhere to dig.' A phone call to one of our local farmers who had already agreed in principle to allow us to lay duct across his land and the Arkholme phase of the B4RN dig began. This didn't come out of the blue; it was the culmination of several months of planning, fundraising and negotiating with local landowners, but at last we were off. B4RN was coming to Arkholme.

Once the project was underway my involvement went through various stages.

The Tea Lady

The first phase of the project was very labour intensive. There was lots of hand digging and dragging duct around, which my back wasn't up to. So I became the Tea Lady. Volunteer diggers ran on tea and cake so I brewed up three or four times a day and carried it out to wherever they were digging. I'm sure there are photos around of me struggling across muddy fields carrying my red crate of hot drinks and biscuits. There may even be a picture of me flat on my face in the mud after my welly stuck in a sink hole, but still the tea got through.

I wasn't alone. The B4RN army marches on cake, and keeping them supplied could be a major operation. Ones that stick in my mind are the home-made scones with jam and cream served by one Arkholme household and the cherry cake that fuelled the Whittington dig.

The Technician

Once enough duct was in place we needed to start installing fibre. With the help of technicians from our suppliers we learnt the arts of fibre blowing, fleeting, catching sponges and all the other skills needed to get the fibre into the various properties. This was new territory for me, but it soon became second nature. I was involved with most of the projects fed from Arkholme, and Chris tells me I keep popping up in her photos all over the place.

From installing fibre I moved on to splicing FTUs (fibre termination units) for Genexis routers. Most of the villages on the Arkholme end of the project have FTUs spliced by me. It wasn't all without incident; I have another claim to fame as the first entry in the accident log. I stood up too quickly after kneeling on the floor splicing an FTU, and when I put my weight on the foot, which had gone to sleep, it gave way leaving me with a nasty sprain.

Configuring Genexis routers was another of my jobs. In the early phase these had to be configured individually. This involved connecting them to a network and manually copying the configuration onto them. The installers never had enough pre-configured routers so I spent many evenings sitting at home copying the config onto new routers which could be dropped off where needed the following day. Ian Threlfall from WenNet did a lot too.

The administrator

As the network grew it soon became obvious that the administration wasn't keeping pace with the installation; someone was needed to make sure that the accounts were set up in a timely manner. B4RN moved on to receiving money by direct debit by 2015, and now the direct debit has to be set up before the connection is turned on. But then getting customers live was the priority and banking almost an afterthought. This became my job along with checking deliveries at the auction mart office. One of my memories from this time is having a delivery of around 200 routers for which the serial numbers had to be entered into the system. Two of us spent the best part of a day doing this and I'm sure there were numerous typos and errors. The next day a bar-code reader was ordered so we wouldn't have to go through that again.

We all sighed with relief when Kristina arrived to take over and bring order to the office. I carried on helping with the bookkeeping until Catherine was taken on and I could move onto something else. A sign of how B4RN has grown is that the first time Kristina and I prepared the paperwork for the end of year accounts, she took three lever arch files of invoices and related documents to the accountants. Recently the files containing the equivalent documents occupied a shelf running the full length of Kristina's office.

IT support tech

With the administration under control and more volunteers learning house kit installation, I moved back into my home territory of tech support. There was no formal support system, we didn't even have a dedicated phone line (or anyone to man it full time). Emails and requests for help mainly came in by word of mouth through the volunteer chain and were passed along until they reached someone who could deal with them.

Most of the queries were to do with setting up the system, understanding speed tests, connecting to wifi and getting the wireless signal through the house. It is much the same with today's issues.

Fibre breaks were rare although we did have some bizarre ones. I remember one 'should have gone to Specsavers' moment where someone removing a garden hedge was cutting through the roots and thought some of them were a bit strange. He only realised what he had done when his and his neighbour's internet stopped working. Animals knocking connectors off the outside wall, rodents chewing fibre and runaway lawnmowers cutting through fibres were also not unknown. One of my favourite stories was a cat tangling itself up in fibre that had been blown into a property and was coiled up waiting for final installation.

Once we moved to Melling there was the opportunity for a more formal support system. For one thing there was more room for staff. A receptionist was taken on so phone calls could be answered and messages taken. There was still a degree of passing calls along until they hit someone who had the answer. I learnt a lot about wide area network infrastructure, which was new territory for me, and about how Genexis routers worked.

Slowly the team grew from two part-time staff (me and a network support engineer part of whose job was first line support) backed up by Tom when needed. Today we have eight full-time tech support staff on the frontline. They are backed up by a growing team of connections and network support technicians. But the queries aren't much different from those of the early days—internal wifi coverage, apparent slow speeds, getting their devices to connect to the wifi and suchlike, with the occasional 'I've put a spade through my fibre' type call.

Eleven years on I'm still around; I don't do as much now, I spend a few hours a week in the office helping out on the phones, but I work mainly from home, fielding emergency calls in the evening and helping out if there is a major outage.

I'm also the link between the support desk and the BUG (B4RN User Group) which meets on Zoom every Friday and runs its own Facebook group and website.



The computer club on Zoom. L/R Pat, Chris, David, Hugh, Phil, remote groups



WenNet club in the cowshed.



The computer club from the WrayNet days in Wray Institute.



Ray and Patrick, stalwarts of the club, get their spade awards



At a computer club workshop on home network security.

How times have moved on! The first computer club in Wray in 2003 consisted of 4 desktop PCs that were shared by the village, and meetings were also held in Brenda's 'cowshed' where the photo shows her showing Rosemary how to book show tickets online.

Now everyone has their own device and can also join in online. Remote groups can still join in via Zoom.

The old computer club from the Wray and WenNet days is now renamed the B4RN User Group or Bug.

The group carries on meeting. Even though most people do not have computers any more, they are more likely to struggle with getting wifi to multiple smart televisions or smart devices in their homes. Gone are the days when the internet mainly fed a single PC in the home. The internet of things (IoT) is amongst us, wifi calling on smartphones means that in many areas where there is no mobile signal, people can use their smartphones with wifi calling now if they know how. Choosing which VoIP service is another issue they can advise on. It is also a social gathering every Friday. <https://www.thebug.org.uk>

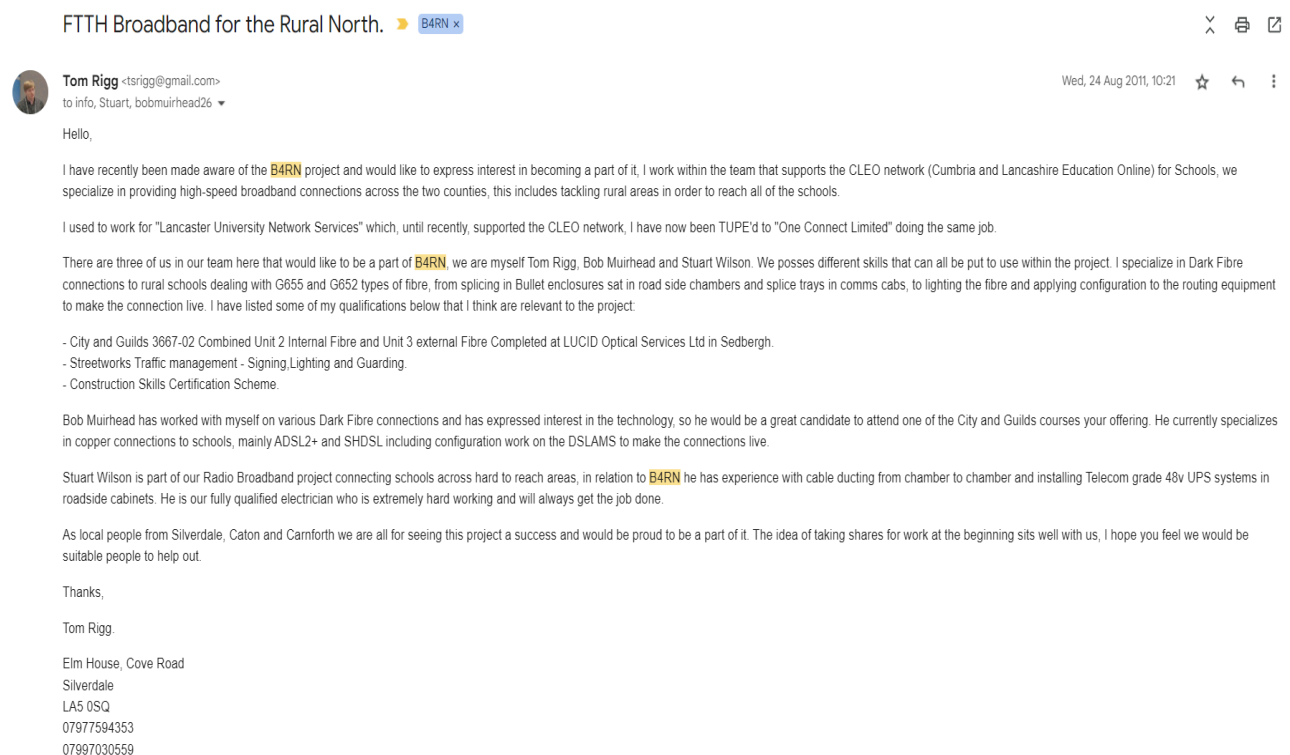
The BUG is available for anyone who needs help, whether it is for their own connection or for help in building their own network. The volunteers who attend the Zoom meetings have a vast range of experience between them.

They also have resumed the actual meetings which stopped during Covid, and meet on the first Friday of every month, as well as virtually too, at Melling. They really enjoy sharing apples.

Once we got enough customers and income coming from them, and Monica had sorted the loans with Barry, we got our new premises in Melling and could start paying staff. We took on Alistair first, he was a fusion splicer by then. We had originally paid Bruce and Iain in shares, but then took them on properly as staff. Kristina, Amy and Jennifer managed the office, but Barry needed more help with the network.

Tom joins us

Tom Rigg had been one of the early volunteers, writing to B4RN in August 2011 to offer his help even before we had launched our project. Below is his first email.



Tom's first email to Barry.

Tom had worked at LUNS and moved to OneConnect when the council gave them the contract to maintain CLEO network. He carried on helping WenNet and Nick, and he got the feed into the village for the NRSP unit's new project. This involved a bit of subterfuge, but in improving the feed to the school, the Living Lab



Tom's sponsored duct, under the car park at Abbeystead.

and WenNet were able to continue for more projects.

Tom came to volunteer help to B4RN in 2012, before any of us learned how to do enclosures, and he did a lot of work, installing the enclosures (bullets) and trays in his spare time and taught us the tricks. The sponsored duct with his name on is buried in the trench at Abbeystead Hall car park, which takes electricity to the cabinet and fibre into the hall. As soon as we could, we employed him. Tom became our COO. (chief operations officer).



The bullet Tom did to bring Bleasdale live.



The WrayNet and WenNet feed at the village school.



Tom bringing the BT feed live for the university project.



The cabinet Tom brought live for WrayNet and WenNet.

The photo is the bullet that Tom did in the Bleasdale breakout chamber.

Tom says, 'I went from OneConnect Ltd (Openreach) back to Lancaster University (LUNS) first and had an even more secure position there, career path set out and all that comes with it. And I remember the phone call when Barry rang me at work in 2015, he asked if I was in... The look on the uni guys' faces when I didn't hesitate, it was a done deal on that phone call.'

'I valued what B4RN stood for, its direction, and what it was doing in support of the communities, it reminded me of why I went to the uni in the first place—we were connecting rural primary schools with 2-10Mbps over dial-up and ADSL and making a difference in their lives.'

'I didn't care about the money and job protection I got at the uni, it was like I was set free and I've loved every minute since!'

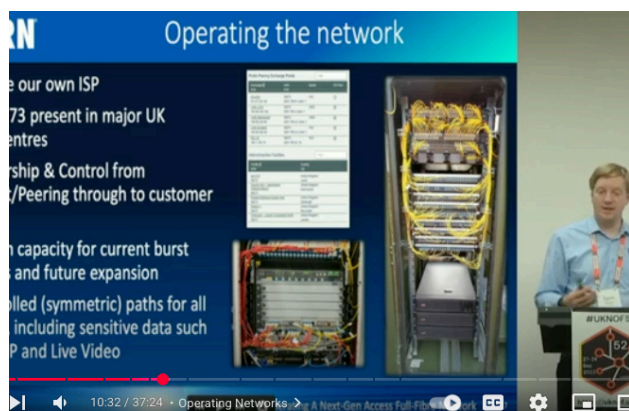
Tom still runs the network and has trained many more who have then become staff.

He is often a speaker at industry events as B4RN is leading the way for rural builds in the UK

[LINX I 14: Physical Infrastructure: Challenges in Build for AltNets](#) (Tom Rigg, B4RN), and also many other presentations for others who wish to do similar work.



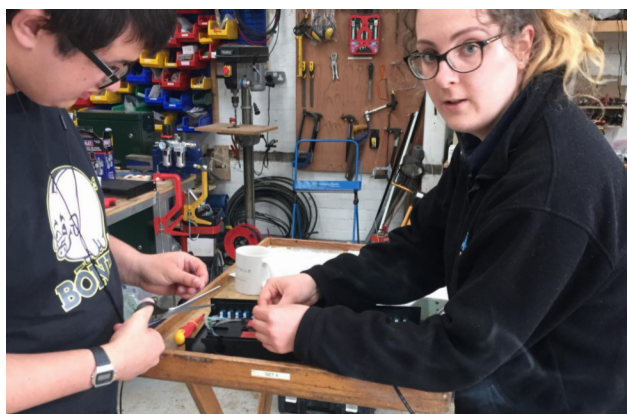
Tom presenting at industry events.



Our network.



More space for duct deliveries.



Hugh Tamlin and Alex Colton building cabinet trays in the workshop.



Civils work in Kirkoswald. Photo by Irene Sanderson.

He's also implemented the upgrade of the network with the Halo project to enable a 400 Gbps resilient loop round the UK [The Heart of B4RN I Kubus I Juniper - Short Version](#)

Tom also speaks at our showtell days and helps new communities understand the ethos of the organisation.

Tom is now our chief executive officer and a director of the company.

The new office space at Melling had a huge storage yard, and used to be the village station. It also can accommodate larger deliveries. Bringing the world to the village suddenly took on a new meaning. The workshop enables staff to work on the cabinets before they are delivered to site, preparing the electrics and installing the fittings for trays and switches. This saved using the gazebo or Frank's caravan trailer and made it all more efficient. Repairs and preparation could be done in there and a large storeroom for stock meant it could be kept dry and clean instead of at a farm outside in the weather.

There is a huge network operations centre upstairs where staff monitor the network. It also became the helpdesk centre when more staff were taken on in the years between 2016 and the present. Martin May was the first helpdesk employee, and as time moved on more staff were taken on.

Initially TNP staff (The Networking People) who had originally formed out of the Lancaster University Network Services (LUNS) had helped Barry run the network side of things. Once Tom Rigg (also one of the LUNS team who had helped the WrayNet and WenNet network projects) came to B4RN, he recruited and trained staff to do the management of the network.

B4RN were granted code powers in 2016. This meant they were allowed to dig in public places like roads. This really speeded up deployment of

networks, as council permits had been very expensive and took a lot of time to arrange.

A civils team was formed, which undertook all the streetworks jobs, and blowing of core fibre with Frank and Bruce. When PIA (Physical Infrastructure Access) came in and we could use Openreach ducts, they managed all that too.

Local youngsters were taken on as network engineers, and have been trained up to senior level and run the core team under Alistair.

As the years went by even more staff were needed. We now have a fully-staffed helpdesk of staff and NOC engineers are on call 24/7. We took on staff for organising vouchers when the funding became available as vouchers are a big administration headache.

A full connections team is also available now. This replaces many of the jobs the volunteers used to do, but a more professional approach is needed due to the volume of people wanting to connect.

Story of the blue pound

If you paint a pound coin blue, and use it to pay someone and then track it, the length of time it stays in the community reflects how sustainable that community is.

We now employ 80 local people. They are paid in blue pounds; they buy their meat from the butcher across the yard, their lunches from the local cafes and spend on groceries and stuff in the local shops. We pay our shareholders interest on their shares. We supply local small schools and churches with a free service (saving blue pounds). We also bring jobs into the area, which helps us gain local support.



B4RN to Botton Head

By Catherine Taylor

We live over 6 miles from the telephone exchange, so our internet was never much good. As the World Wide Web grew, so did our sons, and increasingly, we wanted to be online.

We tried a dongle, which was fine for a year or two, then satellite, but that was an expensive facility—especially when you went over your allowance.

Along with a few neighbours we looked for alternatives for rural connectivity. Then came B4RN. Andrew attended the launch meeting at the Storey, and was one of the first investors in B4RN. We got involved because of talking to the WrayNet and WenNet people, and started engaging with locals who would take part in and support the project. A public meeting was held at Tatham Fells School and things started to happen.

It took a while to get wayleaves. Direct connections don't always work; there are objects and sometime landowners in the way but alternatives can usually be worked out.

Trenches were dug and duct was laid using diggers, not mole-ploughs. Robert had been involved with digging in Quernmore, and along with Andrew and Stephen, helped take the route through from Thursgill, Greenbank, Dixons, Botton Head, Whitray, Bank End, and Lythe Bank. Despite some challenges it got done, and we had a connection in March 2015 when Iain and Al came with the B4RN splicing trailer to splice and connect.

Just as we were connected we were looking forward to submitting our Rural Payments Agency (RPA) forms online when they put it back a year and wanted it on paper!

I started working at B4RN in 2017 when there was about 20 staff. There are now around 80. I enjoy my work, and knowing we are improving connectivity in the hard to reach rural areas is rewarding.

My role is interesting and varied. I consider myself fortunate to work in a modern office with great colleagues and happy customers.

My story, by Monica Lee

B4RN started as a thought in the early 2000's. A long time ago Barry and I put together a proposal for a wireless network for Abbeystead. That was shelved for lack of funding, but later Barry came along with the suggestion of a community fibre network covering the seven parishes between Quernmore and Arkholme. He had been working with WenNet CIC who had created a fibre network in their local area and evidenced its possibilities. The reasoning behind the geographical spread of the plan was the possibility of accessing the main north-south trunk fibre route at two points, one in Quernmore and one

in Arkholme. Barry had also discussed the Arkholme end of the proposal with The WenNet group, and we joined them to try to make progress with it.

In 2011 Barry, Chris and Lindsey Annison registered an Industrial and Provident Society under the name B4RN. We chose this company structure to ensure that the society's assets could never be sold and would belong to the community in perpetuity, formalised the management committee. This expanded as activists became aware of B4RN and bought into the idea. Exciting but scary times. Initially, we met in people's houses, and then, as B4RN grew in size, in village pubs and village halls.

We were desperate for money and investigated various possible sources of funding for the project. Barry had submitted a proposal to the Defra Rural Development Programme for England for £750,000, in partnership with Lancaster City Council, for funding for a FTTH network. The bid was successful, but was integrated into LCC plans. This was done on the explicit understanding that B4RN's element of the project would be maintained. To our intense frustration this did not happen, largely because of the involvement of BT, and so we lost this funding. We sent an open letter to Eddie Sutton, who was the Assistant CEO, in County Hall, Preston. (see a copy of the letter at the end of this chapter) This was eventually discussed in Parliamentary circles, and the relationship between OpenReach and the LCC was finally put under scrutiny. Unfortunately, too late to help us. We were rather disheartened after this experience, and gave up on hoping for government grants, so we decided to proceed on the basis of the network being entirely constructed and funded by the community. The proposal was for a 1000Mbps connection to every property in the seven parishes, at a time when the officially stated government position was that a connection speed of 2 Mbps would be satisfactory for the lifetime of any network currently being constructed.

We managed to bring enough landowners on board to lay fibre from Quernmore cabinet through to Abbeystead, and enough community investment to pay for the fibre and ducting. This was principally raised through shares in B4RN, and loans from the community that were secured against B4RN equipment of similar value. No bank would support us. In 2013 we got the loan of a Land Rover from the Prince's Trust, and secured a loan of £300,000 from the Esmée Fairburn trust in 2014, plus a small grant from the Lancaster University Turbine group. All of these were exceptionally important for our survival. B4RN's finances remained very fragile for many years, with much anxiety about stalling creditors for long enough until new investment became available to cover previously incurred debt.

We succeeded in generating national interest in the project. John & Andrew Metcalfe from Hare Appletree, conducted the well-publicised first dig on their land on March 15th, 2012, attended by Eric Ollerenshaw, MP for Lancaster & Fleetwood, and around 100 volunteers, setting B4RN and Quernmore on the map. The One Show came to see us on 23rd May 2012 (<https://b4rn.org.uk/about-b4rn/news-events/bbcs-the-one-show-b4rn-feature>) and Maria Miller, the Secretary of State, visited on 30 April 2013 <https://b4rn.org.uk/about-b4rn/news-events/a-grand-day-out>. We hosted both of these at my house as B4RN had no premises. Later, Prince Charles (now HRH King Charles) came to see B4RN on 1st April 2015, and he made our 1000th connection.

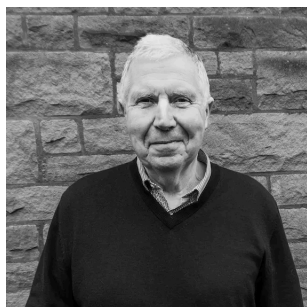
In 2014 we rented a small office at the Lancaster Farmers' Auction Mart, and at the same time employed our first two paid staff, Kristina Fournier for office work and Alistair Adams-Huset for fieldwork. In 2015 we moved the centre of operations to Melling. The loan from Esmee Fairburn placed a charge upon the company, and interactions with other bodies necessitated more formal governance structure and hence a Board of Directors. Most of the management committee chose not to come on the board, so Barry and I became Founding Directors. Barry was Chair, and I replaced Mary Jackson as Company Secretary.

Much of the volunteer work described in this book focuses on digging and installing - we focused on the office bits. Things like developing a robust (financially, and legally sound) system for share purchase and withdrawal, the management of EIS certification and of payment of interest; insurance and contracts with external agencies; setting up HR systems and benefits from scratch for our brand new employees; and establishing the community loans, which eventually amounted to £3.5 million in round figures. Lots of communication with volunteers, landowners, shareholders and stakeholders - all the basic office and finance jobs that are needed to get the whole thing moving. We were proud of what we did, even if no one really noticed!

The original thought processes and ways of working, which had been appropriate for an organisation of volunteers with no employees, were still dominant as B4RN grew to 35 staff over a couple of years. Working with volunteers is different to that of structuring and managing an organisation of employees; particularly an organisation with a hard job to do in a rapidly changing environment, and we needed to develop a culture that accommodated working with both volunteers and employees at the same time. We worked towards an organisation that was agile, with an emergent, strategic focus that was committed to the best service and quality and treated people internally and externally with respect and support. An organisation proud of itself and what it stands for. From the beginning we supported both flexible working, and home working – features which after Covid are now commonplace, but at the time were definitely a bit strange. We also put effort into keeping in touch with the wider community developing a system of social gatherings which were well received but sadly stopped during Covid. We succeeded in creating an organisation with proper regard for employment law and workers' rights, with an appropriate structure for both paid staff and volunteers working side by side.

B4RN is now a very different company to the one we started with – it covers a large area and provides superb leading-edge, resilient, sustainable, environment and climate-friendly service to all who want it within B4RN-land. B4RN is well known as a leader within the industry. – and has come a very, very long way from its humble roots. But one thing has not changed. The B4RN ethos is a family one, of quick friendly help and respect for all – be they staff or customers, old codgers or young hopefuls. B4RN remains rooted in its communities, and would not survive without the continued support and good will of volunteers, diggers, tea and cake providers, landowners and investors. B4RN helps communities by giving free service to communal places, social tariffs and working towards reducing the digital divide. People normally see and praise B4RN as a network builder and provider, but we were innovative in much of what we did. The B4RN culture, organisation and governance did not happen naturally. We have fostered it from the start and are determined to maintain it.

Directors



Chris Carr, Chair

Chris Carr

Director and Chairman. Chris Carr is a Yorkshireman by birth and studied law at Oxford. He was Principal of St Martin's College in Lancaster for 10 years and the first Vice Chancellor of the University of Cumbria before retiring in 2009. He is a Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire.

Chris lives in Aughton and with Hilary championed the drive to bring B4RN to the village. Chris remains active in digging in the B4RN network beyond the boundaries of Aughton and joined the management committee of B4RN early in 2015.



Monica Lee, Company Secretary

Monica Lee

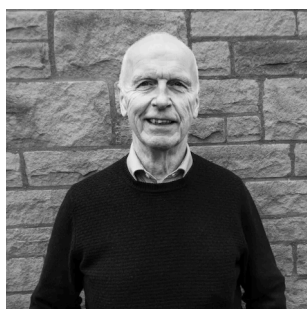
Director and Company Secretary. Monica Lee was Visiting Professor of HRD at Newcastle Business School, and based at Lancaster University Management School for many years.

She has worked with a wide portfolio of organisations in the UK, Central Europe, CIS and the USA, coordinating and collaborating in management development, research and teaching initiatives. She is a chartered psychologist, and is a Fellow of the CIPD and the RSA.

She is actively involved in the local community and is Chair of Governors of Cawthorne's Endowed School, Abbeystead, and a Trustee of the Cawthorne Educational Foundation.

She is also a Director of L&K Group Ltd. which comprises a group of companies that serve the agricultural communities in the North West. She is a founding member of B4RN, and is one of the first directors as well as being on the management team. Monica also started the Friends of B4RN charity.

She sees the amazing effect that B4RN has upon isolated rural communities and is in awe of such a large co-operative volunteer effort that is changing people's lives.



Peter Hearne

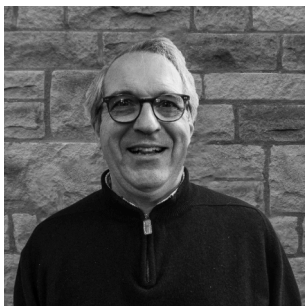
Peter Hearne

Director. Peter Hearne was born and raised locally and has spent most of his adult life in and around the Lune Valley. Convinced that the B4RN venture would be of massive benefit to the community, he was an early investor and has been an enthusiastic supporter of the B4RN project from the beginning.

Originally qualifying as a Works Manager specialising in production planning and control, Peter spent much of his early career in sales and marketing roles for large multi-nationals before building his own technology business from the early 1980s onwards. His on-going business interests reflect his long-term involvement with the built environment, with a special interest in historic listed buildings.

Formerly Chair of Governors of Beaumont College and a Director and Treasurer of North Lancashire Citizens Advice, Peter has been actively involved in community and voluntary work for over 30 years.

In all, Peter has close to 50 years' experience in the development and management of organisations in both the commercial and charitable sectors, experience that he now brings to the board of B4RN.



Ivan Sedgwick

Ivan Sedgwick

Director. Ivan Sedgwick is a native of Hampshire but married a Lancastrian. They have had a base in Gressingham since 1991 and now live there full time, having previously worked in London and New York.

He helped connect the dots to get B4RN through their and their neighbours' land, and to their own properties.

He is involved in small-company finance and serves as a trustee for a number of charities. He joined the B4RN board in 2022.



Michael Lee

Michael Lee

Director and Chief Strategy Officer. Michael grew up in the Forest of Bowland in Lancashire and read engineering in Cambridge. His early career was in the army, where as an officer he served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and then later the Royal Dragoon Guards. He undertook tours of duty in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

During his post-military career he has managed engineering projects for the oil and gas sector, and worked as a specialist consult with a focus on operational improvement and communications.

Michael started work with B4RN in February 2021.



Tom Rigg, CEO

Tom Rigg

Director and Chief Executive Officer. Tom Rigg is the friendly and highly experienced Chief Executive Officer of B4RN, a multi-award-winning community-led ISP based in Lancashire. With over 15 years of telecommunications experience, Tom has been instrumental in developing and delivering broadband services across the North. Under his leadership, Broadband for the Rural North Ltd is building a reliable and future-proof full-fibre broadband network, delivering to those hardest to reach.

Tom passionately advocates for the transformative power of high-speed broadband and the importance of providing equal access to digital services for all. He firmly believes that community-led broadband initiatives, such as B4RN, can help bridge the digital divide and bring the benefits of the digital age to rural areas. If you have any questions about B4RN or want to chat about broadband, Tom is always happy to help!



Caroline Raynor

Caroline Rayner

Director. Caroline grew up and went to school in Morecambe, before studying law with French in Nottingham and Montpellier. She attended law school in Nottingham and completed her legal training at a local firm in Lancaster, qualifying as a solicitor in 2008. She is proud to have practised locally ever since.

She is a specialist in employment law, and enjoys advising businesses of all shapes and sizes both locally and further afield. She is engaged with the local community and is involved with a Lancaster-based charity which she assists with HR and other strategic issues, having previously been the first female secretary for another local charity that is over 300 years old. She is regularly involved in knowledge sharing with local businesses and contributing to the media on employment and HR and employment law issues.

Senior staff



Mary Woodward.

Mary Woodward

Chief Financial Officer. Mary is a dynamic & highly motivated professional. Commercially focused & results driven with a proven track record of delivering significant improvements to Performance targets. Outgoing and energetic personality. Excellent organisation, presentation and communication skills. A competent leader as well as a valuable senior team member,

Mary is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Accountants England & Wales (ICAEW), qualifying in 1993. Mary has worked at senior management & director level for a number of businesses in a variety of industries & has a wealth of experience managing business finance.



Luke Kelsall.

Luke Kelsall

Chief Information Officer. Luke has over 20 years of experience in the telecommunications industry, spanning both IT and infrastructure leadership roles, His early work at Legend Communications included pioneering involvement in one of the world's first cloud infrastructure offerings, Demon Virtual Servers. He has developed deep expertise in infrastructure management, cloud computing, software solutions, performance optimisation, and cybersecurity best practices. With a proven track record of innovation, operational excellence, and change management in high-stakes environments, he continues to deliver strategic value at the intersection of technology and business.

Elaine Elrick, Chief Delivery Officer. Awaiting bio.

Mr Eddie Sutton Assistant Chief Executive, PO Box 78
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PR1 8XJ¹

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From: B4RN Management Team B4RN Lancaster Auction Mart Wyresdale Road Golgotha Lancaster, LA1 3QJ 9th July 2012

Dear Mr Sutton

Thank you for your email and attached letter to the Trustees of Broadband for the Rural North (B4RN), containing the Analysys Mason Report, and dated 12th June 2012. We are also aware of your presentation to the Oversight and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) referring to B4RN on 4th July 2012.

Both your letter and presentation evidence a lack of understanding of B4RN's position and intent. At the OSC meeting you stated that your approach to the rural areas was no different to that of B4RN. We find this surprising and my letter is intended to clarify the position.

The nature of the B4RN Organisation.

B4RN is a not-for-profit company registered with the Financial Services Authority under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 using the community benefit option, and thus it is a cooperative Social Enterprise. There is a maximum shareholding of £20,000 and any surplus has to go back into the community. The workforce is derived from the community, and local jobs are being created to support B4RN. This is a community initiative with community benefits. It was established by people living in Bowland and the Lune Valley, with the aim of installing 100% coverage 1,000Mbps fibre to the home (FTTH) to those properties, initially in 8 parishes, who cannot otherwise get superfast broadband (SFBB). B4RN has made it clear that it is keen not to extend itself to areas that would be provided with SFBB by the County Council/BT.

Connection speeds and coverage.

Much of the related publicity and correspondence implies that LCC/BT will provide SFBB to B4RN areas, but this has usually been couched in terms of 'up to' a certain speed, and a variety of percentage figures have been given to indicate what proportion of the rural population will receive SFBB. The EU and UK government target for SFBB is to have download speeds of greater than 30Mbps for 2015, and 100Mbps for 2020. Therefore SFBB schemes under consideration now need to show future proofing with 100Mbps guaranteed for 2020 or accept that what is proposed at present is a very short term measure.

The position of B4RN is clear. The community project will provide 1000Mbps, ten times the EU and UK target, to **every** property for which it is requested in the parishes which it covers. As noted by Peter Cochrane, former Chief Technology Officer for BT, in his testimony to the House of Lords on Tuesday 20 March 2012², FTTH is the best future-proof form of broadband.

The position of the LCC/BT project is less clear to us. B4RN have repeatedly requested information about actual line speeds in each area (a simple exercise usually done by automated test equipment overnight) and confirmation of exactly what speeds are being promised for each postcode rather than the estimates normally provided. These factual data have not been forthcoming and B4RN has been forced to guess which areas BT will be unable to provide with SFBB. BT has already committed to laying fibre to its cabinets, and thus 40-80Mbps capable FTTC is part of its natural commercial and competitive development. All those homes and businesses near the cabinets will benefit greatly from FTTC. The rural community is largely composed of SME's who will not receive that benefit. You say in your letter that, *"The remaining 3% of businesses and homes (20,000 premises) are located in Lancashire's most remote rural areas where the physical environment requires the assistance of local communities to make SFBB available."* Despite receiving additional funding, and as explained by Brendan Dick, Managing Director, BT Regions on the One Show³, it is not commercially viable for BT to provide SFBB to these rural areas. It is these remaining 3% of properties that B4RN seeks to help. For these communities the key

difference between working with the LCC/BT or B4RN is that with the former, once connected, all the profit generated goes to BT shareholders. In the latter the community have control over charges, and everything goes back to the community. This is a major distinction between the two, and highlights one of the reasons for B4RN's popularity. In addition, B4RN's connection speed is likely to be so significantly better than that proposed by BT that B4RN is receiving regular requests to extend the planned area of provision, and is working with those areas to help them.

Competition and cooperation.

B4RN was not established to compete with BT. Its aim was to step into places current County Council and BT plans cannot reach. It is a community initiative and not a commercial one. It is not exclusive: B4RN intends to offer open access for alternative operators, including BT. Although in your letter you say that you have offered to work with B4RN, the following actions of the LCC and BT strongly suggest that B4RN is seen as an unwelcome competitor.

1. B4RN's requests for information have been repeatedly ignored.
2. Some of the documentation the LCC have circulated about B4RN and SFBB provision in the rural north west has, at best, been misleading.

²<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/communications-committee/news/broadband-evidence-cochrane/>

³<http://b4rn.org.uk/bbcs-the-one-show-b4rn-feature>

Some of the recent claims made for future provision by BT in parishes such as Arkholme, if true, point to the need to examine them for the charge of anti-competitive behaviour.

4. Despite being an inclusive community project, the area's access to community funding has been actively blocked by the LCC. This occurred at the inception of the project, when the £750,000 bid to Defra Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) made by Lancaster City Council for funding for the FTTH broadband initiative was integrated into LCC plans on the explicit understanding that the remit of the project (1000Gbps FTTH for 100% of the core parishes, 7 of which are now in the B4RN project) would be maintained. This did not happen, and led to the establishment of B4RN.

5. The LCC (as a government body) recently competed against B4RN (a community initiative) for the Defra Rural Community Broadband Fund, (RCBF). It was at this stage that B4RN submitted a formal challenge to the LCC State Aid application.

6. Given that the LCC has strong commercial links with BT⁴, it is hard to see that it as an impartial facilitator of the provision of SFBB.

Conclusion.

It is difficult to understand why BT has the support of the LCC in obtaining substantial amounts of public funding to roll out an inferior service that is not future-proof, whilst B4RN relies on private investment and sponsorship to cover the seed-corn costs of a self-sustaining project that will transform the community - one that has been lauded as visionary at the EU⁵ and has recently been honoured with the ISPA **Internet Hero of the Year Award**⁶

Progression of this innovative community initiative is at present significantly challenged by the LCC's counterproductive actions. B4RN would like to work with the LCC to achieve SFBB across the whole of Lancashire, including the technologically impoverished 3%,

Monica Lee

Professor Monica Lee

On behalf of the B4RN Management Team

Types of Broadband provision – for reference.

Fibre to the home (FTTH) provides 1000Mbps low maintenance symmetrical service and is recommended as the best future-proof form of broadband

Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC), by which fibre is brought to a cabinet in the core of a community and then alternative methods such as copper or wireless take it to the homes. This can provide SFBB to houses near the cabinet, but speeds drop of rapidly with distance from the cabinet. This can give up to 80Mbps and thus is not future-proof.

Satellite can be used to meet rural Internet access needs in some places, but it has downsides such as high cost data rates and high latency making real time communication difficult, and can not deliver 'SFBB' as defined by the EU and the UK.

⁴<http://www.oneconnectlimited.co.uk/about-us.aspx>

⁵<http://b4rn.org.uk/b4rn-invited-to-present-to-eu-digital-champs>

⁶<http://www.thinkbroadband.com/news/5319-ispas-awards-2012-winners.html>