

# From the Royal Mile to Infinity – but not beyond!



Just off the Royal Mile in Edinburgh's Old Town two thriving businesses are working away in buildings which are centuries old. Both of these businesses depend on having quick access to the internet, but although they lie in the same place, one has homemade fast broadband and one has a very slow internet speed.

The List, which is the business with access to fast broadband, gets their service from a cable slung out of the window connected to the broadband service in their founder's house which by lucky coincidence lies right next door. The other business on the top floor, political monitoring company, Newsdirect, cannot access this homemade arrangement as they simply do not have a suitable window. Is this really the 21st century? How can a fast broadband service be accessible to one building but not another three feet away?

And why should it be the case in the 21st century that these businesses in the heart of the city cannot get access to fast broadband? One is a metre nearer the Royal Mile than the other, and you cannot get much more central than that.

We asked Brendan Dick the Chief Executive Officer of BT for his comments, and he has indeed responded to The Edinburgh Reporter, but unfortunately not yet with a solution. He explained that he is having the company's engineers check on the latest position.

Newsdirect's business employs a dozen people and is based on political monitoring. As part of that business they stream

live videos from Holyrood on Parliament TV. This is made pitifully slow by their existing broadband speed of just under 3mbps. The firm has been in its city centre offices for over 15 years now. They had a sub-tenant until the end of last year and although they now have room for more staff they do not feel able to expand at present. Business owner Kirsty Regan said:-“Any thoughts of doing this is on the back burner until the broadband issue is sorted out. Even if we take up the council’s voucher scheme the broadband would cost us £40,000 over the next three years, rather than the cheaper version offered by BT Infinity, so it is really not viable, as this is 10 times as much as we would otherwise have to pay.”



The List is the producer of a fortnightly magazine but also the producer of a deal of information on their own website. They have about 23 employees, but are also a bit reluctant to expand due to the uncertainty of their access to the internet. All it would take is for their neighbour to move, and they might lose their access to fast broadband.

The List’s Digital Director, Simon Dessain, explained that BT accepted the order to install Infinity in the office last year, but now it seems they cannot fulfil it. Dessain said:-“We have been told by BT that they have to upgrade the cabinet, and that there are two side by side. Quite where they are we are not sure. The number of hours I have spent on this is detracting from my business. We may have to consider moving if this service, which is fundamental to our business, cannot be offered here. It is just pure luck that Robin Hodge who founded The List lives next door!”

[The City of Edinburgh Council offer vouchers](#) of up to £3000 to each business to help with the cost of accessing the internet. Sadly this scheme is of little benefit to either The List or newsdirect at this time. Even if they buddy up together the cost of the new internet and the cost of servicing that for

the next three years is much more than the £3000 offered.

CEO Brendan Dick has replied as follows:-

*Sorry for the delay in reverting to you, I had to go and check for the latest on the cabinet serving Tweeddale Court.*

*The situation has not changed since this was last investigated, in that whilst BT has upgraded Waverley exchange for fibre to the cabinet and fibre on demand, as well as faster ADSL and Ethernet, FTTC is not currently available to businesses located at Tweeddale Court as the local cabinet has not been included in our commercial deployment.*

*BT is investing £2.5 billion in its UK fibre deployment and, like any business, it has to make its investment decisions based on sound rationale. When planning fibre investment, Openreach looks at a number of criteria including costs of deployment; likely demand from service providers on behalf of their customers, existing network topography and costs of infrastructure build. Not every cabinet in any given exchange area will meet this criteria, this being one such case.*

*Unfortunately, our understanding is that Tweeddale Court is not eligible for inclusion in the intervention project with the Scottish Government as this programme, and others like it across the UK, is set up to provide fibre in largely rural areas beyond the reach of commercial fibre upgrade programmes, and as such this cabinet as it does not meet the State Aid criteria as defined under EU rules.*

*As mentioned, BT has upgraded Waverley Exchange for Ethernet, a business class product which offers speeds ranging from one megabit per second (Mbps) up to 10 Gigabits per second. Depending on their needs, businesses can opt for a choice of guaranteed broadband speeds over a dedicated line and if relevant across multiple sites, at a fraction of the cost of*

*previous comparable services., from a range of service providers.*

*Depending on what a business is doing with its bandwidth, Ethernet/leased lines may indeed be the most appropriate solution. You can find out more here: <http://business.bt.com/broadband-and-internet/leased-lines/business-benefits/>*

Mr Dick recognises that one property in Tweeddale Court has broadband but not the other. When The Edinburgh Reporter pointed this out he explained:-“The difficulty is that the lines serving some premises in Tweeddale Court are served from an already enabled cabinet, which was commercially viable, whilst these businesses are served from another, which isn’t. I appreciate that may seem odd, but is the case unfortunately.”