



ORRA Full Fibre Broadband Report: 15th May 2025

Update 15th May 2025

The first version of this report was published on 11th February 2025. Since then it has been revised with the latest information and clarifications. Where new information has been added to the report it has been flagged as [\(updated\)](#).

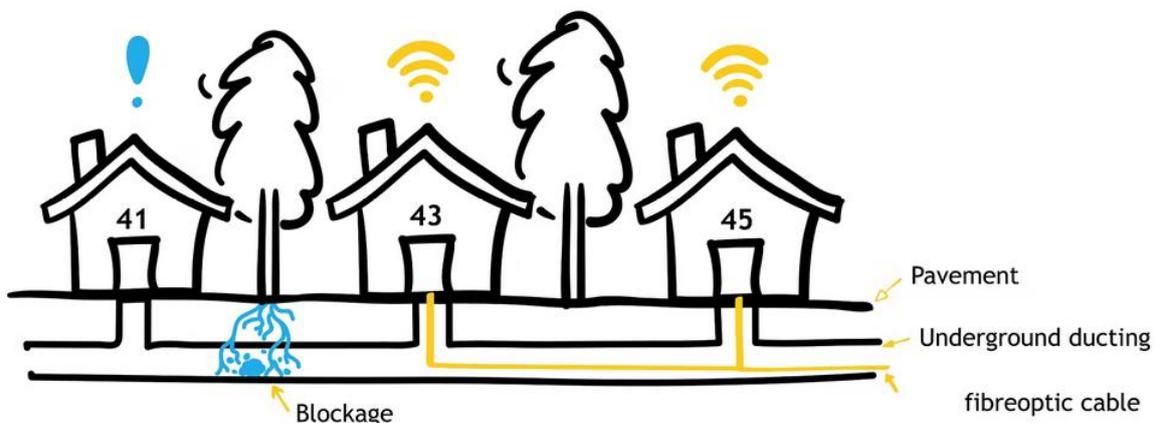
Summary [\(updated\)](#)

Over the last few months there has been considerable progress putting together a plan to deliver Full Fibre Broadband to the Old Rotton Estate. This project has been a significant undertaking with many moving parts and technical details. Openreach are constrained by budgetary considerations, while naturally the ORRA Committee seeks to obtain the best outcome for the estate with a minimum of disruption to residents.

Proposals are in place to resolve many of the outstanding issues. However, there are still some unresolved issues regarding Walnut Tree Walk, Ratton Drive and Ratton Garden, so unfortunately we do not yet have a final proposal at the time of writing.

Introduction

Since 2022 the ORRA Committee has been investigating bringing Full Fibre Broadband to the Rotton Estate. An initial presentation was made by Lightning Fibre, which was considered by members of the Committee. Openreach were also working in the area, and stated they could use existing ducting to install new fibre. It was decided to engage with Openreach and investigate their proposals. A survey was carried out and some blockages in the existing ducting were located. These blockages are typically caused by wear and tear, debris, or tree roots.



Unfortunately, momentum was lost and Openreach moved on, having completed their other projects in the Hampden Park area. In November 2024 I reinitiated contact with Openreach and they have shown some interest in re-examining the project.

I would like to make clear that I am not a telecoms specialist. This report is my own work and my best understanding of the technical elements and of Openreach's position.

Copper Cable vs Full Fibre (updated)

The Old Ratton Estate is currently served by a network of copper cables that provides telephone and internet services to residents. Some of this copper cable is housed in underground ducting that is buried under the grass verge or the road. In some cases there is no ducting and the cables are buried directly in the ground. Nationwide, this copper network is aging and becoming increasingly costly to maintain and unable to meet the needs of modern households.

Optical fibre is the modern replacement for copper cable. It has far greater capacity and is unaffected by electromagnetic interference. Fibre can be laid in existing ducting when it is present, or connected between telegraph poles.

Government policy nationwide has been to encourage telecom companies to upgrade the network from copper to fibre, and various targets and incentives have been put in place to facilitate this. Openreach is the largest infrastructure provider in the UK and plans to phase out all copper connections by 2027. Nationwide, approximately 69% of homes already have Full Fibre, including many of the streets neighbouring the Old Ratton Estate.

Site Visit 28th January 2025

On 28th January 2025 members of the Committee met with the Openreach Project Manager for a site visit. We inspected the estate, starting at 1 Walnut Tree Walk and finishing at The Grove. Each issue was identified on a map, and solutions proposed. We wanted to explore multiple options so that they could be presented to residents for consultation.

Consultation With Residents (updated)

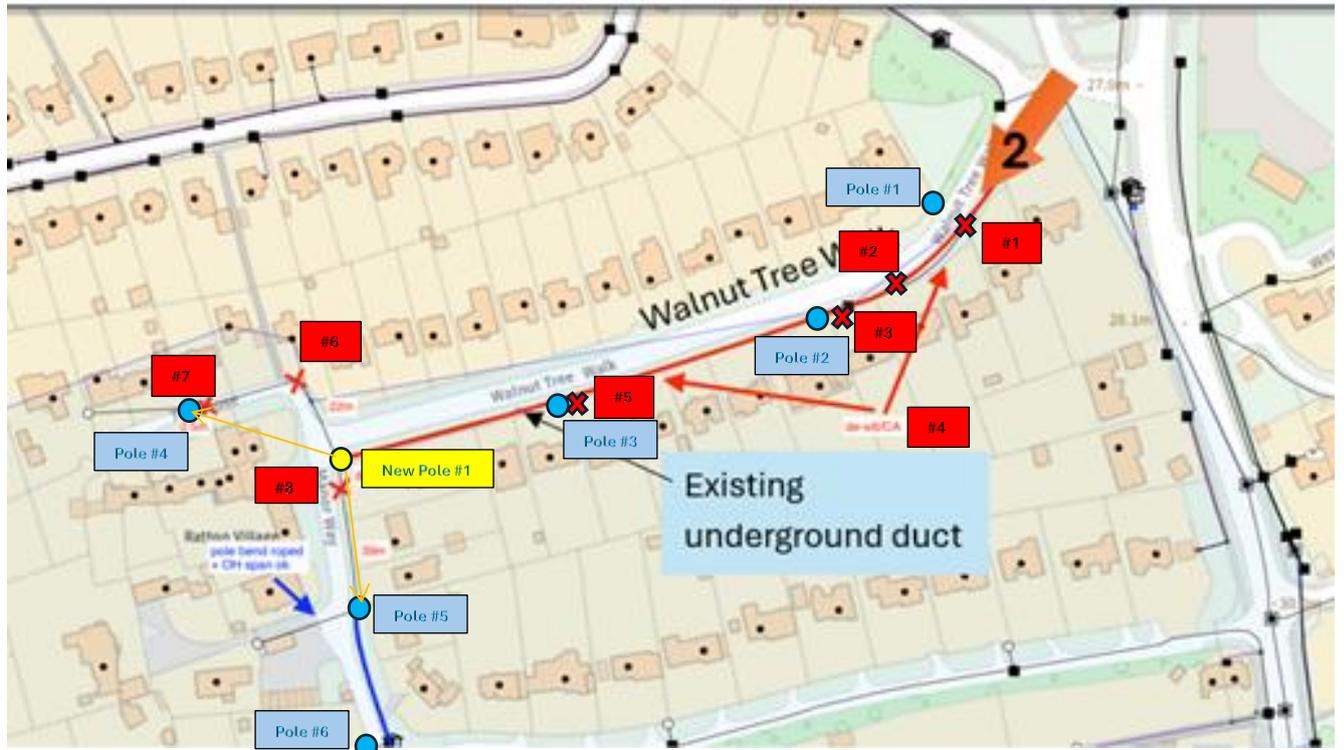
The first version of this report was distributed to all residents via email on 11th February 2025 and there followed a process of receiving and replying to feedback. The response was generally positive with most residents keen to receive the upgrade, but some objections were raised about locating a new pole on Ratton Drive.

Site Visit 10th April 2025 (updated)

On 10th April 2025 members of the Committee met again with Openreach to discuss the progress of the project. Solutions for Ratton Drive, Linkway and The Grove were discussed based on the latest information and feedback from residents.

Known Issues and Proposed Solutions (updated)

Walnut Tree Walk, The Close, Manor Way



Map 1: Walnut Tree Walk, The Close, Manor Way.

Map notes:

- Blue lines are existing ducts with no known issues.
- Red crosses are known blockages in ducting. Some locations are approximate.
- Red boxes identify reference number of problem areas.
- Blue circles are existing poles.
- Yellow circles are potential locations of new poles.
- Orange lines indicate overhead cables to bypass blocked ducting.

Issue #1: Duct Blockage in Road 3-5 WTW (updated)

Blockage in the ducting running under the road in the vicinity of 3 and 5 Walnut Tree Walk.

Solution 1:

Dig road to repair ducting.

Issue #2: Duct Blockage in Road 7 WTW (updated)

Blockage in the ducting running under the road in the vicinity of 7 Walnut Tree Walk.

Solution 2:

Dig road to repair ducting. This is a recently flagged issue and if the works would impact driveway of 7 WTW, consult with resident.

Issue #3: Duct Blockage in Verge 9-11 WTW

This is thought to be a blocked duct located between the access chamber at the front of 9 WTW and Pole #2, between 9 and 11 WTW.

Solution 3:

Dig soft verge outside 9 WTW to clear blockage.

Issue #4: Heavily Silted Ducting between 3 and 19 WTW (updated)

A long section of ducting here is blocked with silt. Once this silt is cleared it may reveal new issues with the ducting.

Solution 4:

A desilting team can clear this section using existing access chambers, no dig work required.

Issue #5: Duct Blockage 21 WTW

Blockage in the vicinity of Pole #2, outside 21 WTW.

Solution 5:

Clear blockage: Dig soft verge of 21 WTW.

Issue #6: Duct Blockage 2 The Close

Located in vicinity of driveway of 2 The Close.

Solution 6:

Bypass blockage: Install New Pole #1 on corner of WTW and Manor Way, outside 25 WTW. Overhead connection from New Pole #1 to Pole #4, passing above roof of 2 Manor Way.

Issue #7: Duct Blockage 6 The Close

Located in vicinity of base of Pole #4, outside 6 The Close.

Solution 7:

Same as #6. Bypass blockage: Install New Pole #1 on corner of WTW and Manor Way, outside 25 WTW. Overhead connection from New Pole #1 to Pole #4, passing above roof of 2 Manor Way.

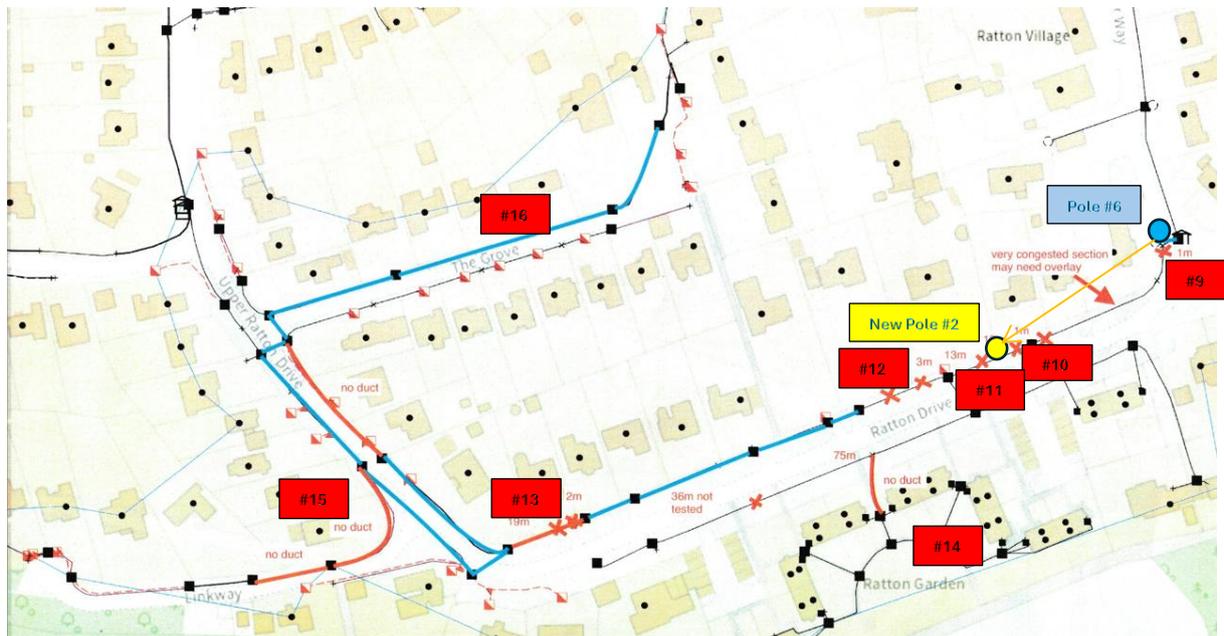
Issue #8: Duct Blockage Manor Way

Located in soft verge of Manor Way, bordering 25 WTW.

Solution 8:

Clear blockage: Dig soft verge to clear blockage.

Ratton Drive, Ratton Garden, Linkway, Upper Ratton Drive, The Grove



Map 2: Ratton Drive, Ratton Garden, Linkway, Upper Ratton Drive, The Grove.

Map notes:

Blue lines are existing ducts with no known issues.

Red crosses are known blockages in ducting. Some locations are approximate.

Blue circles are existing poles.

Yellow circles are potential locations of new poles.

Orange lines indicate overhead cables to bypass blocked ducting.

Issue #9: Duct Blockage and Congestion 26-30 RD (updated)

Serious blockage and cable congestion on the corner of Manor Way and Ratton Drive, bordering 26 Ratton Drive.

Proposed Solution 9a:

Clear blockage: Extensive digging of 26 Ratton Drive to clear blockage.

Proposed Solution 9b:

Bypass blockage: Install New Pole #2 on verge between 32 and 30 Ratton Drive. Overhead connection from Pole #6 to New Pole #2.

Proposed Solution 9c:

A New Pole was also proposed at an alternative site on the corner of the verge at 25 Ratton Court. However, this proposal was rejected by a vote of Ratton Garden residents.

Openreach Preferred Solution:

9b or 9c. Objections were raised to a new pole on RD, so alternatives are being investigated.

Issue #10: Duct Blockage 30 RD (updated)

Located in verge outside 30 Ratton Drive.

Proposed Solution 10a:

Clear blockage: Dig verge of 30 Ratton Drive.

Proposed Solution 10b: Same as 9b. Bypass blockage: Install New Pole #2 on verge between 32 and 30 Ratton Drive. Overhead connection from Pole #6 to New Pole #2.

Openreach Preferred Solution:

10b. An objection was raised to this new pole, so alternatives are being investigated.

Issue #11: Duct Blockages 32 RD

Two blockages located in verge outside 32 Ratton Drive.

Solution 11:

Clear blockages: Dig verge of 32 Ratton Drive.

Issue #12: Duct Blockage 36 RD

Located in verge outside 36 Ratton Drive.

Solution 12:

Clear blockage: Dig verge of 36 Ratton Drive.

Issue #13: Duct Blockages 48 RD (updated)

Two blockages located in verge either side of tarmac driveway of 48 Ratton Drive.

Proposed Solution 13a:

Clear blockages: Dig soft verge of 48 Ratton Drive, digging driveway and reinstating if necessary. Permissions have not yet been agreed with owner so an alternative is being investigated.

Proposed Solution 13b:

Openreach will investigate an alternative route for the feed to enter the estate from Babylon way and via Upper Ratton Drive. This would avoid the need to dig into the road. We are awaiting the results of this investigation.

Openreach Preferred Solution:

To be confirmed.

Issue #14: All new ducting for Ratton Garden (updated)

The ducting feed into Ratton Garden is currently served by a connection crossing Ratton Drive from outside 32 Ratton Drive. A survey was performed on 29/3/25 and confirmed that there is currently no ducting in place inside Ratton Garden. All new ducting would need to be installed to provide Full Fibre to these properties. This would be a major undertaking, and it will be for Ratton Garden to decide how they wish to proceed. A site visit is planned for 20th May 2025 so that the directors of Ratton Garden can discuss the proposals with Openreach.

Solution 14:

Await outcome of discussions between Ratton Garden and Openreach.

Issue #15: New ducting on Linkway (updated)

On 10/4/25 Openreach confirmed that ducting was in place on Linkway (contrary to the map above), but that a new section of ducting would need to be installed connecting Upper Ratton Drive with Linkway.

Solution 15:

Install new ducting from URD to Linkway, crossing the verge and into the road by 2 Linkway.

Issue #16: New ducting crossing road between 11-12 The Grove (updated)

A connection is required from the existing ducting outside 11 The Grove to serve properties on the other side of the road.

Solution 16:

Install a short section of ducting to cross the road between 11 and 12 the Grove.

Other areas of note

Ratton Drive: Even numbers 2-22 and odd numbers 1-11

These properties are served by a separate section of ducting that connects from Willingdon Road and up Ratton Drive, terminating in the road between 16 and 18 Ratton Drive. There are no known issues with this ducting. However, Openreach have identified issues with the infrastructure passing under Willingdon Road and will need permissions from Eastbourne Council to undertake works here. For the purposes of efficiency, Openreach would plan to commence these works at the same time as the rest of the Ratton Estate.

Ratton Drive: 39, 41, 43, 45

Existing ducting runs to a point outside 45 Ratton Drive. It is proposed that these four properties can be served by a CBT located here, see “Fibre to the Premises” below.

Upper Ratton Drive: (updated)

Upper Ratton Drive has suitable ducting in place and would be connected either by a feed from Ratton Drive or alternatively from Babylon Way if that route is more feasible.

Notes on different solutions (updated)

Where blockages can be cleared with a dig into the soft verge this is generally the preferred solution, since it is less disruptive and costly than road works. Preserving tree roots is of major concern, and ORRA would consult with a tree specialist to obtain professional recommendations.

Digging into the road is less desirable but may be necessary, particularly where the ducting is located under the road as appears to be the case for 3-7 WTW. While Openreach does offer reinstatement guarantees, ORRA may have concerns about the long-term structural impact on the roads, as well as the cosmetic effect. A professional surveyor may be employed by ORRA to assess the impact if this option is pursued.

Telegraph poles may be a relatively straight-forward solution to bypassing problem areas. In some cases this is the least disruptive and most cost-effective solution. However, overhead cables can be difficult to maintain where there is thick foliage from trees, and some residents may consider them unsightly. I note that there are already a total of nine poles on the estate, so their use is not unprecedented. Proposed New Pole #1 has received support from residents as an alternative to extensive dig works. Proposed New Pole #2 has however met with objections from some residents, and an alternative location was rejected by Ratton Garden.

Openreach were asked if they could use moling technology to deal with blockages as an alternative to digging. The reply was that it is not their policy to perform moling in these circumstances. It was inferred that the cost of moling made it unattractive to Openreach, although there may also be technical reasons of which I am unaware. Please see the discussion of “Cost and Viability of the project” at the end of this report.

Fibre to the Premises

The current Openreach build team is only concerned with upgrading the fibre connection along the streets, to what are known as CBTs (Connectorised Block Terminals). The final stage is to connect from the CBT in the street to individual premises. These connections are entirely at the discretion of individual property owners and are to be negotiated between themselves and the supplying company. Residents can choose providers other than Openreach at this stage, and those providers have the right to lease the existing Openreach Full Fibre infrastructure. This final stage of the build is independent of current discussions between ORRA and Openreach.

Reinstatement Policies

Openreach are a well-established brand in the telecoms industry and maintain the largest broadband network in the UK.

Regarding reinstatement I have been told by Openreach:

“For any excavation the reinstatement would be on a like for like basis, we would endeavour to leave the area as we found it. Assessments would be made in advance of any excavation to ensure any specific materials can be obtained.”

and

"Openreach adheres to the NRWSA governance when working in the highways"

The full specification can be found here:

<https://app.hauc-uk.org.uk/sroh>

Dig works will inevitably cause some disruption, and the project is estimated to run for approximately two weeks. The Committee will liaise closely with Openreach and any subcontractors to ensure minimum disruption.

Cost and Viability of the project (updated)

The project is proposed at no cost to ORRA. It was briefly discussed with Openreach whether ORRA would make a contribution to the cost of the project, but it was agreed that this would cause additional complications and will not be explored further.

Openreach will undertake all works and will recoup their costs by leasing the new infrastructure to Broadband providers. However, this does mean there is a point at which the project is uneconomical for Openreach, at least for the moment. Extensive digging will raise their costs, as will a piecemeal approach: they want a clear plan in place and then to complete the works as rapidly as possible.

This is an ongoing discussion with Openreach, and I am hopeful it will successfully deliver modern infrastructure to the estate. However, from the outset it was apparent that there may simply be no cost-effective solution at this time. If we cannot agree a plan with this Openreach team, they will move on from this area, for now. The project would be revisited at some point in the future, since there is an obligation to complete the upgrade to fibre before the copper network can be retired. In that event, ORRA might invite other fibre companies to make a proposal on how they would solve the issues identified. The investigative work done so far would not be wasted, since we are now all far better informed about the outstanding issues to be resolved in the future.

Lastly, there is no risk that the estate will be disconnected from existing copper infrastructure without a replacement. The concern is rather that without this upgrade, we will fall behind neighbouring areas, potentially impacting quality of life and house prices.

Next Steps (updated)

While the project has experienced delays due to its complexity, we will continue to explore solutions to the outstanding issues. I await new information regarding Walnut Tree Walk, Ratton Drive, Ratton Garden and the feasibility of a feed to Upper Ratton Drive via Babylon Way. It may be that these remaining issues can be resolved relatively quickly. However, I am not able to speculate further regarding the timescale of a resolution. I will continue to provide updates and consult with residents as more information becomes available.

This report is being made available to all ORRA members. Thank you for taking the time to read it and for your ongoing support. I hope you will be able to attend the ORRA AGM on 20th May, for which all residents have received an invitation.

Please refer to the ORRA website for the latest updates:

<https://www.orra.online/news-and-announcements/full-fibre-broadband/>

Please send any questions and feedback to:

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