

users to next generation broadband services. WBC will be made available in a phased way with UK coverage rising to around a potential market of 10 million homes by April 2009. Should service providers decide to offer end users services on WBC, any subsequent plans for next generation broadband end users launch activities including timescales, are decided by the service provider themselves. So, just to clarify, 21CN is the network we are putting in place WBC is the package of next generation services which will run over that network – sold to ISPs by BT Wholesale

5 and 6. In terms of speed, WBC will offer the highest stable speed that a line can support and there are many factors that affect broadband service availability and speed. These include electrical interference, faulty wiring and the equipment that is connected to the network as well as distance from the exchange. BT works closely with service providers to provide the best quality connection possible, however there is a limit to what can be achieved where very long lines to the home exist. Unfortunately the process of being switched-on to BT's next generation broadband service will not resolve any existing broadband service availability/speed issues, specifically where customers have been informed that this is due to their distance from the local telephone exchange. The equipment which WBC runs on supports speeds of 24Mbps. We estimate that across the UK 50% of customers will be able to get speeds of 6.3Mbps or more and 75% will be able to get speeds of over 3.3kbps. It really does depend on factors such as distance from the exchange, interference from electric fences and other sources etc.

7. There are no backhaul constraints on 21CN. The existing backhaul, i.e. cables back to the core network from the telephone exchanges, will be upgraded with fibre which will be able to cope with all likely current and future demand.

8. On timescales, 21CN (and WBC)) is being rolled out in two phases. The first stage due to be completed by Spring 2009 will reach 10 million homes and businesses. We are currently in the process of planning the schedule for the rest of the exchanges in the UK to be enabled to 21CN in collaboration with the rest of the industry so that their requirements are taken on board. I am afraid I cannot at this time, give any commitment on timescales.

9. Once we are in a position to give a target date we would expect that date to be met but, as you will appreciate, this is a massive project, involving cross industry negotiation and it would be unrealistic to anticipate that problems which might impact on some timescales will not occur

10. I am not an expert on Connected Communities, however the main drawback with ADSL broadband is that it is distance limited – the further the cable goes from the exchange the lower the speed until a point is reached where service cannot be delivered at all. It is possible that some people living in the Western Isles would be able to get a broadband service via the Connected Communities project but might be out of reach of ADSL – even when 21CN reaches their local exchange. My understanding of the Connected Communities service is that it offers speeds of between 0.5Mbps and 2Mbps. Once 21CN reaches the Western Isles ISPs offering ADSL broadband will have the capability to offer their customers higher speeds – depending, of course, on how far the customer is from the exchange.